

# Introduction: The “Magic Eye” of the Crucified Christ

## My Conundrum

For reasons that will become clear later on in this book, I have come to believe that Jesus revealed an *agape*-centered, other-oriented, self-sacrificial God who opposes violence and who commands his people to refrain from violence (e.g., Matt 5:39–45; Luke 6:27–36).<sup>1</sup> I also believe in the divine inspiration of the Old Testament (OT), primarily because I have good reason to believe Jesus treated it as such. Since I confess Jesus to be Lord, I do not feel free to disagree with him on this matter.<sup>2</sup>

1. To be discussed in vol. 1, chs. 4–5. On the disputes over the definition of “violence,” see vol. 1, ch. 1, n. 34. On issues surrounding the nature of *agape*-love, see vol. 1, ch. 4, n. 4. All Scripture references are to the NIV unless otherwise noted.
2. So argues M. A. Rae, J. Goldingay, C. J. H. Wright, R. Wall, and K. Greene-McCreight, “Christ and the Old Testament,” *JTI* 2, no. 1 (2008): 3–4; G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 95–96. The classic defense of this perspective is B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel S. Craig (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948), 299–407. On Jesus’s high view of Scripture, see John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: Tyndale, 1971); Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 49–67; Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 138–45; David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 23–26. On debates surrounding what precisely constituted the canon Jesus believed in, see vol. 1, ch. 8, n. 43.

I should acknowledge that there is a great deal of scholarly debate about the proper label Christians should use for the Hebrew Scripture. Some contemporary scholars argue that referring to it as the “Old” Testament reflects an attitude of superiority toward Judaism, sometimes expressed as “supersessionism.” While sensitive to this concern, I nevertheless concur with those who argue that the alternatives of “Hebrew Bible” and “First Testament” are even more problematic for various reasons. I have therefore decided to follow the lead of Philip Jenkins (*Laying Down*

## THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE WARRIOR GOD

Yet I and everyone else who shares these two convictions face a conundrum.

How are we to reconcile the God revealed in Christ, who chose to die for his enemies rather than to crush them, with the many OT portraits of Yahweh violently smiting his enemies?<sup>3</sup> How are we to reconcile the God revealed in Christ, who made swearing off violence a precondition for being considered a “child of your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:45), with the portraits of Yahweh commanding his followers to slaughter every man, woman, child, and animal in certain regions of Canaan (e.g., Deut 7:2, 20:16–20)? How are we to reconcile the God revealed in Christ, who with his dying breath prayed for the forgiveness of his tormenters (Luke 23:34) and who taught his disciples to forgive “seven times seventy” (Matt 18:21–22), with the OT’s portraits of God threatening a curse on anyone who extended mercy toward enemies (Jer 48:10; cf. Deut 7:2, 16; 13:8; 19:13)? And how can we possibly reconcile the God revealed in Christ, who expressed profound love for children, promising blessings on all who treated them well and pronouncing warnings for all who might harm them (Luke 18:15–17; Matt 10:42, 18:6–14), with the OT portrait of God bringing judgment on his people by having parents cannibalize their own children (Lev 26:28–29; Jer 19:7, 9; Lam 2:20; Ezek 5:9–10)?

Because Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the OT, I cannot agree with the many today who argue that we must simply reject such violent portraits of God, even though I cannot disagree with their claim that some of these portraits “strike us as sinister and evil.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, because I believe

*the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses* [New York: HarperOne, 2011], vii) and others who continue to refer to this body of literature as “the Old Testament.” For a balanced discussion, see Fredrick C. Holmgren, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change—Maintaining Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 119–38. I will address the charge of supersessionism in vol. 2, appendix X.

