

WITTGENSTEIN'S THEOLOGIANS?
A SURVEY OF LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S
IMPACT ON THEOLOGY

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There is little doubt that Wittgenstein has influenced the discipline of *philosophy*, as well as subsidiary fields, and that he is a towering figure among twentieth-century intellectuals. Many scholars consider him the most influential philosopher of the century, and note that during the span of his career he produced two markedly different, yet equally brilliant, philosophies. It has been said that he is a “cultural figure of international significance,”¹ whose mesmerizing influence over his disciples is rivaled only by Socrates.² His impact reaches into such various fields as cognitive psychology, sociology, ethics, literary criticism, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. Beyond this, it must be noted that Wittgenstein has ushered in a new intellectual era, in much the way that Kant did during his day. Rather than a Kantian turn to the subject, however, Wittgenstein bequeaths a turn to language and practice. This influence has been well documented.³

What has been overlooked, however, is how *theologians* now stand in the shadow of Wittgenstein. Until recently, statements such as “Wittgenstein’s work has not had a great deal of influence on theology” and “it is unclear what might happen to a theology given the full Wittgenstein treatment” could be made without raising eyebrows.⁴ But particularly in the past two decades, Wittgenstein has been appropriated in increasingly more theological proposals, including such disciplines as ethics, hermeneutics,

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¹ Bryan Magee, “Wittgenstein,” in *The Great Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 323.

² Edward T. Oakes, “Ludwig Wittgenstein Confesses,” *First Things* 24 (June 1992) 37.

³ Hans-Johann Glock provides a list of fields that Wittgenstein has influenced, such as sociology of knowledge, psychology, aesthetics, politics, art, and linguistics (*A Wittgenstein Dictionary* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1996] 28–29). Indeed, Wittgenstein is often noted as the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century. See, for example, Anthony Kenny, *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) vii, xv; P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein’s Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) ix–xviii; Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); and John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: Basic Books, 1998) 4.

⁴ Keith Ward, review of Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) in *RelS* 24 (1988) 267, 269.

philosophical theology, philosophy of religion, systematic theology, biblical studies, evangelism, and missions. His insights are adopted across denominational boundaries, in such traditions as Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, Baptist, Reformed and Presbyterian, and Mennonite. Moreover, his influence is not limited to one "school" of theologians, but includes Thomist, postliberal, liberal, and evangelical theologians.

With Wittgenstein's influence thus stated, several questions arise. What is the nature of Wittgenstein's influence? Which of his insights have been adopted, and to what end? Who are the theologians that adopt his insights, and how deep is the appropriation? Which theologians oppose Wittgenstein, and how are they affected by his influence on the discipline? In seeking to answer these questions, and to argue that Wittgenstein's influence in the field of theology is pervasive, this paper will be divided into five parts: (1) a summary of the central themes of Wittgenstein's later writings; (2) a survey of selected theologians who are fully Wittgensteinian; (3) an examination of certain theologians who are selective in their adoption of Wittgenstein's insights; (4) a look at certain theologians who oppose Wittgenstein, but nonetheless are affected by his influence on the discipline as a whole; and (5) an attempt to show the overall picture of Wittgenstein's influence.

I. WITTGENSTEIN'S LATER PHILOSOPHY

For years, Wittgenstein was known to most theologians as a fideistic philosopher who had a "theory" about the autonomy of language games.⁵ Recently, however, this interpretation of his work no longer has a corner on Wittgenstein studies. His later work as a whole has been given deep and extended consideration by theologians, who appropriate his insights in a rich variety of ways. Four elements in particular are important for understanding theological appropriations of Wittgenstein. Indeed, they are central to understanding Wittgenstein's attempts to overcome the manifold dualisms of traditional Western thought. Such dualisms have fostered an unhealthy antipathy to the human body, and have seduced Western thinkers into trying to "break free" from the body. This is evidenced in: (1) philosophical method, in the attempt to transcend the body by constructing grand theories; (2) anthropology and psychology, in the denial of the embodied nature of the soul; (3) language, in the denial of the bodily nature of "meaning;" and (4) epistemology, in the separation of the mind from the world. To these four elements the article now turns.⁶

1. *Philosophy.* Wittgenstein is notorious for his unorthodox style of writing, and for purposefully arranging his work in such a way that one cannot discern any type of structured theory. One struggles to find any con-

⁵ D. Z. Phillips and others are known for making popular this interpretation of Wittgenstein. See D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

⁶ The purpose of this summary is to prepare the reader to understand the later parts of this article. It is not sufficient for anything more than a cursory glance at Wittgenstein's work.

clusions within his writings. Rather than drawing conclusions, he insinuates. Why does he not employ clear premises and conclusions? The primary answer is that his method of writing unlocks the purpose of his philosophy. He is rebelling against the traditional conception of "philosophy as the setting forth of grand theories," and throughout his later writings one can discern his relentless attack on this type of philosophy. Wittgenstein writes: "We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place."⁷ And again, "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything."⁸ Rather than viewing philosophy as metaphysical explanation, or theory-building, Wittgenstein views it as description, and as therapy for philosophical confusion. Wittgenstein wants his reader to work through philosophical problems without succumbing to illusory theories and meaningless metaphysical language. Language should not attempt to get outside of itself by becoming what it is not (explanatory and metaphysical).⁹

2. *Anthropology and psychology.* Intertwined with Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy, language, and knowledge is a persistent treatment of the relation of mind and body. Wittgenstein rejects any philosophy that attempts to separate the thinking subject from his own body and from the rest of the world. Here, Wittgenstein is fighting the majority tradition in Western philosophy in its inner-outer distinction and two-substance theory of reality, and against Descartes in particular. For Wittgenstein, the grounds for a person's knowledge are not interior and experiential. "I have tried to convince you," he writes, "of just the opposite of Descartes' emphasis on 'I.'"¹⁰ But this does not mean that Wittgenstein is some sort of empiricist. In fact, rationalists and empiricists are much alike, as both (wrongly) conceive of the mind as being separate from the body and from the world. But Wittgenstein is arguing that mind is inextricably intertwined with the body, that interiority is bound up with the public and physical. The public and physical foster the inner and mental, rather than *vice versa*. "Nothing is more wrong-headed than calling meaning a mental activity."¹¹ Indeed, language has made available to humanity an enormous diversity of expressions that enable one to think in various, subtle, and nuanced ways. Therefore Wittgenstein wants to overcome the outside-inside bifurcation by means of language.

