

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF REFORMED THEOLOGY AND LIFE

# UNIO CUM CHRISTO<sup>®</sup>

UNION WITH CHRIST



Valuing the Text  
for All Its Worth



Westminster  
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# Text and Textuality

PAUL WELLS

**T**he first issue of *Unio cum Christo* in this pre-Reformation celebration year of 2016 presents the captivating issue of the text of the New Testament. It reminds us of the debt of gratitude we owe for the diligent and painstaking efforts of those who labored to recover the best possible text of Scripture from the distant past after nearly a thousand years dominated by Jerome's Vulgate, which had virtually become the Christian Bible. So familiar is our Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, or the Bible translated into our native tongue, that we easily forget the magnitude of the achievement.

The focus of this issue is primarily on some of the humanists from the time of the Renaissance in Europe whose work contributed to the subsequent translation of Scripture into the vernacular: Erasmus, Lefèvre d'Étaples, Ximenez, Beza, and many others should not be forgotten, nor should the translators who benefited from their work, including Tyndale, Luther, Olivétan, and Coverdale. Their passion for Scripture fueled the fire that blazed abroad in the sixteenth century, *post tenebras lux*, bringing with it the precious knowledge of Christ as Lord and Savior.

The Scriptures, the formal principle of Christian faith, bind us to Christ as the Word of God; by and through Scripture alone we benefit for salvation from union with Christ (*unio cum Christo!*), via the material principle of justification by faith in Christ alone. These three foundational principles stood alongside two others in the magisterial Reformers' teaching: grace as the whole of God's work and the glory of God as the reason and finality of God's purpose and, consequently, of human life itself.

Remove the *alone* from Scripture, Christ, faith, grace, and God's glory, and something totally different raises its ugly head, the destructive *pluses* or *ands* of all synthesis religion, subtracting from divine salvation by adding

something human. The *plus* invariably collapses into the salvation by works of Roman Catholicism or the humanistic morality of theological liberalism, as well as all forms of semi- or full Pelagianism. Furthermore, remove any one of the analogical five, and the end product is another gospel. This is particularly so in the case of Scripture itself, the formal principle of religion, without which there is no knowledge of Christ, faith, or grace, or recognition of the glory of God. So Scripture is vitally important to Christian faith, and the question naturally follows: *which* doctrine of Scripture can allow Scripture to convey this knowledge of Christ, from a Reformed perspective? To that the Calvinistic Reformation replied consistently with the notion of the self-authentication of Scripture, the witness of the Bible to itself as divine revelation, with the complementary internal witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Adolf von Harnack was correct when he affirmed that in Protestantism the witness of the Holy Spirit took the structural place of church tradition in the Roman system.

Of course today we look at the Scripture question of the Reformation with different eyes from those of the Reformers. They looked back on a tradition-bound hierarchical institution, described with all its vicissitudes in book IV of Calvin's *Institutes*, a charter of Christian liberty if ever there was one. For the Reformers, finding the text of Scripture through the *ad fontes* approach was a liberation, and it opened a new future full of hope. If the Bible had not been silent in the church preceding their time, as the works of the Aquinases, Bonaventures, and Bernards show, it was certainly muzzled by the institution as the property of an increasingly degenerate clergy. The Reformation, as a return to the original sources, was the opening of Scripture, and it extended most importantly to the laity. No longer a sacred object in a strange language chained in the church, it was unleashed through public reading, proclamation, and debate. So should we continue today, as Kent Hughes reminds us in his article.

Today our take is very different from that of the Reformers, and the tendency is to mute the authority of Scripture with a thousand qualifications. We look back to the Reformation with the perspective of a Bible that has been undermined by criticism, made irrelevant by one-dimensional ideologies, and relativized in a new global situation by competing religious worldviews. One recent analysis has suggested that the Scriptures "died" when their ecclesiastical underpinning was weakened following the Reformation and the rise of confessional conflicts, with the result that its authority became unsustainable. The Scriptures were eclipsed by the "academic Bible" of biblical studies and became a *text*, its status weakened by polemics. In the eighteenth-century Enlightenment universities, particularly in

Germany, the critical academic Bible resurrected as an ancient text became the successor to the scriptural Bible. The text was examined outside of the context of adherence and commitment and in such a way as to support a sociocultural project. The Bible was relativized, no longer considered as the Scriptures of the church, and, having lost its universal claim to authority, it became a pawn in the promotion of the tolerance, reasonable morality, and power of the state. The lines of tension that had existed and found resolution in previous eras between faith and reason, theology and science, revelation and history, and sacred and secular were redeployed in the context of a deepening dichotomy.<sup>1</sup>

This description is interesting because it has the merit of showing how, with the Enlightenment, the Scriptures became the academic Bible with limited social and intellectual value that is the blight of today. Biblical scholars in the academy make it a duty to stand apart from the faith of the church and confessional commitments, instead determining what possible interpretations the text might have, with a high commitment to neutrality and scientific objectivity. Their views, whether on questions of historicity, science, or gender equality, filter into the media as new insights, creating the dual impression that the Bible is irrelevant, belonging to a world no longer ours, and that it is susceptible to unrestricted hermeneutical manipulation. Christian belief, now beset by pluralism, is constantly under pressure to update in terms of present social knowledge and plausibility. The church is upbraided to get on board, and when it does so, it becomes obese full of humanistic tolerance and lacking the power of immunization against present ills. So by following the trending academic Bible, the church loses the vitality of a dialectically relevant prophetic message; its positivity to the latest trends distance it from the biblical gospel of God's judgment and salvation. It may well be that the church, remade in the image of present society, has lost any power of immunological rejection, the possibility to say no, and has adopted the *too-much-of-the-same* mentality "that derives from overproduction, overachievement and overcommunication" and that German-Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han calls "the violence of positivity."<sup>2</sup>

If the contrast of the lost Scriptures and the "academic Bible become text" of biblical studies is pertinent, some fine tuning needs to be done on it from a Reformed perspective. Firstly, it should not be forgotten that the great achievement of the Reformation was to open the Scripture as God's

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<sup>1</sup> Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 5.

revelation of good news for humanity. If the later academic Bible became a text in the confines of reason, the Scripture of the church had been set in different confines prior to the revolution of Luther and the return to the sources, its message limited by institutionalized traditions. In that context, the Word of God was as much neutralized by a human factor as it was later by rational scrutiny. The Reformed *sola Scriptura* was an antithetical principle that aimed to bring all human factors under its sway, whether the autonomous intellect or the authoritarian church. Recovery of the ancient biblical texts gave Christianity the chance to realign, after a millennia and a half of existence, with the one Word that does not originate in human experience and culture. The challenge the Reformation issued was the scandal of something that stands over against the normal avenues of human knowledge and achievement, the unique moment of the Word of God made flesh, the only mediator, and with it the witness of the Word to this truth. The confessional struggles after the Reformation were not just differences of opinion; rather, they frequently arose from resistance to the Scripture principle by synthesis theology, either Roman or rationalistic. The struggle was over the supposed insufficiency of Scripture, Jerusalem against Rome and Athens.

Secondly, from a reformational perspective, *tota Scriptura* is the necessary complement of *sola Scriptura*. The Bible is not a random collection of texts, but a book, even if it is made up of all sorts of documents, stories, history, genealogies, law codes, instruction, poetry, future predictions, and proverbial wisdom. The historical reality behind our word *Bible* is ancient and complex. It transcribes the Greek *biblia* (from *biblos*, the inner bark of papyrus), originally meaning “books.” It is found in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament in Daniel 9:2: “I Daniel perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.” The word here refers to prophetic writings or scrolls that had come down to Daniel from Jeremiah (25:11), who lived a while before. “Books” passed into Christian usage and came to refer to the Old Testament. By and by, the “books” were recognized as “the Book,” the whole of the Bible as an ensemble. The earliest use of “the Bible” in English seems to be toward the end of the fourteenth century in *Piers Ploughman*, Chaucer, and Wycliffe. Around 1450 Johann Gutenberg began work on a printed Bible using movable type for letterpress, known as the Forty-Two Line Bible. It was finished five years later and was the first printed book.

From a covenantal Reformed perspective, the “books” of Scripture are not just “texts” randomly pieced together to make a job lot. According to the Scriptures themselves, the texts witness to God’s redemptive work in

history to save his people and are inspired by the Holy Spirit to that end. Their existence is not just punctual, as if the Bible existed because of a series of historical one-offs, but as part of the great and mysterious working of divine providence. The Scripture exists as a unity that depends on “the being and moral government of God,” “God’s relation to the world,” and “the immanence of God in all his creatures and his concurrence with them in all their spontaneous activities.” Consequently, the Scriptures

although composed by different human authors on various subjects and occasions, under all possible varieties of providential conditions, in two languages, through sixteen centuries of time, yet they evidently constitute one system, all their parts minutely correlated, the whole underlying a single purpose and thus giving indubitable evidence of the controlling presence of the divine intelligence from first to last.<sup>3</sup>

Just as inspiration depends on divine providence, so providence expresses Lordship. The Scripture comes to us as God’s Word, and when revelation is complete, it is a whole with constituent parts, as God intended. *Tota scriptura* means that the parts contribute to the meaning of the whole and that the whole gives meaning to each of the parts. Scripture is not the end product of canonization, but the recognition of a canon is a consequence of inspiration in the context of God’s covenant salvation of his people, as the articles on canon here underline. Considered outside of this matrix, the academic Bible of biblical studies no longer functions as Christian Scripture with a unified message, even if it yields some insights into its parts from a limited perspective. The specter of a “gnostic bible” for the initiates lurks around the corner. Considering the Bible as text, as a collection of texts, or as isolated pericopes, is an impoverishment as far as the vast perspectives of the Christian Scripture and its witness is concerned.

Finally, the academic Bible of biblical studies is a poor thing next to the Christian Scripture as God’s witness to salvation in Christ. In a certain respect academia has fashioned a different Bible from the inspired Scriptures of Christian confession, just as a church that no longer confesses Christian truth is no church in the biblical sense. The prime postulate of critical studies is that the Bible is like any other human book and must be approached as such. The rise of biblical scholarship and criticism, it is invariably affirmed, made necessary a new doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, and the old doctrine disappeared for ever. The history of the doctrine

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<sup>3</sup> Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979/1881), 8, 9, 30.

of inspiration over the last few centuries shows repeated attempts to keep something of the divine while affirming the unilateral humanity of the texts and treating them as such. So the form of Scripture was distinguished from the content, the dead words were contrasted with living acts of revelation, inspiration was reformulated as limited, or the Spirit was said to lead the people of God without any direct influence on their witness to that experience. Often inspiration was claimed for the Bible because in some way or other it “inspires me.” All this falls short of Reformed theology’s dual authorship of Scripture and divine accommodation to humanity.

Like any book, the Bible has two sides, one that is seen, which is the result of a process of production, and one that is unseen, the hidden world behind it made up of the lives of the authors, their thoughts, their experiences, their observations, and their whole witness to the mighty acts of salvation. A book has no existence apart from this “outer” side, which can take many forms. The words penned depend on what goes on behind the scenes. In the case of Scripture, this is the domain in which God works with the human authors of his Word, accommodating himself to their persons and situations, yet without compromising the truth to be revealed in human words. Both sides of the Scripture as a book are important. Its outer aspect may seem much like any other book. Yet it is different because of “special revelation” and the unseen factors that have gone into its making—the biblical claim that God was speaking through his chosen witnesses to express his Word. Above all, the Bible centers on the person of Jesus Christ and, as God’s inspired Word, has as its correlate the incarnate Word.

Therefore, when approaching the Bible one must consider not only its human form but also how it was inspired, how God spoke his Word through his witnesses, and what and who were “behind” it. It is not the antiquity of the texts that makes them interesting, because myths and metaphors are thought provoking à la Ricoeur. It is the fact that God chose to speak his Word by “breathing” it. So those who labored in service to the text of Scripture in the sixteenth century are to be honored, as we seek to do in this issue, because they contributed to bringing the Word of God down to us in written form, and with it the Savior of whom it witnesses by Spirit and in truth.

# Meredith G. Kline on Covenant Community and Canon

**MEREDITH M. KLINE**

## **Abstract**

Meredith G. Kline supported conservative views of canon by arguing that ancient Near Eastern treaties and Deuteronomy contained canonical clauses, meaning that their texts were authoritative for the vassal community when they were written, as were biblical books performing functions governing that community. Based on discontinuities between the Old and New Testament forms of the covenant community, Kline redefined *canon* as documents structuring and implementing the polity of the various phases of the vassal community. Thus, the Old Testament counts as Scripture, but not canon, for the church. Critical scholarship perceives Kline's views as conservative dogma rather than historical argument; conservatives approve his demonstration that all Scripture is covenantal, but dislike his distinctions between faith, individual-life, and community-life (polity) norms.

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## ***I. Meredith G. Kline as Covenant Theologian***

**M**eredith G. Kline (1922–2007) was a covenant theologian.<sup>1</sup> Trained in Reformed theology at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1944–1947 under Van Til, Stonehouse, Young, and Murray, all influenced by Geerhardus Vos, Kline understood the concept of covenant to be a core component

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<sup>1</sup> In this article Kline refers to Meredith G. Kline. Both his son (Meredith M. Kline) and grandson (Jonathan Kline) publish in biblical studies.

of the Reformed system of doctrine. As he completed his doctoral work in the mid-1950s, Old Testament scholars began to relate the Hittite suzerainty treaties that had been published in the decade before World War II to Old Testament covenantal texts. Perceiving the significance of these ancient Near Eastern second-millennium suzerain-vassal treaties for biblical and theological studies, while believing that proper interpretation of extrabiblical cultural materials should harmonize with conservative views of the Bible, he was among the first to correlate these Hittite documents with the organization and dating of the book of Deuteronomy. The elements of the typical second-millennium treaties (identification of the suzerain, historical prologue, stipulations, sanctions, and document disposition) could be correlated with the organization of the speeches of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy, while the book's thematic pattern corresponded more closely to the second-millennium Hittite treaties than to the seventh-century B.C. neo-Assyrian treaties, which critical scholars preferred to relate to Deuteronomy because they theorized it was composed in that time period.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, Kline related the ancient Near Eastern treaties to the debate between critical scholars and conservative theologians on the concept of the biblical canon, arguing in support of conservative views that biblical books were canonical when produced because treaty texts had document clauses making them canonical when they were written, and because biblical books performed functions that regulated the life of a vassal community. He also applied the idea that ancient Near Eastern treaties regulated vassal communities to discussions of the discontinuities between the old and new covenants.

In the process of correlating covenant community with canon, Kline redefined *canon* in a way narrower than previous discussions had defined it. A dictionary definition of canon makes the term synonymous with “Scripture”: “the books of the Bible officially accepted as Holy Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> Instead, Kline restricted canon to documents implementing official functions of the polity of a vassal covenant community.

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<sup>2</sup> Kline combined articles published in *The Westminster Theological Journal* in 1960 and a commentary on Deuteronomy published in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1962) into *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); a reprint of the last, available from Wipf & Stock and hereafter referred to as TKG, brings into book form his ideas supporting Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. For a recent argument for that position, see Paul Lawrence, *The Books of Moses Revisited* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011) and the comprehensive documentation of ancient Near Eastern treaties in Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Definition 4 for canon<sup>1</sup> in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 272.

## II. *Traditional Approaches to Biblical Canon*

When Kline related covenant to canon,<sup>4</sup> the dominant concept of canon considered it a list of texts or books that were authoritative for a faith community. Critical scholars dated the final form of the lists to a time after Jesus for the Old Testament and to the fourth century A.D. for the New Testament. Conservative theologians dated the conclusion of the production of Old Testament writings to during the postexilic period before Jesus and recognition of the corpus of New Testament documents to the second century A.D. Also, critical scholars considered books to be canonical only when the list was finalized, whereas conservatives believed that, because of their divine authorship, biblical books were canonical as soon as they were produced, not when a whole collection was recognized as authoritative. The major theological question in the discussion was whether canonical documents formed the covenant community or whether the covenant community created the canon. According to the critical dating Israel never had a canon, the Old Testament became the canon for Judaism, and the Old Testament plus the New Testament became the canon for Christianity.

Even if there was agreement on biblical books becoming canonical as they were produced, critical (late daters) and conservative (early daters) scholars still would differ. Nonconservative views of the Bible devalued the divine component of Scripture by treating prophecy about the future, whether of Old Testament prophetic books or of Deuteronomy's sanctions and provisions for the monarchy, as descriptions after the fact rather than as predictions. They also assumed the theories of source criticism, which dated Deuteronomy to the time of Josiah in the first millennium rather than to Moses in the second millennium. In contrast, conservatives emphasized the divine authorship of Scripture so that predictive prophecy was possible for Spirit-directed prophets, and a book like Deuteronomy was dated in the second millennium in the days of Moses at the beginning of the Israelite theocracy long before the monarchy, as the book presented itself, rather than at the end of the monarchical period.

Although scholarship based on evaluation of the Dead Sea Scrolls has increased variations on the traditional critical understanding of canon, Steinberg and Stone's overview of current discussion of canonization

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<sup>4</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), hereafter referred to as SBA, was followed in 1975 by a second, revised edition (reprint available from Wipf & Stock), which added a chapter on the gospels to the first edition that had included two chapters, previously published in the then-out-of-print TGK, and several chapters which had appeared in *The Westminster Theological Journal* in 1969–1970.

indicates that the basic positions have not changed since three decades ago, when opposite poles on the topic were represented by Roger T. Beckwith,<sup>5</sup> who championed the idea that the Old Testament canon was closed before the Christian era, and by John Barton,<sup>6</sup> who theorized that a lot of respected Hebrew texts floated around during intertestamental times without being collected into a canonized unit until well into the Christian era.<sup>7</sup>

### III. *Covenant Community and Canon*

Kline stated in the preface to *Treaty of the Great King* (TGK) that the “significance of the treaties for subjects like the beginnings of the canon of Scripture and the authenticity of the Pentateuch as well as the historicity of various covenants recorded in the Bible can hardly be overestimated” (TGK 7). A decade later he had combined articles on canon and covenant with other studies in *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (SBA), redirecting biblical canon from a finalized collection of authoritative books for a faith community back to the traditional conservative definition of canon as a growing collection of texts with official functions in the administration of God’s covenant community.

The formation of the canon, rather than being a matter of conciliar decision or a series of such decisions with respect to a preexisting literature, was a divine work by which the authoritative words of God were through the mystery of inspiration inscripturated in document after document, the canon being formed by the very appearance of these God-breathed scriptures. (SBA 23)

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<sup>5</sup> Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> “The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity,” in Julius Steinberg and Timothy Stone, eds., *The Shape of the Writings* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 1–58. Since Kline did not deal directly with the debate about the dating of the final listing of canonical books, he is rarely mentioned in scholarship on the topic. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), lists SBA in its bibliography but does not refer to Kline in the text. Beckwith mentions Kline’s correlation of Deuteronomy with second-millennium treaties and the significance of its canonical sanctions but does not discuss Kline’s canonical nature of the whole Old Testament and New Testament. For a concise presentation of a conservative position on various theories about canonical lists, see Eckhard Schnabel, “History, Theology, and Biblical Canon: An Introduction to Basic Issues,” *Themelios* 20.2 (1995): 16–24. Current treatments of canon such as Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011); David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Ched Spellman, *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), do not even mention Kline.

Kline focused on the elements of the treaty pattern in order to apply them to the covenantal functions of the legal, historical, prophetic, and wisdom portions of the Old and New Testaments.