3. I will review these violent portrayals of God in vol. 1, ch. 7. In vol. 1, ch. 5, I will briefly address several instances in Jesus’s ministry in which some allege that Jesus condoned or engaged in violence. I provide a more comprehensive response to allegations of violence in the NT in the four appendices to this volume. Aside from this, however, this work will be focused exclusively on violent portraits of God in the OT. Readers should also note that throughout this work I will be using the concept of a “portrait” or “depiction of God” to refer to any understanding of God that is explicitly or implicitly present in a biblical passage, regardless of its genre. As I am using these phrases, most canonical narratives and poems in the OT reflect certain assumptions about God and in this sense contain a “divine portrait.”

that Jesus reveals an *agape*-centered, other-oriented, enemy-embracing God who opposes all violence, and because I have become convinced that the New Testament (NT) presents Jesus as the revelation that surpasses all others, I also can no longer agree with many of my fellow Evangelicals who insist that we must simply embrace these violent divine portraits as completely accurate revelations of God alongside the revelation we are given in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

I am thus caught between the Scylla of Jesus's affirmation of the OT as divinely inspired and the Charybdis of his nonviolent revelation of God. This is the conundrum that motivated me—that forced me—to write this two-volume work. With Jerome Creach and many others, I am convinced that resolving the conundrum created by the OT's violent portraits of God constitutes “one of the greatest challenges the church faces today.”<sup>6</sup>

### The Background

I think it will benefit readers to know a bit of the story that forced this conundrum upon me. The book you are now reading is not actually the book I started to write ten years ago. When I began this work, I still shared the above-mentioned common Evangelical assumption that affirming the divine inspiration of the OT required one to embrace the straightforward meaning of every one of the OT's violent depictions of God. My plan was to write a relatively brief book that would combine all the best exegetical and historical explanations I had compiled over the years as to why God commanded and engaged in violence in the OT, with a few of my own ideas thrown into the mix. My goal, which is shared by most Evangelical books addressing this topic, was to put the best possible “spin” on the OT's violent portraits of God, demonstrating that God was justified in each instance in which he commanded and/or engaged in violence.<sup>7</sup>

4. Kenton L. Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 37.

5. On Jesus as the revelation that surpasses all others, see vol. 1, chs. 2–3.

6. Jerome F. D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 1.

7. See, for example, Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand

To my dismay, around fifty pages into my writing project, I felt I had no choice but to abandon it. Four considerations brought me to this conclusion.<sup>8</sup> First, while the arguments I had compiled once felt rather compelling to me, most now struck me as strained and inadequate. Second, as I mentioned above, and as I will demonstrate later on (vol. 1, chs. 2–3), I had come to the realization that the NT presents Jesus not as one revelation among others but as the revelation that culminates and supersedes all others. As Mark Buchanan notes regarding the conviction that permeates the book of Hebrews, “in every way, Jesus . . . is superior to whoever and whatever has come before him. The past is a mere shadow of Christ’s present reality and of his glory.”<sup>9</sup>

Third, and closely related to this, I had come to the realization that Jesus not only supersedes all previous revelations, he is the ultimate focal point of these revelations. As he himself taught, and as a multitude of passages in the NT confirm, all Scripture bears witness to him (e.g., John 5:39–47) and especially to his sufferings on the cross (Luke 24:25–32, 44–47). And fourth, this last point led to my eventual discovery that the cross forms the thematic center of everything Jesus was about, from his incarnation to his resurrection and ascension (see vol. 1, chs. 4–6). Whereas I once understood Jesus’s saving work on the cross in isolation from his life, teachings, and ministry, I now saw that everything Jesus was about was orientated around the revelation that God is other-oriented, self-sacrificial, *agape*-love (1 John 4:8) as defined by his all-surpassing sacrifice on the cross (1 John 3:16). And since all Scripture bears witness to Christ, I came to realize that this means, more specifically, that it bears witness to the Christ whose identity, life, and ministry were oriented around his passion.

Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); David T. Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011). For other works that argue along these lines, see vol. 1, ch. 7, n. 28. On an unrelated matter, while I believe males and females are equally created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–28), and while I respect those who may disagree with my decision, I will in this work follow the convention of referring to God as “he.” Among my reasons for following this practice is the fact that I will be quoting a great deal of Scripture, all of which uses the second person male pronoun to refer to God, and I felt it would be cumbersome as well as distracting to continually adjust my language.

8. Each of these factors will be developed and defended in subsequent chapters.

9. M. Buchanan, “Can We Trust the God of Genocide?,” *CT*, July/August 2013, 23. See, e.g., Heb 1:3, 8:5, 10:1; cf. Col 2:17.

