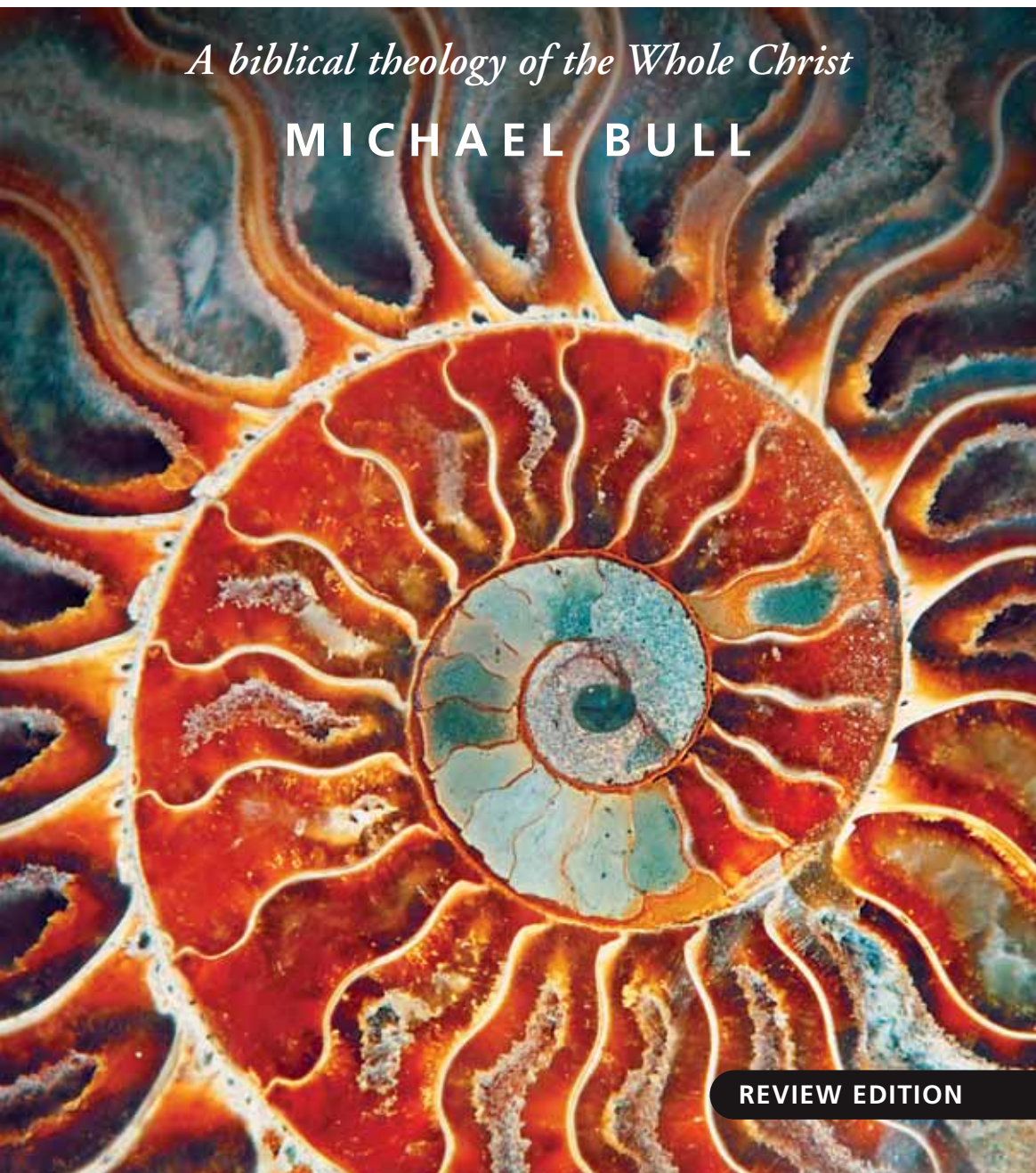


# T⊕TUS CHRISTUS

*A biblical theology of the Whole Christ*

MICHAEL BULL



REVIEW EDITION

# T⊕TUS CHRISTUS

*A biblical theology of the Whole Christ*

To correctly interpret the last chapter of a book, you must understand everything that has gone before. Without a big handle on the Old Testament, we misinterpret the New.