Kline wrote in the preface to *SBA* that republishing his article on the two tables of the Decalogue as referring to two copies of the covenant being deposited in the temple, one copy for the Lord and the other for the vassal community, “these ten years later is still timely, therefore, since it may (in effect) introduce a new consideration into the current discussion” (*SBA* 9). Similarly, almost half a century later it appears timely to reconsider his ideas on the relation of canon to covenant community, since his ideas on canon have not been elaborated.<sup>8</sup>

Kline’s correlation of ancient Near Eastern treaties with biblical texts led him to focus on the kingdom-administering functions of biblical books for the Lord’s vassal community. His concentration on the covenant community informed his answers to questions of when biblical books became canonical for the community and what books counted as polity directives for the community.

### **1. *When Was a Biblical Book Canonical for the Covenant Community?***

Kline was not simply repeating the conservative dogmatic position that the divine authorship of Scripture ensured biblical books were canonical as they were written. He was proposing that biblical books were canonical as written even when viewed from an understanding of the role the human authors performed in writing the books. The human authors were functionaries in the administration of God’s covenant community. The documents they produced were not just literary texts that were recognized as authoritative for the faith community and added to a growing canon but were documents performing official functions in the life of the community. The books were not just part of an accumulating religious library housed at a cult center but were directives for the life of a human vassal kingdom existing as part of the divine lord’s empire. The traditional definition of canon as a list of holy books, however, continues to dominate the discussion, even for evangelicals.

Perhaps Kline did not state his thesis forcefully enough, since an evaluation of his position by Brevard Childs did not fully represent Kline’s argument:

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<sup>8</sup> Craig Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 251–78, chapter 8 on canon, does not refer, even though it would strengthen his argument, to Kline’s views on covenant and canon.

Kline's basically dogmatic formulation of the history of the canon in terms of divine inspiration which assured an inerrant transmission of the Word of God reflects completely the pre-Semler, seventeenth-century understanding which has not even seen the historical problem. These issues are far too complex simply to circumscribe by a strictly theological definition. Therefore, in spite of some excellent insights, the total impact of the book misses its intended goal.<sup>9</sup>

While the program of Childs focused on the meaning of the final form of a biblical book for a faith community, he did not jettison critical theories on the late dating of canonical lists or on the literary evolution of biblical texts, which dated them later than conservatives believed the books were produced. The charge of Childs that Kline was merely reformulating conservative dogmatic positions on the canon overlooked statements that a new argument was presented based on historical facts, the literary structure of ancient texts, and the roles those texts played in the administration of ancient empires. Kline stated that "the attempt will be made to arrive at a specifically and authentically *historical* conception of the matter" (SBA 25, emphasis added) and

we will see the Old Testament as more than an anthology of various types of literature produced by a series of authors across a span of centuries. We will understand that it all issued ultimately from the throne room of Israel's heavenly King and that all its literary forms possess a *functional unity* as instruments of Yahweh's ongoing covenantal oversight of the conduct and faith of his vassal people. (SBA 46, emphasis added)

Kline argued that the initial stage of the formation of the Old Testament canon began with Deuteronomy, a text of Mosaic speeches renewing the Sinai covenant at the transition of covenant mediatorship from Moses to Joshua. To it were prefixed the rest of the Pentateuch, functioning as external historical prologue in addition to Deuteronomy's internal historical prologue. The Pentateuch focused on the formation of the old covenant community and the rest of the Old Testament documented important stages in the administration of the Israelite community. The initial phase of Old Testament canon was associated with Moses.

## **2. Deuteronomy as Canonical**

Ancient Near Eastern treaties and legal documents such as *kudurrus* (steles documenting royal grants of various benefits to recipients) contained document clauses, divine sanctions against violators, not only of the recorded legal

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<sup>9</sup> Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 56.

transactions, but also of the physical document, whether tablet, stele, or other form. “A feature of the covenant tablets of peculiar significance for their canonical character is the inscriptional curse, or what we may call the canonical sanction. The tablet was protected against alteration or destruction by making such violations of it the object of specific curses” (SBA 29). Since the contents of the ancient Near Eastern treaty documents regulated the administration of kingdoms, their document clauses functioned as canonical clauses, indicating the text was authoritative for the participants involved, when it was produced. “And the inviolable authority of these written tablets, vividly attested to by the document clause and, especially the documentary curse, sufficiently justifies our speaking of the canonicity of these treaties” (SBA 30). Kline argued that, likewise, the Moses-authorized copy of Deuteronomy with its divinely sanctioned, canon-forming, document clause (Deut 4:2), its placement under the tabernacle throne of the divine overlord of the covenant with the two copies of the Decalogue, one for the sovereign suzerain and one for the human vassals, and its stipulated septennial reading to the congregation, separated Deuteronomy from other cultural texts. The document clause meant that, analogously to the second-millennium international Hittite treaties, Deuteronomy was canonical as it was produced, an authoritative instrument for regulating the behavior of a geopolitical organization, the Israelite theocracy. In addition to the documentary sanction making the book canonical as it was produced, Kline argued, Israel’s taking the oath at the cutting of the covenant meant that the covenant community was acknowledging the transaction’s canonicity when the text recording the covenant-making was written. “For the Old Testament as covenantal canon was by nature community-attested canon from the time of its Mosaic beginnings” (SBA 91). Deuteronomy was canonical in light of its simultaneously being produced by a divine suzerain, having a canonical clause, and being acknowledged as binding by the people of Israel (Deut 26:17).

### ***3. Old Testament as Canonical***

Old Testament books besides Deuteronomy, however, do not have canonical clauses protecting their written form by divine sanctions. Kline therefore argued that in addition to the traditional conservative theological idea that biblical books were authoritative for the covenant community because they had a divine author, the Old Testament books were canonical by his definition because as they were produced they performed official functions in the divine administration of the Israelite theocracy, whether it had the form of a tribal alliance, a (divided) monarchy, or an ethnic organization functioning as a dependent entity in a foreign empire.

The rest of the Old Testament books were not understood as a mere collection of culturally significant literary texts grouped late in the history of the covenant community to legitimate its subsequent existence, but were perceived as performing the function of administering the covenant kingdom throughout its existence. Because of their official functions in the kingdom, the texts were considered canonical as they were produced.

The several major kinds of literature—history, law and wisdom, prophecy and praise—as they are employed in the Old Testament all function as extensions (free and creative to be sure) of some main section or feature of the foundational treaties. The functional extension may be by way of administrative or judicial application or by way of didactic or confessional elaboration. But in each case a special relationship can be traced between the function and a particular element of the treaty documents, and thus a literary dimension is added to the functional in our identification of the Old Testament in all its parts as a covenantal corpus. (SBA 47)

These official kingdom-administering functions were determined by relating Old Testament books to the components of the suzerainty treaties. Thus, the Pentateuch consisted not only of Deuteronomy, which contained all the elements and structure of the treaty pattern internally, but also of materials that functioned as historical prologue to that covenant-renewal document. The historical prologue material in Deuteronomy 1–4 summarized the history of the covenant relation from the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, to the rebellion of the vassal people and the destruction of the renegade generation, to the gracious preservation of the following generation to bring it to the promised land, history that had been recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. It documented the forty-year history of the wayward vassals' relationship to their Lord, who had been identified in terms of the first component of the treaty pattern as both Creator of heaven and earth and sovereign of various covenant communities as recorded in Genesis, prologue to the establishment of the theocratic kingdom as recorded in Exodus, and as redeemer from oppressive bondage in Egypt. Genesis through Numbers functioned as identification of the suzerain and historical prologue to the covenant renewal on the plains of Moab.

In broad terms, the historical books functioned as documentary witnesses to Israel's adherence to the stipulations of the covenant, justifying the Lord's implementation of the covenant sanctions. During the time when the covenant community existed in the form of a tribal league, the book of Joshua was a witness to the Israelites' commitment to Yahweh at the time of the leadership of the covenant community transitioning from Joshua to charismatic saviors, and to the faithfulness of the covenant suzerain in

directing the commanded conquest of the land promised to the patriarchs by his wisdom and power. Judges documented the inability of tribal leaders to preserve the faithfulness of Israel to the covenant, thus demonstrating the need for a monarchy. The books of Samuel recorded the transition to the monarchical form of the community as legislated for in the stipulations of Deuteronomy, while Kings provided justification for the implementation of the covenant curses at the Exile as depicted in the sanctions of Deuteronomy. At the end of the Exile the book of Daniel indicated how Israelites might live as components in a province of the various empires Daniel predicted, Chronicles indicated how postexilic Jews had cultic continuity with the monarchical stage of the community, while Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther documented the Lord's formation and preservation of the postexilic form of a cult-centered, ethnic, political unit dependent on a foreign empire as they entered the dark ages before the arrival of their promised Messiah.

The prophets were seen as messengers of the Great King, imitating the practices of ancient Near Eastern international diplomacy, conveying covenant lawsuits to deviant vassals, warning them to avoid the ultimate curse sanctions of the covenant by repentant renewal of allegiance to the divine suzerain and graciously promising ultimate blessing beyond the infliction of the impending curses.

Wisdom literature elaborated the identification of the covenant suzerain as a Lord whom his vassals were to fear even when undergoing common (Job and Ecclesiastes) or theocratic (Lamentations) curses. Yahweh was a Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer to be praised in hymns for the blessings exemplified by those names. He was also to be called upon in laments as their Protecting Covenant Suzerain from antagonistic forces within and without the kingdom. And he was to be extolled as Wisdom for elaborating the cultural mandates of labor and marriage by the sagacious insights of Proverbs and Song of Songs. The wisdom books did not function officially in establishing or administering covenantal sanctions in the divine kingdom, but they did contribute to the cultic activity and religious perspective of the community.

#### ***4. New Testament as Canonical***

Kline also saw the New Testament documents as performing administrative functions for the new covenant community, now in the form of the church, which was not a geopolitical institution, as Israel had been. The Gospels were shaped as documents focusing on the ministry of the covenant mediator, culminating in his death, which ratified the new covenant, thus corresponding to the book of Exodus. The book of Acts recorded the history of

the development of the new covenant community as a group that added Gentiles to Israelites as members forming an institution with differently functioning earthly leaders and worship practices contrasting with those of the old covenant community. The epistles elaborated the stipulations of the new covenant and functioned as covenant lawsuits against established churches, while Revelation also brought covenant lawsuits from the glorified covenant Lord to city-congregations, along with promises of protection from historical antagonists and depictions of the execution of the ultimate covenant sanctions associated with the consummating glory of the new heavens and earth and the lake of fire.

Thus, the books of the Old Testament and New Testament functioned to direct the Lord's covenant community in its varying forms. The books were canonical for the covenant community when they were produced because of the official kingdom functions they performed.

Reformed folk tend to appreciate Kline's support of and new argumentation of traditional conservative understandings of canon,<sup>10</sup> although evangelicals have not developed Kline's ideas.<sup>11</sup>

Critics like Childs, however, were not convinced by Kline's arguments because debates still exist between critics and conservatives on the dating of the biblical books. Kline's arguments added to the conservative arsenal for engaging in canonical battles, but critics were skeptical that their defenses were any less effective. Kline's scholarly utilizing of extrabiblical documents to support the early dating of Old Testament texts and their canonicity by conservatives, combined with strongly worded descriptions of mainstream Old Testament documentary hypotheses as "scholarly phantasy" (SBA 8) and "a grotesque distortion of the historical facts, a Wellhausenian anachronism on a millennial order of magnitude" (SBA 43), was not appreciated by reviewers of the dominant school.

The problem for Childs was that Kline's historical argument, supposedly substantiating conservative dating of Old Testament books, assumed the legitimacy of using the face-value internal witness of biblical books to date them, rather than the results of source criticism that purportedly warranted later dates; according to them Kline had not dealt adequately with such details, even for Deuteronomy.

Perhaps Kline's ideas have been forgotten because they have not received the necessary elaboration he knew was needed: "The more precise

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Robert Reymond thinks Kline's argument successful. See Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 69–70.

<sup>11</sup> See the earlier reference to Beckwith or a typical brief discussion like Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 487–97.

delineation of biblical canonicity requires that it be perceived as fully as possible in its specific historical character, and much remains to be done along these lines” (SBA 25).

Questions not raised by Kline need to be investigated in the future. If prophetic oracles, covenant lawsuits, were authoritative when spoken, were the individual speeches canonical for the community at the time they were spoken, or were they canonical only when collected into a prophetic book? Were individual psalms canonical when composed, or only when the collection was finalized? The process of canonization of individual books can be analogous to the collections of the Old Testament and New Testament as wholes. Also, did the canonical function of books change over time, for example, from documentation warranting implementation of covenant sanctions to historical prologue for a subsequent phase of the covenant community?

### ***5. Is the Old Testament Canonical for the New Covenant Community?***

Kline’s focus on the community-governing functions of biblical books was not only unacceptable to critical teaching on the canon but also resulted in an idea that did not fit the conservative mold. The most surprising statement of Kline for evangelicals was that the Old Testament is not the canon of the Christian church (SBA 99). This claim appears unusual if one assumes canon should be defined as a collection of documents that provide authoritative instruction for the church. Kline did not deny that the Old Testament texts authoritatively directed church members with wise counsel, as properly interpreted. He restricted, however, the definition of canon to its function for a particular form of the covenant community. Canon had to do with the *polity* of the covenant community, and as that community changed form, the polity changed, and therefore its canon changed. The Old Testament was documentation for the administering of a theocracy, a geopolitical kingdom, while the New Testament was documentation for the direction of a church, a spiritual institution without a bounded geographical location or a visible, politically recognizable organization, despite attempts throughout Christian history to make it so by analogy with the form of the Old Testament covenant community. Since Kline integrally associated canon with the administering of the covenant community and the form of that community changed radically from theocracy to church, the discontinuity in the form of the covenant community meant there was a discontinuity in canon; what was canon for the old covenant was not canon for the new covenant. By his definition there are two separate canons. In the traditional view, the

new covenant canonical material supplements the old covenant material so that they merge into one canon. The difference in perspective reflects the two different senses in which the word canon is being used.

Kline related the concept of canon to ideas about continuities and discontinuities between the old and new covenants. He distanced himself from dispensational approaches that minimized continuities and from critical positions that perceived the Old Testament as sub-Christian (SBA 96). He distinguished between faith-norms and individual life-norms, which exhibit continuity at the individual level, and community life-norms or polity-norms, which evidenced discontinuities.

Continuity of faith-norms was evident in that both old and new covenants

unfold the same principle of redemptive grace, moving forward to a common eternal goal in the city of God. The blessings of old and new orders derive from the very same works of satisfaction accomplished by the Christ of God, and where spiritual life is found in either order it is attributable to the creative action of the one and selfsame Spirit of Christ. According to the divine design the old is provisional and preparatory for the new, and by divine predisclosure the new is prophetically anticipated in the old. External event and institution in the old order were divinely fashioned to afford a systematic representation of the realities of the coming new order, so producing a type-antitype correlativity between the two covenants in which their unity is instructively articulated. (SBA 98)

Continuous individual life-norms existed, such as

the creation ordinances of marriage and labor, instituted in Eden, reinstated after the Fall, and covenantally formalized in the postdiluvian covenant which God made with all the earth, explicitly for as long as the earth should endure. Such, too, are the universally applicable life-norms included in the stipulations of the Mosaic covenants, regulative of a man's life in relation to his neighbor. The New Testament, though not legislatively codifying these life-norms, does presuppose them and didactically confirm them. (SBA 102)

In contrast,

the Old Testament's community life-norms for Israel are replaced in the New Testament by a new polity for the church. The Old Testament laws dealing with the institutional mode of the kingdom of God in relation to the cultural mandate and with the community cultus of Israel, those norms which are the peculiarly canonical norms, were binding only on the community of the old covenant. In these terms, the Old Testament, though possessing the general authority of all the Scriptures, does not possess for the church the more specific authority of canonicity. Under the new covenant the Old Testament is not the current canon. (SBA 102)

Thus, for Kline the old canon still provides direction for the lives of new covenant community members. Exodus 21:22–25 could be used to argue against abortion by members of either the theocracy or the church; violations of the Decalogue are as reprehensible in the new covenant as in the old. There is continuity for the covenant communities in these individual behavioral norms. But there is discontinuity at the community level: the theocratic community is commanded to annihilate Canaanite inhabitants or Philistine invaders of the promised-land protectorate, while the church community is commanded not to engage in the destruction of contemporary Jews or Palestinians in the former holy land territory or of non-Christians anywhere on the planet. Both communities are theocratic monarchies (SBA 98), but along with priests, the earthly form of the theocracy was led by charismatic leaders and later kings, whereas the visible church is led by elders and deacons. Old Testament prophets, functioning as members of the divine, heavenly council, continually brought covenantal lawsuits implementing Deuteronomic sanctions, initially against Israelite kings and subsequently against all members of the nation. The canon grew through prophetic productions. The canon, however, is closed for the current covenant community, which will not undergo a church-destroying curse of exile because of the faithful, covenant-obedience of its Federal Head; rather, it is subject only to the lawsuits of Revelation 3–4 against particular congregations. Old Testament ritual legislation is not New Testament worship. The Old Testament conquest to cleanse a divinely defined holy territory for a geopolitical community is not New Testament evangelism to produce a nonnational, nonpolitical body. Although the biblical redemptive paradigm of the divine suzerain saving his vassals by defeating his and their enemies and afterwards building himself a palace is applicable to the realities of the old and new covenant communities, the form of the two communities is different, so their canons are different.

An original reviewer of SBA, Pieter Verhoef, did not like the idea that the Old Testament was not part of the canon of the new covenant community. Verhoef also did not find agreeable Kline's distinctions between faith, community-life, and individual-life norms.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, review of *Structure of Biblical Authority*, by Meredith G. Kline, *Westminster Theological Journal* 36.3 (Spring 1974): 413–15. More recently, Frame has voiced similar reservations. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 219. “I find these distinctions unpersuasive. I grant that we should define the canon as those documents that God has given to govern the lives of the covenant people of God. But I don't see any biblical basis for the distinctions between life and faith, or individual and community, that Kline sets forth. Faith is part of life, and both individual and community life are under God's covenant.” For an elaboration of Frame's methodological and some conceptual differences with Kline, see his chapter, “Meredith G. Kline's *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis*

Might Kline have avoided the criticism of the Old Testament not being canon for the church by treating the Old Covenant as historical prologue to the New Covenant just as he considered Genesis, with its referencing of various covenants, as historical prologue to the Sinai covenant, as indicated by his titling his covenant-theological development of Genesis as *Kingdom Prologue*? He had stated in SBA (53),

If the Pentateuch is viewed as a unified corpus with God's covenant with the exodus generation of Israel as its nucleus, the narratives of Genesis and the first part of Exodus assume the character of an historical prologue tracing the covenantal relationship to its historical roots in Yahweh's past dealings with the chosen people and the patriarchal ancestors.

Perhaps Kline might have focused his argument better by naming “community-life norms” as “covenantal polity norms,” thus making it easier to concentrate on the discontinuity between the old and new covenants. The discontinuity he recognized subsequently informed his controversial positions on topics like theonomy, the relation of church and state, and the Sabbath.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, interacting with Kline on covenant-community and canon is not simple because the topic involves our understanding of covenant theology, the contrast between common and redemptive grace, and the distinction between earthly and heavenly kingdoms, theological themes that currently have volumes being written about them from myriad perspectives. For example, compare contrasting approaches to covenant theology just by former students of Kline—Niehaus, Hahn, and Horton.<sup>14</sup>

## Summary

Previous to SBA, critical scholarship defined canon as a list of books authoritative for a faith community that attained canonical status only when the list was finalized by the community. Conservatives argued that biblical books had canonical status when written and that the canonical corpus accumulated over time. Kline sought to support the latter approach by

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*Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*,” in John Frame, *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology* (Lakeland, FL: Whitefield Media Productions, 2011), 151–98.