Now, at first blush, I realize that these “new insights” may not sound very revolutionary. Indeed, they may strike some as the sort of things one might learn in an intro-level seminary theology class. It is not that I had never heard these four insights before. Indeed, it is not as though I did not, to a certain degree, previously believe in them. After all, the NT clearly reflects these convictions in a variety of ways. Yet, it was only when I began to write the book I had initially planned on writing that I began to grasp the profound significance of these convictions. And the more clearly I grasped the significance of these convictions, the more I sensed the inadequacy of the “best-spin” explanations I had planned on using.

At the same time, I increasingly sensed the peculiarity of the fact that my professed belief in the supremacy of the revelation of God in Christ had virtually no impact on my wrestling with the violent portraits of God in the OT. Though I had always professed that all Scripture should be interpreted in a way that bears witness to Christ, as the church has always done, it had never occurred to me to wonder how this holds true of portraits of God commanding his people to mercilessly slaughter “anything that breathes” (Deut 20:16) or prompting parents to cannibalize their children. And frankly, I do not think I am alone here.

Seeing these insights in this deeper way reframed my conviction about how we are to arrive at our understanding of God. Like most Christians, I had up to this point assumed that while Jesus’s revelation of God should be at the center of my understanding of God, I was also supposed to accept every other portrait of God in Scripture as revelatory as well, including the violent portraits. Hence, like most Christians, I had a mental picture of a God who was Christ-like *to a degree* but who was also capable of commanding merciless genocide and bringing about familial cannibalism. And like most Christians, I had no way of reconciling these conflicting perspectives other than by trying to put the best possible “spin” on the violent portraits. But my deepening appreciation of Jesus as the one and only “exact representation of God’s being” (Heb 1:3) and the one to whom all Scripture points meant

that my conception of God should no longer be Christ-like to a *degree*. I now understood, in a brand-new way, that “to see [Jesus]” is “to see the Father” (John 14:9).

This meant that the challenge we face with regard to the OT’s violent portraits of God is not about how to make God look less like a “moral monster,” to use Paul Copan’s phrase.<sup>10</sup> Our challenge is not even about how to reconcile these portraits with the revelation of God in Christ. The challenge, I now realized, is about how we can disclose how these portraits, together with all Scripture, actually point to Jesus, whose identity, life, and ministry are centered on the revelation of the self-sacrificial, *agape*-love of God most fully disclosed on the cross. And as it concerns this challenge, I came to see, the relative adequacy or inadequacy of my “best spin” arguments was completely irrelevant, which is why I had to abandon my project and start from scratch.

### **The New Challenge and the New Perspective**

If the challenge of reconciling brutally violent portraits of God with the revelation of God in Christ was daunting, the challenge of disclosing how these portraits actually bear witness to Christ, and more specifically to Christ crucified, initially seemed impossible. Yet, as I pondered the new challenge before me, I found my first glimmer of hope in the writings of a second- and third-century scholar and preacher named Origen.

As I will discuss later on, Origen (and he was not alone here in the early church) was admirably forthright in acknowledging the challenge posed by canonical material that seemed “unworthy of God.”<sup>11</sup> Origen encouraged disciples to never allow themselves to become angry, disgusted, or frustrated when they confront such material, and to never give in to the natural impulse to reject this material as though it was not divinely inspired. Origen rather advised disciples to humble themselves before God as they held the unresolved conundrum in

10. Copan, *Moral Monster?*

11. Origen’s approach to problematic portraits of God and other puzzling material in Scripture will be discussed in vol. 1, ch. 10.

mind, all the while remaining confident that all Scripture, including material that appears “unworthy of God,” is divinely inspired. In time, Origen taught, the Spirit will enable us to see beyond the surface appearance of things, where the conundrum resides, and find a resolution in a deeper, more profound, revelatory truth.<sup>12</sup>

I took Origen’s advice to heart. For several months, I poured over a long list of written-out passages that I had compiled in which God is depicted as engaging in or commanding violence. As I did so, I pondered the question of how, on the authority of Jesus, this material could be divinely inspired for the ultimate purpose of bearing witness to the crucified Christ.