3. *Language.* Wittgenstein believed that a faulty view of natural language is embedded in much philosophy, a view that conceals the way a person uses language as a social activity. In the opening paragraph of *Investigations*, he

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (German-English parallel text; trans. G. E. M. Anscombe; Oxford: Blackwell, 1958; repr. 1997) 109.

⁸ *Ibid.* 126.

⁹ For an interpretation and defense of Wittgenstein's "philosophy as therapy" see James F. Peterman, *Philosophy as Therapy: An Interpretation and Defense of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophical Project* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932–1935* (ed. Alice Ambrose; Oxford: Blackwell, 1979) 63.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 693.

gives an extended quotation from Augustine's *Confessions*, which Wittgenstein cites as illustrative of a particularly widespread misunderstanding of language. Augustine writes,

So whenever [grown-ups] referred to something by name, and in mentioning the name made some gesture towards the object in question, I took a firm hold of it with my memory. . . . I would listen to the words, and immediately I would work out from their position in different sentences what they meant; and, as soon as I had learnt to get my tongue around them, I began to string them together in sentences of my own, in order to convey my own desires.¹²

Here, Augustine speaks of language as if it is used primarily to refer to objects, and as if the meaning of a word is found in ostensive reference. By leading with this quote, Wittgenstein could immediately begin working against what he regarded as inadequate views of language—not only that of Augustine, but also the logical perfectionism of Frege and the Platonic essentialism of his own earlier writings.

Probably the most oft-quoted and well-known concept in Wittgenstein's later writings is "language game," which he used for the purpose of showing the complexity of language and its closely-knit relationship with people and their lives.¹³ He employs the notion of language games to refer to the way children learn their native language,¹⁴ as well as to describe particular linguistic activities such as cursing, greeting, praying, giving orders, or telling jokes.¹⁵ These language games are guided by the grammar of that particular language, and are in no need of epistemic justification. Wittgenstein is trying to teach the reader that words are always used in contexts: social, behavioral, and linguistic contexts. In paying attention to such contexts, one can begin to understand one's language and life.

4. *Knowledge.* For Wittgenstein, knowledge does not begin with consciousness—for that matter, it does not begin with anything. Rather, knowledge is rooted in a person's form of life. A shared form of life is the context within which he knows what he knows. The subject, therefore, should not view himself as a Cartesian "ego" separated from the world. Only a god could view the world from above:

¹² Augustine, *The Confessions* (trans. and ed. Philip Burton; New York: Knopf, 2001) 13.

¹³ Wittgenstein's use of the term "game" is not at all meant to suggest that language is somehow trivial. Rather, it is meant to show that just as games have rules that are read off the play of the game, language has grammar that shows a person what makes sense within the language; a proposition is senseless if it is not seen within its language game as a whole. For Wittgenstein, these language games are *guided* by the grammar of that particular language. As for whether grammar is strictly determinative of one's use of a word, or if it allows quite a bit of free play, is a point of no small debate among Wittgenstein scholars. David Pole, in *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (London: The Athlone Press, 1950) asserts that Wittgenstein's language-game is a rule system governing linguistic behavior. Stanley Cavell, in "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," *The Philosophical Review* 71/1 (1962) 67–78, attempts to demonstrate that Wittgenstein's language is not strictly regulated. Rather, it functions without boundaries. For some actions within a language, no rules exist. For example, in basketball, there is no rule about how far to extend the arm when shooting. Rules do not exist prior to the game.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 23.

The form of expression we use seems to have been designed for a god, who knows what we cannot know; he sees the whole of each of those infinite series and he sees into human consciousness. For us, of course, these forms of expression are like pontificals which we may put on, but cannot do much with, since we lack the effective power that would give these vestments meaning and purpose.¹⁶

Wittgenstein is not saying that the subject lacks a world to represent. Rather, he is saying that a person, including his language and form of life, is inextricably intertwined with that world. Therefore, the subject cannot step back from the world in order to see and describe "reality." Thus in knowledge, just as in language, psychology, and philosophical method, as described above, Wittgenstein is affirming the embodied nature of human thought and action.

II. THE WITTGENSTEINIANS

One commentator remarked in 1988 that "it is unclear what might happen to a theology given the full Wittgenstein treatment."¹⁷ Less than two decades later, however, it has become increasingly clear that numerous theologians have found Wittgenstein's insights to be so deeply resonant with Christian belief and practice that they appropriate him in a formative manner. These theologians come from a variety of denominational affiliations and "schools" of theology. Among those who could be listed are Rowan Williams, David Burrell, Fergus Kerr, Stanley Hauerwas, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Brad Kallenberg, Paul Holmer, Donald MacKinnon, Cornelius Ernst, Herbert McCabe, and Victor Preller. It is the purpose of this section to begin to show the rich variety of theologies that are given the "full Wittgenstein treatment."

1. *Stanley Hauerwas.* Stanley Hauerwas, probably the most discussed and debated (living) theologian in the Anglo-American world, is often identified as a postliberal theologian and probably is best known for his revival of virtue theory in ethics and for his Christian pacifism. What is not as readily known, however, is Hauerwas's profound debt to Wittgenstein. One theologian writes of Hauerwas that "Wittgenstein's influence on him [is] of an entirely different order than that of other contemporary thinkers" and that "Hauerwas is able to do ethics precisely because he has been enabled to think *through* Wittgenstein *by means of* the particular language of Christianity."¹⁸ Indeed, the question is not whether Wittgenstein influenced Hauerwas, but how that influence is revealed.