**Recognising the Bible's DNA gives us  
a new perspective on the future.**

Its repeated historical and literary structures not only unlock the Old Testament, they carry us to some staggering conclusions about the identity, purpose and future of Christianity.



The Bible does not speak in ideology divorced from reality.  
It speaks in the energising, intoxicating flesh-and-blood  
symbols of the Creation, and so should we.

This book is also an unofficial introduction to the groundbreaking  
interpretive work of James B. Jordan and Peter J. Leithart—  
*theology you can eat and drink.*



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TOTUS CHRISTUS

Michael Bull is a graphic designer who lives and works  
in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, Australia.  
He is married to Karen and they have three children.  
His passion is understanding and teaching the Bible.

## T H A N K   Y O U

To those who listened, questioned, advised and  
encouraged, especially David P. Field who read an  
early draft in a single afternoon.

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*Totus Christus, A biblical theology of the Whole Christ*

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This edition of *Totus Christus* is solely for review purposes.

*All characters and events in this publication, living, dead or resurrected, are purely factual.*



For my children, Hilary, Olivia and Nathaniel  
*who are all now part of the big picture,*



for James B. Jordan  
*whose books and lectures gave me new eyes.*

## Table of Contents

---

<i>Introduction</i>	A Beautiful Mind .....	1
1	Big Bible Handle .....	9
2	Flying Information .....	13
3	“You Can’t Do That With Scripture!” .....	21
	<b>PART ONE - CREATION</b>	
4	One, Two, Three, Fall... .. <i>Adam</i>	33
5	Garden, Land, World I .....	<i>Heaven &amp; Earth</i> 39
6	Great Escape .....	<i>Noah</i> 49
	<b>PART TWO - DIVISION</b>	
7	Two Warriors .....	<i>Abraham</i> 59
8	Stairway to Heaven .....	<i>Jacob</i> 73
9	Red Robes .....	<i>Joseph</i> 81
	<b>PART THREE - ASCENSION</b>	
10	Red Rivers .....	<i>Moses</i> 89
11	Metal Man I .....	<i>The Tabernacle</i> 101
12	Seven Champions .....	<i>Judges</i> 111
13	The Outsiders .....	<i>Ruth &amp; Job</i> 125
14	Dead Meat .....	<i>David</i> 135
15	Prince of Peace .....	<i>Solomon</i> 151
16	The Evil Twin I .....	<i>The Kings</i> 169
17	Sea Beasts .....	<i>Jonah &amp; the Captivity</i> 183
18	Metal Man II .....	<i>Daniel 1-6</i> 191
19	Hole in the Wall I .....	<i>Ezekiel 1-24</i> 213
20	The Land and the Sea I .....	<i>Ezekiel 25-48</i> 231
21	City of Peace .....	<i>Ezra and Nehemiah</i> 245
22	Four Winds I .....	<i>Zechariah, Daniel 7-12</i> 261
23	Beauty and the Beast .....	<i>Esther</i> 307
24	Closed Book .....	<i>Intertestament Period</i> 321





## PART FOUR - TESTING

25	Greater Moses .....	<i>Christ as the Ark</i>	335
26	Greater Adam .....	<i>Christ's Ministry to Eve</i>	345
27	Watchman .....	<i>Christ the High Priest</i>	355
28	Garden, Land, World II ..	<i>Christ's Crucifixion</i>	361
29	Chariot of Fire and Water ..	<i>Christ's Ascension</i>	371