What eventually happened to me was a bit like what happens when a person stares “the right way” at the two-dimensional patterns of a “Magic Eye” picture and suddenly discerns a three-dimensional object rising out of it. Prayerfully contemplating Scripture’s violent portraits of God with the conviction that they are divinely inspired and thus must somehow point to the self-sacrificial God revealed on Calvary, I suddenly began to catch glimpses of the crucified God in them.<sup>13</sup> Origen’s advice, it seemed, proved right.

This new perspective set me on a course of research that was com-

12. For a similar contemporary assessment on how paradoxes can open our eyes to supernatural truths, see Ian T. Ramsey, “Paradox in Religion,” in *Christian Empiricism*, ed. Jerry H. Gill (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 107.

13. Michael Gorman prefers “the *cruciform* God” to “the *crucified* God,” for he worries that crucified God “may imply that there is no distinction between the Father and the Son.” Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 18n26. It is not clear to me, however, why we should any more worry that “the crucified God” collapses the Father-Son distinction than we worry that referring to the Son or to the Spirit as “God” collapses this distinction. In fact, one could argue that refusing to speak of “the crucified God” reflects a subtle form of either subordinationism or Nestorianism (viz. separating the crucified humanity of Jesus from the divinity of Jesus). Throughout this book, therefore, I will follow the precedent of Eberhard Jüngel, Jürgen Moltmann and Richard Bauckham, as well as of Martin Luther and other church fathers, and not hesitate to speak of “the crucified God.” See Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christianity in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). On a related note, the term “*cruciform*” literally means “having the shape of the cross.” Yet, as is illustrated in Gorman’s work, it has become customary for scholars to use this term as a metaphorical reference to the self-sacrificial loving character that Jesus exhibited when he freely offered up his life on the cross on our behalf. This is how I will be using the term throughout this work.

pletely different from my first project. And the more I researched, the sharper this perspective became and the more I found confirmations of it throughout the biblical narrative.

It is this perspective, and this research, that ten years later produced the two-volume work you are now reading. And whereas the violent depictions of God in the OT used to pose the greatest challenge to my faith in the “God-breathed” nature of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16), I must confess that I now consider the manner in which these portraits bear witness to the crucified Christ, and the manner in which this is confirmed throughout Scripture, to be one of the strongest demonstrations of Scripture’s divine inspiration.

### **The Cruciform Hermeneutic**

The claim I will be defending throughout this work is that there is a way of interpreting Scripture’s violent portraits of God that not only resolves the moral challenges they pose but that also discloses how these portraits bear witness to God’s nonviolent, self-sacrificial, enemy-loving character that was definitively revealed on Calvary. More specifically, I will be making the case that when we interpret these divine portraits with the resolved conviction that the true character of God is fully revealed in the crucified Christ, we are able to see beyond the surface appearance of these portraits (viz. beyond what mere exegesis can unveil) and discern the cruciform character of God in their “depth,” to use a common metaphor of Origen’s. I will refer to this cross-centered approach to Scripture as the “Cruciform Hermeneutic.”

The driving conviction of the Cruciform Hermeneutic is that since Calvary gives us a perspective of God’s character that is superior to what people in the OT had, we can also enjoy a superior perspective of what was actually going on when OT authors depicted God engaging in and commanding violence. If we remain committed to the conviction that all Scripture is inspired for the ultimate purpose of bearing witness to the revelation of God on the cross, and if we therefore humbly look for the crucified God in the depths of the OT’s violent depictions

of God, my claim is that we do, in fact, find him. Like a beautiful three-dimensional object rising out of a two-dimensional mundane pattern in a “Magic Eye” book, I believe the Cruciform Hermeneutic enables us to discern the beauty of the crucified God rising out of portraits of God that on the surface appear profoundly ugly. The crucified Christ, in short, gives us the “Magic Eye” to discern him in the depths of even the most horrifically violent portraits of God.

