LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Implementation Phase for Selected
Micro-project Assignment**

A Paper Submitted to

Submitted to Dr. James Zabloski,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

Micro-Project I: Historical and Current Practices

DSMN 852 – B01

by

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# Contents

## Description of Implementation Phase Activities

As preparation for this phase, forty peer-reviewed articles from academic journals were read and ten were selected for this micro-project. The intent was to gather information from highly credible sources that were commenting on how culture has changed in the most recent generations and what impact those changes will have upon the process of creating disciples of Jesus.

Specific focus was given to understanding how people's worldviews have changed, the impact of technology upon individual's behavior and thought processes, the tendency in individuals overall to move toward materialism and consumptionism. This self-seeking modality turns people's hearts away from the truths in God's Word and establishes themselves as the "best" authority in their lives. Articles were sought which indicate how these types of thought processes come into play and how society is driving this kind of paradigm.

Information was sought that describe how changing mores are impacting the view of family and the importance of family in determining truth boundaries and what authority is placed upon the views of the family.

Finally, articles were also sought to see how others view the *Shema* from Deut 6[1] and what impact those considerations have upon a person's religious perspectives as well as views on the authority and work of the Holy Spirit in influencing and protecting truth standards.

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

**Baker, Samuel. "Who's Shaping Whom? Digital Disruption in the Spiritual Lives of Post-Familial Emerging Adults," *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 16, no. 2 (2017): 117–43. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1163/24055093-01602003.**

Article Summary

Dr. Samuel Baker currently serves as the chair of the Christian Ministry & Intercultural Studies department at Corban University, located in Salem, Oregon. Dr. Baker achieved his Ed.D. at George Fox University, and a M.A Christian Education as well as a B.A Psychology from Biola University. Baker served churches in multiple states and in a variety of ministries.[2]

The author addresses the significant changes in communication technology and how it is affecting early adults regarding their interpersonal relationships. Baker contends that technology is causing culture change and states "it continues to reshape a variety of frameworks: individual, social, and ecclesiastical."[3] Baker describes how increased use of communication technologies (smart phones, Facebook, etc.) are having impacts upon familial relationships and creating a state that is described in the article as "post-familial."[4] This state describes how family members are alone together as they interact with each other and those outside the family with their smart devices. Baker poses the question, "What is an appropriate theological response to the shaping effects of technology in the lives of emerging adults?"[5] The author warns of the tendency for ministers to hold "dystopian views of digital engagement"[6] and encourages the readers to

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[2] Corban University, "Dr. Samuel E. Baker", Accessed February 9, 2021, https://www.corban.edu/faculty/dr-samuel-e-baker.

[3] Samuel Baker, "Who's Shaping Whom? Digital Disruption in the Spiritual Lives of Post-Familial Emerging Adults," *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 16, no. 2 (2017), 117.

[4] Ibid., 118.

[5] Ibid., 119.

[6] Ibid.

develop their own "integrative approach to a theology of technology" if they are to be effective

in providing holistic guidance." [7] Baker concludes that those seeking to influence others

spiritually need to be aware of technology's influence to help early adults not be conformed to

the world and adopt a "crowdsourced" view of God.

## Article Critique

Baker introduces an interesting discussion on a culture change that is certainly having a

significant impact upon how individuals interact with each other daily.  He describes how these

technologies degrade social interaction from what it has been in the past and suggests that people

need to be aware of how it will change family discourse and engagement. Baker's call to action

is very pertinent to ministers in the current environment as their congregants and not following

traditional family behaviors and it is wise to recognize that the assumptions that have been used

to engage in relational ministries will have to adapt the new cultural norms. A well-thought-out

theology of technology will provide a minister with convincing arguments to persuade the

impacted individuals of the degradation that has occurred in their family relationships and aid

them in recovering those healthy relational interactions.

Baker attempts to find a space between techno-utopians and those with a dystopian

viewpoint of the impact of technologies upon our lives.  Baker tended toward a dystopian

viewpoint himself when he discussed users of displays for reading as opposed to using printed

texts.[8]  Baker's bias should give a reader pause and encourage them to consider that all of the

data analysis is not complete on the full impact of technologies and a reader should remain open-

minded until further research is available.