## PART FIVE - MATURITY

30	Open Book .....	<i>Acts 1-13</i>	383
31	Greater Eve .....	<i>Acts 13-28</i>	401
32	Vindication .....	<i>The end of the age</i>	419
33	Metal Man III .....	<i>Revelation 1</i>	433
34	Watcher Trees .....	<i>Revelation 2-3</i>	443
35	Greater David .....	<i>Revelation 4-5</i>	457
36	Four Winds II .....	<i>Revelation 6-8</i>	475
37	The Evil Twin II .....	<i>Revelation 8-9</i>	489
38	Hole in the Wall II .....	<i>Revelation 9-11</i>	505
39	The Land and the Sea II .....	<i>Revelation 11</i>	521
40	Greater Esau .....	<i>Revelation 12</i>	523
41	Greater Nebuchadnezzar .....	<i>Revelation 13</i>	535
42	Greater Balaam .....	<i>Revelation 13</i>	543
43	Greater Esther .....	<i>Revelation 14</i>	551
44	Greater Joshua .....	<i>Revelation 15-16</i>	561
45	Greater Jezebel .....	<i>Revelation 17-18</i>	577
46	Greater Solomon .....	<i>Revelation 19</i>	591



## PART SIX - CONQUEST

47	Greater Amalek .....	<i>Revelation 20</i>	603
----	----------------------	----------------------	-----



## PART SEVEN - GLORIFICATION

48	City of Peace II .....	<i>Revelation 21-22</i>	621
----	------------------------	-------------------------	-----

<i>Conclusion</i>	Hole in the Floor .....		635
-------------------	-------------------------	--	-----

## APPENDICES

1	The dominion trap .....	663
2	Noah's nakedness .....	671
3	Covering as a robe .....	672
4	The Nephilim factor .....	673
5	The beginnings of Egypt .....	677
6	The structure of the Abraham narrative in Genesis .....	678
7	The structure of the Jacob narrative in Genesis .....	679
8	The structure of the Joseph narrative in Genesis .....	680
9	The Ascension offering as re-Creation .....	681
10	The structure of the Judges narrative .....	682
11	The structure of the Samson narrative .....	683
12	The structure of the Bathsheba narrative .....	684
13	The footstool of His feet .....	684
14	Solomon's disastrous geopolitics .....	687
15	Elijah and Moses .....	690
16	Jesus at Belshazzar's feast .....	692
17	Chariot of fire .....	695
18	Covenant recapitulation in New Testament history .....	699
19	God's grove .....	702
20	The promise of His appearing .....	705
21	The future of Israel re-examined .....	711
22	The structure of Matthew's gospel .....	731
23	The meaning of the Mount of Olives .....	735
24	From bondage to freedom .....	738
25	The abomination of desolation .....	743
26	Symbolism: a manifesto .....	754
27	Michael's dispute .....	763
28	The grape harvest of Revelation 14:17-20 .....	766
29	Postmillennial suffering .....	772
30	The structure of the narrative in Genesis 1-3 .....	774
	<b>Recommended reading and listening</b> .....	<b>780</b>
	<b>Index</b> .....	<b>781</b>





## *Introduction*

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### **A beautiful mind**

JESUS CHRIST RULES THE WORLD, but most Christians think His kingdom is yet to come. They are expecting this gospel age to end in defeat. The Bible's own historical and literary patterns, however, lead us to expect victory in this age, *in history*, before Christ returns.

A close friend said I was like the main character in the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, desperately looking for patterns of conspiracy in the newspaper clippings pinned all over the walls of his shed.

Well, the patterns appear far too frequently to be imaginary or coincidental. And, once they are identified, even the obscure chapters and weird visions (the parts often classed by scholars as irrelevant relics—"vestigial organs"—of ancient culture) suddenly carry great relevance for today. Modern Christians must no longer approach the Bible as judges (critics) but humbly as the *accused*.

The patterns in the Bible enable us to interpret it correctly, and this approach leads inexorably to the conclusion that Christ reigns now and there will be a gradual, visible victory for His church.

### **A Christian future**

Even though Christians agree on the fundamentals, there are conflicting approaches to interpreting "the big picture". So who is right and does it matter? Shouldn't we forget about trying to work it out and just get on with the job?