### **The Theological Interpretation of Scripture**

Like all analogies, the “Magic Eye” analogy has its limitations, for it could be thought that I am suggesting that God inspired his word to function as a sort of cryptogram, requiring a special “eye” to discern its revelatory content. This is not what I am suggesting. Rather, I will argue that because God supremely values authentic *agape*-love relationships, and because he does not want to dehumanize people, he relies on influential rather than coercive power to accomplish his purposes. For this reason, I submit, God had to accommodate his self-revelation to the spiritual state and cultural conditioning of his people in the ages leading up to Christ. Only gradually could God change people’s hearts and minds so that they could receive more and more truth about his true character and about his ideal will for them. And whenever God’s people have come to understand more about his true character and will, they have always been able to look back and find divinely intended meanings in earlier writings that the original authors could not have perceived.

Nowhere is this more evident than with the NT authors, as I will demonstrate in volume 1, chapter 3. Because of the surprising revelation of God that they received through Christ, the authors of the NT read the OT through the lens of Christ. With this “Magic Eye,” they were able to find Christ in passages that would otherwise appear totally unrelated to Christ. Not only this, but following the precedent of the NT, the vast majority of theologians up until modern times have assumed that Scripture contains divinely intended meanings that the

human authors of Scripture could not have known but that could now be discerned in light of God's fuller revelation in Christ.

As I will discuss later on, this approach to Scripture only began to be rejected when the historical-critical method began to be applied to Scripture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The assumption behind this method was that the only academically respectful way to read the Bible was to study it the same way one would study any other ancient work—namely, without the faith assumption that this literature is inspired by God and may therefore contain divinely intended meanings that the original human authors could not have anticipated. This humanistic approach to Scripture unfortunately came to be widely shared by Christian pastors and scholars alike, and as we will see, it has had a strongly erosive effect on the faith of the church.

Fortunately, throughout the last century, and especially over the last several decades, an increasing number of Christian scholars have championed the legitimacy, and indeed the necessity, of returning to the traditional Christian way of interpreting Scripture. This approach has received the label “Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (henceforth TIS), and as I will discuss at length in chapter 12, most who advocate it argue that a return to a precritical way of reading Scripture entails that we must return to a Christocentric way of reading Scripture (viz. a way that discloses how all Scripture bears witness to Christ). Indeed, many theologians in the past, as well as some in the present, have shared my conviction that the cross is the thematic center of Jesus's ministry and have thus held that a truly consistent Christocentric reading of Scripture entails a “crucicentric” reading of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> The Cruciform Hermeneutic I will develop and defend in this volume and apply to Scripture in the subsequent volume is my attempt to build upon this crucicentric conviction.

Luther was undoubtedly the most emphatic advocate of this perspective, arguing that the cross was “the center” around which everything in Scripture revolved.<sup>15</sup> He went so far as to transform Paul's

14. The term “crucicentric”—meaning “centered on the Crucifixion”—is from D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 14–19.

resolve to know “nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2) into a key hermeneutical principle, claiming to “see nothing in Scripture except Christ crucified.”<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly the most ardent contemporary defender of this view, and, therefore, perhaps the single most influential theologian on this present work, has been Jürgen Moltmann. He went so far as to claim—rightly, in my opinion—that “the crucified Christ . . . [is] the key for all the divine secrets of Christian theology.”<sup>17</sup>

### A Curious Omission

I trust I have said enough to demonstrate that the “Magic Eye” analogy is not suggesting anything more unusual about the Bible than what the church tradition has always espoused. Indeed, there is absolutely nothing in principle novel about the Cruciform Hermeneutic I will be developing and employing. To the degree that it contains anything new, it is only because I am attempting to apply the traditional Christocentric—and therefore crucicentric—hermeneutic of the church more consistently than has been done in the past.

I believe the clearest indication that the Christocentric hermeneutic of the church has not been applied as consistently as it should have been is that so far as I have been able to determine, no one since the fifth century has attempted to apply this hermeneutic to the OT’s violent portraits of God.<sup>18</sup> While Luther claimed to “see nothing in Scrip-

15. WA 1:52, quoted in A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther, Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1969), 172–73.

16. WA 4:153, quoted in Wood, *Captive to the Word*, 176–78.

17. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 114. I should add that Jüngel (*God as the Mystery*) is also particularly emphatic on the absolute centrality of the cross for Christian theology, as is N.T. Wright throughout his many writings, but especially in his latest work. See N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion* (New York: Harper One, 2016).