<sup>13</sup> On the latter, see Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 189–97.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Volume 1: The Common Grace Covenants* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014); Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006).

applying insights gained from ancient Near Eastern international treaties to the concept of biblical canon. The ancient Near Eastern treaties were texts with clauses protecting, by divine sanctions, the written document from alteration. Kline saw such clauses as creating canonical texts, authoritative for the vassal community, which simultaneously recognized the text and the empire-administering function that it performed as binding for the life of the community. In the process he made canon a technical term, changing its meaning from a list of texts recognized as authoritative by a religious community to a document performing an administrative function over a vassal community.

By trying to demonstrate that all the biblical books were covenantal developments of various parts of the treaty structure, Kline strengthened conservative convictions on the covenantal nature of the whole Bible. He did not change, however, the opinions of critical scholars on the dating of biblical books, even Deuteronomy; so they viewed his ideas as conservative dogma, his argument as theological rather than historical.

By defining a canonical document as one performing official functions in the administration of the life of a vassal community, Kline associated canon with community polity. Thus, he posited that as the polity of the community changed, its canon changed; the Old Testament was authoritative Scripture for the church, but not part of its canon; the concept of biblical canon needs to reflect the discontinuities between the old and new covenants.

Kline's contribution to canon studies provided new directions that could still be profitably pursued, but to change opinions on the dating of biblical books would require historical evidence, archaeologically uncovered copies of biblical texts from before the time of Malachi, while the reaching of consensus on the significance of discontinuities between the old and new covenants for canon would depend on the unlikely prospect of the resolution of differences among the proliferating solutions to a multitude of debated issues within Reformed and evangelical theology.

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# The Pauline Canon and Gnosticism

PETER JONES

## Abstract

Gnosticism and canon are as different as contemporary theological liberalism and biblical orthodoxy! Indeed, the latest versions of liberalism seek to create a “new” view of Christianity shorn of any notion of creed or canon and based precisely on the faith of their ancient Gnostic counterparts. While the early church in its most ancient creed affirmed the validity of Scripture (1 Cor 15:3-8), the Gnostics spent a good part of their time reviling those Scriptures—opting for a “canon within the canon”—and the God, the Creator, who inspired them. This perennial heresy returns today in various spiritual forms of paganized Christianity, but they will not prevail against the historic rock of the biblical canon.

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**W**hile the reader might be tempted to believe that Gnosticism is an ancient heresy that the church dealt with definitively in the first three centuries, nothing could be further from the truth. Gnosticism is alive and well today, present in unusual places in its various modern forms, both within and outside the church. The canon is an idea that deeply divided ancient Gnosticism from biblical orthodoxy, and in the same way it also divides modern forms of Gnosticism from contemporary biblical orthodoxy.

## I. Definition of Gnosticism

Gnosticism was a second- to fourth-century heresy claiming that salvation could only be gained through esoteric, mystical knowledge, or *gnosis*—the knowledge that one is divine. Gnostics held that the material world (matter) is evil and that only the spirit is good. Gnosticism thus proposes a search for the self, based not in historical scriptural revelation or in reason, but within one's own self, via mystical, out-of-body experiences and trances. In the Gnostic system, the Creator of material things is actually Satan, and the Old Testament is understood to be full of diabolical lies and foolishness. The true Gnostic God is the Father of the Totalities, and the true Jesus is a spirit-being sent from this pantheistic reality behind all things. Matter is illusion and history is without significance.

The Gnostic writings are extensive. In particular, fifty ancient texts, the earliest of which dates from the end of the second century A.D.—the so-called Nag Hammadi library—were found in 1945. For some progressive “Christians” this promised a new day for a deconstruction of orthodoxy both in its theological and in its historical claims. They hailed these Gnostic Gospels as the “lost” books of the Bible, attempted to date some of them, like the *Gospel of Thomas*, in the first century, and must wonder why they were not part of the Canon.

In the 1970s, Harvard scholar Elaine Pagels won awards for her book *The Gnostic Gospels*, in which she tries to show these gospels to be an early, valid expression of Christianity that was later suppressed by patriarchal, power-hungry bishops.<sup>1</sup> Harvey Cox, in 2009, stated that early Christian Gnosticism has been proven by modern scholarship to exist from the earliest times and will be the basis of interfaith spiritual dialogue.<sup>2</sup> Cox wondered what would happen when “the cat is completely out of the bag,” when everyone learns that much of original Christianity was actually Gnostic and that from now on we no longer need creeds and canons.<sup>3</sup> In 2012, Diana Butler Bass, a historian of Christianity and a leading voice in progressive and “emergent” Christianity, announced in her book *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, in perfectly Gnostic terminology, that God is now “defined in less dualistic terms” in favor of “finding one's self in God and find[ing] God in one's self.”<sup>4</sup> For Bass, this

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of the Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

involves praying to God as “our Mother” and seeing God “less in terms of an absolutist, sin-hating, death-dealing ‘almighty Father in Heaven’ and more in terms of ... the nourishing spirit of mother earth.”<sup>5</sup>

## II. *Gnosticism and the Canon*

In spite of the late twentieth-century liberal attempt to rehabilitate Gnosticism as a genuine form of early Christianity, as noted above, not one of the Gnostic texts met the criteria for canonicity when the canon was formally constituted in the fourth century, so none were included. This was not because of the power-hungry bishops, as Pagels claims, but because Gnostic theology was a total denial of authentic Christian faith. As to canonicity, New Testament scholar Ben Witherington argues that “Gnosticism was a nonstarter from the outset because it rejected the very book the earliest Christians recognized as authoritative—the Old Testament!”<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, even the so-called proto-Gnostic Marcion (who rejected the Old Testament and created the first “canon” around A.D. 150 containing New Testament books shorn of any references to the Old Testament) did not include in his canonical list the *Gospel of Thomas*, considered the earliest Gnostic book. This exclusion is telling, since Marcion was an early and committed Gnostic who would have given anything to include such a gospel, since it fit his own criteria so beautifully. Though some radical New Testament scholars have claimed that Thomas is earlier than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Marcion’s omission can only mean that the *Gospel of Thomas* was written later than A.D. 150, in which case subsequent Gnostic texts were written later as well. Thus none of them could qualify according to the canonical criterion of apostolicity, which accepted only books written by an apostle who saw the historical Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

## III. *Gnosticism and Paganism*

In spite of the Gnostic gospels’ superficial “Christian” elements, such as a focus on Jesus, the early Christian fathers knew that Gnosticism was merely a variant of ancient paganism with a few “Christian” additions.<sup>8</sup> The mystery

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 115.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 73–75.

<sup>8</sup> See Peter Jones, *Stolen Identity: The Conspiracy to Reinvent Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2006).

religions of the Greco-Roman Empire (in particular the worship of the goddess of the underworld, Isis) captured the attention of certain Gnostic sects. Hippolytus, the second-century anti-Gnostic church father, documented that the Gnostics of his day sought “the wisdom of the pagans,”<sup>9</sup> in particular by attending Isis-worshipping ceremonies, in order to understand “the universal mystery.”<sup>10</sup> This is akin to the interfaith worship services we observe today. However, it was clear in the early days that Gnosticism had nothing to do with the faith of the Bible, especially since it denied any value to the Old Testament and rejected the fundamental defining doctrines of the New Testament.

A case in point is the thinking of the so-called disciple “Thomas” of the *Gospel of Thomas*. When “Jesus” asks him, “Who do men say that I am?” (as in the canonical Gospel narrative of Matt 16:16), Thomas answers, “Master, I am incapable of saying what you are like.” At this, Jesus rebukes him, saying, “I am not your master.” Then the Gnostic Jesus takes Thomas to one side and tells him secrets. When he returns to the other disciples, they ask about the secret teaching, but Thomas refuses to tell them, knowing, as the text states, that “they will stone him.” This is a hint as to what the secret teaching was. Stoning was the Jewish penalty for blasphemy—making oneself God. Jesus will not allow Thomas to call him master because Thomas has “drunk from the bubbling stream.” Jesus further declares, “He who drinks from my mouth will become like me. I will become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed.”<sup>11</sup> Thomas is the true Gnostic who knows himself to be divine, like Jesus. Here in this enlightenment of *gnosis* that Thomas undergoes, the Creator-creature distinction of biblical revelation is utterly undermined.<sup>12</sup> So from whence does this unbiblical thinking arise?

#### IV. Gnosticism and Hinduism

The same destruction of the Creator/creature distinction has become widespread in the West due to the invasion of Eastern Vedic practice. Gnosticism was and still is a Western version of Hindu paganism—to which, ironically, so many “Christian” liberals now flock to discover “true” spirituality—that

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.9.10; cf. Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 199), 147, 154; ANF 5:57.

<sup>11</sup> *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 13, in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 108.

<sup>12</sup> See my larger treatment in Jones, *Stolen Identity*, 64–66.

same “universal mystery” the Gnostics sought in the days of Hippolytus. There is, however, a radical difference between Christianity and Hinduism:

Hinduism sees the physical realm as more or less one and the same as God. It considers the cosmos of no importance in seeking God. Christian belief sees God as separate from physical realm of earth and yet it is a reflection of His goodness and glory. Though it is under a curse, it still speaks to man about His creator and one day will be redeemed with man.<sup>13</sup>

There is no possible synthesis.

As we noted above, Bass suggests rediscovering the worship of the goddess, and Cox rejects creeds for the sake of amorphous “spiritual” practice. But the comparison goes deeper. Scholars have long suggested a profound relationship between the Vedic traditions of Hinduism and Gnosticism.<sup>14</sup> Both reject the flesh as an illusion and seek absorption into the spirit. The term *gnosis* closely resembles the Hindu term Veda, since the Sanskrit root of Veda is *vid*, to know. Thus these two religious systems are actually known by the same term, which means “knowledge.” This is not factual or intellectual knowledge but spiritual enlightenment. Both require various mystical techniques for acquiring the higher states of altered consciousness. In Hinduism, deep mysticism via the mindless repetition of mantras achieves the enlightened goal of non-dual perception. In the Nag Hammadi *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, Hermes, the father, “instructs the initiate in secret knowledge and guides him into an ecstatic experience of the eighth and the ninth” levels of bliss.<sup>15</sup> This includes a written chant: “a o e eee ooo iii ooooo ooooo uuuuuu oo oooooooooo oooooooooo oo.”<sup>16</sup> Pagels states correctly, “They [the Gnostics] argued that one’s own experience offers the ultimate criterion for truth ... Gnosticism has nothing to do with belief but with dimension of experience and religious imagination.”<sup>17</sup> This connection with Eastern religions is clearly shown by Pagels, who seeks to characterize Gnosticism as “a wider valid expression of Christianity”;<sup>18</sup> in her personal

<sup>13</sup> “Hinduism and Christianity,” Trail Christian Fellowship, [http://www.trail.org/pages/page.asp?page\\_id=273593](http://www.trail.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=273593).

<sup>14</sup> Mark H. Gaffney, *Gnostic Secrets of the Naassenes: The Initiatory Teachings of the Last Supper* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2004), 160.

<sup>15</sup> James Brashler et al., “*The Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth*: Introduction,” *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 292.

<sup>16</sup> *The Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth* 10–15.

<sup>17</sup> Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Elaine Pagels, “What Was Lost Is Found: A Wider View of Christianity and Its Roots,” in *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries of the Da Vinci Code*, ed. Daniel Burstein (New York: CDS Books, 2004), 100.

life also, she inevitably tries to blend Buddhism with her version of Christianity,<sup>19</sup> a version so “wide” that it has lost all coherent meaning.

## V. *Gnosticism and Sexuality*

Not only is Gnosticism returning through Eastern spirituality, it is taking the West by storm in its redefinition of sexuality. Robert Reilly, a Roman Catholic jurist and astute cultural observer, recently formulated his critique of the modern homosexual movement by describing it as a contemporary form of Gnosticism because it reinvents reality.<sup>20</sup> He argues correctly that Gnosticism does not accept the evidence of material reality, but rather looks within for personal truth. It is true that certain contemporary views of sexuality reject the “given-ness” of biology, favoring the idea of “gender” as a self-constructed result of individual choice. In my own study of this ancient heresy,<sup>21</sup> I discuss how Gnosticism’s dualism between flesh (bad) and spirit (good) resulted in the rejection of the objectivity of the flesh, including normal marriage and childbirth (“flee maternity” and “destroy the works of femaleness,” *Dialogue of the Savior* 144.9–10). It proposed the spiritual construct of androgyny as the ideal (*Gospel of Thomas* 22) and therefore thoroughly rejected heterosexuality.

Interestingly, a modern Gnostic scholar, June Singer, at the height of the sexual revolution in the 1960s, wrote a programmatic book, *Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality*,<sup>22</sup> in which she called for a new sexual theory (though her old Gnostic template was not exactly new). She declared, “We have at hand ... all the ingredients we need to fuse the opposites within us.” Clearly she had in mind more than an open acceptance of androgyny/homosexuality: “What lies in store as we move towards the longed-for conjunction of the opposites ... [is when] the human psyche realize[s] its own potential through building its own cosmology, and supplying it with its own gods.”<sup>23</sup>

This clear statement of religious intent and the programmatic joining of the opposites, not just of male and female but of God and creation, represents the radical rejection of the Twoist universe and the transcendent

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<sup>19</sup> Pagels stated this in a public address that I attended.

<sup>20</sup> Robert R. Reilly, “The New Gnosticism of the Homosexual Movement,” *The Catholic World Report* (May 12, 2015), [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3869/the\\_new\\_gnosticism\\_of\\_the\\_homosexual\\_movement.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3869/the_new_gnosticism_of_the_homosexual_movement.aspx). See also his insightful work, *Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior Is Changing Everything* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Jones, *Stolen Identity*, 96–101.

<sup>22</sup> June Singer, *Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), 207, 267, 275.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

God who created it.<sup>24</sup> Just like the Gnostic “goddess” Zoe, who “breathed [fire] upon his [Jahweh’s] face ... and threw him down into Hell” (*Hypostasis of the Archons* 95.8–14), Western culture rejects the Creator via the massive spread of both neo-Gnostic spirituality and neo-Gnostic sexuality, now with constitutional authority.

If ever we needed a canon, it is now, both in its broader and narrower sense. If the Gnostics, as Pagels states, “have nothing to do with belief” and everything to do with “experience and religious imagination,” then Gnosticism has no canonical worldview. Each Gnostic believer is a canon unto himself, which eventually produces utter chaos, which is what we are beginning to see today. This is the very opposite of canon in Christian orthodoxy. The biblical notion is based upon a very particular view of God. God, who is distinct from the world and Creator of it, engages with human beings at specific times and places to establish a gracious covenant sealed by written documents. That is how ancient treaties were established—with written texts. That is how God established his covenant with Israel, as Meredith Kline so ably shows.<sup>25</sup> As the Apostle Peter said, “We have the more sure word of [written] prophecy” (2 Pet 1:18).

## **VI. Irenaeus, Anti-Gnostic Church Father and the Preservation of the Canon**

Irenaeus (A.D. 125–202), bishop of Lyon, became one of the greatest and most successful opponents of the heresy of Gnosticism. His principal work is *Against Heresies*, a defense of orthodox Christianity specifically against its Gnostic rivals. Irenaeus was born in A.D. 125, and when he was a young man living in Smyrna (Turkey), he became a disciple of Polycarp, who, at the age of 86, was burned at the stake for his refusal to deny his faith (A.D. 156). Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John, the author of a number of New Testament writings, particularly the Fourth Gospel, which is a first-hand

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<sup>24</sup> I use the term Twoist to describe the worldview of the Bible, which sees between God and the creation the expression of two kinds of existence. Such an understanding of this ultimate relationship explains the place of Twoist values that God placed within the created order to remind us of that ultimate distinction.

<sup>25</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 76–93. Here is the full text which identifies the prophetic word as written “Scripture”: “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:18–19 ESV).

account of the life of Jesus. In his first epistle John states,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1–3 ESV)

Irenaeus clearly understood that there was an objective revelation of truth, beginning with Jesus, who claimed to be “the truth,” as John noted in his Gospel (John 14:6), a truth that was passed on from generation to generation by faithful teachers and had to be guarded and preserved (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14). This is doubtless the earliest sense of *canon*. Irenaeus understood the notion of the guarding of the deposit. This “deposit,” whether written or unwritten, is the earliest form of canon. Irenaeus called what had been handed down from the apostles the “rule” (Latin *regula*) or “canon” (Greek *kanon*) of the faith. He says in his *Against Heresies* 1.10.1:

The church, dispersed throughout the world ... received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty ... and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets predicted the dispensations of God: the coming, the birth from the Virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension of the beloved Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>26</sup>

He meant by the “canon or rule of faith” the summary of what the Old Testament and the apostles taught about the faith and what had been preserved orally and via the written texts from the apostles known to him. At that time, there was no definitive list of apostolic books, so the canon was the teaching of faithful men who preserved the apostolic teaching. This rule was to be used to test the teachings of various prophets and church leaders as to their orthodoxy, and as far as Irenaeus was concerned, the Gnostics failed the test on every point. As already noted, the very notion of a canon was foreign to Gnostics, for whom spirituality was based on “ever-changing experience and imagination” and for whom sexuality was what one perceives oneself to be. Spirituality was not dependent on fixed elements of historical revelation, and sexuality was not dependent on a pre-existing divine creation.

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<sup>26</sup> Translated by Robert M. Grant in his *Irenaeus of Lyons: The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 70.

## VII. *The First Canon*

Was Irenaeus misguided? Are the New Testament scholars correct who argue that the church began with a Gnostic, anything-goes faith to which the present church must now conform? Such was the judgment of the famous early twentieth-century liberal scholar Walter Bauer. Bauer claimed that early Christianity was so diversified and theologically confusing that there were no clearly defined orthodox or heretical opinions.<sup>27</sup> This argument has held sway among liberal biblical scholars up to the present time. Thirty years ago I published an article with the intriguing title, “1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle,”<sup>28</sup> not particularly looking for issues of canon or early church theology. However, as I worked on that verse, its context revealed some fascinating facts about the early church and about the church’s first canon.<sup>29</sup> Verses 3–8 give every reason to believe that we have in our hands the very first “creed” or canon of the early church, for the following reasons:

- This creed predates Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul says to the Corinthians, “For I delivered to you as of first importance *what I also received.*” He explicitly renounces any claim to authorship, treating the text as a fundamental statement of the gospel that he received from others in the church who predated him.
- Some interpreters claim that Paul “received” this text directly from the Lord Jesus. However, while Paul does say in 11:23, in the account of the Last Supper, that what he received was “from the Lord,” in fact, because of its virtually verbatim repetition of the gospel account of the words of Jesus inaugurating the Last Supper, Paul doubtless meant by the term that he received the account directly from the Lord via those who were present when the Lord spoke those words. Paul is dependent on others who preceded him in the faith, leaders he elsewhere calls “those who were apostles before me” (Gal 1:17).

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1996); see the excellent work of Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Jones, “1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 3–34.

<sup>29</sup> I am not the only scholar to assert this. See Michael Goulder, “The Baseless Fabric of a Vision,” *Resurrection Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996), 48. See also Gary Habermas, “Tracing Jesus’ Resurrection to Its Earliest Eyewitness Accounts,” in *God Is Great, God Is Good: Why Believing in God Is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad V. Meister (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 212; Gerd Lüdemann and Alf Özen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 9, 15; Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 224–25.