The problem is, getting the big picture wrong makes it harder to get on with the job. If we expect historical defeat, we'll get it. It also robs us of the things God has given us to spur us on. It subtly abandons the very earthy, physical commission of Christ and settles for a faith that is fundamentally disconnected from reality. The

Lord's mandate to both Adam and the apostles was domination of the *physical world*. Western culture is dying not because the end of the world is near. It is dying because the western church swapped her physical inheritance for *gnosticism*. James Jordan writes:

“...gnosticism is the tendency to de-historicise and de-physicalise the Christian religion. Gnosticism transforms history into ideology and facts into philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>

## Head, heart or heaven—anywhere but here

Christianity is thus in the head, in the heart, or in heaven—anywhere but *here* on earth. Three major interpretive errors hinder the accomplishment of the Great Commission:

*Academic* Christianity makes **itself** the arbiter (*judge*) of which parts of God's Word are historic fact. The Bible is inspired but somehow its chronologies are embarrassingly naïve.<sup>2</sup> This makes both the first half of the 4000 year Biblical history into *ideology*, and the climax of the Bible into *ideology*. Instead, the academics' faith rests in the very same pop-science/pop-history (Ephesians 4:14) which founds the secular humanism they are understandably failing to thwart. Bookending the gospel with gnosticism,<sup>3</sup> they advocate a religion disengaged from reality.<sup>4</sup> Christianity is intellectualised, and hope for tangible victory is written off as misusing the gospel to disguise a political agenda.

*Superstitious* Christianity takes a pop-psychology, verse-for-the-day, **self-help** approach to the Bible, which packages isolated verses and prescribes them as comfort pills. Christianity is internalised. It fails to bring Christians to maturity or give them an understanding of how God works in history. Like babies, their

- 1 James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days, A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One*, p. 71.
- 2 See James B. Jordan, *The Embarrassment of Biblical Chronology*, BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY Vol. 1, No. 1, [www.biblicalhorizons.com](http://www.biblicalhorizons.com)
- 3 “Gnosticism is the great counterfeit of Christianity. Gnosticism replaces the facts of the history of creation and redemption with philosophical ideas. The Apostles' Creed, in that it simply recounts history, is the premier anti-gnostic document of the church. The most famous modern gnostic was Karl Barth, and his followers are legion.” James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church*, p. 127.
- 4 Perhaps it's no wonder the phrase “The Christ event” is popular. Apparently the “story” of Jesus is one of the few parts of the Bible that are actually true. It also depersonalises Christ Himself as ideology.

vision is limited to their *personal* world when God's command is to conquer the physical world.

*Alarmist* Christianity takes the Bible seriously, but seriously misinterprets it. This world is God's Vietnam, and we are standing on a hotel roof in Saigon awaiting the helicopters.<sup>5</sup> Christianity is individualised. It's every man for **himself**. This thinking led to a retreat from society, politics, economics and education. Strategic kingdom planning was abandoned. Why invest in training future leaders when the end is nigh?

All three approaches are sincere, but wrong. Their pale shadow of the fearless, strategic takeover that Christ commanded leaves many Christians without the vision, tools or confidence to build and maintain a long term cultural legacy. Yet these are our *heritage*.

## Totus Christus

Rediscovering our identity is the solution for this lack of confidence. Israel's history is most assuredly our history, as much as a narrow trunk suddenly fills the sky with branches. This theme of trunk and branches, Adam and Eve, head and body, Old Testament and New, Christ and the church—the *Whole Christ*—is the deep structure that undergirds the entire Bible, and the New Testament is but the final, majestic sweep. To regain her identity, the church must develop not only an intimate knowledge of the Old Testament, but one that is *totally* integrated with the New.

“Recovering the Old Testament as a text in which Christians live and move and have their being is one of the most urgent tasks before the church. Reading the Reformers is good and right. Christian political activism has its place. Even at their best, however, these can only bruise the heel of a world that has abandoned God. But the Bible—the Bible is a sword to divide joints from marrow, a weapon to crush the head.”<sup>6</sup>

5 An illustration from Douglas Wilson's *Blenheim Lectures*. Available from [www.canonpress.org](http://www.canonpress.org)

6 Peter J. Leithart, *A House For My Name*, p. 40.

## TOTUS CHRISTUS

When comprehended with a robust, whole-Bible *biblical theology*, the Bible is a sword that cuts us like a sacrifice and enables us in turn to crush the serpent's head not only in our heads and hearts, but in our culture.