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[7] Samuel Baker, "Who's Shaping Whom?", 120.

[8] Ibid., 134.

**Bergler, Thomas E. "Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity,"** ***Christian Education Journal***, 17, no. 1 (2020): 75–91. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0739891320903058.

Article Summary

Dr. Thomas E. Bergler teaches in the Ministry and Missions Department at Huntington University, located in Huntington, IN. The author earned his Ph.D. in American Religious History from the University of Notre Dame, a MA in Theology and Church History from Wheaton College, and a BS in Chemistry and History from the University of Michigan.[9]

This article considers the traits of Americans whose birth years would categorize them as "Generation Z" and how to develop appropriate strategies to aid these individuals toward spiritual maturity. The author presents an explanation from Scripture of what traits a mature believer should exhibit, then presents his analysis of the challenges Generation Z individuals will present to those attempting to invest in them and aid them in understanding the pathway they will travel to spiritual maturity. Bergler declared that "When it comes to religious beliefs and practices among Generation Z, the minority who are committed Christians are doing reasonably well, a less committed middle group that identifies as Christian is not faring as well, and the minority who profess no religious affiliation is growing."[10] Bergler explains to the reader that those who wish to reach Generation Z individuals should reflect upon the research that shows that the methods used for biblical teaching are not proving to be very successful. Bergler references studies conducted by the Barna Group in 2018 and the National Study of Youth and Religion conducted in 2005, where the number of Millennial teenagers that qualified at

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[9] Huntington University, "Tom Bergler", Accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.huntington.edu/meet-the-faculty/tom-bergler

[10] Thomas E. Bergler, "Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity," *Christian Education Journal*, 17, no. 1 (2020), 79.

"devoted" were 8% in the 2005 study and the 2018 study.[11] Berger highlights the need for mature believers to help these young people "catch a vision for spiritual maturity and pursue it in community with other disciples of Jesus."[12]

<div align="center">Article Critique</div>

The author presents an excellent argument regarding the imperative in Scripture that encourages mature believers to help develop new believers and the need for new believers to pursue growth toward spiritual maturity. The author uses that argument to explain that a mature believer must also consider how to address the cultural influence a new believer has experienced and how to address specific misconceptions that they have been appropriated. He explains common traits those in this age group exhibit such as a slow growth strategy, intense use of social media and mobile technology, mental health struggles, risk aversion and a desire for material things to power their life goals. Understanding these traits will be very helpful to the discipler of these young adults and allow them to interpret how God's Word can answer the questions that they are likely to be struggling to answer.

The author encourages mature believers to spend extra effort "on apologetics and on learning activities that involve the affective and volitional domains so that these young people will take greater ownership of their beliefs."[13]

The author references "The National Study of Youth and Religion" in this article but does not footnote the study nor reference the specific publication from which he asserts a statement based upon this study. It appears to have been a project of the University of Notre Dame and

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[11] Thomas E. Bergler, "Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity," 80.

[12] Ibid., 90

[13] Ibid., 87.

included surveys from 2003, 2005 and 2008.[14]  The author relies upon other writers for several of

his observations that point out the characteristics of the Millennials in the test group.

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[14] University of Notre Dame, "National Study of Youth & Religion", Accessed on February10, 2021 from https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/research-design.

**Brandner, Tobias. "The Church as Family,"** *Theology Today (Ephrata, Pa.)*, **76, no. 3 (2019): 217–23. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0040573619859018.**

Article Summary

Dr. Tobias Brandner serves as an Associate Professor at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College in Hong Kong.  Brandner earned his ThD and MDiv from the University of Zurich.[15]

Brandner discusses the importance that family relationships have upon the Chinese churches and the leadership structures within them.  He describes how traditional Confucianism aligns well with defining the need for strong, supportive families, which the Christian church in China can promote as well to the believers in the churches. Brandner continues by explaining that the church leadership structures benefit from the expectation of having a "family feel". Brandner states, ". . . the family paradigm of the Christian church creates closely knit communities.  The closeness and reliability of relationships contrast with the anonymity and individualization of modern urban life and give churches great relational and perhaps more importantly financial strength."[16]

Brandner explains the efforts that the central government has exerted over the decades to erode familial relationships and to transfer the reliance of individuals to the government for support and approval. Brandner points out that the efforts have had a significant negative impact upon families, but people do not find the government to be a good substitute for the family relationships, thus creating fertile ground for the church to provide a community for relational

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[15] The Chinese University of Hong Kong, "Tobias Brandner", accessed on February 13, 2021 from https://www.theology.cuhk.edu.hk/en/academics/teaching-staff/tobias-brandner.