- There is internal evidence that the text was not written by Paul. It has a Semitic flavor, containing the Semitic name Cephas to refer to Peter, and referring to Scripture using a non-Pauline expression. To cite Scripture, Paul uses the phrase “as it is written,” actually thirty-one times—and later in v. 45. The phrase “according to the Scriptures” is never Paul’s way of speaking, which betrays the fact that Paul is citing a text not his own.
- The text contains typical elements of a creed: “that ... that ... that ... that” (vv. 3–5). To those creedal statements, which include the appearance to Peter, there follows a list of confirming facts: “then ... then ... then ... then” (vv. 6–7), followed by a closing statement, added by Paul, “last of all” (v. 8). It is clear that original Christianity, from the beginning, was fixed, not fluid—expressed in an inviolable creedal form. Creeds, by nature, are meant to last. Interestingly, as a measure of his sense of authority, Paul writes himself into this creed (v. 8).
- Paul affirms that what he received from others was first in importance (v. 3), doubtless because this text was first in time—no doubt the first, original statement of the faith of the Jerusalem church. This is a text established by the original apostles in the thirties in Jerusalem, since all the people mentioned, including Peter, are from Jerusalem in the earliest days—the twelve, James, all the apostles, the five hundred, all of whom witnessed the appearances during the forty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, Paul mentions all those who believed during the first month of the history of the faith. None of them were Gnostics!
- This creed contains the very fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy that were rejected by the Gnostics: Christ’s historic atoning death, his burial, and his resurrection, the last confirmed by many eye-witnesses and Christ-appointed apostles, as well as by the inspired witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. This creed contains the essential content of the gospel witness, the very subject matter that was subsequently worked out in the apostolic writings of the first century. The Gnostics hated the Old Testament, rejected the cross and the resurrection, and held that Yahweh, the Creator, would one day be thrown into hell.
- This gospel, says Paul, is the one gospel that the original church, both Jewish and Gentile, believed and the one that all the apostles preached. “Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor 15:11). It is evident that the early church was not an incoherent mixture of Gnostic and orthodox believers. In the early period it really was one apostolic church.

The cat is “completely out of the bag,” but not when, as Cox believes, the contemporary church understands that the ancient church was a spiritual group of Gnostics who rejected creeds and doctrines and relied entirely on the Spirit. Rather, it is “out of the bag” when the church understands that Gnosticism was clearly a later apostasy, always and consistently rejected by biblical orthodoxy from the very beginning. Taking seriously 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, we are compelled to conclude that this text must be dated in the mid-thirties of the first century and that Paul received it directly from the founding apostles in Jerusalem no later than the mid-thirties. This being the case, there is no time for a “fluid period” in which the earliest Christians believed whatever they wanted in total incoherence. In fact this text forces us to state that the Christian gospel was fixed from the beginning and that what we have in 1 Corinthians 15 is the original canon of the church, from which the final written canon organically derives.

### **VIII. *Paul, the Last Apostle***

It follows that if Paul’s “last of all” in v. 8 closes the apostolic circle (and I believe it does<sup>30</sup>), then this text implicitly raises the principle of the closing of the canon. There is no further foundational revelation. The notion of a unique apostolic ministry of revelation, limited to the time of Christ’s incarnation and appearances, carries within it the idea of completed revelation as norm or canon for the church, which the church later formally established by affirming the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as apostolic and authoritative. Not a wisp of Gnosticism appears in the earliest “canon” of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8; nor in the writings of the apostles as they circulated in the second and third centuries, preserved by faithful men; nor in the final canonical list of New Testament writings established in the fourth century. From the earliest centuries, the church gave us an implacable, consistent historical witness that Gnosticism was always considered an alien religion by original, Christ-inspired orthodoxy. We must say of liberal “Christian” Gnosticism today what the great German Gnostic specialist Kurt Rudolph said of ancient Gnosticism: it is “a parasite prosper[ing] on the soil of a host religion.”<sup>31</sup> If that is true, the cat is indeed out of the bag!

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<sup>30</sup> For further strength and detail to this argument, please consult Jones, “1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle.”

<sup>31</sup> Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 55.



# The New Perspective on Abraham?

GERHARD H. VISSCHER

## Abstract

Paul is not the only one in need of re-analysis, according to some scholars. Abraham, in their view, was not just the first Jew but also the first Gentile, and his role in Romans 4 has more to do with being a Gentile than it does with his being the father of the Jewish people. Gerhard Visscher examines whether this reasoning holds up in the writings of Paul and his contemporaries.

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**W**hile reference to “the New Perspective on Paul” has been commonplace for some time, even to the point that now the term “*beyond* the new perspective” is used,<sup>1</sup> one effect that often goes unnoticed is that the role of Abraham has also undergone re-evaluation. A new perspective is also being proposed with respect to Abraham, the father of all believers. If the question in the New Perspective on Paul concerns questions of works-righteousness and ethnicity, the same questions arise about this patriarch of all believers. Does Paul draw on Abraham in Romans 4 because Abraham is an outstanding example of justification by faith through grace alone, or because he considers Abraham to be the first Gentile who turns to God?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Notice, e.g., the subtitle of the book by Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> This article is an expansion and reworking of points raised in Gerhard H. Visscher, *Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul: Faith Embraces the Promise*, SBL 122 (New York: Lang, 2009).

Most will agree that a thorough answer to the question also involves an examination of how Abraham was viewed by Paul's contemporaries. It is in fact precisely on this understanding of how literature on the intertestamental period understands Paul that the discussion turns. Bruce W. Longenecker, a scholar who takes an exegetical approach that is very much like that of the leaders of the New Perspective on Paul (James D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright), is at one point in his book dialoguing with Stephen Westerholm, a leading critic of the New Perspective on Paul. Regarding Westerholm's insistence that "Rom. 4:1–5 is 'positively fatal' for any reading which considers Paul's critique in 3:21–31 to operate on the level of an attack on Jewish ethnocentrism,"<sup>3</sup> Longenecker says, "Westerholm's criticism suffers in that it does not grapple with the manner in which the figure of Abraham functioned in Early Judaism; in Jewish self-definition, and in Jewish attempts to preserve their distinctive way of life, Abraham played an essential role."<sup>4</sup> The point is significant enough to warrant reviewing all the evidence that Longenecker presents.

First, Longenecker suggests, much as James Dunn has, that in times when Abraham or his descendants were undergoing religious persecution (e.g., the Maccabean period), it was through maintaining their ethnic distinctiveness that Abraham's descendants displayed their faithfulness to God.

Second, Abraham showed himself to be the ideal Jew by entirely obeying the Mosaic law *even before* it was revealed, a fact, says Longenecker, "which itself calls into question Westerholm's claim that Abraham's works 'were certainly not observances of the peculiarly Jewish parts of the Mosaic code.'"<sup>5</sup> *Jubilees*, in particular, says Longenecker, develops the theme that Abraham observes "all the Mosaic prescriptions for ethnic distinctiveness."<sup>6</sup> Thus, Longenecker takes the position that "by 'works' Paul is thinking in 4.1–5 specifically of ethnic practices which distinguish Jews from gentiles."<sup>7</sup>

Longenecker does not deny that the charge of "works-righteousness" may play a role in 4:1–5, but he suggests that

*if* Paul is charging Jews with the attempt to *earn* their salvation by works in a legalistic sense, even this plays a part within his case against Jewish ethnocentrism. ... They think that they are *reacting* to God's grace by their ethnic practices, but, as

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant: A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1–11*, JSNTSup 57 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 211.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 211–12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Paul insists, the proper response is faith. By rejecting this requirement of covenant relationship, ethnocentric Jews are seen to be *acting* by their own efforts (their ethnic ‘works of law’) in order to gain God’s grace.<sup>8</sup>

What needs to be noted here is the rather narrow position that Longenecker has taken. If there is “works-righteousness” (“legalism,” as he calls it), it has only to do with legalism in the context of ethnocentrism, i.e., a boasting in “works” that are boundary markers.<sup>9</sup> An analysis of Longenecker’s view, then, would need to determine whether, in the wider context of Paul’s world, Abraham’s righteousness (or faithfulness/obedience) was generally linked with his observance of practices that distinguish Jews from Gentiles.

A related question is this: What did Paul mean when he referred to God as one who “justifies the ungodly” (*ton asebeē*) in Romans 4:5? When it is noted that 4:5 clarifies 4:3, it is evident that Paul had Abraham in mind here first of all and is thus actually referring to the patriarch as “Abraham, the ungodly”! In what sense?

New Perspective scholars are quick to propose a view here that differs from the traditional understanding, suggesting that the word “ungodly” is a reference to Abram’s Gentile state, in which he lived prior to his circumcision. Dunn, for example, writes,

Paul puts together two concepts which in Jewish thought were mutually exclusive: God justifies ... the ungodly (the one who is outside the covenant, that is, outside the sphere of God’s saving righteousness). ... Since the covenant began with Abraham, Abraham was already seen as the type of the proselyte, the Gentile who turns away from his idolatry to the one true God.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, after suggesting that there is nothing in Genesis 12–15 to prepare us for the description of Abraham as ungodly, Wright says:

Paul is presumably thinking of Abraham’s whole history, from his background in pagan Ur through to YHWH’s call and the establishing of the covenant. Jewish tradition knew of Abraham’s background in idolatry and tended to regard him as the first one to protest against this and to worship the one true God instead. Paul does not entirely dissent from this tradition. As he will show in the rest of the chapter, Abraham is thus the forefather quite specifically of Gentiles who come to faith, not merely of Jews. This is, in fact, the beginning of a daring theme: that Abraham is actually *more like* believing Gentiles than he is like believing Jews.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>9</sup> On whether this tenet of the New Perspective holds up, see my *Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul*.

<sup>10</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 205.

<sup>11</sup> N. T. Wright, *Romans*, NIB 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 492.

Similarly, also later, Wright clearly shows that he understands “ungodly” in this manner when he writes: “the God who justifies the ‘ungodly,’ i.e., the Gentile idolaters, the outsiders.”<sup>12</sup>

The question this essay is dealing with then is whether the literature of Paul’s day and Paul’s writing themselves support the viewpoint that Abraham is referenced as “righteous” only with a view to those practices that distinguish Jew from Gentile and whether it is the Jew/Gentile divide that explains Paul’s reference to Abraham as “ungodly.”

### **I. Abraham: “Righteous,” But in What Sense?**

*Jubilees*,<sup>13</sup> a book from which Longenecker seeks support,<sup>14</sup> mentions in 23:10 that whereas the lifespan of others was shortened because of sin, this was not the case with Abraham, for “Abraham was perfect in all of his actions with the LORD and was pleasing through righteousness all of the days of his life.” In *Jubilees* 12, Abraham is pictured as one who opposes his family on account of their idolatry. In 16:20–31, Abraham is described as celebrating the Feast of Booths flawlessly even long before this Mosaic feast was ordained. In *Jubilees* 18, the events of Genesis 22 are recounted, but only after the author has recounted all the other tests that Abraham had faced and said, “And in everything in which he (God) tested him (Abraham), he was found faithful. And his soul was not impatient. And he was not slow to act because he was faithful and a lover of the Lord” (17:18).

Even the death of Sarah is not too difficult a test for Abraham; *Jubilees* 19 says of Abraham, “He was found faithful, controlled of spirit. ... He was recorded as a friend of the Lord in the heavenly tablets” (19:9). In *Jubilees* 24:11, as the author reflects on Genesis 26:5, Isaac is told, “And all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed because your father obeyed me and observed my restrictions and my commandments and my laws and my ordinances and my covenant.”

Benjamin Schliesser discusses the view of the author of *Jubilees* on Abraham extensively and says that altogether, Abraham’s exemplary faithfulness is described about nine times:

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 495.

<sup>13</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg dates *Jubilees* in the mid-second century B.C.E. (“Abraham the Convert: A Jewish Tradition and Its Use by the Apostle Paul,” *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998], 152).

<sup>14</sup> Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 211, n. 3.

The deed character of Abraham's conduct is embedded in and embraced by his continuous trust and faithfulness towards God. This relationship is tested, proved, and confirmed in various situations that require the repeated commitment to God and his promise. ... In the words of *Jubilees*: He was faithful and ready to act.<sup>15</sup>

Not far from this are the words of 1 Maccabees 2:52, strikingly similar to Romans 4:3: "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?" Similarly, Sirach 44:19–21 reads,

Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory. He kept the law of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with him; he certified the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he proved faithful. Therefore the Lord assured him with an oath that the nations would be blessed through his offspring; that he would make him as numerous as the dust of the earth, and exalt his offspring like the stars, and give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.

Noteworthy in Sirach 44:20 is the expression that Abraham "proved faithful" (*eurethē pistos*); Schliesser points out that, with respect to both Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 22, when "faith" is mentioned of Abraham, Ben Sira understands this as denoting Abraham's "faithfulness" to God.<sup>16</sup> This is not unlike the approach of *Jubilees*.

*The Prayer of Manasseh* states plainly that Abraham did not sin against God (8).

Similarly, the *Damascus Document* says of Abraham that "he did not walk in it [i.e., evil], and he was accounted a friend of God because he kept the commandments of God and did not choose his own will."<sup>17</sup>

Josephus too describes Abraham as offering obedience to God; regarding the events of Genesis 22, Josephus describes him as one who deemed "that nothing would justify disobedience to God and that in everything he must submit to his will" (*Ant.* 1.13). As a result, we are told that God "took pleasure in what He had given [Abraham] and would never fail to regard with the tenderest care both him and his race" (*Ant.* 1.13). Similarly, Philo says of Abraham in light of this event, "He had not neglected any of God's commands, nor ever met them with repining or discontent, however charged with toils and pains they might be, and therefore he bore the sentence pronounced on his son with all nobleness and firmness" (*Abr.* 35).

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Schliesser, *Abraham's Faith in Romans 4*, WUNT 2.224 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 180.

<sup>16</sup> Schliesser, *Abraham's Faith*, 173.

<sup>17</sup> CD 3:2–4; cf. Simon Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 236.

In the Mishnah, it is said that along with the ten wonders done for the Jewish fathers in Egypt, the ten blows against the Egyptians, and the ten trials of the fathers, there were “ten trials” which were “inflicted upon Abraham . . . and he withstood all of them” (*m. ’Abot* 5.3). Similarly, Mishnah *Qiddushin* 4:14 reads, “We find that Abraham our father had performed the whole Law before it was given.”

In other rabbinic writings, one finds expressions like: “Just like myrrh is the most excellent of all spices, Abraham was the chief of all righteous men” (*Cant. Rab.* 1.13; cf. *Pirqe R. El.* 26; *’Abot R. Nat.* 33; *Gen. Rab.* 55.2; *Lev. Rab.* 3.11; 11.7).

Others who have studied the literature have come to similar conclusions. Nancy Calvert-Koyzis concludes after doing so,

Abraham functions as the prototype of one who rejects idolatry for faith in the one God and, in many cases, expresses that faith in obedience to the law. Even in the differing historical and political circumstances in which each of the texts was written, Abraham functioned to identify primary characteristics of the people of God.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, George W. E. Nickelsburg concludes that this literature sees Abraham as a model for religious behavior.<sup>19</sup> It should be noted, though, that the evidence is not necessarily saying that Abraham attempted to “earn his salvation” by means of works, but it is clearly saying that Abraham was known for his obedience.

So too, G. Walter Hansen, in an appendix on “Abraham in Jewish Literature,” concludes that while E. P. Sanders’s attempt to place Abraham in a covenantal-nomist context does not entirely fail, Abraham is seen in a varied fashion in the literature of Paul’s day:

Some texts (especially OT, and, in different ways, the Psalms of Solomon and Philo) emphasize the priority of the covenant with Abraham over the Mosaic Law and interpret Abraham’s faith primarily in terms of a response to the covenantal promises. Other texts (especially Sirach, Jubilees, I Maccabees, and the rabbinic writings) interpret the Abrahamic covenant in terms of the Mosaic Law and view faith as a response of obedience to that Law.

Paul’s use of the Abraham story is more closely aligned to the first emphasis. However, his Christocentric reinterpretation of the Abrahamic covenant, his inclusion of Gentile believers within that covenant, his separation of the Mosaic law and exclusion of non-Christian Jewish lawkeepers from that covenant, and his

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, *Paul, Monotheism and the People of God: The Significance of Abraham Traditions for Early Judaism and Christianity*, JSNTSup 273 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 142–43.

<sup>19</sup> Nickelsburg, “Abraham the Convert,” 172.

understanding of faith as exclusively faith in Christ serve to highlight the fact that his portrait of Abraham must be seen in an entirely different category.<sup>20</sup>

Although Longenecker has claimed support from Francis Watson's earlier work,<sup>21</sup> in his more recent significant work on Paul, Watson notes in a very pertinent comment:

The term 'works' refers to actions carried out in conformity to the divine will in both Romans 4.2 and 1 Maccabees 2.51. In neither case is the concern merely with 'the obligations which marked off [the Jewish people] most clearly as the seed of Abraham, the children of Israel, the people of the law (circumcision, food laws, Sabbath, in particular ...)' (Dunn, *Romans*, I.201). The food laws and the Sabbath are not relevant to Abraham's story, and yet the possibility that Abraham was 'justified by works' is for Paul a serious (though false) interpretative option. In the case of 1 Maccabees, the works of zeal for the law inspired by the fathers consist in the actions of the three brothers, as narrated in chapters 3–6. The fact that circumcision and food laws are important in the earlier account of martyrdoms (1 Macc. 1.41–64) tells us nothing about the scope of the term 'works', as used either by the author of 1 Maccabees or by Paul.<sup>22</sup>

Watson has suggested that Pauline theology is intertextual in form and that in order to understand how Paul reads texts of Scripture, one needs to pay attention as well to how others read the same texts. He points out that the writings of Eupolemus<sup>23</sup> attempt to portray Abraham as outstanding for his "zeal for piety," that *Jubilees* portrays Abraham as one who carefully observes the law to its letter, that Philo is more interested in seeing Abraham as one whose soul gradually progresses towards God, and that Josephus attempts to present Abraham in accordance with the interests of Greco-Roman historiography. The point is that all these other interpretations of Abraham also sketch Abraham as a morally exemplary figure, as one who is a "role model for human conduct in relation to God."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts*, JSNTSup 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 199.

<sup>21</sup> Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 212.

<sup>22</sup> Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 182, n. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Watson (*Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 259, 267) refers here to "Pseudo-Eupolemus" but disputes the "pseudo" designation (259, n. 48). For a further discussion on this point, see also Nickelsburg ("Abraham the Convert," 159, n. 24), who agrees with Watson. See also James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 873–82. At one point, Eupolemus notes, in a fashion similar to that of others, "Abraham excelled all in nobility and wisdom; he sought and obtained the knowledge of astrology and the Chaldean craft, and pleased God because he eagerly sought to be reverent" (Ps.-Eup. 3); see "Praeparatio Evangelica 9.17.2–9," *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2:880.

<sup>24</sup> Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 268.