Hauerwas, like Wittgenstein, rejects high theory and system-building. One of the consistent charges against him is that it is difficult to find his system,

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 426.

¹⁷ Ward, review of *Theology after Wittgenstein* 269.

¹⁸ Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) 7, 8. Kallenberg's book is the successor to his dissertation, which is an attempt to uncover the resonance of Wittgenstein's insights with Hauerwas's theological ethics (cf. "Changing the Subject in Postmodernity: Narrative Ethics and Philosophical Therapy in the Works of Stanley Hauerwas and Ludwig Wittgenstein" [Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998]).

his foundations, or the “center” of his thought. Hauerwas responds that this is because “[Wittgenstein] slowly cured me of the notion that philosophy was primarily a matter of positions, ideas, and/or theories.”¹⁹ Rejecting such temptations to be a system-builder free him to get “back to the rough ground,” to be a teacher of the Christian language, a therapist for theological problems. To this end, he has chosen to write essays rather than books: “Without presuming that my work has anything like the power of Wittgenstein’s, it remains my intention that the essays, like his aphorisms, should make the reader think at least as hard, if not harder, than the author has about the issues raised.”²⁰ If the reader will think harder about the issues raised, from within the Christian language, then she will become more virtuous. So Hauerwas rejects theological system-building, and therefore understands the task of theology to be descriptive rather than speculative, therapeutic rather than theoretical.

Hauerwas also pays careful attention to Wittgenstein’s insights into language. Although his appropriation of Wittgenstein is not evidenced by a frenzied use of the phrase “language-game,” it is shown in Hauerwas’s belief that language is always embedded in a form of life. Christian discourse is embedded in Christian practice. Understanding words such as “sanctification” or “justification” comes from understanding the Christian life as a whole, and not from translating such terms into neutral philosophical language. Cartwright points out that, for Hauerwas, “The interpretive enterprise of reading scripture is always located in the web of ecclesial practices, skills, and gestures,” such that “the church is the irreplaceable locus of authority for reading Scripture.”²¹ Kallenberg argues that this focus on community is evidence of the “deep ingression” of the notion of “form of life” in Hauerwas’s thinking.²²

Also central to Wittgenstein’s and Hauerwas’s programs is the uprooting of mind-body dualisms. Both men try to show that the body reveals the soul rather than concealing it, that the public expresses the private rather than obstructing it. There is no private experience that can be separated from bodily and linguistic factors. Language is continuous with experience—language gives one the categories with which to experience “experience.” Hauerwas writes, “Wittgenstein . . . helped me see that ‘mind’ did not relate to body as a cause to effect, for ‘mind’ was not a singular thing or function” and again, “Wittgenstein ended forever any attempt on my part to try to anchor theology in some general account of ‘human experience,’ for his writings taught me that the object of the theologians’ work was best located

¹⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) xxi.

²⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 6.

²¹ Michael G. Cartwright, “Stanley Hauerwas’s Essays in Theological Ethics: A Reader’s Guide,” in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader* (ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) 641.

²² Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar* 8, 113–59.

in terms of the grammar of the language used by believers."²³ All of this means that the body is important. It is not a peripheral garment to be tossed aside after death. That Hauerwas takes the body seriously is seen in his rejection of suicide and euthanasia: "Everyone seems to agree that if anything is a moral problem suicide and euthanasia are prime examples and thus ready grist for the ethicist's mill. As Wittgenstein suggests, we seem to be on fundamentally moral grounds when dealing with the taking of one's own life."²⁴ Hauerwas, therefore, does not allow for mind to be separated from body, nor consciousness from language and activity.

Insights from Wittgenstein's writings pervade Hauerwas's work. Indeed, the examples above hardly suffice to demonstrate. Hauerwas thinks Wittgenstein is helpful for rejecting relativism, fideism and radical skepticism, and for building a non-foundational Christian realism.²⁵ He is helpful for retrieving a biblically and traditionally Christian view of church and community, and of evangelism and missions. In short, Hauerwas finds Wittgenstein's central insights resonant with Christian theology.

2. *Fergus Kerr.* Fergus Kerr's *Theology after Wittgenstein* has been hailed as a twentieth-century theological classic, and his Wittgensteinian Thomism has been given significant attention not only in England and America, but also on the Continent.²⁶ *Theology after Wittgenstein* is divided into three parts. In the first part he reviews a handful of modern theologians who are held captive by a flawed conception of the self, and he shows how Wittgenstein worked hard to uproot this same flawed conception. According to Kerr, the modern notion of "self" arose from Descartes's theological philosophy of mind. Descartes wanted to be able to get rid of "bodiliness" and uncover the essential self, the thinking core of consciousness. Malebranche and Kant carried on this tradition in philosophy, while Rahner, Küng, and Cupitt, among others, carry on the tradition in theology. Kerr follows Wittgenstein in rejecting this tradition. In the second part Kerr provides an introduction to the *Investigations* that focuses on Wittgenstein's rejection of the Cartesian "I" and on Wittgenstein's non-empiricist realism. In the third part he discusses the relevance and ramifications of all of this for theology.

In *Theology after Wittgenstein* and other works, it is clear that Kerr finds in Wittgenstein an able therapist for the knotted ways of thinking and the manifold confusions of traditional Western thought. These confusions,

²³ Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* xxi.

²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas with Richard Bondi, "Memory, Community, and the Reasons for Living: Reflections on Suicide and Euthanasia," in *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977) 101.

²⁵ Stanley Hauerwas with Mike Quirk, "Stanley Hauerwas: An Interview," *Cross Currents* 52 (2002) 14.