18. I will discuss the significance of the fourth and fifth centuries in vol. 1, ch. 6. I should note that some sixteenth-century Anabaptist leaders were moving in the same direction I am taking in this work, as I will discuss in vol. 1, ch. 6. Their reinterpretation project was short-lived, however, due to the intense persecution they were subjected to. I should also note that while a number of contemporary theologians and biblical interpreters have attempted to wrestle with Scripture’s violent divine portraits from a Christocentric perspective, I know of none who have disclosed the Christocentric, let alone crucicentric, meaning of these portraits. They have rather tended to merely discuss the manner in which these violent portraits were part of an overall trajectory of progressive revelation leading up to Christ (see vol. 1, chs. 8–9).

ture except Christ crucified,” for example, he never disclosed how he saw “nothing except Christ crucified” in Scripture’s portraits of God commanding the merciless slaughter of entire populations. Indeed, despite the fact that the church has always held that Scripture should be interpreted Christocentrically, the church’s chief theologians have tended to interpret Scripture’s violent portraits of God exactly as they would have were they *not* reading Scripture Christocentrically. Curiously, these theologians have been willing to go to great exegetical lengths to reconcile large portions of Scripture with their understanding of God’s metaphysical attributes (e.g., his immutability and impassability). Hence, any Scripture that ascribed change or suffering to God was typically interpreted to depict God as he appears to us, not as he actually is. But until rather recently, no one has seen the need to apply this same strategy to reconcile Scripture with God’s moral attributes, especially as they are revealed in the crucified Christ.

The conviction driving this work is that it is time to correct this inconsistency. For the revelation of the crucified God is primarily a revelation of God’s moral character. Hence, if there are any passages of Scripture where a Christocentric, and, more specifically, a crucicentric, hermeneutic ought to make a difference, it is with those portraits of God that seem to flatly contradict this character.

### Outline

It will prove helpful for readers to have a broad road map of where I am heading before embarking on this journey. The first volume of this work is focused on developing and defending the Cruciform Hermeneutic while the second volume is focused on developing and defending the Cruciform Thesis, which is simply my label for what we find when we read the OT with this hermeneutic.

The argument of this present volume will unfold as follows. In part 1 (chs. 1–6) I will set up the problem we will be addressing while also laying the foundation for its solution. Chapter 1 is foundational for my entire project, for I will here demonstrate that in contrast to the conception of faith many embrace today, biblical faith has always allowed

for, and indeed encouraged, people to honestly question God when he appears to act in uncharacteristic or unfaithful ways. I will in this chapter also address the urgency of boldly exercising this questioning kind of faith in our post-9/11 world, in which we have become acutely aware of the dangerous influence violent portraits of God exercise on people who deem them sacred.

In chapters 2 and 3 I make the case for my previously mentioned claim that the revelation of God in Christ is not merely one revelation among others, nor even the greatest revelation among all others. Rather, I will argue that the NT presents Christ as the revelation that culminates all others, the revelation through which all previous revelations are to be interpreted, and the revelation to which all previous revelations point. I will follow this in chapters 4 and 5 by building on the work of Thomas Torrance and others to demonstrate that the cross should be understood to be the thematic center of Jesus's atoning life rather than merely as an atoning event at the end of his life. Hence, to say all Scripture bears witness to Christ is to say it bears witness to Christ *crucified*. And in chapter 6 I will defend my understanding of the centrality of the cross against objections that have been, or that could be, raised against it.

In part 2 (chs. 7–9) I will spell out the challenge that the violence ascribed to God in the OT poses. Since this material presents the problem I am wrestling with in this work, some readers might legitimately wonder why it was not placed before my case for understanding the crucified Christ as the definitive revelation of God. The answer is that I have come to believe that the full depth of the problem this material poses can only be appreciated when viewed in the light of the firm convictions that the cross reveals what God is really like and that all Scripture is ultimately intended to bear witness to this revelation. Without these two convictions in place, some readers might assume that the OT's violent divine portraits present us with a mere moral problem that we could perhaps adequately respond to simply by putting the best possible “spin” on them. Such a response, I will argue, would actually prevent us from discerning how these portraits bear witness to the

cross, for we shall see that it is precisely in their morally problematic nature that these portraits point us to the cross.