Similarly, Jacqueline C. R. de Roo has noted that later Jewish writers were inclined to elevate the character of Abraham. De Roo cites extensive evidence from *Jubilees* to prove that Abraham was thought to be chosen by God because of his obedience;<sup>25</sup> as the story of his obedience comes before his call, the author of *Jubilees* implies that Abraham was chosen because he possessed spiritual understanding (11:16), opposed the idolatry of his family members (11:16–17; 12:1–8), acknowledged God as the only God (12:4, 16–19), and chose God (12:16–17). De Roo adds,

In short, no other figure in Judaism of Paul’s time was as revered as Abraham. He was the epitome of piety due to his perfect or, at least, close to perfect obedience to God’s will, as revealed in his good moral actions as well as in his impeccable performance of Mosaic rituals. Abraham’s piety is viewed as the basis of his divine election.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, Simon Gathercole has shown from his extensive survey of the literature of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha that not only election but also obedience plays a significant role.<sup>27</sup> Qumran literature, according to Gathercole, is permeated with the notion that final judgment is on the basis of works.<sup>28</sup> This applies also with respect to Abraham, who is not just *an* illustration from the Hebrew Scriptures for Paul; “as our forefather,” says Gathercole, “he is *the* example. If Paul’s theology cannot accommodate him, it *must* be false.”<sup>29</sup> And so the position that Paul is opposing in 4:2, says Gathercole, is one that says “that Abraham was declared righteous *subsequent to and because of* his obedience, his faithfulness under trial.”<sup>30</sup>

Clearly then, Longenecker’s view will not stand.<sup>31</sup> It is not always within

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<sup>25</sup> Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, “Works of the Law” at Qumran and in Paul (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 101–2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 109. De Roo sees this literature of Paul’s day as containing so much evidence about the obedience of Abraham that she suggests that many saw him as a redeemer figure who actually made atonement for the sins of all Israelites and their salvation. She suggests then that, for example, Paul in Rom 4:1–5 is urging his addressees “not to view Abraham as their redeemer, but Christ” (170). There are two problems with this view, however. First, proving that many saw Abraham as especially obedient to the law of God is not the same as saying that he made atonement for the sins of others; de Roo has not given proof of the latter. Second, there does not appear to be any evidence in Paul’s letter to the Romans that Abraham was seen as a redeemer figure.

<sup>27</sup> Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting?* 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>31</sup> Don Garlington has also sought support for his New Perspective approach by referring to Longenecker’s work and suggesting that Westerholm has “an *a priori* agenda to fulfil” (Don B. Garlington, “The Obedience of Faith”: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context, WUNT 79 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991], 257). Such an accusation, however, though repeated often (cf. *Ibid.*, 8, n. 20; 37, n. 21; 41, n. 36) can also cut two ways, especially since one looks in vain

the context of ethnocentrism that Abraham's obedience is extolled; much more is at stake than obedience to those acts that testify to his Jewishness. Abraham is commonly portrayed as an outstanding example of an ethically moral person who pleased God by all his actions.

Of course, this general perception of Abraham as obedient and performing good works alone is not enough to make the point. The real question is whether, according to this literature, *God* acknowledged Abraham to be righteous on the basis of what he did. Sprinkled among the above texts, however, are plenty of texts that suggest that this too was part of the understanding. *Jubilees* 23:10 says that "Abraham was perfect in all of his actions with the LORD and was pleasing through righteousness all of the days of his life." First Maccabees 2:52 reads, "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?" Sirach 44:20 refers to Abraham's obedience and faithfulness and says, "Therefore the Lord assured him with an oath ..." (44:21). The *Damascus Document* says that he was "accounted a friend of God because he kept the commandments of God" (CD 3:2–4). A. Andrew Das also reviews the intertestamental evidence and concludes that Sanders and other New Perspective scholars after him have downplayed the role of obedience and the degree to which such works of obedience are seen as necessary in Second Temple Jewish thought:

Quite apart from the boundary-marking features of the Law, works of obedience—even perfect obedience—play a prominent role in Second Temple Jewish thought. Such Second Temple texts provide a necessary context for Paul's discussion of Abraham's works in Rom 4:4–5 and may be the clue to resolving the new perspective debate. ...

New perspective interpreters such as Dunn and Wright have correctly highlighted the abandonment of Jewish ethnocentrism in Paul's letters, but their central claim that his critique of the Law is *limited* to ethnocentrism does not withstand scrutiny. The Jews considered observance of the Law's works to be a necessary accompaniment of God's gracious election of the people.<sup>32</sup>

## II. Abraham: "Ungodly," But in What Sense?

Turning to the related question regarding what Paul has in mind when he references Abraham as "ungodly" in Romans 4:5, it is striking, first of all, that if Paul had Gentiles in mind here, he clearly had a word to express that (*ethnē*), and throughout Romans he does not show any hesitation to use it.

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throughout his writing for any significant interaction with Westerholm's position and any significant evidence from the literature.

<sup>32</sup> A. Andrew Das, "Paul and Works of Obedience in Second Temple Judaism: Romans 4:4–5 as a 'New Perspective' Case Study," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71.1 (2009): 803, 812.

Even if it is true that Abraham is sometimes referred to in Jewish literature as the first believing Gentile, this is not what Paul is referring to when he uses the word *asebēs*. According to Walter Bauer, that word relates to “violating norms for a proper relation to deity, *irreverent, impious, ungodly*.”<sup>33</sup> It is simply not faithful to what Paul writes to suggest that he means something like “to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies *the Gentile* ...” As Gathercole has pointed out, “the category of the ‘ungodly’ is not restricted to *Gentiles*.”<sup>34</sup> The intent of the word *asebēs* is to emphasize a lack of godly qualities. This is apparent from how Paul uses the term and its cognates elsewhere in Romans. In 1:18 he uses it as a reference to the ungodliness of all people (*epi pasan asebeian kai adikian anthrōpōn*). In 5:6 he uses *asebōn* as a play on words with *asthenōn*, emphasizing human inability, helplessness. In 5:6, it would surely do injustice to the text to consider *asebēs* as referring first of all to pagan status, for then it would amount to Paul considering himself a Gentile and the ensuing argument would be lost. And the ensuing argument is again clearly about those who are morally sinners and Jesus who is not. In 11:26, Paul quotes Isaiah 59:26 and suggests that “all Israel will be saved” only by having *asebeia* removed from Israel!

As Fiedler says, “to use Abraham as an example of the believing *asebēs* is entirely un-Jewish.”<sup>35</sup> But it is entirely in accord with what Paul is saying in this context: Abraham has no righteous works to boast of before God. Watson has confirmed that the literature of Paul’s time would be loath to use such a word for Abraham; in fact, Philo uses its very antonym when he describes Abraham as one who, “filled with zeal for piety, the highest and greatest of virtues, was eager to follow God” (*ekeinos toinun eusebeias, aretēs tēs anatatō kai megistēs, zēlōtēs genomenos espouasen epesthai theō*).<sup>36</sup> Paul, says Watson, has a different understanding of Abraham:

Paul claims that Genesis 15.6 speaks only of a single defining moment in Abraham’s life, when he gave credence to the specific divine promise, “Thus shall your seed be” (v. 5); it is this act of credence that constitutes Abraham’s righteousness before God. Abraham, then, is simply the recipient of the promise, the beneficiary of future divine saving action, of which he can be absolutely sure because it has been promised, and because that promise is divine and therefore credible in spite of its apparently incredible content. If we ask who Abraham is apart from the promise, Paul’s

<sup>33</sup> BDAG 141.

<sup>34</sup> Simon Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 158.

<sup>35</sup> P. Fiedler, “*asebēs*,” *EDNT* 1: 169.

<sup>36</sup> Philo, *On Abraham*, 60; cf. Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 244.

answer is simply that he belongs to the company of the ‘ungodly,’ whom God justifies and whose sins are therefore forgiven (Rom. 4.5–8).<sup>37</sup>

Of course, there is a reason why New Perspective authors wish to understand *asebēs* as “Gentile.” Since there is a desire to remove the question of deeds and merit out of the discussion as much as possible, this word—which indicates that Abraham, like all those others referred to in 3:20, failed to meet the appropriate divine standard—needs to be interpreted differently. The interpretation fails, however. What Paul writes reinforces what was said in the former section: righteousness needs to be given to Abraham, because on his own, he is not righteous but ungodly, impious, and unrighteous.

Schliesser shares the concerns discussed here, pointing out that too often “exegetes take the edge of [*sic*] Paul’s statement by neglecting or obscuring the identification of the ‘ungodly one’ with Abraham or by ignoring the problem altogether.”<sup>38</sup> Some have suggested that Paul is making a more general statement and is not saying specifically that Abraham was ungodly.<sup>39</sup> Surely, however, to exclude Abraham from this statement destroys the whole logic of what Paul is writing in Romans 4:3–5. As Schliesser says,

Nowhere does Scripture call Abraham (anything like) “ungodly,” yet it is impossible *not* to deduce from the apostle’s line of thought that he *de facto* does so. Though Abraham is not mentioned specifically in 4:4–5, he is the case in point and example *par excellence* for what takes place. ...

Abraham remained in the sphere of ungodliness (1:18–3:20), as long as faith did not govern his life. ... Paul even stretches his thought back to the beginning of his letter: There, Gentiles are accused of ‘ungodliness,’ which equals unrighteousness (*adikia*), suppressing the truth of God’s faithfulness (1:18), ignorance towards God the creator and his power (1:20), and the rejection to give glory to God (1:21). ... Hence, all have sinned and are apart from faith, Gentiles and Jews, and their sinfulness and ungodliness is not merely a passive being apart from God, but an active neglect of his godliness.<sup>40</sup>

The concern of Paul is not to define certain moments in Abraham’s life when he sinned. Instead, it is a matter of Abraham belonging to the general human condition: weak, ungodly, and sinful, as Paul has described in the

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>38</sup> Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith*, 345.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer says, for instance, that the phrase *epi ton dikaiounta ton asebeē* does not “mean that Abraham was himself *asebes*” (*Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1993], 375), and William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam have argued that 4:5 is not a description of Abraham (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1968], 101).

<sup>40</sup> Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith*, 345, 347.

opening chapters of his letter.<sup>41</sup> To come back to the early part of Romans 5, where the conclusions of chapter 4 are being drawn, it is noteworthy that the word *asthenōn* is used in the same breath as *asebōn* in 5:6, since there as well as in 4:5, the sense seems to be that the *asebōn* (ungodly) are the ones who are *asthenōn* (weak, without strength)—what they need they must receive as a gift because they do not have the necessary resources of themselves. This classic interpretation of 4:1–5 is confirmed in 4:18–25, where the aged patriarch and his wife have no resources left but God’s promise, and it is applied to the new people of God in 5:1–11.

Another surprising aspect in all of this is that God is said to be one who “justifies the ungodly” (*ton dikaiounta ton asebeōn*). For anyone familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, which often speak against justifying such people (Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23; Exod 23:7), this is startling once again. Exodus 23:7 uses almost the same expression but then as something God will not do (*ou dikaiōseis ton asebeōn*). Isaiah 5:23 also uses the same words as it denounces those who “justify the ungodly” (*oi dikaiountes ton asebeōn*). But in Paul’s view, the surprise here is not that God justifies Gentiles rather than Jews, but that he justifies those who have no ground for such justification in themselves but instead should really be found guilty. As Halvor Moxnes puts it, “The most polemical and provocative argument in his controversy with Jews was this description of God in Rom 4:5, that he justifies the ungodly.”<sup>42</sup> Robert Jewett says,

The general pattern in the Hebrew Scriptures and subsequent Judaism is that God justifies only those who obey the law. Something radically new is in view here, even though Abraham is employed as the precedent, namely that God in Christ restores a right relationship with those who have not earned it.<sup>43</sup>

Paul has already explained now how this is possible: justification is by God’s grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24–25). In Westerholm’s terms, God gives extraordinary righteousness precisely to those who have no ordinary righteousness of their own.

In conclusion, the “old perspective” on Abraham, not unlike the “old perspective” on Paul, is pretty much on the mark.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>42</sup> Halvor Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict: Studies in Paul’s Understanding of God in Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 110.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 314.

# Scripture, Mishnah, and Confessions

PAUL R. GILCHRIST

## Abstract

“Scripture, Mishnah, and the Confessions” examines the rabbinic sayings of the Pharisees at the time of Christ, the “oral law of Moses” that ultimately was written down in A.D. 200. These Mishnaic interpretations thought to apply the Old Testament to their new culture. The author notes that church leaders, wittingly or unwittingly, elevate their formal documents to the same level of authority in seeking to adjust to changing cultures. This tendency is observed in the history of the church, whether Romanism or liberalism, fundamentalism or evangelicalism, and sometimes in confessional church circles.

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**G**ood intentions sometimes lead to unintended consequences. This article seeks to show how the Mishnah, though it aimed at addressing how Jews were to apply some teachings from Moses and the Prophets while under the Greek and Roman empires, not only went beyond the Scriptures but even misinterpreted God’s rule for faith and practice. Worse yet, the “tradition of the elders” as expounded in the Mishnah eventually replaced Moses and the Prophets as the authoritative expression of God’s revelation. Are there lessons for us in the Reformed tradition who subscribe in our ordination vows to one or another standard expression of the Reformed faith? First, the questions that must be asked are: Who were the Pharisees? and What was the Mishnah?

## I. *Origins and Background of the Mishnah*

Following the division of Alexander the Great's empire among his four generals, the Jews in Judea were under pressure from the Seleucids in Syria and/or the Ptolemies in Egypt to become assimilated to Hellenistic culture. Then, after gaining their independence under the Maccabees, they had to adjust to the cultural changes that led to rethinking their religious practices required by the Mosaic documents. Various parties emerged. Among these the Pharisees and Sadducees became the leading religious leaders of the Jews, although not all Jews were strict followers. The Pharisees as a party were a very small minority, as we are told by Josephus.<sup>1</sup> The Sadducees were the more conservative party, claiming descent from Zadok, the priest. They were identified as the religious leaders centered in the temple in Jerusalem. With the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the priestly party disappeared and the influence of the Pharisees was firmed up. They were more open to accommodation to Hellenistic culture, but sought to keep their roots in the Mosaic tradition.

Some Second Temple literature gives evidence of a measure of godliness among some Jews of the period, many of whom were looking for the coming of Messiah.<sup>2</sup> There were many Jews who, "as [Jesus] spoke these words, ... believed in Him,"<sup>3</sup> including some of the Pharisees such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Indeed, the great majority of those who became Christians in the early church were Jews and many Gentile proselytes to Judaism. In the last year or so of Christ's ministry, he concentrated on teaching his disciples, while at the same time there were increasing clashes with the Pharisees. He faced their opposition firmly. Further on, there was a growing problem in the early church with "some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed" (Acts 15:5). In short, they still had not shed all the baggage of their past.

The earliest stage of interpretation by the Pharisees was the system of Midrash, whereby they interpreted the Scriptures and *augmented them with expansions of their own* in their controversies with the more conservative Sadducees as exponents of the Torah. This, however, posed somewhat of

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.2.42.

<sup>2</sup> However, Second Temple literature also reveals some erroneous teachings. *Reading Romans in Context: Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), is an excellent compendium of articles on various passages of Romans that compares and contrasts the theology of Second Temple literature and that of Paul.

<sup>3</sup> John 8:30 (NKJV). Unless indicated all quotations hereafter are from the NKJV.

a threat to the Pharisees, since it assumed that the Scriptures were the authoritative Torah of Moses and the Prophets. As some of the Pharisaic positions could not be defended from the Scriptures, *they soon moved to the Mishnaic system of teaching*. This oral tradition of the rabbis from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. was eventually put down in written form at the end of the second century by Rabbi Judah-ha-Nasi and called the Mishnah. Herbert Danby, editor for the Oxford University Press tome, states,

The Mishnah ... maintains that the authority of those rules, customs, and interpretations which had accumulated around the Jewish system of life and religion is equal to the authority of the *Written Law itself*, even though they found no place in the Written Law. ... Inevitably the inference follows that the living tradition (the Oral Law) is *more important than the Written Law*,<sup>4</sup> since the ‘tradition of the elders’, besides claiming an authority and continuity equal to that of the Written Law, claims also to be *its authentic and living interpretation* and its essential complement. (Emphasis added)<sup>5</sup>

It is to be noted that although the Mishnah taught Jews to repeat daily the Shema (Deut 6:4–6) and the eighteen *Berakoth* (blessings or benedictions), they became no more than empty phrases and vain repetitions, devoid of a heartfelt relationship with a personal God. Thus, the Oral Law became the “doctrines and commandments of men.” *Appeal was made to the Mishnah, the work of the sages, both for doctrinal and judicial matters.*<sup>6</sup>

The focus of this paper is on the rabbinic teachings in the Mishnah, with additional light shed by the Targumim, since these teachings represent the religious establishment in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee in the time of Christ. Second Temple literature is a much larger body of literature; it includes the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran. We hope to show that the Mishnah to a very large degree reinterpreted the Old Testament teaching, resulting in legalism; in contrast to this reinterpretation, Jesus and the apostles provide a direct spiritual continuum with Moses and the Prophets in theology and worship, law and ethics.

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<sup>4</sup> Danby footnotes here: “See Sanh. 11<sup>3</sup>: ‘Greater stringency applies to the observance of the words of the Scribes [namely, the authorized exponents of the law] than to the observance of the [Written] Law.’”

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), xvii.

<sup>6</sup> The Mishnah was put into writing about A.D. 200. Later rabbis and sages made additional decisions and expansions, so that in the fourth century A.D. the Jerusalem Talmud came into being and the Babylonian Talmud was written in the fifth century A.D.

## II. *Jesus and Old Testament Scriptures*

The gospel narratives open their accounts connecting the life of Jesus with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. All four gospels immediately identify their writings as a continuation of the Old Testament. In all cases, the evangelists are careful to cite passages from the Old Testament that identify the promises, prophecies, and types that were fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus shows that he is solidly grounded in Moses and the Prophets, underscoring their authority with “It is written.” Indeed, when Jesus does quote or allude to the “tradition” (i.e., “the oral tradition of Moses” later written down in the Mishnah), he often contrasts it with something from the Old Testament with “But I say unto you ...” (e.g., Matt 5:22). This contrast should not be lost on us: when Jesus was saying, “You have heard that it was said to those of old ...” (e.g., Matt 5:21), he was clearly referring to the difference between the “oral tradition of the elders” and the authoritative written Word of God. The source of his strength is founded upon the authority of the written Scriptures, and more specifically in Yahweh, the great I Am, who reveals himself in the Old Testament.

Beginning with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, one begins to see some interaction between Christ and the rabbinic teachings of the Mishnaic oral tradition. When read in their own context, the rabbinic teachings are found to have a different meaning than that given in the Sermon on the Mount. Alfred Edersheim mentions two areas that exhibit the contrast between New Testament and rabbinic teaching: humility and perfectness. “New Testament humility, as opposed to Jewish (the latter being really pride, as only the consciousness of failure, or rather, of inadequate perfectness, while New Testament humility is really despair of self); and again, Jewish as opposed to New Testament perfectness (the former being an attempt by means of external or internal to strive up to God; the latter a new life, springing from God, and in God).”<sup>7</sup>

### ***A. There are several passages in the Gospels where Jesus Christ expresses his high view of the inspiration and authority of the Law of Moses and the Prophets.***

1. *Matthew 5:17–20*. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (v. 17).

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 5th ed., 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, 1886), 1:528. Edersheim, born in Vienna in 1825 into a Jewish family, studied the Torah and the Talmud at a gymnasium attached to a synagogue. He was converted to Christianity under the preaching of “Rabbi” John Duncan, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary.

The Sermon on the Mount marks how the righteousness of the kingdom of God “goes deeper than the mere letter of even the Old Testament Law.”<sup>8</sup> The Beatitudes correspond to the old covenant blessings. Here Christ points to the real continuity between Old Testament and New Testament, showing the relation of each to the other. Matthew 5:17–20 (especially v. 20) clearly shows a grand climax and transition to the “criticism of the Old Testament-Law in its merely literal application, such as the Scribes and Pharisees made.”<sup>9</sup>

It must be observed that when Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old” (v. 21),<sup>10</sup> he was not referring to Moses or the Prophets, for whom he held a very high esteem. Rather, he was referring to “the Rabbinic appeal to those that preceded, the *Zegenim* or *Rishonim*.”<sup>11</sup> “Those of old” thus were the authors of the “oral tradition,” which the scribes and Pharisees were promulgating as though it had come down orally since the times of Moses. This oral tradition of the Pharisees, as noted earlier, was what finally became codified in the Mishnah by the end of the second century A.D.