²⁶ Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986; 2d ed. London: S.P.C.K., 1997). David Ford, for example, calls Kerr's book "one of the classics of British philosophical theology" ("British Theology after a Trauma: Divisions and Conversations," *Christian Century* 117/12 [12 April 2000] 426).

according to Kerr, revolve around unhealthy mind-body dualisms, denigrations of the human body which are motivated by the desire to gain an "absolute conception of reality."²⁷ This flawed conception, as Kerr sees it, not only is in prominent thinkers such as Descartes, but is deeply embedded in the language and life of ordinary people. In their attempts to speak, to gain knowledge, and to worship, they attempt to "step outside of their bodies," to transcend their humanity. Kerr's primary move throughout his career has been to loosen theologians from this antipathy toward the body. He wants a way of knowing that is fit for humans, a way of speaking that acknowledges the bodiliness of language and meaning, and a way of worshiping that does not negate a person's humanity.

Kerr's rejection of mind-body dualism, along with his Wittgensteinian affirmation of the embodied nature of life, has immediate bearing on more than a few theological issues. In relation to abortion, for example, Kerr writes, "If . . . Wittgensteinian considerations . . . for the existence of a human being are given due weight, then a very different context for the debate seems to appear."²⁸ This is because, under a Wittgensteinian view, the humanness of an embryo would rely upon the "close relationship of physical dependence on an adult member of our species" rather than upon some mysterious hidden ego.²⁹ For Kerr, Wittgenstein's insights also are confluent with Christian teaching on the atonement. "Following Wittgenstein," he writes, "one might be able to root the doctrine of the atonement in brute facts about the internal dynamics of any human community,"³⁰ to such an end that one can say that "Jesus was scapegoated, willingly, to preserve the community, but in the aftermath of the execution the cycle was apparently broken: the 'sin' of his tormentors did not fall in turn upon them."³¹ Thus the Wittgensteinian rejection of anthropological dualisms lends support to Catholic Christian teaching on the atonement and on abortion, as well as on numerous other theological issues.³²

Further, Kerr appropriates Wittgenstein in apologetics. Kerr points out that Wittgenstein had a great interest in theological questions, probably more so than any philosopher since Nietzsche.³³ What revolted Wittgenstein about some Christian theologians, however, was their attempt to make Christianity into a rationalist philosophical system. Wittgenstein writes, "The symbolism of Christianity is wonderful beyond words, but when people try to make a philosophical system out of it I find it disgusting."³⁴ Kerr shares Wittgenstein's aversion, and offers a non-foundationalist, non-rationalist apologetic

²⁷ Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* 3–27.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 177.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.* 181.

³¹ *Ibid.* 182.

³² Other issues include transubstantiation, liturgy, the afterlife, volition and moral action, and Gnosticism.

³³ Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* 151.

³⁴ Brian McGuinness, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations recorded by Friedrich Waismann* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979) 117.

that is an invitation to the other-believer to partake of the life and language of the Christian community, to live in the midst of the body of Christ. The beauty of life in the church is the most persuasive, and most Christian, "argument" that a Christian can provide. For Kerr, a Thomist, none of this is incompatible with Aquinas, whose Five Ways do not function as a foundationalist apologetic, but as *a posteriori* theological observations that leave God's transcendence intact. "The proofs of God's existence," Kerr writes, "which come early in the *Summa Theologiae* cannot be transported from their theological context into philosophy of religions courses—arguably, at least."³⁵

Although this essay has focused on Kerr's *Theology after Wittgenstein*, his interaction with Wittgenstein is not limited to this book alone; indeed, most of his articles and books evidence his debt to Wittgenstein.³⁶ For Kerr, "since [Wittgenstein] is the last great philosopher in our tradition who cared passionately about the Christian religion, it would be perverse of theologians to avoid his studies of what we may properly say."³⁷ For this reason, Kerr appropriates Wittgenstein throughout his theological work, in moral theology, theological epistemology, and metaphysics.

3. Brad J. Kallenberg. Brad J. Kallenberg is an example of an evangelical who presses Wittgenstein into full theological service. Kallenberg is a theologian, evangelist, and campus minister whose work consistently calls into question the hegemony of modernist reductionism over Christian theology and practice. This modernist reductionism has hurt the church's ability to be faithful in its evangelism and discipleship, as evidenced by three problems. First, Kallenberg seeks to overcome the metaphysical reductionism of the modern paradigm. Christians, he thinks, have been tempted to reduce the church to a mere collection of individuals, and evangelism to the mere addition of more individuals. Instead, Christians should conceive of the church as an organic community, and of evangelism as the entrance of others into this community. The evangelistic task of Christians, therefore, is to "naturalize" new believers into the new community, which will in turn change their social identity.³⁸ The new believer will be transformed in his thinking and living.

Riveted to this metaphysical reductionism is a linguistic reductionism, which Kallenberg also seeks to overcome. Believers who are stuck in a modernist paradigm view conversion as mere cognitive assent to isolated propositions. This is because we have been taught to view language and the world as separate entities. But Kallenberg argues that this is not right;

³⁵ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 207.

³⁶ See, for example, Fergus Kerr, "Idealism and Realism: An Old Controversy Dissolved," in *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honor of Donald MacKinnon* (ed. Kenneth Surin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 15–33; Fergus Kerr, "Transubstantiation after Wittgenstein," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999) 115–30.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 187.

³⁸ Brad J. Kallenberg, "Conversion Converted: A Postmodern Formulation of the Doctrine of Conversion," *EvQ* 67 (1995) 347.

as Wittgenstein has shown us, language is continuous with the world, not separate from it. Kallenberg writes, “Children initially learn a language not by having objects pointed out to them—that comes very much later—but by being trained into a form of life.”³⁹ Language is not private, but communal: “Learning a language is an irreducibly social enterprise that trains a child into a communal mode of living. Thus Wittgenstein likens language to a series of games that require partners for playing.” The cash value, therefore, of overcoming linguistic reductionism, is a better model for evangelism: evangelism is a process of language acquisition rather than mere cognitive assent to propositions. New believers are acquiring a new language.