In chapter 7, therefore, I provide a comprehensive overview of the OT's most troubling portraits of God. Far from putting the best possible "spin" on them, my aim is to emphasize how thoroughly they contradict the revelation of God in Christ, despite the fact that I regard them all to be divinely inspired. Following this, I will in chapter 8 critically discuss "the Dismissal Solution" espoused by scholars who believe the only proper response to violent portraits of God within the canon is to reject them. And in chapter 9 I will critically discuss "the Synthesis Solution" espoused by scholars who believe we must embrace the surface meaning of violent divine portraits as bona fide revelations of God alongside the revelation of God in Christ. I will argue that there are a host of serious shortcomings in both the "Dismissal" and "Synthesis" proposals, the most important being that they fail to disclose how the OT's violent divine portraits bear witness to the nonviolent, self-sacrificial, enemy-embracing love of God revealed in the crucified Christ.

Finally, in part 3 (chs. 10–12) I will develop and defend the Cruciform Hermeneutic. In chapter 10, I will review the historic precedent in the church tradition for the hermeneutic I am proposing by exploring a theological approach to Scripture's violent depictions of God that was widespread in the early church but was unfortunately abandoned in the fourth and fifth centuries. Theologians such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Cassian felt they could not reject Scripture's violent portraits of God, for they believed them to be divinely inspired. At the same time, they also believed they could not synthesize them with the revelation of God in Christ, for they believed the violence that these portraits ascribed to God contradicted this revelation and was "unworthy of God." Instead, these fathers explored ways of reinterpreting these portraits, which is why I label this approach "the Reinterpretation Solution." I will focus my attention on Origen, for he was the most prolific, and arguably the most brilliant, advocate of this approach. Although I will argue against the allegorical way in which Origen reinterpreted violent divine portraits, I will contend that he and

others who espoused this approach were correct in seeing the need for a Christ-centered reinterpretation of these portraits and were heading in the right direction. As such, their theological interpretation of the OT's violent portraits of God constitutes the closest precedent in church history to the one I am defending in this work.

In chapter 11, I will develop the Cruciform Hermeneutic by analyzing the manner in which faith gives us the unique ability to discern the cruciform God in a crucified and “cursed” first-century Jew from Nazareth (Gal 3:13). I will then argue that if we simply exercise this same faith while interpreting the OT's violent portraits of God, we can begin to discern the same cruciform God in the depths of these portraits. We shall see that when interpreted this way, Scripture's violent divine portraits become mini-literary crucifixions that function as harbingers of the historical crucifixion.

I will then bring this volume to a close in chapter 12 by providing a more nuanced understanding of the Cruciform Hermeneutic as I flesh it out in light of the previously mentioned TIS movement. More specifically, I will flesh out the manner in which our cross-centered approach to Scripture nuances five generally held convictions by advocates of TIS: namely, our understanding of the Bible as “the Word of God,” the *sensus plenior* (surplus of meaning) of Scripture, the unity of Scripture, the Christocentric purpose of Scripture, and the role of the reader in interpreting Scripture. We will find that the distinct way the Cruciform Hermeneutic appropriates each of these aspects of the TIS movement will have implications for our interpretation of violent divine portraits of God in volume 2.

My ultimate hope for this two-volume work is that readers will acquire the cross-centered “Magic Eye” that allows them to discern the self-sacrificial, indiscriminately loving, nonviolent God revealed on the cross in the depths of the OT's sometimes horrifically violent depictions of God. And in seeing this, my hope is that readers will see that the revelation of God on the cross must bring a once-and-for-all end to all of our own violent conceptions of him. Just as we renounce the sin and violence manifested on the surface appearance of the cross, even

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as we by faith discern God stooping out of love to bear this sin and violence, so too, I contend, we should renounce the sin and violence manifested on the surface appearance of the OT's violent depictions of him, even as we by faith discern God out of love stooping to bear this sin and violence. For when the sin of the world was nailed to the cross with Christ (Col 2:14), the sinful conception of God as a violent warrior god was included.

Hence, the revelation of the *agape*-loving and sin-bearing crucified God entails the permanent crucifixion of the violent warrior god.