[16] Tobias Brandner. "The Church as Family," *Theology Today* (Ephrata, Pa.), 76, no. 3 (2019): 218.

support.  Brandner asserts that the Chinese government sees the churches as challengers to their influence and will continue to encroach upon that influence.

<div align="center">Article Critique</div>

The article provides a glimpse into one aspect of what has been the most successful evangelical outreach in the modern age and how familial closeness can withstand intense outside pressure. The author's observations of how the evangelical church is prospering in China allow the reader to consider how important the "church family" will be in other nations and cultures.  The fact that people seek out the church for a "sense of belonging" speaks to the inherent need of people to have that connection with each other, especially within the family of God.  Also, it is interesting to see the author's comments about how the Chinese governmental leaders have a pattern of describing themselves as "Fathers" to the Chinese people.  Brandner mentions that this practice is ". . . echoed by the present leader, who is styled as father and popularly celebrated as "big daddy Xi"" [17] by the party propaganda ministry.  Brandner continues by describing strengths of the family church paradigm that allows flexibility and resiliency under pressure and weaknesses that can cause internal divisiveness among the churches.

The article does not explain how familial closeness is developed within these churches among members who were not blood related family.  Brandner does describe how the families are often closely knit because of the familial bloodlines but does not explain how the churches minister to those who are not part of the genetic families.  The author simply asserts that the churches view themselves as family in general, without providing context of what behavior and thoughts support such a view.

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[17] Tobias Brandner. "The Church as Family," *222.*

**Kopiec, Piotr. "Consumer Society: Its Definitions and Its Christian Criticism,"** *Hervormde*
*Teologiese Studies*, **76, no. 3 (2020): e1–8. https://doi-**
**org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4102/hts.v76i3.5910.**

Article Summary

Dr. Piotr Kopiec serves as the Chair of Protestant Theology at John Paul II Catholic

University of Lublin, in Lublin, Poland.[18] Kopiec engages the reader in a conversation regarding

how culture and economies have evolved a state of consumptionism into individuals. He presents

the argument that consumptionism has been created by the industrial revolution and

urbanization. Kopiec decries the effects of consumptionism as he asserts it has reduced

mankind's values and reduces all relationships to transactions which feed further consumption.

Kopiec suggests that a person should consider the rise of consumptionism in two forms: socio-

economic and psychological. Kopiec describes how the industrial revolution, coupled with the

spread of democratic governments, gave rise to the rapid advancement of consumer society.

Kopiec shares, "In a democratizing society, the consumer society has an inherent potential to

unfold itself and consequently the conditions making its proliferation possible."[19] The author

describes the psychological form as a consumer cycle of thought. Kopiec says, "A consumer

lives in the consumer cycle, which consists of the sequence desire–purchase–consumption(use)–

disappointment–new desire."[20]  The author contends that the consumer will not stop looking for

new experiences.

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[18] Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, "dr hab. Piotr Kopiec prof. KUL", Accessed on February 11, 2021 from
https://pracownik.kul.pl/piotr.kopiec/kontakt

[19] Piotr Kopiec, "Consumer Society: Its Definitions and Its Christian Criticism," *Hervormde Teologiese*
*Studies*, 76, no. 3 (2020), 4.