Finally, Kallenberg works to subvert epistemological absolutism. He seeks to replace a Cartesian paradigm with a social model of knowledge, which he believes is the more *Christian* way of having certitude and making universal claims. In “The Gospel Truth of Relativism,” he argues that a social model of knowledge, as informed by Wittgenstein and MacIntyre, “*does not render incoherent the Christian practice of making unqualified, universal truth claims in the proclamation of the gospel.*”⁴⁰ Under this model, Christianity is *shown* to be true by the lives of its converts:

By extension, the Christian claim that the gospel is universally true expresses the conviction that standing before the throne of the Lamb on the last day will be at least one convert representing every possible conceptual scheme—every tribe, tongue, people and nation . . . My point has never been to argue that Christians, and Christians alone, have the epistemic right to make universal claims on the grounds that at the end of time only their tradition will be left standing—although as a believer, this *is* my conviction.⁴¹

His point here is that Christians do not have, and do not need, Cartesian certainty. Moral and psychological certitude is what we have, and that is better in any case; Cartesian proofs not only are not available, but they would distort Christian faith.

4. *Other Wittgensteinians.* Hauerwas, Kerr, and Kallenberg are by no means the only theologians who could have served as case studies of Wittgensteinian theology. Hauerwas and Kerr themselves have been influenced by Wittgensteinian Thomists such as David Burrell, Victor Preller, Cornelius Ernst, and Herbert McCabe. Burrell is famous for linking Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblance with Aquinas’s doctrine of analogy and for arguing that theologians should stop searching for foundations and neutral languages and should rather embrace theology as grammar.⁴² Victor Preller does not explicitly tie his re-reading of Aquinas to Wittgenstein’s influence, but Hauerwas and Burrell both have noted the strong family resemblance

³⁹ Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002) 23.

⁴⁰ Brad J. Kallenberg, “The Gospel Truth of Relativism,” *SJT* 53 (2000) 178.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 209–10.

⁴² David Burrell, “Analogy and Philosophical Language” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973); David Burrell, “Theology and the Linguistic Turn,” *Communio* 6 (1979) 112.

between Preller's work and Wittgenstein's.⁴³ Cornelius Ernst used Wittgenstein's writings to argue for the need to shift from a philosophy of being to a philosophy of meaning, and for the dissolution of modern dualisms that have riddled theology.⁴⁴ Likewise, Herbert McCabe's Wittgensteinian insights on mind and language are directed toward reconnecting Christian language and doctrine to the Christian community, thereby bringing it back from its misuse by modern systematicians.⁴⁵

Thomists, however, are not the only theologians to be influenced so. The late James Wm. McClendon, Jr., a Baptist theologian at Fuller Theological Seminary, found Wittgenstein's insights resonant with systematic theology: "Wittgenstein looked beyond modernity to another way of construing selves, world and God, and in his case this turn paralleled a quest for a faithful Christian existence."⁴⁶ McClendon's appropriation of Wittgenstein is seen in his focus on the close relationship of language and practice and in his attempt to overcome modernism without conceding relativism. Rowan Williams and Donald MacKinnon are Anglican theologians who are Wittgensteinian, while Paul Holmer was Lutheran. Holmer appropriated Wittgenstein without hesitation, mainly in the service of arguing that the Christian faith has been warped and distorted by attempts to subsume it under metaphysical schemes and to provide it with "neutral" philosophical foundations.⁴⁷ Donald MacKinnon and Rowan Williams, after reading Wittgenstein, gave up doing "systematic" theology, and began to do theology *in media res*.⁴⁸

The theologians listed above are only a sampling of those who have appropriated Wittgenstein in a formative manner. Each of them considers Wittgenstein's insights to be confluent and resonant with Christian belief and practice, and each considers those insights to be a constructive way forward in theology. There are many theologians, however, who recognize the value of Wittgenstein's work but who do not think that his work as a whole is confluent and resonant with Christianity. These "users" seek to adopt particular elements of Wittgenstein's program, while rejecting others.

III. THE USERS

Although some theologians are not willing to give their theologies the "full Wittgenstein treatment," they are willing to muster his support for certain projects. Wittgenstein's work is appropriated in such diverse areas

⁴³ Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). For Hauerwas's and Burrell's comments on Preller, see Stanley Hauerwas, "Connections Created and Contingent: Aquinas, Preller, Wittgenstein, and Hopkins," in Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004) and David Burrell, "Religious Understanding," *The Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969) 685.

⁴⁴ Cornelius Ernst, *Multiple Echo* (trans. Fergus Kerr and Timothy Radcliffe; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968).

⁴⁶ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 272.

⁴⁷ Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

⁴⁸ Donald MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth, 1968) 223; Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

as hermeneutics and biblical interpretation, ecumenical reconciliation, realist theories of language, and non-foundational theological realism. Like “The Wittgensteinians” above, “The Users” come from across the ideological spectrum—they include conservative evangelical, liberal-revisionist, and postliberal theologians, among others.

1. *Hans Frei and George Lindbeck.* It has been no secret that the post-liberal movement is influenced by Wittgenstein. Hauerwas is clearly Wittgensteinian, as seen above, but what about the founding fathers, Hans Frei and George Lindbeck? Both Frei and Lindbeck view Wittgenstein’s work as helpful for theologians, though neither of them is willing to give his theology a fully Wittgensteinian therapy. Frei acknowledges that Wittgenstein’s writings taught him to do theology in a descriptive rather than speculative, and hermeneutical rather than ontological, fashion. Frei writes, “[Wittgenstein] described how we actually use language in ordinary conversation and so weaned me from a specialized vocabulary and thought form both for philosophy and theology; second, it weaned me away from high-flown ontological reflection in order to understand theology.”⁴⁹

Moreover, in his, “Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,” Frei points out Wittgenstein’s import for the specific task of biblical interpretation, and utilizes the philosopher’s insights to that end in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* and in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.⁵⁰ Frei, however, was never fully Wittgensteinian, as is evident in (1) his *Eclipse and Identity*, which use Wittgenstein’s insights on language, but turn those insights into heavily theoretical treatises on hermeneutics; and (2) his argument that the biblical narratives are “history-like,” which seems to privilege the un-Wittgensteinian assumption that he has stepped back from the world and knows what history should look like.