There are at least three crucial reasons for a renewed emphasis on teaching biblical theology to *everyone* in church:

- 1 *We don't know how to read the Bible.* We need to interpret it properly before we can apply it. We forget we are reading someone else's mail, and take it out of context. We apply texts directly to ourselves or to current newspaper headlines with disastrous results. When we meet together, we search our feelings or latch onto any old idea we find rattling around in our subconscious, pool our ignorance and claim we are taking the Bible at "face value". *We wouldn't treat any other literature this way.* Who was it written to? What events were on their horizon? What previous events could the author be referring to? Where does the passage fit in history? What previous history does the text have in Scripture? Without checking for "previous", we have no frame of reference for our *interpretation* of a passage before we make an *application* of its truth;
- 2 *We ignore or isolate the Old Testament.* We stay in safe, familiar territory which leaves most of the Bible unexplored and foreign to us. And when we do deal with the Old Testament, it is presented as disconnected morality tales rather than as waves in an increasing conquest. This leaves Christians without a clue about how God works in history. We also fail to see Christ in all the Scriptures. *The entire Old Testament predicted Him.* This is bigger than a "Where's Wally" hunt for Jesus. There are recurring event-patterns and symbols in the Old Testament that must be observed if we are to understand the structure of Jesus' ministry, the goal of the Great Commission and the history of the first-century church;
- 3 *We misinterpret much of the New Testament,* including some of its key passages, because we are ignorant of how God's plan



unfolded in the Old Testament. To interpret the last chapter of a book, you must understand everything that has gone before.

One example would be those verses in Hebrews that seem to imply that Christians can lose their salvation. Another would be interpreting the Revelation correctly. Understanding the foundations laid during the Restoration period for the events of the first century is the only way to interpret the “apocalyptic” passages of the New Testament successfully. For this reason, we will be placing great emphasis on some of the prophets, unlocking them with patterns from earlier Scriptures.

The coming of the *Whole Christ* was predicted and prefigured throughout the Old Testament and fulfilled in the first century. Understanding this has many deep, practical benefits for church, doctrine and missions that remain untapped for most Christians.

## Exegetical blinkers

The interpretive approach taken in this book can be, for those unfamiliar with its big picture, such a paradigm shift that an isolated tenet might appear untenable. As it is highly impolite to request that people digest 20 thick books and 1000 lectures<sup>7</sup>, I decided the most effective means to communicate this view was a single, accessible, jargon-free juggernaut, a book which argues from the *inside* of the Bible *outward*, tackling major objections before they arise. *Totus Christus* builds its case slowly but surely, which also makes it a book you can't just dip into here and there.

The approach is much nearer the mainstream of historic and orthodox Christian exegesis than many modern conservative interpreters would imagine. It is time we discarded both the remnants of debunked higher criticism<sup>8</sup> and the practice of imposing our fly modern worldviews onto the Bible. The Bible will *never* be accommodated to the current ephemera. It comes in like a sword and violates our thinking until we think the way God does. Then it has dambusting consequences in every area of life. Peter Leithart writes:

<sup>7</sup> You should still read the books and listen to all the lectures. See *Recommended Reading and Listening*, on p. 780, for books related to the topic and websites with further helpful materials.