[20] Ibid., 5

Kopiec advances the *Evangelii Gaudium* presented by Pope Francis in 2013, where the Pope discussed how the idolatry of money and consumption could be equated with the golden calf from Exo 32:1-35.[21]  Mankind's increased reverence for the acquisition and consumption of products and experience overwhelms their desire for meaningful relationships with others or with God. The author states, "The Bishop of Rome seems to reveal a hermeneutical set of interrelations building today's social reality; firstly, human beings instrumentalize themselves, reduce themselves to a consumer good, which causes a deepening social exclusion."[22]

## Article Critique

This article clearly defines the journey which modern man has pursued to seek personal comfort and satisfaction, as well as explaining how the existing governmental and economic environment has made consumptionism available to many people rather than just a few elites. The amazing prosperity that modern economies provide has led to a significant worldview shift. While people decry the non-stop marketing efforts of the marketplace, the same people feverishly pursue and consume the products offered to maintain their status and comfort within their societal relationships.  Mankind has always tended to observe others and to mimic those who have things that are perceived as valuable.  The pace of innovation unfortunately devalues new acquisitions in such a short period of time.  This sets the individual back into the consumer cycle described above and there does not appear to be any change is this process in the foreseeable future.

The article also explains that many in the world are unable to access this lifestyle yet yearn to be like those who live such a lifestyle.  The pervasiveness of television around the world

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[21] Piotr Kopiec, "Consumer Society: Its Definitions and Its Christian Criticism,"6.

[22] Ibid.

exposes the American lifestyle to far-flung groups and incites them to crave what is not available to them.

The article's title suggests that it will be a Christian criticism, yet it is predominantly a criticism made by the Catholic Church. Even though the thoughts proposed by Pope Francis will resonate with evangelical Christians, this article would be enhanced with more Christian voices being included in the argument.

**Porter, Steven L. "Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character,"** ***Christian Education Journal*, 16, no. 1 (2019): 79–94. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0739891318820334.**

Article Summary

Dr. Steven L. Porter teaches theology and philosophy for Talbot's Institute for Spiritual Formation at Biola University. Porter gained his Ph.D. from the University of Southern California, a M.Phil from the University of Oxford, a MA from the Talbot School of Theology, and a BA from Biola University.[23]

Porter explains that a person's will is a key driver to their development in spiritual formation. The author heavily relies upon the wisdom of Dallas Willard's writings on spiritual formation to advance his concerns. Porter highlights the importance of understanding the role of the will in spiritual formation. Porter raises the priority of the human will in spiritual formation by relating how Jesus spoke to His disciples about proper and improper prayer. In His examples, Jesus pointed out that a person who performed for others or who sought to manipulate God were misguided and only received benefits that their minds granted, rather than blessings from God. Porter states, "The ability we have to originate a course of action, to set our minds on this rather than that, to do one thing and not another, is what contributes to who we are and who we are becoming."[24] Being actively aware of their motivations and choosing to pursue a relationship with God requires an action of a person's will.

The author references ineffectual prayers identified by Jesus in Matt 6:5 as opposed to effectual prayers in Matt 6:4, where the individual hides themselves away in private and seeks

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[23] Biola University, "Steven Porter", Accessed on February 11, 2021 from https://www.biola.edu/directory/people/steven-porter.

[24] Steven L. Porter, "Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character," *Christian Education Journal*, 16, no. 1 (2019), 83.

the Lord without anyone else being a part of the conversation. This recognition of the importance of the relationship with God demonstrates a believer's understanding of God as a person rather than a formless entity. Porter encourages believers to see, "it is loving of God to direct his children to approach himself in a manner that frees them from false views of themselves, of himself, and of the Divine-human relationship."[25] Porter reminds the faithful that it takes an act of their will to properly value God and approach Him as God has encouraged.

Porter describes the four stages of progression toward complete identification of a person's will with God's that Willard had expressed. The four stages (surrender, abandonment, contentment, and participation) will serve to align a person's will with God's and allow them to enjoy fellowship and directed purpose in the service of the kingdom of God.

Article Critique

Porter makes a compelling argument as he advances these concepts to aid the reader in understanding the process of spiritual formation and recognize how vital the will is in determining the individual's progress in their formation. His conclusion states how a disciple who is learning to do all that Jesus commanded (i.e., the Great Commission) needs understanding of this concept to establish a basis of care for their will. Porter's assertions, along with Dallas Willard's comments, point out the need for an individual to purposely set their will to pursue relationship with God and to acknowledge His Lordship in their lives. Without this active recognition and submission, the cultural influences each person experiences will be more effective in steering the believer away from spiritual formation.