George Lindbeck, co-patriarch along with Frei of the postliberal school, adopts Wittgenstein’s insights for his ecumenical ecclesiology. Early in his career, Lindbeck was a Yale philosopher, but after being a delegated observer at the Second Vatican Council was reassigned to the theology department, where his subsequent books and articles arose from, and were driven by, his involvement in ecumenical dialogue. His *magnum opus*, *The Nature of Doctrine*, is clearly indebted to Wittgenstein, who Lindbeck acknowledges “has served as a major stimulus to my thinking.”⁵¹ This influence is uncovered in several of Lindbeck’s arguments in *The Nature of Doctrine*.

⁴⁹ John F. Woolverton, “Hans W. Frei in Context: A Theological and Historical Memoir,” *ATR* 79 (1997) 377–78. Woolverton gives this quote without specifying his source. Presumably, it is from his interview with Frei.

⁵⁰ Hans W. Frei, “Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,” in Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays* (ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 26–44; Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

⁵¹ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 24.

One of Lindbeck's arguments for a postliberal theory of religion and doctrine is epistemological. He argues against foundational views of religion and theology—either cognition-based or experience-based—and for a cultural-linguistic view which sees Christian theology as arising from Christian language and practice. He writes:

a religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought. . . . it is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good (though it may involve these), or a symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or sentiments (though these will be generated). Rather, it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experience of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments.⁵²

Neither propositions nor interiority provide foundations for religion. For Lindbeck, who is following Wittgenstein, communities of belief do not have foundations; rather, they have language embedded in a shared form of life.

Another of Lindbeck's arguments deals with doctrinal disputes and problem dissolution. His interest in this topic arises from his involvement with the Second Vatican Council, while his approach to the issue stems from his reading of Wittgenstein. Lindbeck is concerned to provide an understanding of doctrine that allows for ecumenical agreement without doctrinal capitulation. Foundationalist understandings of religion and doctrine, however, cannot accomplish such a goal. The cognitive foundationalists are too concerned with doctrinal constancy, and therefore tend to ignore ecumenism. The experiential foundationalists, on the other hand, care too little about doctrinal constancy or doctrinal reconciliation. So Lindbeck offers a cultural-linguistic understanding of doctrine in which doctrine functions within a religion much as grammar functions within a language. Under this regulative theory of doctrine, doctrine is analogous to a computer program. "Just as genetic codes or computer programs may remain identical even while producing startling[ly] different products depending on input and situation, so also with the basic grammars of cultures, languages, and religions. They remain the same while the products change."⁵³ The influence of Wittgenstein is clear—Lindbeck is seeking the therapeutic dissolution of doctrinal problems; he is attempting to do "ecumenism as doctrinal therapy."

Other evidences of Wittgenstein's influence can be discerned in his comparative religions argument and in his writings on hermeneutics. Lindbeck, however, stops short of being fully Wittgensteinian, in that (1) the overall impression gained of *The Nature of Doctrine* is that it is a high theory of religion and doctrine; and (2) Lindbeck seeks to maintain a modified correspondence theory of truth, while Wittgenstein rejected notions of correspondence as unhelpful and confusing. This is not to say that Lindbeck misunderstood Wittgenstein; it is simply to say that he adapted Wittgenstein for his own purposes.

⁵² Ibid. 33.

⁵³ Ibid. 83.

2. *Kevin Vanhoozer and Anthony Thiselton.* Several evangelical theologians rely upon Wittgenstein's insights in the service of hermeneutics and biblical interpretation. Kevin Vanhoozer's *Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* is an example.⁵⁴ In this book, Vanhoozer is giving his response to the postliberal theological program, especially as focused on George Lindbeck's proposal in *The Nature of Doctrine*. One strong similarity between Lindbeck and Vanhoozer is that they both resource Wittgenstein's work in setting forth their respective performance models of interpretation. Both understand, through Wittgenstein, that one comes to understand language through watching it in action, through discerning its use in context. Vanhoozer writes, "The place to begin arguing this point is Wittgenstein's suggestion that understanding comes through watching language games in action ('look to the use')."⁵⁵ The difference between Lindbeck and Vanhoozer, however, is that while Lindbeck's "ecclesial" model of performance interpretation finds the meaning of the text in the use of language in the church today, Vanhoozer's "canonical" model finds the meaning of the text in its canonical use. Vanhoozer also appropriates Wittgenstein's insights at other points along the way, in forming his evangelical canonical hermeneutic and in conceptualizing the task of theology.⁵⁶

Anthony Thiselton's work in general hermeneutics and biblical interpretation is heavily dependent upon the work of Wittgenstein. He writes, "We shall argue most emphatically for the relevance of Wittgenstein's thought both to hermeneutical theory in general and to the interpretation of the New Testament."⁵⁷ In constructing a general hermeneutical theory, he relies upon the notion of language games, writing "what meaning *is*, as Wittgenstein observes, depends on the language-game from within which meaning-currency is drawn."⁵⁸ And again, "The meaning of words depends on their setting or non-linguistic situation, even more than grammar," and "the problem of meaning is best approached when language is viewed as part of a human activity, or of a form of life."⁵⁹ In other words, language is not private and existential, but public and contextual.

The public and contextual nature of language bears upon biblical exegesis and theology. Thiselton writes, "Meaning in theological or religious

⁵⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 212.

⁵⁶ The most helpful section of *The Drama of Doctrine*, for understanding Vanhoozer's interface with Wittgenstein, is Chapter Seven, "The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Canon" 211–37. He also interacts with Wittgenstein's work in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), and *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

⁵⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 26.