Some have argued that Jesus was laying down a general principle that his own statements are more stringent than those of the scribes and Pharisees.<sup>12</sup> However, as David Jones writes,

Jesus’ interpretation of the Law is not invariably more stringent than that of the Pharisees. Indeed, sometimes the opposite is the case. Responding to the Pharisees’ stringent interpretation of the fourth commandment, Jesus twice reproves them for failure to incorporate into their hermeneutic the principle of Hosea 6:6: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13, 12:7). ... Standards are not righteous for being rigorous; it is not godly to be more strict than God.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1:529

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1:530

<sup>10</sup> Some older manuscripts omit “to those of old,” but that does not detract from the question of to whom he is referring: is it to the scribes and Pharisees or to Moses and the Prophets? From the contrasts and the correctives which Christ provides, it is clear that it is to the authors of the “oral tradition” that began during the Second Temple period and the pre-Mishnaic oral tradition of the Jews.

<sup>11</sup> Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 1:538.

<sup>12</sup> J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth: A Biblical Examination of Divorce and Remarriage* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1981), 67–68. Laney applies this concept to the matter of remarriage after divorce for adultery (Matt 5:29–30), arguing that if Jesus would allow remarriage in such cases, then he “would be siding with the conservative school of Shammai, which allowed divorce only in the case of adultery,” and if so, then “Jesus’ teaching did not rise above that of Shammai and the Pharisees, contrary to His usual pattern ... [as] Christ customarily rebuked the superficiality of the Pharisees with His own more stringent interpretation of the Law.” Thus, Jesus was more stringent by prohibiting remarriage.

<sup>13</sup> David C. Jones, “The Westminster Confession on Divorce and Remarriage,” in *Minutes of the Eighteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Atlanta, GA: Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, 1990), 157.

John Murray further amplifies this discussion when he writes,

What Jesus is saying is that the righteousness of the scribes, notwithstanding its meticulous adherence to the minutiae, does not begin to qualify for the kingdom of heaven; it has no affinity with the demands of the kingdom of heaven. This is so not because the kingdom of heaven does not demand righteousness, nor because it is indifferent to the minutiae of divine prescription, but because the demands of the kingdom of heaven are far greater than anything that ever enters into the conception of the scribes and Pharisees. They have not begun to reckon with the demands of the kingdom of heaven. Paradoxically, it was their concern for detail that led them to miss the whole genius of kingdom righteousness; the detail was not the detail of divine prescription. They made void the law of God by their own traditions.<sup>14</sup>

2. *Luke 24:25–32 and 24:44–45*. In the postresurrection appearance to the two on the road to Emmaus, Jesus reaffirmed the authority and veracity of the Law and the Prophets. Responding to their discouragement concerning the previous few days, Jesus gently rebuked them by saying, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” (vv. 25–26). Then the account continues: “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (v. 27).

Later that first Sunday night after his resurrection, he appeared to his disciples. After eating with them, he said, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44). Luke goes on to say, “And He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (v. 45).

One must notice that the inspired Gospel writer calls “Scriptures” what Christ referred to as “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” Thus, the authority that Jesus was quoting and explaining was not only the written Law of Moses, but the Prophets and the Psalms—the Psalms being the first book of the third section of the Scriptures, known by the Jews as the Ketuvim, i.e., the Writings.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Christ gave to the written Law, the Prophets, and the Writings the highest authority. This stood in contrast to the “oral tradition,” which the Pharisees considered to have come down by word of mouth from Moses; they considered this oral Law to be of higher

<sup>14</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 155.

<sup>15</sup> The Jews referred to the three parts of what we designate the Old Testament as the Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim, i.e., the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, later shortened to the acronym Tanak.

authority than the written Pentateuch. Not only so, but they gave less authority to the Prophets, and placed the Writings at an even lower level of inspiration and authority.

3. *John 13:34–35*. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love another; as I have loved you” (v. 34).

As they left that celebration of the Passover Feast, Jesus gave them this most significant “new commandment,” which is that they should love one another, just as Christ himself had exhibited by personal example. The question is this: Is this commandment to be understood as a contrast to the Old Testament commandments, or is it more a renewal of the central positive teaching of the commandments of the Old Testament, i.e., to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves?<sup>16</sup>

It might be helpful to note two things: First, he refers to the commandment as “new” (Gk. *kainos*). This word is used in contradistinction to the Greek *neos*, which means something “brand new.” *Kainos* is used of something being “renewed.” This word is used of the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21:1), of the new covenant (Luke 22:20), and of a new person in Christ (2 Cor 5:17)—in each case the renewal is in view.<sup>17</sup>

Second, we go back to our Lord’s response to the question asked by a Pharisee lawyer in Matthew 22:34–40 as to which is the “great and foremost commandment.” Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 (love for God) and Leviticus 19:18 (love for neighbor). When Christ gave this new commandment in John 13:34, does it really differ from the “great and foremost commandment(s)” of the Old Testament? Further, the Lord added a clear hermeneutical principle: this “great and foremost commandment” must be applied to all of the Law and the Prophets, the Scriptures. John 13:34 seems to be a particularized application for his disciples, adding that he himself has personally exemplified this in his relationship with them. Not only so, but this “love for one another” will be the foremost badge before a watching world that they truly are disciples of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Matt 22:37–40, which quotes Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18.

<sup>17</sup> Consider the difference between buying a brand new car in contradistinction to a fully refurbished car restored to mint condition.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Schaeffer defined orthodoxy in terms of correct belief and observable love. James M. Boice identified six marks of the church in *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 576 and 584–85, including “a loving people,” citing John 13:34–35 and 17:26.

**B. There are numerous times in the Gospels when Jesus interacts with the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees and contrasts their rabbinical interpretations with his own perspective.**

Matthew 5 clearly exhibits a contrast between the righteousness of the kingdom and that set forth by the rabbis of Israel. The similarity of language between rabbinic teachings and that of the Sermon on the Mount should not be confused with sameness of spirit. Edersheim correctly points out that

in teaching addressed to His contemporaries, Jesus would naturally use the forms with which they were familiar. Many of these Rabbinic quotations are, however, entirely inapt, the similarity lying in an expression or turn of words. Occasionally, the misleading error goes even further, and that is quoted in illustration of Jesus' sayings which, either by itself or in the context, implies quite the opposite.<sup>19</sup>

A similar position is expressed by Martin McNamara regarding some of the Targumim:

In seeking to determine the position of the Targums on any particular point, it is important to examine the Targums as translation, to see how faithful they are to the message and teaching of the original biblical text. It may be that certain emphases within later Jewish tradition run counter, and depart from the biblical text. On some occasions the Targum clearly rewrites the biblical text through what are known as "converse translations," which say the opposite of what the text itself says.<sup>20</sup>

1. *Matthew 5:21–22*. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever calls his brother 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."

It should be noted that the second part of the quotation, namely, "and whoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment" is not to be found in Moses or the Prophets. This underscores the point made above, that Jesus was countering or correcting the accretions or minutiae in the interpretation of the teachers of the law.

Also not found in the Old Testament are the additional phrases in verse 31, "let him give her a certificate of divorce," and verse 43, "and hate your enemy." Neither is "and hate your enemy" found in the Mishnah, but it is

<sup>19</sup> Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 1:531.

<sup>20</sup> Martin McNamara, "Some Targum Themes," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Vol. 1, The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 324.

part of the Qumran Community Rule (IQS). The Qumran sect noted that the instructions in Leviticus 19:17–18 are directed toward “your brother,” “the sons of your people,” and “your neighbor.” Community members were not to correct or rebuke outsiders, including fellow Jews whom they saw as apostate. Harboring hatred in one’s heart toward outsiders was permitted. Chapter 9 of the Community Rule specifies that the leader of the community “shall not rebuke the men of the Pit nor dispute with them.”<sup>21</sup> Later in the chapter comes the declaration, “Everlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy for the men of perdition!” The sectarians arrived at their narrow interpretation of Leviticus 19:17–18 by comparing these verses with Nahum 1:2, which states that “the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies” (ESV). While it is wrong to hate or practice revenge against a brother, they reasoned, hatred against an enemy is endorsed by God’s example, which they were called to follow (Lev 19:2). On the contrary, if anything this is the very opposite of what Moses said in Exodus 23:4–5: “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring him back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.” Consider also Deuteronomy 23:7, where the principle is expressed in the negative: “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land.” Thus, instead of “hate your enemy,” Christ provided a corrective to this Qumran quote by stating “love your enemies,” he was expressing a spiritual and moral principle already found in the Old Testament.

Christ was underscoring the breadth and depth of the application of the Law by showing that the Law addressed not mere outward behavior but inner attitudes that stem from the heart. The Lord took into account what was considered the sum of the first and second commandments, namely, “to love the Lord your God with all your heart” and “to love your neighbor as yourself.” He understood and applied what he later said explicitly: “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>22</sup> Apart from these two foundational principles, the Scriptures will be misconstrued and distorted.

2. *Matthew 11:28–30*. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

<sup>21</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 83.

<sup>22</sup> Matt 22:37–40.

There was nothing light and easy in the teachings of the Pharisees; indeed, they put “heavy burdens” that were grievous to be carried and laid them on men’s shoulders (cf. Matt 23:4). Alfred Plummer writes that “‘heavy laden’ (πεφορτισμένοι [*pephortismenoi*]) does not refer primarily to the load of sin, but to the burdens which Pharisaic interpretations of the Law imposed, and which, after all, gave no relief to men’s consciences.”<sup>23</sup> He then adds that from Christ we can “learn the nature of the righteousness ... a meek and lowly heart, not of external observances.” He further notes that *kopiōntes* (laboring) implies toil, referring to a weary search for truth and for relief of a troubled conscience, while *pephortismenoi* (heavy laden) implies endurance, referring to the heavy load of observances that give no relief. Konrad Weiss agrees: “In the NT φορτίζω [*phortizō*] means the burdening of men (Lk. 11:46) ... with the legal demands of the rabbis without any directions or help in their observance.” He adds, “The ref. is to those who sigh under Rabbinic legal practice.”<sup>24</sup> Luke 11:46 underscores this by adding to these burdens *dusbastakta* (hard to bear). So, when Christ said, “Take My yoke upon you,” he was contrasting his “light teaching” with the “heavy teaching” of the Pharisees. He alluded to the metaphorical use of “yoke” in the Old Testament, where it has the sense of servitude.<sup>25</sup> Jeremiah 5:5 referred to the great men (i.e., leaders) of Judah and Israel who betrayed their call to high office and had “broken the yoke and burst the bonds,” a figure for the law of God and his covenant. This figure was commonly used by the Jews in Second Temple Judaism. In the Psalms of Solomon, it seems to be used in a positive way: “We are beneath your yoke for evermore, and beneath the rod of chastening” (7:8); “He shall possess the peoples of the heathen to serve Him beneath His yoke” (17:32). It was used as a metaphor for obligation, especially to the service of the Law. For example, “For behold, I see many of Your people who have withdrawn from Your covenant, and cast from the yoke of Your Law.”<sup>26</sup> Edersheim makes the point that the Pharisees “had weighted ‘the yoke of the Kingdom’ to a heavy burden, and made the Will of God to them labour, weary and unaccomplishable.”<sup>27</sup>

In the Mishnah one reads that R. Nehunya ben Ha-Kanah (ca. A.D. 70–130) says,

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<sup>23</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 170.

<sup>24</sup> Konrad Weiss, “φορτίζω,” *TDNT* 9:86–87.

<sup>25</sup> E.g., in Jer 27 and 28.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Baruch 41:3. Cf. also Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 51:26; *Pirqe Aboth* 3:8.

<sup>27</sup> Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 1:562.

He that takes upon himself the yoke of the Law, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom [i.e., the troubles suffered at the hands of those in power] and the yoke of worldly care; but he that throws off the yoke of the Law, upon him shall be laid the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care.<sup>28</sup>

Further on, R. Eleazar of Modiim says,

If a man profanes the Hallowed Things [i.e., the offerings, some texts read ‘the sabbaths’] and despises the set feasts and puts his fellow to shame publicly and makes void the covenant [i.e., to render himself uncircumcised] of Abraham our father, and discloses meanings in the Law [i.e., those who ignore or dispute the ‘traditions of the elders’; or a secondary sense, ‘behave impudently against the Law’] which are not according to the *Halakah*, even though a knowledge of the Law and good works are his, he has no share in the world to come.<sup>29</sup>

Edersheim comments that

practically, ‘the yoke of the Kingdom’ was none other than that ‘of the Law’ and ‘of the commandments;’ one of laborious performances and of impossible self-righteousness. It was ‘unbearable,’ not ‘the easy’ and lightsome yoke of Christ, in which the Kingdom of God was of faith, not of works. And, as if themselves to bear witness to this, we have this saying of theirs, terribly significant in this connection: ‘Not like those formerly (the first), who made for themselves the yoke of the Law easy and light; but like those after them (those afterwards), who made the yoke of the Law upon them heavy!’<sup>30</sup> And, indeed, this voluntary making of the yoke as heavy as possible, the taking on themselves as many obligations as possible, was the ideal of Rabbinic piety.<sup>31</sup>

The heavy yoke of the oral tradition was reflected by Peter in his speech against “some of the sect of the Pharisees” at the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:10, when he said: “why do you test God by *putting a yoke on the neck* of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” Paul’s argument for the Christian’s liberty in Christ was contrasted to the yoke of the oral tradition in Galatians 5:1: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be *entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (emphasis added).<sup>32</sup> Thus, Peter and Paul agreed with Jesus Christ regarding the “heavy yoke” of the oral Law, which had crept into the early church through “some Pharisees who believed.”

<sup>28</sup> *ʿAbot* 3.5 (Danby, *The Mishnah*, 450).

<sup>29</sup> *ʿAbot* 3.12 (Danby, *The Mishnah*, 451).

<sup>30</sup> *Sanh.* 94 b, middle.

<sup>31</sup> Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 2:143–44.

<sup>32</sup> See discussion below on Acts 15:12 regarding the absence of summary of Paul’s speech.

3. *Matthew 12:1–8*. There were differences between Christ’s teaching on the Sabbath and that of the Pharisees. Their antagonism with increasing vehemence was culminated with their charge that he was working in league with Beelzebub. That the disciples plucked the rye or barley grain was not a problem, since this was permitted according to Deuteronomy 23:25. They were not accused of stealing but of working on the Sabbath by plucking and rubbing the grain in their hands. The scribes and Pharisees considered reaping, threshing, and winnowing as working on the Sabbath and thus forbidden.

Jesus responded with two illustrations from the Old Testament, thus pointing to the fact that every rule has its limitations and that ceremonial laws sometimes must yield to the higher claims of love and necessity. First, Jesus responded, “Have you not read ...?” (v. 3), significantly referring to the Former Prophets,<sup>33</sup> which the Pharisees considered to have less authority than the Law of Moses. David and his outlaw followers ate from the showbread in the tabernacle, which only the priests were permitted to eat. Further, the priests’ heaviest workday was on the Sabbath in the Temple as they administered the Sabbath sacrifices. Second, Jesus then quotes Hosea 6:6 for the second time: “I desire mercy [Heb. *hesed*], not sacrifice” (Matt 9:13).<sup>34</sup>

One needs to read the tractate on the Shabbath in the Mishnah (in the Second Division, *Moed* [‘Set Feasts’]) to get a feel for the minutiae imposed upon the Jews. There are twenty-four sections in the tractate on Shabbath, each with some four to eleven paragraphs of detailed regulations. Several examples may be quoted that are apropos to what the Lord was addressing. Shabbath 7.1 states,

A great general rule have they laid down concerning the Sabbath: whosoever, forgetful of the principle of the Sabbath, committed many acts of work on many Sabbaths, is liable only to one Sin-offering; but if, mindful of the principle of the Sabbath, he yet committed many acts of work on many Sabbaths, he is liable for every Sabbath [which he profaned]. If he knew that it was the Sabbath and he yet committed many acts of work on many Sabbaths, he is liable for every main class of work [which he performed]; if he committed many acts of work of one main class, he is liable only to one Sin-offering.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In our Bibles we call them the Historical books.

<sup>34</sup> Laird Harris identifies *hesed* both as an attribute of God in attitude and action of love apart from its relation to covenants. See *TWOT* 1:305–7. God’s people are to reflect this attribute individually and corporately even as Christ explicitly stated: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

<sup>35</sup> Danby, *The Mishnah*, 106.

Shabbath 7.2 continues with a list of classes of work: “The main classes of work are forty save one: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading ...”<sup>36</sup> Again, in Shabbath 10.6, “If a man plucked aught from a holed plant-pot he is culpable; but if from an unholed plant-pot he is not culpable.”<sup>37</sup>

Edersheim makes an interesting observation: “Holding views like these, the Pharisees, who witnessed the conduct of the disciples, would naturally harshly condemn, what they must have regarded as gross desecration of the Sabbath. Yet it was clearly not a breach of the Biblical, but of the Rabbinical Law.”<sup>38</sup>

4. *Other passages.* Space does not permit examining additional passages. Suffice it to list the following and suggest these would yield further insights: Matt 5:27–29; 12:9–14; 15:1–20 and Mark 7:1–23; Matt 19:3–10; 22:34–40; note especially Matt 23:2–36; et al.

### III. *Paul’s Confrontations with Judaizers in Acts*

The Book of Acts gives us a helpful insight into Paul’s view of the Torah and his confrontations with Jews. In Acts 14 we read of Paul in the synagogue at Iconium. The result of the preaching was that “a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks [Gk. *hellēnoi*] believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles [Gk. *ethnē*] and poisoned their minds against the brethren” (vv. 1–2). The opposition resulted in persecution and Paul’s being expelled from the region.

In Acts 15 we see for the first time a disagreement over doctrine and practice among believing Jews and Gentiles.<sup>39</sup> This was initiated after “certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the *custom of Moses*, you cannot be saved” (v. 1). Paul and Barnabas and other leaders appealed the matter to the Synod at Jerusalem. There they met with the “apostles and the elders” (v. 4), reporting all that God had been doing among the Gentiles through their ministry. But those who held a different view, referred to as “*some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed*,” “rose up” (v. 3) in opposition, claiming, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” Circumcision reflected a most visible and important issue, but at the heart of the

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>38</sup> Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 2:56.

<sup>39</sup> Not to be confused with the disagreement in polity and social concern seen in Acts 6.

matter was how Gentile believers should observe the Mosaic Law. Note: Moses never intended the Old Testament Law as a means of justification.

At the Jerusalem Synod (or Council), Peter was the first to speak. His brief is presented in Acts 15:7–11, and this is his conclusion: “Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (v. 11). This perhaps clarifies what he was talking about when he said just before that, “Why do you test God by putting *a yoke on the neck* of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (v. 10). This seems to be a clear allusion to Jesus’s statement, contrasting the heavy “yoke of the scribes and Pharisees” with his own yoke, which “is easy.”<sup>40</sup>

In Acts 15:12, Luke records that Paul and Barnabas gave their report of God’s working among the Gentiles through their ministry. One must ask in light of the summary of Peter’s remarks and of James’s remarks in Acts 15:13–21, Why is Paul’s presentation not summarized and recorded? This is especially an important question, considering that Luke summarizes Paul’s sermons and testimony in many instances. I would suggest that the reason is that Paul had written his epistle to the Galatians addressing this very issue, seeking to resolve the problem in the churches he had established on his first missionary journey. This epistle was written, then, just before the Jerusalem Synod, and he used it as his brief before the court in Jerusalem. This would explain why Luke does not summarize his views at the council of Jerusalem: he knew that there was already a written document that served as Paul’s brief.