## TOTUS CHRISTUS

“The Bible seems especially complex and difficult to modern Christians, because, however hard we try to think biblically, we have been subtly but deeply influenced by modern philosophy and science. Often, even when we have rejected the explicit conclusions of science, we unconsciously adopt a scientific mind-set. One example of this is our tendency to operate on the modern assumption that all ideas can be defined with infinite, scientific precision, and that concepts can and should be distinguished very sharply. The more you study the Bible, the more you will find that it cannot be forced into this mould. Ideas and symbols in the Bible meld together, overlap, and stretch out in a thousand different directions. This is not to say that the Bible is irrational or unscientific, or that we cannot make any meaningful distinctions. But a modern reader cannot escape the sense that the Bible speaks a very different language than he learned in “Chem. Lab” or Philosophy 101.”<sup>9</sup>

*Totus Christus* is a book full of *ideas*. To cover the ground required to make the case, it moves at a cracking pace. Ideas that might have enjoyed a paragraph elsewhere are often limited to a single sentence. If speculations appear dogmatic, it is because “perhaps” gets tedious.

Undoubtedly, some details could do with refinement, but the evidence for the basic premise is far too frequent for it not to be sound. Some readers will still balk at certain points, but don’t be deterred. These apparent “oddities” play an important role later on, and the Appendices cover some areas that require further support.

This book is mostly a summary of other people’s hard work. I have added my own insights—and most likely a few errors—but hope it is a helpful introduction to the groundbreaking interpretive labours of James B. Jordan and Peter J. Leithart, as well as the insights of Douglas Wilson and others. These bold, godly, good-humoured men have answered questions I have had for many years. To credit their input at *every* point would be impossible.

8 Higher criticism regards Bible texts as fallible human creations with purposes bound by their historical contexts, in contrast to the view that the original texts (autographs) were the inerrant Word of God.

9 Peter J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power*, p. 93.

I believe Mr. Jordan's gift of seeing things with Bible eyes especially needs a wider audience. David Field, Postgraduate Course Leader at Oak Hill Bible College in London, wrote:

“As I've had occasion to say over and over and over again, Jim Jordan is one of God's greatest gifts to the church in our generation. Personally I can say that for more than 15 years he has been, without a shadow of doubt, the single biggest influence on my way of thinking and teaching about all things biblical and theological. Much more significantly, Peter Leithart, the theological genius who, by the sheer grace of God, is rapidly becoming one of the major reformed catholic theological voices of our time, never ceases to acknowledge his indebtedness to Jordan.”<sup>10</sup>

God does not speak in theological jargon or ideology divorced from reality. He speaks in the energising, intoxicating flesh-and-blood symbols of the Creation, *and so should we*.

“One of the problems with modern Bible readers is the deep influence of Greek thinking. Unless we are able to think like Hebrews, we will not be able to understand the Bible on the level that God intended. Jordan will challenge your assumptions, make you think, and will radically change the way you read God's word. Your understanding of the Bible will never be the same.”<sup>11</sup>

*Totus Christus* should be both an eye-opener and an encouragement. Even if you finally reject its approach, I guarantee you will find it thought-provoking. Hopefully it will provide some tools to better interpret both the Word and the world with a mind saturated in and preoccupied with the Bible—the beautiful mind of Christ.

Michael Bull  
Katoomba, Australia

<sup>10</sup> David P. Field, davidpfield.blogspot.com

<sup>11</sup> Promotional text for Jordan's 6-part lecture series, *Reading the Bible (Again) for the First Time*. Available from [www.americanvision.org](http://www.americanvision.org)

## *Seeing Totus Christus*

Reading the Bible organically means reading it intertextually and typologically. Intertextual reading listens for echoes of and allusions to other passages within the canon, using Scripture to interpret Scripture. Typological reading looks for repeating patterns within the unfolding storyline of Scripture. Biblical typology is focussed on *totus Christus* — the whole Christ, head and body, Jesus and the church. Typology means reading the Bible on its own terms, as a revelation of the suffering and glory of Christ (Lk. 24). As we move from type(s) to antitype, there is both correspondence and escalation.