⁵⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 13.

⁵⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (ed. I. H. Marshall; Exeter: Paternoster, 1977) 77; Anthony C. Thiselton, "Word: Language and Meaning in Religion," in *NIDNTT* 3.1130.

discourse depends on how stretches of language draw their currency from regular, observable, patterns of behaviour in life."⁶⁰ A salient example is Jesus' teaching on redemption, which is always interpreted in the context of his redemptive actions. Therefore "concepts like 'being redeemed' . . . are made intelligible and 'teachable' not on the basis of private existential experience but on the basis of a public tradition of certain patterns of behaviour."⁶¹

Finally, Wittgenstein's work also can be used to clean up the mess that deconstruction and radical relativism have made. He argues that Derrida, for example, would have been well served to pay attention to Wittgenstein's notion of forms of life: "In Wittgenstein's phraseology 'the surroundings' of language give it at least part of its currency . . . [But] Derrida . . . unlike Wittgenstein . . . fails to recognize the stability of linguistic 'markers' offered by human behaviour in the public domain."⁶² In other passages, Thiselton also gives Wittgensteinian therapy to Nietzsche, Foucault, Rorty, and Fish.

3. *Other Users.* Frei, Lindbeck, Vanhoozer, and Thiselton are joined by a host of other theologians whose agendas are diverse. Gordon Kaufman, for example, who is associated with liberal and revisionist theology, appropriates Wittgenstein for grammatical analysis of philosophical and theological dilemmas.⁶³ William Placher, a hybrid between revisionist and postliberal, seeks to use Wittgenstein's insights to do theology in a non-foundationally realist manner.⁶⁴ John Frame and David Clark are evangelicals who press Wittgenstein into the service of linguistic realism.⁶⁵ All of these theologians have recognized the significance of Wittgenstein's work and have adapted his insights to their concerns. Rather than rejecting him as unhelpful, or embracing him as a model for theology, they have taken a middle road of partial appropriation.

IV. THE REJECTERS

Thus far, all of the theologians mentioned have appropriated Wittgenstein's insights in some fashion. There are some theologians, however, who fully recognize Wittgenstein's significance, and choose to interact with his writings, but who reject his essential ideas. Two noted theologians who reject his insights are David Tracy and Norman Geisler. Tracy is a prominent "liberal-revisionist" theologian, while Geisler is a "conservative evangelical"

⁶⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 38.

⁶¹ Thiselton, *Two Horizons* 382.

⁶² Thiselton, *Interpreting* 39.

⁶³ Gordon D. Kaufman, "Reading Wittgenstein: Notes for Constructive Theologians," *JR* 79 (1999) 404–21.

⁶⁴ William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989).

⁶⁵ See David K. Clark, *To Know and to Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002).

who has served as president of both the Evangelical Theological Society and the Evangelical Philosophical Society. On many accounts, one could not conceive a wider chasm between two theologians. However, Geisler and Tracy join hands in recognizing the need to interact with Wittgenstein's insights, and in rejecting those same insights.

1. *Norman Geisler.* For Norman Geisler, Wittgenstein is an epistemological disaster, and this is all the more reason for concern because of the manifold negative implications that Wittgenstein's insights have for theology, if adopted. Geisler's main contentions are two. First, he rejects Wittgenstein's therapeutic and descriptive method. Geisler thinks that theologians should indeed be theoretical and explanatory. "The challenge, then, is for the Christian to 'out-think' the non-Christian both in building a system of truth and in tearing down systems of error."⁶⁶ Instead of Wittgensteinian therapy, therefore, Geisler seeks to build a theoretical system, and give foundational justification for it.

Second, Geisler rejects Wittgenstein's language games. While Geisler agrees with Wittgenstein's rejection of Platonic essentialism, he argues against what he calls Wittgenstein's conventionalist theory of meaning. Such conventionalism is Wittgenstein's "deadliest legacy"⁶⁷ and is an example of a "hollow and deceptive philosophy" that "has led many astray from the historical view of Scripture."⁶⁸ He warns theologians not to fall prey to Wittgenstein and other linguistic relativists. In the place of essentialist and conventionalist views of language, Geisler argues for "linguistic realism," which asserts that meaning transcends symbols and linguistic conventions. "Meaning is objective and absolute . . . because there is an absolute Mind, God . . . who has communicated it to finite minds (human beings) through a common but analogous means of human language . . . that utilizes transcendent principles of logic common to both God and humans."⁶⁹ So, for Geisler, Wittgenstein's conventionalism is a poison in the pot for Christian theologians.

2. *David Tracy.* David Tracy, like Geisler, is a foundationalist of sorts who has built an elaborate system of fundamental and systematic theology. Tracy does not explicitly reject Wittgenstein in his writings—indeed, he even allows Wittgenstein frequent cameo appearances—but his essential ideas are dissonant with Wittgenstein's insights. The difficulty with demonstrating Tracy's "rejection" of Wittgenstein is that it is difficult to find Tracy rejecting anybody's work. He seems to like everything he reads, even when such various

⁶⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 73.

⁶⁷ Norman L. Geisler, "Ludwig Wittgenstein," in *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 783.

⁶⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002) 424.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 105.

works contradict each other or go against the grain of his own work. Nonetheless, it is clear from a reading of Tracy's work that he does not appropriate Wittgenstein's central insights. This is revealed in at least two manners.