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[25] Steven L. Porter, "Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character," *Christian Education Journal*, 16, no. 1 (2019): 81.

Porter concentrates on expressing his thoughts and those of Dallas Willard. His other citations are relegated to definition support and not allowing those other voices to contribute significantly to the conversation.

**Spickard, James V. "The Dark Side of Religious Individualism: A Marcusian Exploration,"** *Critical Research on Religion*, 7, no. 2 (2019): 130–46. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/2050303219848066.

Article Summary

The author, Dr. James V. Spickard, earned his Ph.D. from Graduate Theological Union, a MA from New School for Social Research, and a BA from Stanford.[26] He currently serves as a professor at the University of Redlands, Redlands, CA.

Spickard presents an article that examines the concept of religious individualism through the lens of Herbert Marcuse, who was a scholar with the Institute of Social Research and wrote series of books from 1940 to 1972. Marcuse presented the idea that individuals submit, without realizing it, to the established order. Spickard says, "Marcuse would see contemporary religion as not independent enough from the status quo to provide a source of critique."[27] Spickard and others have built their premises upon this thought and Spickard focuses on discussing how a person's choice for religious individualism will lead them to submit to the "status quo" of the existing culture.

Spickard's article argues that religious individualism has resulted in organized religion losing its voice and being dismissed by the culture. Spickard points out how the sexual scandals in the Catholic church have had a significant impact upon the credibility of all organized churches in the American culture. He explains that individuals are defining religion for themselves and believe that God requires little, and church is a helpful community filled with nice people. Spickard voices, "Individualized religion specifically does not focus on structures of

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[26] Academia, "James V. Spickard", Accessed on February 11, 2021 from https://redlands.academia.edu/JamesVSpickard.

[27] Spickard, James V. "The Dark Side of Religious Individualism: A Marcusian Exploration," *Critical Research on Religion,* 7, no. 2 (2019), 136.

oppression. Nor does it focus on communities. Instead, it focuses on personal development: an "I'm OK, you're OK" spirituality that emphasizes living a good life and helping others while accepting the status quo, which is okay. Individualized religion is also a source of personal identity. Like other consumer goods, it is a means of self-expression."[28]

## Article Critique

Spickard's discussion provides a credible argument of how the seeker sensitive movement in churches can lead to individualistic behavior in the realm of religious thought. His description of people seeking a comfortable happiness is well stated. Marcuse was primarily presenting observations on non-religious matters in the 1950's, but his thoughts do amply describe how individuals within the church who do not have a strong identity in Christ have been impacted by the culture and have modified their expectations of what their religious life should look like. Spickard points out that religious voices have lost impact as they have been attached to other meanings by the masses. Spickard says, "And yet, the issue is not just whether religious voices speak on issues of injustice; it is whether they are heard. Though the Religious Right has considerable influence in the United States, it largely concerns itself with the famous culture wars, not with structural critique."[29]

Spickard's article attempts to describe how religious individualism is not equipped to become meaningful in providing meaningful action in culture, which does not seem an appropriate conclusion considering what was presented. The conclusion that would make more sense was that religious individualism tends toward narcissism and a consumptive lifestyle rather than providing a meaningful impact to society.

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[28] Spickard, James V. "The Dark Side of Religious Individualism: A Marcusian Exploration," *Critical Research on Religion,* 7, no. 2 (2019), 136.

[29] Ibid., 139.

**Sutton, Lodewyk. "An Appropriation of Psalm 82 against the Background of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Christian Church as a Change Agent in the Fourth Industrial Revolution,"** *Hervormde Teologiese Studies***, 76, no. 2 (2020): e1–9. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4102/hts.v76i2.6126.**

Article Summary

Dr. Lodewyk Sutton serves as a professor of Old and New Testament Studies at the University of the Free State, in Bloemfontein, South Africa. He earned his Ph.D. in Old Testament Studies, a MDiv, a BTh and an BA from the University Of Pretoria.[30]