Acts 15:13–21 summarizes the speech by James, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup> James recommends a letter be sent to the brethren in Antioch area with these solutions. This is agreed upon by the apostles and elders (Gk. *presbuteroi*) with the consent of the church as a whole. The letter (vv. 23–29) further dissociates the apostles and elders from the legalism of those who “came from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to *the custom* of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (v. 1) and the “Pharisees who believed,” who felt that Gentile believers should be commanded “to keep the Law of Moses” (v. 5). To require observance of such things as circumcision as prerequisite to salvation is to “add to the Scriptures” a teaching that goes beyond Moses and the Prophets.<sup>42</sup>

It will be helpful to briefly review several recurring statements regarding the Mishnaic rabbinic writings:

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<sup>40</sup> See notes above sub Matt 14:28–30.

<sup>41</sup> James the brother of John and son of Zebedee was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Deut 4:2; 12:32.

- The Mishnah was *equal to the authority of the Written Law itself*, even though Mishnaic teachings found no place in the Written Law.
- Inevitably the living tradition (the Oral Law) *is more important than the Written Law*.
- The “tradition of the elders” claims also to be *its authentic and living interpretation*.
- *Appeal was made to the Mishnah, the work of the Sages, both for doctrinal and judicial matters*.
- Greater stringency applies to the observance of the words of the Scribes than to the observance of the [Written] Law (See Sanh. 11.3).
- The focus in the Targumim has shifted from Yahweh God to instruction in the Torah of the Lord.

#### IV. *What of Our Confessions and Catechisms?*

As inheritors of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, we concur with the great Reformers who pointed out the accretions and distortions in doctrines, worship, and governance that like barnacles had become part and parcel of Romanism. For example, Brennan Manning references Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which the Grand Inquisitor, defending the church’s taking away of the people’s freedom “for their own good,” says to Jesus,

“They will be amazed at us, and will think of us as gods ... because we are ready to rule over them. ... But we shall say that we are obeying you and ruling only in your name. ... [W]e shall not let you have anything to do with us anymore.” Indeed, “Why have you [Jesus] come to disturb us?”

Manning comments,

After fifteen hundred years the institutional Church, *instead of proclaiming Jesus, had supplanted Him*. Ecclesiastical traditions and man-made laws had usurped Jesus, and the Church was living off the success of its ingenuity. ... The question had become not “What does Jesus say?” but “What does the Church say?” (Emphasis added)<sup>43</sup>

Dostoyevsky captures the problem, and with him we readily acknowledge the many deviations from Scripture exhibited in such things as pelagianism, monasticism, celibacy, indulgences, and later the supremacy of the papacy and *ex-cathedra* authority, and Mariolatry.

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<sup>43</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005/1990), 145–46. I am indebted for this to my son, Daniel S. Gilchrist.

Voices of protest emerged. Jan Hus, who was encouraged by the writings of John Wycliffe, whose books were publicly burned in 1410 in Prague, preached that all human rules and institutions should be evaluated in light of the Scriptures, emphasizing freedom from the burden of human rules not in accord with the Scriptures.<sup>44</sup> And we remember well Martin Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms in 1519: "It is impossible for me to recant unless I am proved to be wrong by the testimony of Scripture or by evident reasoning. ... My conscience is bound to the Word of God."

Protestant churches further responded by developing confessions and/or catechisms that essentially reflected their Reformed beliefs based on the Scriptures.<sup>45</sup>

When the Puritan refugees established the Massachusetts colony, they went a bridge too far in seeking to have "a Puritan experiment." The most famous expressions of legalism were their strict observance of doctrines and judicial procedures. We remember the trials of witches and adultery cases, often going way beyond the guidelines presented in the Scriptures.

With the rise at the end of the nineteenth century of Modernism, which denied five essential doctrines, Evangelicals countered with the Five Fundamentals, which were to a large degree promoted by the rising Dispensationalism, which eroded the authority of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, many other important doctrines of Scripture were neglected, and a new system for moral living arose; consider the five rules for Christian living: no smoking, no drinking, no dancing, no movies, no card playing [and, some may add, no lipstick]. The solid confessional standards of the Reformation period were silenced, and shallow theological thinking followed. In the 1920s and 1930s, a diminished and weakened Christianity emerged in the churches.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Reformed churches emerged, reasserting the doctrines and practices of the Reformation. New denominations were formed, some dividing but a few uniting with others. In the early 1980s, during the time of the joining and receiving of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), I was invited to participate in a committee discussing a proposed Directory of Worship. I presented some arguments from the Scriptures. A PCA member presented a counter argument based on the Westminster Standards. I asked how these arguments could be understood from

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<sup>44</sup> John Huss, *The Church* (New York: Scribner's, 1915), 149.

<sup>45</sup> The World Reformed Fellowship affirms the following historic expressions of the Reformed Faith: The Gallican Confession, The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Thirty Nine Articles, The Second Helvetic Confession, The Canons of Dort, The Westminster Confession of Faith, the London Confession of 1689, and the Savoy Declaration.

Scripture. He responded, “But our Confession and Catechisms are *the authorized interpretation of the Scripture*.” I wondered then if this wasn’t putting the Standards on the same level of authority with the Scriptures. A few years later, I read John Vance’s doctoral dissertation on “The Ecclesiology of Thornwell,” where he quotes Thornwell from his *Collected Writings* (IV:313):

“Whatever the Bible condemns our Confession of Faith condemns ...” Further, he stated: “They are the *same authority*; the Confession is nothing except as the Bible speaks in it and through it; and in adopting, we have averred it to be an honest and faithful interpretation of God’s teaching.”<sup>46</sup>

Later Thornwell wrote, “[They are] *the accredited interpretation of the Word of God*. It is not an inference from it, nor an addition to it, but the very systems of the Bible.”<sup>47</sup>

Yet it is these very Standards that declare their subordination to the Scriptures:

The supreme judge by which *all controversies* of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, *doctrines of men*, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, *can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture*. (WCF 1.10, emphasis added)

It behooves we who are confessional to recognize the danger of elevating our confessional documents to a *de facto* ultimate authority over the Scriptures even with good intentions. It is more work to argue from a solid exegetical study of Scripture than to merely quote a line from a confession or catechism. In this postmodern age, it is incumbent upon us to begin with the authoritative Scriptures as Christ and the apostles did, using the confessional documents only as supporting and corroborating evidence.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John Lloyd Vance, “The Ecclesiology of James Henley Thornwell: An Old South Presbyterian Theologian” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1990), 266.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. (Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, 367; emphasis added).

<sup>48</sup> I am indebted to my friend Dr. Rick Perrin for some of these concluding thoughts.



# The Impact and Influence of Erasmus's Greek New Testament

**PETER J. GOEMAN**

## **Abstract**

Although often eclipsed by the giants of the Reformation, Desiderius Erasmus had a notable influence on the Reformation and the world that followed. Responsible for five editions of the Greek New Testament, his contributions include a renewed emphasis on the Greek over against the Latin of the day, as well as influence on subsequent Greek New Testaments and many translations, including Luther's German Bible and the English King James Version. In God's providence, Erasmus provided kindling for the fire of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

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“**T**he name of Erasmus shall never perish.” Time has proved these words, spoken by one of his friends in the early 1500s, to be true. Today, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam is recognized as a key figure—especially in regard to his influence on Bible translation and textual criticism. Although his fame has been superseded by the heroes of the Reformation, many of them were beneficiaries of his hard work. The Reformers owed him much. In the English-speaking world, the average person may not know Erasmus's name, yet those who read the Bible today are indebted both to his contribution and to those he influenced.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my friends and colleagues Abner Chou and Will Varner for reading an earlier version of this article and providing valuable feedback.

Much has been written about Erasmus's life, and this article will focus on his work on the Greek New Testament. We will examine the timeline and the sources Erasmus used, as well as his contribution to subsequent scholarship. This is a fitting emphasis on the five hundredth anniversary of the first edition of Erasmus's Greek New Testament in 1516.

## **I. Early Life and Academic Training**

Many uncertainties surround Erasmus's birth.<sup>2</sup> This appears to be intentional, as it is widely acknowledged that he was the illegitimate child of a priest, Gerard, and a physician's daughter, Margaret.<sup>3</sup> In a day when a child born out of wedlock did not normally have the opportunities given other children, it appears that Erasmus was intentionally vague in talking about his birth.

Erasmus's parents placed him at a young age in a school in Deventer run by the *Fratres Collationarii* (Brothers of the Common Life).<sup>4</sup> He did not enjoy this time, although this early education, which most likely included an introduction to Greek, was foundational to his later success.<sup>5</sup>

When his parents died, there were few options open to him, so he entered a convent school at Steyn around 1487.<sup>6</sup> He did not appreciate monastic life, and he left in 1493 to become the secretary for the bishop of Cambrai.<sup>7</sup> This opportunity allowed him to operate in a scholarly capacity. Thriving in the more academic circles of France, Erasmus extended his time there, capitalizing on the opportunity to study and further his education in Paris.

In 1499 Erasmus experienced a turning point in his life while traveling in England. It was in England that he made some important friends, chief of whom were John Colet and Thomas More, who inspired him to focus on religious studies. It was also at this time that Greek became a passion for him.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Joseph Mangan, *Life, Character and Influence of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 1:3; cf. Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969), 7; Albert Rabil Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of a Christian Humanist* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1972), 2–3, n. 3; William W. Combs, "Erasmus and the *Textus Receptus*," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 36. Erasmus himself gives apparently conflicting information as to the year of his birth, as late as 1469. Born sometime between 1466–1469, he seems to this writer most likely to have been born in 1466.

<sup>3</sup> Mangan, *Life, Character and Influence*, 1:3–5; Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Garden City Books, 1952), 4–5. Since Erasmus had a brother by the name of Peter, three years his senior, it appears this relationship between Gerard and Margaret had been one of length.

<sup>4</sup> Mangan, *Life, Character and Influence*, 1:8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Huizinga, *Erasmus*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions to New Testament Scholarship," *Fides et Historia* 14.3 (1987): 7. Erasmus was born in a day when Latin was king in the academic world,

Upon his return to Paris, Erasmus devoted himself to the study of Greek. He decided to pursue a doctorate at Cambridge in 1505, but another opportunity came up during a visit to Italy, where many of the refugees from the fall of Constantinople had fled, allowing him to gain insights into the Greek language. Erasmus spent 1506 to 1509 in Italy, studying Greek from the native speakers and perfecting his knowledge of it. By the time he returned to Cambridge, he had progressed so much that in 1511 he was invited to teach Greek there.

Erasmus's education was exemplary. He was able to think and speak fluently in Latin, the academic language of the day. In addition, he was now as well versed as anyone in Greek—which would serve him well for the tasks that lay before him.

## II. *Erasmus's Greek New Testament*

In order to understand Erasmus's journey, one must note the significance of Lorenzo Valla's *Notes on the New Testament*, a work he came across in the summer of 1504.<sup>9</sup> It was this work, read and published by Erasmus in 1505, that convinced him of the need to ensure the accuracy of the New Testament readings found in the Latin Vulgate.<sup>10</sup> Like Valla, Erasmus was convinced that in many places the Vulgate readings were deficient. Prompted by Valla's work, he began work on his *Annotationes* on the New Testament, published in 1516 along with the first edition of his Latin and Greek New Testament.

In August of 1514, Erasmus arrived at Basel in search of more manuscripts for use in finalizing his *Annotationes*, with the hope of printing them with the Vulgate. It seems that he originally wanted to work with a printer named Aldus, but the latter had died in February 2015, so he pursued his project with another printer named Froben.<sup>11</sup>

It appears that Erasmus's original intention was to publish his *Annotationes* with the Vulgate in an effort to help demonstrate his corrections.<sup>12</sup>

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while Greek was only in the initial stages of revitalization. It would be Erasmus's own work, coupled with the newfound power of the printing press, that would launch the study of Greek to a prominence unknown for close to a century.

<sup>9</sup> Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. Rabil writes, "In his preface to these notes, we find Erasmus speaking for the first time, not about the recovery of the old theology through a study of more ancient Greek and Latin authors, but rather about the recovery of the text of the Bible. He recognizes that this is a much more audacious undertaking than the interpretation of the fathers. For his entire letter is cast in the form of a defense of Valla, who went so far as to correct the New Testament."

<sup>11</sup> Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 41–42; Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 90.

<sup>12</sup> Erika Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotationes on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 23. Rummel states, "It is likely that he envisaged

In contrast to the academic elite of his day, who prized the Vulgate, Erasmus saw the need for an updated Latin version.<sup>13</sup> In an ironic twist, although he originally intended to publish only his *Annotationes* along with the Vulgate, he was persuaded to publish not only his *own* Latin translation (instead of the Vulgate), but also a Greek text.<sup>14</sup>

This work was published in March 1516 under the title *Novum Instrumentum*. The first edition was rushed in its production, and there were many errors in the printing. Many scholars believe that this was because Froben had heard of an imminent publication of the *Complutensian Polyglot*, a multi-volume work containing a Greek New Testament that had been in print since 1514 but was awaiting the necessary papal approval before publication,<sup>15</sup> and was rushing to print Erasmus's work in an effort to precede it.<sup>16</sup>

The quality of Erasmus's 1516 edition leaves much to be desired. Some have described it as a dreadful publication, fit only for a school child.<sup>17</sup> F. H. A. Scrivener describes this first edition as "the most faulty book I know" because of typographical errors.<sup>18</sup> Erasmus himself claimed that the haste of the preparation led to the first edition being "thrown together" rather than edited,<sup>19</sup> and for this reason many of Erasmus's critics decried his work as inferior—especially by comparison with the careful work of the *Complutensian Polyglot*. However, despite its many mistakes, Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum* was received with such excitement that a new edition was undertaken almost immediately.

for it the traditional format, that is, the notes appearing on their own or in conjunction with the Vulgate." Cf. István Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The Historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 133; Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 41. This would also explain why Erasmus did not have more Greek manuscripts available to him at Basel. Since he did not originally intend to publish a Greek text, he was forced to rely upon those available at Basel.

<sup>13</sup> Preserved Smith, *Erasmus: A Study of His Life, Ideals and Place in History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923), 161–62.

<sup>14</sup> Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 42.

<sup>15</sup> Bainton, *Erasmus*, 133. The quality of the *Complutensian Polyglot* was far superior to that of Erasmus's 1516 edition. However, studies have yet to show which Greek manuscripts the Polyglot used. On this point see Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 140; cf. Franz Delitzsch, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Polyglottenbibel des Cardinals Ximenes* (Leipzig: Edelmann, 1871).

<sup>16</sup> For the view that Froben and Erasmus were simply motivated to get a Greek New Testament out as soon as possible, see Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 10.

<sup>17</sup> Léon Vaganay and Christian-Bernard Amphoux, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 131.

<sup>18</sup> F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), 2:185.

<sup>19</sup> *Praecipitatum verius quam aeditum*. Cf. Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 42; Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 11.

Erasmus and Froben took a risk in publishing the *Novum Instrumentum* without written approval from Pope Leo X. In an effort to pre-emptively appease the pope, Erasmus wrote a letter of dedication as a foreword to his work.<sup>20</sup> The gamble paid off, as Erasmus's work became popular while the *Polyglot* waited authentication for publication.

Erasmus was obliged to rely in his publication on the seven Greek manuscripts that were available to him in Basel, and he compiled his Greek New Testament from these manuscripts and included it along with his Latin translation.<sup>21</sup>

Erasmus's Greek Manuscripts	
Codex 1 <sup>cap</sup>	Twelfth-century minuscule codex containing the whole New Testament except Revelation
Codex 1 <sup>r</sup>	Twelfth-century manuscript containing Revelation, minus Rev 22:16–21 (A transcript of this manuscript was sent to the printer with the last six verses translated into Greek from the Vulgate.)
Codex 2 <sup>c</sup>	Twelfth-century minuscule codex containing the Gospels (This manuscript was the printer's copy for the Gospels.)
Codex 2 <sup>ap</sup>	Twelfth-century (or later) minuscule codex containing Acts and the Epistles (This manuscript also served as the printer's copy.)
Codex 4 <sup>ap</sup>	Fifteenth-century minuscule codex of Acts and the Epistles
Codex 7 <sup>p</sup>	Eleventh-century minuscule codex containing the Pauline epistles
Codex 817	Fifteenth-century manuscript containing the Gospels

Printing of the first edition began in August 1515 and was completed in March 1516, over 1,200 folio size manuscripts being produced. Almost immediately Erasmus wrote to a friend about plans for a corrected edition, urging secrecy so that the first edition would sell.<sup>22</sup>

The second edition in 1519 changed the title from *Novum Instrumentum* to *Novum Testamentum*. It corrected many misprints, but the text itself remained virtually the same as the first edition. For the second edition,

<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Murray, *Erasmus and Luther: Their Attitude to Toleration* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 22–23. It is ironic that this work would eventually be one of the main causes of the rift between Leo X and Martin Luther.

<sup>21</sup> Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 10–11; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 143–48; Vaganay and Amphoux, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 131; Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 45. Combs notes, "All of these were the property of the Dominican Library in Basel except for 2<sup>ap</sup>, which was obtained from the family of Johann Amerbach of Basel. Manuscripts 1<sup>cap</sup> and 1<sup>r</sup> had been borrowed from the Dominicans by Johannes Reuchlin. Erasmus borrowed them from Reuchlin."

<sup>22</sup> Epistle 417. From *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, vol. 3 in the *Collected Works of Erasmus*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 299. Erasmus wrote, "Only mind no one gets wind of this for the printer's sake, for his volumes would all stay in the shop if the buyers knew of it." Cf. Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 11–12.

Erasmus gained access to a twelfth-century manuscript, the Codex Corsendouensis, which has the whole New Testament minus Revelation.<sup>23</sup>

The third edition of Erasmus's *Novum Testamentum*, which appeared in 1522, is famous for its inclusion of the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7–8), which reads: “in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth.” These verses were not included in the 1516 and 1519 editions due to the lack of a Greek manuscript to support the reading. By refusing to include the text in dispute, Erasmus drew criticism from two of his literary critics, Stunica and Lee.<sup>24</sup> Stunica was an editor of the *Complutensian Polyglot*, which included the disputed passage, though he could never produce a Greek manuscript in support of this reading.<sup>25</sup>

Legend has it that Erasmus boldly promised that if his critics could produce a Greek manuscript that contained the disputed part of 1 John 5:7–8, he would include it in his New Testament. Despite this, there does not appear to be firm evidence that such a promise was ever made.<sup>26</sup> Rather, it appears that Erasmus gave in to the pressure to include the passage when he was informed that a Greek manuscript in England included the text.<sup>27</sup> He claimed in the *Annotationes* that he did not believe the reading to be genuine and furthermore that the sixteenth-century codex that included it was adapted to match the Vulgate reading.<sup>28</sup> However, he ultimately decided to include the reading, perhaps motivated by the desire for broader acceptance of his Greek text. By including it, he opened the way for subsequent Greek texts and translations to include it without question.<sup>29</sup>

Erasmus's fourth edition was published in 1527. By this time, he was able to use the *Complutensian Polyglot*, which aided his work tremendously, especially in the book of Revelation.<sup>30</sup> This fourth edition added the text of the Vulgate to the Greek text and Erasmus's own Latin translation.

<sup>23</sup> Yamauchi, “Erasmus' Contributions,” 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” 49.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; Henk J. de Jonge, “Erasmus and the *Comma Johanneum*,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 56 (1980): 385.