First, Tracy contradicts Wittgenstein in using experience as the substructure of knowledge. Especially in his early writings, Tracy offers a theology that is a public exercise in speaking from, of, and about the common experience of mankind. These religious experiences, or limit-experiences, are universally available and are the foundation for human knowledge. It should be noted that, in later stages of his work, Tracy tries to show that he is not an experiential foundationalist, although it is widely argued that he never really altered the essence of his foundationalist program.⁷⁰

Second, Tracy offers a referential theory of language. In an early text, *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy argues that the referent of language is the experience of the self; it is a reference that is "in front of" the text: "A particular experience or language is 'meaningful' when it discloses an authentic dimension of our experience as selves."⁷¹ All religious language arises from, and articulates, experience. In a later work, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, Tracy alters his description of language, recognizing that reason is affected by sociolinguistic factors. But although he cites Wittgenstein in many of his writings, and offers some minor alterations to his theory of language, he does not allow himself to be influenced by Wittgenstein in any substantial manner.⁷² The overall impression gained is that Tracy considers Wittgenstein a significant thinker, and feels the need to show that he has interacted with Wittgenstein, but nonetheless rejects his central insights.

V. WITTGENSTEIN'S INFLUENCE

This paper has argued that Wittgenstein's impact on theologians is pervasive, and the primary evidence for this thesis has been shown through a threefold typology. The Wittgensteinians are those theologians who consider Wittgenstein to be the constructive way forward in theology. Although they have in common that their appropriation of him is deep and extensive, the final product of their appropriation is colorful and diverse. The Users are theologians who interact extensively with Wittgenstein, and although they

⁷⁰ Nancey Murphy, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Alister McGrath, and James McClendon are among those who have argued that Tracy's experiential foundationalism remains intact despite his alterations and denials. Cf. Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1996) 27; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 283; Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996) 72; James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000) 280.

⁷¹ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 71.

⁷² David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). More than a few commentators have pointed out that Tracy's linguistic expressivism remains essentially unchanged. See, for example, Jeffrey Stout, review of Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* in *TToday* 44 (1988) 507 and Gerard Loughlin, review of Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* in *Modern Theology* 7 (1991) 486.

do not give their theologies the full Wittgenstein treatment, they do adopt some of his insights. The Rejecters are theologians whose proposals and ideas are dissonant with Wittgenstein's work, but who nonetheless are compelled to interact with his insights because of Wittgenstein's pervasive influence. While these three models have provided the primary means for demonstrating Wittgenstein's impact on theology, other angles could easily have been taken, which gauge the situation equally well. For instance, it can be demonstrated that Wittgenstein is now a towering figure (1) across denominational boundaries; (2) in various "schools" of theology; and (3) across the various sub-disciplines within theology.

One measure of his impact, as noted immediately above, is the extent to which he has affected the major traditions within Christianity. While this paper has not interacted with Eastern Orthodox theologians, it has shown Wittgenstein's clear impact within Roman Catholic circles (Fergus Kerr, David Burrell, David Tracy, Cornelius Ernst, Herbert McCabe); Lutheran (George Lindbeck, Paul Holmer); Baptist (James McClendon, Norman Geisler); Methodist (Hauerwas); Anglican and Episcopal (Victor Preller, Rowan Williams, Donald MacKinnon, Hans Frei, Anthony Thiselton, N. T. Wright); Reformed and Presbyterian (William Placher, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Frame); and Mennonite (Gordon Kaufman). In each of these cases, the persons mentioned are prominent contemporary theologians within their particular traditions.

Another measure of Wittgenstein's impact is through an assessment of "schools" of theology. Probably the most obvious place to start is postliberal theology, where Wittgenstein's influence is seen on all the major figures—Paul Holmer, Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, and others. Another major grouping is those who call themselves evangelicals—Kevin Vanhoozer, David Clark, John Frame, Brad Kallenberg, James McClendon, Anthony Thiselton, and N. T. Wright. Probably the deepest and most resonant example, however, is contemporary Thomism, where theologians such as David Burrell, Fergus Kerr, Victor Preller, Cornelius Ernst, and Herbert McCabe appropriate Wittgenstein in a formative manner for their respective programs.⁷³ Finally, even liberal-revisionist theologians such as Gordon Kaufman and David Tracy have been affected.

Yet another angle from which to view the landscape is through the various sub-disciplines of theology. Wittgenstein looms large in theological ethics in the work of Stanley Hauerwas and Brad Kallenberg, and in systematic theology through the writings of James McClendon, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Gordon Kaufman. His impact is evident also in historical theology in the work of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei; in hermeneutics through the writings of Anthony Thiselton, N. T. Wright, and Hans Frei; in philosophical theology, as evidenced in the work of Fergus Kerr and David Burrell; and in evangelism, as seen in Brad Kallenberg's writings. Finally, although it has

⁷³ See Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain, eds., *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (London: SCM, 2004).

not been focally significant in this paper, it can be shown that commentators are trying to reconcile Wittgenstein's insights with major figures of the past, such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Newman, and Barth.

In short, Wittgenstein's later writings have made a significant impact on the field of theology. It seems safe to say that his present influence on Anglo-American theology is pervasive. This observation may strike some readers as bizarre because of Wittgenstein's early reputation as an atheist or agnostic relativist. But Wittgenstein has been given a second hearing, and many theologians now consider his insights relevant for the task of theology. Indeed, it is not unwise to agree with Kerr that "theological questions lie between the lines of all of Wittgenstein's writing. It is hard to think of a great philosopher, at least since Nietzsche, whose work is equally pervaded by theological considerations,"⁷⁴ and with Feinberg that "[Wittgenstein's] views are enormously important for theological issues in view of their profound influence in shaping the philosophical milieu of our times and in view of his ideas on religious issues."⁷⁵ Theologians are now compelled to give careful attention to Wittgenstein's work, in light of his influence on the field of theology, and with an eye toward either appropriating his insights (either fully or partially) for their own constructive work, or being prepared to give a carefully considered rejection of those insights.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* 151.

⁷⁵ John S. Feinberg, "Noncognitivism: Wittgenstein," in *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots* (ed. Norman L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 164–65.

⁷⁶ For a more extensive look into the case studies in this article, see Bruce Riley Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Impact on Anglo-American Theology: Representative Models of Response to Ludwig Wittgenstein's Later Writings" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003) 122–40.