Sutton explains that the Fourth Industrial Revolution began around the year 2000 and was initiated by the advancements in computers, networks, advances on the internet, nanotechnology, and robotics. This revolution aided a change in individual's perceptions and moved people in America toward an individualistic society rather than a group-oriented society. This individualism results in people be self-important and self-absorbed. Sutton described one of the "GenMe" attributes as "This is a generation that was born after the cultural mainstream of self-focus was already established and therefore they are a generation this is not familiar with a world that would put duty before the self."[31] These individuals do not rely upon groups for their answers of truth but are more likely to define truths for themselves and expect others to do so as well. Lodewyk states,

> one of the negative factors of the digital age is that it sustains an individual society that can lead to extreme forms of self-obsessiveness and even narcissism. The church, therefore, needs to be familiar with the generation that functions primarily

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[30] Academia, "Lodewyk Sutton", accessed on February 12, 2021 from https://ufs.academia.edu/LodewykSutton.

[31] Lodewyk Sutton, "An Appropriation of Psalm 82 against the Background of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Christian Church as a Change Agent in the Fourth Industrial Revolution," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76, no. 2 (2020), 3.

in this Fourth Industrial Revolution and with how this society differs from ancient biblical societies.[32]

Sutton continues by referencing Psalm 82 and providing the perspective that God is the sole provider for truth and can be relied upon for that truth. The author argues that the church needs to recognize the thoughts of the current audience of individuals and act as a change agent that is active in interpreting how to respond to the changes around society. He argues that rather than teaching them to be group-oriented, the church should attempt to point individuals to seek God for truth and direction as the appropriate authority.

## Article Critique

Sutton speaks clearly of the individualistic nature of Americans and offers an interesting perspective that allows a believer to approach an individual in a manner that has a greater chance of being received well, given their worldview. The author explains that a believer should not assume a person will have a group-centered consciousness and believe it is their duty to do something for others. Sutton explains that they will need someone to explain to them the benefit of having an absolute authority that provides trustworthy guidance rather than having a value that pretends that every individual's truth is factually truth. The chaos in the world clearly demonstrates that not everyone's truth is in fact truth, which logic demands this argument should be set aside. Sutton's focus on choice will likely be persuasive to this generation.

Sutton makes his argument that authority lies solely with God, which is accurate; however, his proposed solution does not do much beyond providing an individualistic person a starting point to appropriating a biblical lifestyle as proposed by Jesus and the Apostles. This topic can be very expansive and will require believers to develop relationships with others to be

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[32] Sutton, Lodewyk. "An Appropriation of Psalm 82 against the Background of the Fourth Industrial Revolution", 2.

able to spend an appropriate amount of time to help them understand the value of surrendering

their control and allowing God's Word to provide them trustworthy guidance.

**Uecker, Jeremy E, and Paul Froese. "Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism: How Source of Religious Authority Is Related to Attitudes About Abortion, Same-Sex Marriage, Divorce, and Premarital Sex," *Politics and Religion*, 12, no. 2 (2019): 283–316. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S1755048318000792.**

Article Summary

Dr. Jeremy Uecker received his Ph. D. in Sociology, and a M.A., Sociology from the University of Texas at Austin.  He gained his BA Political Science and Sociology from Furman University, Greenville, SC.  Dr. Paul Froese attained his Ph.D., and a M.A. Sociology from the  University of Washington, a M.A. Philosophy from the University of Wisconsin and a B.A. Russian from Grinnell College, Ginnell, IA.  Both authors serve as professors of sociology and as research fellows in the Institute for Studies of Religion.

The authors report upon their survey and calculations that sought to determine if a person's adherence to religious individualism correlated to their moral progressivism.  Their questions sought to segment people into categories based upon their reliance upon religious organizations and religious authorities for their positions on a set of contentious matters (abortion, same-sex marriage, divorce, premarital sex) or their preference to determine their positions on those issues based upon other cultural authorities in their lives.  In almost every case, those who identified that they placed high reliance on religious organizations and the leadership of those organizations, were more conservative in their viewpoints on the contentious matters.  Those who placed a higher reliance on other cultural authorities more likely to be described as morally progressive.  The authors' research pointed out that there is an increase in moral individualism, where an individual "is more likely to be influenced by cultural trends which champion individual choice and question the legitimacy of traditional norms and

prohibitions."[33]  The authors describe conservatives as people who "draw not on moral individualism, but rather from religious teachings, texts, and traditions to combat progressive trends . . ."[34]  In their sample, they identified that 51% of the individuals were a form of non-religious individualists, 31% where religious institutionists, and 18% were religious individualists.