Excerpt from *What is Biblical Theology?* Part 2

Rich Lusk at [www.hornes.org/theologia](http://www.hornes.org/theologia)

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## Big Bible handle

*“And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.””* (Luke 2:34-35)

*“I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”*  
(Matthew 10:34)

WHENEVER THE WORD OF GOD COMES, it is an end to business as usual. Some people taste life, others taste death, and there is conflict between the quick and the dead. God sends confusion to those who have chosen death, and gives miraculous persevering strength to those who have chosen life. Eventually, the wicked are judged and the redeemed are gathered around God. God lets His Word loose among us to create new life, thresh out the husks and gather the wheat into His barn. He calls the sheep out from the goats and brings them home. He disturbs us to bring us true rest.

Jesus’ parables were a two-edged sword. They forced the believers to wrestle with spiritual truths. They also *confused* and *incited* the unbelievers to a showdown that would *expose* their true natures and *hasten* their destruction. The Bible is the same. It is living water or a cup of destruction depending upon who is drinking.

The Bible is not an easy book to understand. It takes time, discipline, meditation, a childlike imagination—and the indispensable guidance of the Spirit. God sent it not just as spiritual food but also as a regular workout that brings strength and maturity. Like Jacob, we are to *wrestle* with it, obeying in faith what we have already learned before God reveals any more. It is a process deliberately designed by God to align us to *His way of thinking*, to make us wise and mature, able to judge between good and evil.

## TOTUS CHRISTUS

Much misinterpretation can be avoided if we recognise the Bible's basic patterns—its DNA. This is *not* esoterica. Discerning the shape of God's sovereign work in the past helps us understand both the present and His vision of the future. He is not the author of confusion. His work is engineered and executed both aesthetically and with mechanical precision. He does all things well.

There are three fundamental seven-step patterns in Scripture, which are often three strands of the same cord.

The first is the seven day **Creation** pattern, which appears sometimes as *con*-struction, and sometimes as *de*-struction.

The second, and most fundamental, is the **Dominion** pattern, which is repeated many times in the Old Testament and is also the deep structure of the New. It marks out and claims the territory promised to us by God as a new creation.

The third is the pattern of the seven **Feasts** given to the nation of Israel. The feasts show us that the process of gathering God's people is written into Creation as the harvest year.

The history of the saints moved in a helical motion that steadily grew in scale until Jesus fulfilled all three patterns. We'll overview the Bible in (mostly) chronological order—*Interpretation*—then we'll see how the patterns apply to us today—*Application*.

You might find this process foreign at first, but these patterns will sink in. Once you have the handle it becomes much easier.

Meditating on the patterns and their implications has given me a bigger handle on the Scriptures—and given them a bigger handle on me. This method of study is not a technical diversion. It has answered many questions and, at times, the typological connections have moved me to tears. We can only truly understand Christ with a biblical theology that is literary, historical *and* typological. That is how Christ has revealed Himself.

There's no need for any obscure bit of the Bible to be treated like an isolated part of a mystery antique. In fact, when understood in both their historical context *and* literary structure, these can be the most rewarding. Not a word is idle. The Bible is absolute perfection, an unfathomably integrated living organism, and the literary architecture of a growing house—*totus Christus*.

## *Madmen and Handles*

Just finished reading *The Trouble With Poetry* by Billy Collins (and other poems, the subtitle helpfully adds), and was struck by how metaphor handles are on everything, and how you just need to know how to find them. Most people just look at things right side up, but others — poets, madmen, and Chesterton — know how to flip common objects over, and there, right where you wouldn't have thought to look, is the small brass handle. You pick the thing up and carry it across the way — none of these things is really that heavy — and drop it with a smallish thud right next to something else, and everybody says *whoa*. No need to find a handle on the second thing, not unless you intend to move it somewhere.

I really enjoy his grip on these handles, and was amazed at the apparent ease with which he finds them. My wife picked up the book last night and read a few of his poems — quite appreciatively — and immediately found a handle of her own. She saw right off that if you don't have a handle for the whole world, facility with all the little handles will just turn you into a subdued and whimsical sentimentalist, carrying the burden of particulars to and fro in the gloaming of melancholy.

Unless you know yourself to be *seen*, all seeing is sentimentalism.

*Billy Collins and Other Sentimentalists*

Douglas Wilson [www.dougwils.com](http://www.dougwils.com)