They concluded that those with individualistic sources of religious authority have a robust association with progressive attitudes.  Not surprisingly, the secularists discounted religious authority, but religious individualists appeared to be moving away from religious conventions of the past.

## Article Critique

The methodology used for analyzing this sample appeared well constructed and adhered to prior studies which had been peer viewed and accepted as valid.  The authors pointed out that the topic of abortion did not align with their conclusions on the other contentious items and that more research would be appropriate on that topic.  The spectrum that this study encompassed calls for many sub-classifications to describe the different strata that people might fall in.  The authors derived several classifications, yet many more would have been useful.  It is understandable that it is difficult to measure a person's beliefs along so many scales and be able to easily group any person into a subgroup.  The authors' efforts should be applauded, and they suggest that more research should be conducted to clarify the data.

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[33] Jeremy E. Uecker and Paul Froese, "Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism: How Source of Religious Authority Is Related to Attitudes About Abortion, Same-Sex Marriage, Divorce, and Premarital Sex," *Politics and Religion*, 12, no. 2 (2019), 284.

[34] Ibid.

The authors point out that many religious individualists have several items of progressive thought that do not align with the traditions of their religions.  They also point out that people surveyed "hold progressive moral attitudes because their understanding of morality comes directly from their personal understanding of God rather than an institutionally prescribed understanding."[35]  This comment seems to display that a person grouped as a religious individualist may be operating as a expressive individualist based upon their desire to define God's thoughts themselves outside of Scripture or a religious institution.

The authors pointed out that their methodology did not discern the amount of importance a person placed upon making moral decisions based upon religious principles, which could have skewed the number of people who were reported as being religious individualists rather than properly identified as expressive individualists or utilitarian individualist.  They also commented that people classified in the religious institutionists category and the religious individualist could easily change categories on how they chose to describe their decision-making process and where they placed authority for knowing God's direction for themselves.  Religious individualists were likely to say they listened to God in their heart for direction, even as they based their decisions on what they had learned in Scripture.  A religious institutionist might make a similar decision but say they made choices based upon the church's positions.

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[35] Jeremy E. Uecker and Paul Froese, "Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism", 288.

**Westhuizen, Henco van der. "The Spirit and the Law," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 40, no. 1 (2019). https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4102/ve.v40i1.1933.**

Article Summary

Dr. Henco van der Westhuizen serves as a senior lecturer at in historical and constructive theology at The University of the Free State, Bloemfonteim, South Africa.[36]

Westhuizen has written a very interesting article where he explains how theologian Michael Welker has analyzed the fundamental purposes of biblical law and how those principles relate to God's law that was presented in the Old Testament. Welker continued by considering how the Holy Spirit's influence moves to empower that law to become more than a guide to moral living, but to something "beyond morality."[37] Westhuizen explains that the law provides a "security of expectations", which aids a person to know proper boundaries that they can count upon. Welker describes security as "referring to "certainty, assurances, reliable promises, firm expectations, trust and trustworthiness."[38] Welker had described three codes: the legal code, the mercy code, and the cultic code.[39] The legal code in God's law aids a believer to understand God's character. The mercy code enables a believer to relate to those who do not yet know God as it reminds them of their own need for mercy from God. The cultic code in the law highlights the fact that God is accessible to man. Westhuizen points out to the reader that Welker's work reminds mankind that God's law is meant to aid them, not simply result in condemnation. The

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[36] Academia, "Henco van der Westhuizen", accessed on February 14, 2021 from https://ouvs.academia.edu/HencovanderWesthuizen.

[37] Henco van der Westhuizen, "The Spirit and the Law," Verbum et Ecclesia, 40, no. 1 (2019), 7.

[38] Ibid., 2.

[39] Ibid.

article points out that mankind tends to twist and redefine morality and God's law establishes a

plumbline that can be referenced to determine true morality.

Article Critique

Westhuizen explained Welker's thoughts clearly and provided a convincing dialogue of

the theologian's arguments. His explanation's help a reader understand that it is a work of the

Spirit to transform law from a punishing framework to a revelatory framework of God's

character and love for mankind. Welker's work seems to be a bit mechanical in the way he

describes the Spirit's work in the three categories of law, but that can be understood in that he is

attempting to create a simile to describe how the Law of God can establish boundaries and bring

forth an abundant life for the believer.

Welker describes how the knowledge of God and mercy require the involvement of the

Spirit to keep the intent of the Law from being misapplied by mankind. He argues that the Spirit

of God pours out upon all mankind, rather than just one people. This application aids a reader in

understanding that the Spirit of God is at work on all men to bring blessing to them if they

choose to abide by God's law.

Westhuizen often quoted Welker in German but did not clearly identify if he was directly

translating those statements. In some instances, German was used in quotes and there was no

subsequent translation. Since this article was published in English, it seems reasonable to have

expected all German quotes to be translated.

**Zaas, Peter. "Symposium on the Shema,"** *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, **48, no. 3 (2018): 133–47. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0146107918781280.**

Article Summary

Zaas has compiled three presentations made during the Symposium on the Shema that occurred in 2017. Three scholars who represented Islam, Judaism, and Messianic Judaism were asked to give their reflections upon the Shema. Roberta Sabbath, representing Islam, explained why the Shema was important to Muslims and how it had been slightly transformed to highlight there was only one singular God. Interestingly, she described who this passage was etched onto the outer walls of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and how it was also written on the interior of the Dome. The interior message has a more specific refutation of Jesus as being in any way divine. Sabbath concludes by sharing, "A close reading also highlights just how interwoven were the fates of the developing religions and the indigenous foundations, a contentiousness of familiarity that continues."[40]

Kenneth Hanson described how there is a move of reformation within the Messianic Judaism community to explain that Jesus was a Jew and would not have elevated Himself to the level of the divine as He quoted the Shema. Hanson does describe this is a splinter movement and not the opinion of most Messianic Jews, who would be more easily understood to be Christians who are Jews. These reformers seek to remove the Trinitarian concepts where Jesus was the incarnation of God. Hanson concludes by suggesting, "a fresh look by messianic Jews at the Jesus of history might well pave the way for an expression of their faith that would in no way be in tension with the essence of Jewish monotheism."[41]

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[40] Peter Zaas, "Symposium on the Shema," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 48, no. 3 (2018): 138.

[41] Ibid., 142.

The final scholar was Zev Garber, who represented Judaism. He spoke of the Jewish belief that there is only one God and no others. He argued that Deut 13:1 describes a commandment to not add to what God has stated nor diminish it. His argument is that there is no room for adding two more members to the Godhead according to Scripture.

Article Critique

This article is very useful to gain perspective on how other major religions consider this passage and the arguments those who represent those religions would make against a Christian interpretation of the Shema. It also provides insight to how they would seek to rebut the challenging thought that God chose to send His son, the Word, in flesh to save mankind. Each of these scholars approach this topic from their presuppositions and make reasoned arguments that explain away the deity of Christ so that their religious view can rise about the assertion of a Triune God.

Each scholar presented arguments which are obviously sufficient to them to refuse that there could be a Trinity in existence. The statements of Garber show a deep-seated distrust of any offering of another "god". Garber states, "hence Yeshua/Jesus, worshipped as truly God and Man (and other Messianic belief articles) is totally unacceptable and incompatible to (Rabbinic) Judaism."[42]

The article did not include a Christian viewpoint that was not associated with the Jewish community. It would have been useful to have a Christian scholar presenting a well-reasoned argument from that viewpoint to be included in this dialogue of scholars. These scholars were all speaking to refute Jesus as God and it would have represented a more balanced discussion if the

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[42] Peter Zaas, "Symposium on the Shema," 146.

key focus of their discussion had been properly represented and the "gospel" shared in a manner that explained how God acted and acts, in all of the unity of the persons of God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

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