<sup>27</sup> Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” 50. Now housed in Dublin, Codex 61 is a sixteenth-century manuscript that may have been written with the express purpose of refuting Erasmus's position. It is also possible that the manuscript simply showed influence from the Latin Vulgate, the position Erasmus himself held.

<sup>28</sup> De Jonge, “Erasmus and the *Comma Johanneum*,” 387. Although the Vulgate contains this reading, there is no Vulgate manuscript before the seventh century that does so.

<sup>29</sup> This reading is preserved in the Greek texts that follow Erasmus; it was also picked up in English, most notably by the King James Version.

<sup>30</sup> Bainton, *Erasmus*, 133; Yamauchi, “Erasmus' Contributions,” 12; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 148. Metzger notes that Erasmus wisely changed the book of Revelation in about ninety places due to the influence of the *Complutensian* text.

The fifth and final edition was published the year before Erasmus's death in 1535, largely unchanged, except in that the Vulgate was no longer included.

### III. *Erasmus's Positive and Negative Textual Contributions*

Having examined the chronology of Erasmus's work as well as his sources, we now turn to some specific examples of his contributions. Although an in-depth treatment is beyond the scope of this article, something must be said about his use of textual criticism and attempt to secure an original reading of Scripture.<sup>31</sup> Like Valla before him, Erasmus regularly identified places where the Latin Vulgate differed from the Greek texts available. In this process he occasionally engaged in a form of conjecture, proposing an alternative Greek reading based on the Latin.

An example of Erasmus's textual critical acumen is his treatment of Luke 2:22. The Vulgate reads *purgationis eius* (his/her purification), while Origen and many of the Greek manuscripts read *katharismou autōn* (their purification). In evaluating the evidence, Erasmus decided, on the basis of Origen's textual notes and the manuscripts available, to adopt the non-Latin rendering, "their." What is interesting about this example is that although Stephanus followed Erasmus's lead, Beza reverted to the Vulgate reading, reading it as feminine, "her purification."<sup>32</sup> Beza chose this reading because it was in agreement with the *Complutensian Polyglot*, further arguing that purification rituals would only apply to the mother. The Textus Receptus tradition, including in the KJV in the English-speaking world, followed Beza and the Vulgate for hundreds of years. Today, however, based on additional evidence, scholars and modern translations have reverted to Erasmus's original correction of the Vulgate, showing his textual decision to be valid.

Although Erasmus made positive textual contributions, as shown above, his lack of source manuscripts also greatly limited his ability. Such was the case in Revelation 22:16–21, a passage missing from his Revelation manuscript (Codex 1r).<sup>33</sup> Having no access to a Greek source with this passage, Erasmus translated the passage back from Latin into Greek. This retranslation, compared with later evidence, is quite faulty.<sup>34</sup> However, Erasmus intended

<sup>31</sup> For a full treatment of this issue, see Jan Krans, *Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament*, *New Testament Tools and Studies* 35, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman (Boston: Brill, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>33</sup> Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 11; Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 47. Combs counts twenty errors that have remained in the Textus Receptus from this passage.

<sup>34</sup> Krans notes that in Erasmus's retranslation he omits twelve articles and uses a different verb tense six out of seven times. See Krans, *Beyond What Is Written*, 64; Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 47.

this retranslation to be changed should manuscripts be found with the missing portion.<sup>35</sup> So even though this passage was codified in the Textus Receptus tradition, Erasmus never intended it to go unaltered. He simply did the best he could with the poor sources available.

A similar case is Acts 9:5–6, where the Vulgate reading is longer than the Greek text available to Erasmus.<sup>36</sup> The history of his treatment of this passage is interesting.<sup>37</sup> In the 1516 edition, he includes the Vulgate reading retranslated into Greek. In the 1519 edition, his annotations include a defense of this passage by stating that “most Greek manuscripts” had this reading.<sup>38</sup> However, in 1522 Erasmus began to doubt the reading and even criticized his reliance upon the notes he had made in the margins of his Greek manuscripts.<sup>39</sup> Finally, in 1527, he stated that even the Vulgate tradition did not firmly establish the longer reading.

These examples illustrate that though Erasmus worked responsibly with the resources available, his work, which formed the basis for the Textus Receptus and eventually the King James Version, was marked by both positive contributions and occasional inaccuracies. However, he did practice the methods of textual criticism that scholars follow today.

#### **IV. Erasmus’s Contribution to New Testament Scholarship and Translation**

Having considered the early life of Erasmus and some of his positive and negative contributions to the development of the Greek New Testament, we now examine his influence on those who followed him. While making a number of changes and original contributions, his successors essentially reproduced Erasmus’s Greek Testament, and although the 1516 edition was defective in many ways, the Textus Receptus had its genesis in Erasmus, and his work continued to develop after his passing.<sup>40</sup>

One important feature is the contribution of Erasmus to the order of the New Testament that we follow. As shown above, Erasmus utilized late

<sup>35</sup> See *Resp. ad annot. Ed. Lei, Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami IX–4*, p. 278 ll. 35–43 (hereafter ASD).

<sup>36</sup> The Vulgate reading translates as “It is hard for you to kick against the goad. Trembling and astonished he said: Lord, what will you have me to do?” The Greek manuscripts (except for those in the TR tradition) omit this reading in favor of a much shorter dialogue between Paul and the Lord.

<sup>37</sup> For a reconstructed chronology, see Krans, *Beyond What Is Written*, 59–62.

<sup>38</sup> *In plerisque Graecis codicibus*, see ASD VI–6, p. 240 l. 460.

<sup>39</sup> Krans, *Beyond What Is Written*, 60. Krans points out that Erasmus criticized the notes in the margins of these Greek manuscripts that he made back in 1516.

<sup>40</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 149.

Byzantine manuscripts for his compilation of his Greek text. As far as canonical order is concerned, manuscripts in the Byzantine tradition have the epistles of Paul after the book of Acts, but before the General Epistles, with Hebrews placed after Philemon.<sup>41</sup> This coincides with the New Testament order followed by the Vulgate, which Erasmus dutifully followed. In contrast to the order followed by Erasmus, manuscripts older than the eighth century (with very few exceptions) insert Hebrews in the Pauline corpus between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy, and Acts before the General Epistles.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the older codices to which we have access (e.g., Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus) have a different order of books for the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> Although these older codices are generally considered by the scholarly community to have more weight than their later Byzantine counterparts, even the current textual critical edition of the NA<sup>28</sup> follows the Byzantine order adopted by Erasmus's Greek edition.<sup>44</sup> Thus, although it is not often noted, the Textus Receptus and the English-speaking community trace the New Testament canonical order to the decision of Erasmus to follow the Vulgate and Byzantine traditions. In addition, Erasmus's text was used as a base text for subsequent Greek editions, as well as contemporary translations. One of the most important of these was Luther's German translation.

In 1521, four years after Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, he was excommunicated by the very pope to whom Erasmus had dedicated his *Novum Instrumentum*. Following this, Luther began translating the New Testament into German, completing and publishing it in 1522. The basis for his translation was Erasmus's 1519 edition.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> David Trobisch, "The KJV and the Development of Text Criticism," in *The King James Version at 400: Assessing Its Genius as Bible Translation and Its Literary Influence*, ed. David G. Burke, John F. Kutsko, and Philip H. Towner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 229.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24–25. Codices Vaticanus and Alexandrinus have the Gospels, Acts, Praxapostolos, the Pauline Epistles (including Hebrews), and Revelation, although Vaticanus is missing from Hebrews 9:14 onward. Sinaiticus has the Gospels, the Pauline Epistles (including Hebrews), the Praxapostolos (fronted by Acts), and Revelation.

<sup>44</sup> Trobisch, "The KJV and the Development of Text Criticism," 231–32.

<sup>45</sup> Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 17; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 145. Among other things, Luther agreed with Erasmus's annotations that the *Comma Johanneum* should not be included in 1 John 5. For discussion of Luther's view that this text was added by the Catholic Church as an anti-Arian polemical text, see Franz Posset, "John Bugenhagen and the *Comma Johanneum*," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 49.4 (October 1985): 246–48. It is notable that Luther was indebted to Erasmus even before he began working on his German New Testament. Luther had already been using Erasmus's 1516 edition for his lectures on the latter half of Romans before he was excommunicated. On this point, see Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 160–61. For a study into Luther's dependence on and interaction with Erasmus, see the work of Heinz Bluhm, *Martin Luther, Creative Translator* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965).

Another source indebted to Erasmus, though not as popular as Luther's translation, was the small two-volume New Testament produced in Venice and edited by Melchiorre Sessa. Published in 1538, this text appears not to have had much popularity and is a rare find today.<sup>46</sup> The text itself was comprised of selections from Erasmus's 1522 and 1535 editions, the 1518 Aldine text, and a variety of other unique contributions.<sup>47</sup>

Erasmus also left his mark on Robert Estienne (better known as Stephanus), who in 1546 published the first of four editions of the Greek New Testament (the others coming in 1549, 1550, and 1551). The first three were published in Paris with government funding, and the final edition in Geneva. The 1546 and 1549 editions was a mixture of work from the *Complutensian Polyglot* and from Erasmus. However, beginning with his third edition (1550), Stephanus's text matches most closely Erasmus's 1527 and 1535 editions. The 1550 edition of Stephanus's Greek New Testament contained the first critical apparatus, in which he gave variant readings on the basis of fifteen Greek codices, as well as the *Complutensian Polyglot*.<sup>48</sup> Also notable is that the 1551 edition is the first edition to contain verse divisions, a task accomplished while Stephanus was traveling.<sup>49</sup>

One of the best-known scholars who utilized and edited the Greek text left by Erasmus was John Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza. In his lifetime he published nine editions of the Greek New Testament between 1565 and 1604.<sup>50</sup> Of these editions, the 1565, 1582, 1588–89, and 1598 editions were independent while the rest were reprints. They contained the Greek text, Jerome's Latin Vulgate, Beza's own Latin translation, and significant textual annotations based on numerous manuscripts that Beza had collated.<sup>51</sup> Beza's Greek New Testament was essentially equivalent to Stephanus's 1551

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<sup>46</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 149; W. H. P. Hatch, "An Early Edition of the New Testament in Greek," *Harvard Theological Review* 34 (1941): 69–70. Hatch notes that this edition of the New Testament is largely ignored by scholars who write on the text of the Greek New Testament "because its role in the history of the printed text of the New Testament was unimportant."

<sup>47</sup> Hatch, "Early Edition," 78.

<sup>48</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *How We Got the New Testament: Text, Transmission, Translation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 41; Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 52; cf. Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 150, who only count fourteen manuscripts, one of which was Codex Bezae, which was in Italy at that time.

<sup>49</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 150. Legend has it that this verse division took place while Stephanus was traveling on horseback. Though that is possible, Metzger notes that it is just as likely that Stephanus could have worked while resting at inns on his journey. Perhaps it was a combination of both.

<sup>50</sup> A tenth edition appeared after his death in 1611.

<sup>51</sup> Notable among these manuscripts were Codex Bezae and Codex Claromontanus.

edition.<sup>52</sup> In comparison with those whose work he relied upon, he had more manuscript information available. However, it appears that Beza made relatively little use of the best manuscripts he had (Bezae and Claromontanus), since he made relatively small changes to the text received from Stephanus's 1551 edition. Most of the popular New Testaments of the time were in some way related to Erasmus's work. His contribution to the scholarly world of Greek is a monumental achievement, and his Greek New Testament also left an indelible impact on the English-speaking world.

Erasmus had been preceded by John Wycliffe, rightly heralded for translating Scripture into English in the fourteenth century.<sup>53</sup> This was an important first step in a world that viewed the Latin Vulgate as the only true Scripture and any translation as heretical. Wycliffe began a movement that was continued by the young William Tyndale a century later. In 1524 Tyndale left England, since it was illegal to print an English Bible there, and traveled to Hamburg, Germany.<sup>54</sup> After traveling through Wittenberg, he set up in Cologne, where communication with England was easier. In the spring of 1526, Tyndale's English New Testament was exported to England.<sup>55</sup> It was a masterly achievement and largely dependent upon his contemporaries. Tyndale utilized the 1522 edition of Erasmus's Greek New Testament, the Latin Vulgate, and Luther's German translation, which was based on Erasmus's 1519 edition.<sup>56</sup>

Tyndale's work, influenced both directly and indirectly by Erasmus, was completed by Miles Coverdale in 1535, when the first complete English Bible was printed.<sup>57</sup> Coverdale's translation was by and large a compilation of other translations, mainly Tyndale's, and others where his work was incomplete.<sup>58</sup> Due to the quality of Tyndale's translation, his work was used by many subsequent English translations, being standardized in the King James Version in 1611.<sup>59</sup>

In the English-speaking world, the King James Version (KJV), commissioned by James I in an effort to limit the influence of the popular Geneva

<sup>52</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 151.

<sup>53</sup> For more on Wycliffe's important contribution to the impending Reformation, see Peter A. Lillback, "The Forerunners of the Reformation," *Unio cum Christo* 1.1-2 (Fall 2015): 87-89; Christopher K. Lensch, "The Morningstar of the Reformation: John Wycliffe," *Western Reformed Seminary Journal* 3.2 (August 1996): 17-18.

<sup>54</sup> W. E. Campbell, *Erasmus, Tyndale and More* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1949), 107.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>56</sup> John B. Taylor, "William Tyndale: Bible Translator," *Anvil* 12.1 (1995): 37.

<sup>57</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 89-90.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 176; Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 18. Yamauchi proposes that as much as eighty percent of Tyndale's readings were utilized by the KJV.

Bible, reigned supreme for hundreds of years. Through Richard Bancroft, the new archbishop of Canterbury, King James gave the translators fifteen principles to follow.<sup>60</sup> The first principle stated that the Bishops' Bible was to be used as a base text for the authorized version, and the fourteenth principle was that the Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale, Whitchurch, and Geneva Bibles were to be used rather than the Bishops' Bible when they conveyed the meaning of the original languages more accurately.

These translation principles seem to indicate that the goal of the translators of the KJV was not so much to create a new translation as to revise and collate those already available.<sup>61</sup> In order to ensure that the English translation accurately represented the Greek text, the translation committee relied on Stephanus's 1551 and Beza's 1598 Greek texts, both of which reproduced Erasmus's Greek text with minor changes.<sup>62</sup> So the majority of the sources used in the production of the KJV were directly or indirectly influenced by Erasmus's Greek text.<sup>63</sup>

The last notable publication of the Greek New Testament is that of the Elzevir brothers. Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir published seven editions of the Greek New Testament from 1624 onwards.<sup>64</sup> The text they used was mainly from Beza's 1565 edition, which is essentially the same as Stephanus's

<sup>60</sup> These principles can be found in McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 173–75.

<sup>61</sup> Trobisch, "The KJV and the Development of Text Criticism," 227. William W. Combs, "The Preface to the King James Version and the King James-Only Position," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Fall 1996): 258; McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 177. Indeed, the KJV translators write, "Truly, good Christian Reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one ... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavour, that our mark." See F. H. A. Scrivener, *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible (1611): Its Subsequent Reprints and Modern Representatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1884), 295–96.

<sup>62</sup> James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 104–5, "One can trace the text from Erasmus, who died in 1536, through Stephanus (d. 1559), through Beza (d. 1605), to the KJV translators."

<sup>63</sup> At the same time, we must note that the translators did not rely upon any one source exclusively. Decisions were made that departed from the texts of Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza. An example of this is 1 John 2:23b, which reads, "But he that acknowledgeth the Sonne, hath the Father also." This phrase is not found in Erasmus, the *Polyglot*, Stephanus, or Beza, but the KJV translators choose to accept it as utilized by the Vulgate and the variant notes from Geneva 1560 and the text of the Rheims. For more discussion about some of the unique utilization of sources by the KJV translators, see John R. Kohlenberger III, "The Textual Sources of the King James Bible," in *Translation That Openeth the Window: Reflections on the History and Legacy of the King James Bible*, ed. David G. Burke (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 43–53.

<sup>64</sup> In contrast with the others in this list, the Elzevir brothers appear to have been motivated commercially and did little critical adjustment to the text, relying mainly on the text produced by Stephanus and Beza. See J. Harold Greenlee, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 65.

1551 edition and heavily dependent upon Erasmus's 1527 and 1535 editions. The renown of the Elzevir brothers comes from the second edition of their New Testament (1633), which contains a sentence that reads *Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum, in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus* ("Therefore, you have the text now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted"). The phrase, "*Textum ... receptum*" has given rise to the title *Textus Receptus*, used in general of the Greek New Testament from the first edition of Erasmus (1516) up to that of the Elzevir brothers.<sup>65</sup>

Erasmus's scholarship therefore had tremendous influence on the production of the New Testament. Although initially desiring to improve the Latin translation of the Bible, he is best known today for his work on the Greek New Testament, and his influence is not limited to the academic realm of Greek and Latin. The most popular Bible in the English-speaking world, the King James Bible, is directly (through Stephanus and Beza) and indirectly (through Tyndale and Coverdale) influenced by his work, summarized chronologically as follows:

<i>Cumplutensian Polyglot</i>	Erasmus	Luther's NT	Stephanus	Beza	Tyndale/Coverdale*	KJV	Elzevir Brothers
1514–1522	1516 1519 1522 1527 1535	1522	1546 1549 1550 1551	1565 1582 1588– 89 1598	1526 1534 1535*	1611	1624 1633†

\* At the risk of oversimplification, Coverdale's translation can be viewed as a completion of the work started by Tyndale.

† Although there were five editions following, it was in the preface to this second edition of the Elzevirs' New Testament that the phrase *Textus Receptus* came into existence.

<sup>65</sup> Combs, "Erasmus and the *Textus Receptus*," 35. Cf., Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 152. Metzger notes, "Partly because of this catchword the form of the Greek text incorporated in the editions that Stephanus, Beza, and the Elzevirs had published succeeded in establishing itself as 'the only true text' of the New Testament, and was slavishly reprinted in hundreds of subsequent editions. It lies at the basis of the King James version and of all the principal Protestant translations in the languages of Europe prior to 1881. So superstitious has been the reverence accorded the *Textus Receptus* that in some cases attempts to criticize or emend it have been regarded as akin to sacrilege. Yet its textual basis is essentially a handful of late and haphazardly collected minuscule manuscripts, and in a dozen passages its reading is supported by no known Greek witness."

## Conclusion

In a tale both ironical and providential, a man by the name of Desiderius Erasmus published a New Testament to improve the Latin translation of the day. In so doing, his well-received work and its subsequent editions led to great improvement of the quality of the Greek text. This text became the foundation for both the scholars and the Reformers who followed Erasmus.

Erasmus strongly believed that Christians ought to return to the original Greek sources to gain understanding of Christian wisdom, rather than relying on the Latin sources of the day.<sup>66</sup> He has been called The Forgotten Reformer, a fitting title that acknowledges that his Greek text was used by Luther, Tyndale, Calvin, and Beza.<sup>67</sup> His work gave the Reformers the tools necessary for focusing their efforts on the original Greek in a world that held the Latin Vulgate to be the official Bible of the church.

Not only did Erasmus's influence extend to those Reformers and scholars who came directly after, but his influence has been felt in the English-speaking world through the KJV. With a Greek text that had its origin in Erasmus's, and with various English translations related to his work, the publication of the KJV has influenced language, culture, and churches for over four hundred years.

"The name of Erasmus shall never perish." This has proved to be the case. On the five hundredth anniversary of Erasmus's first New Testament edition, we can look back and see God's providence at work giving the Reformation the tools it needed when it needed them.

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<sup>66</sup> Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contributions," 7–8. Erasmus is noted as having said, "It was not for empty fame or childish pleasure that in my youth I grasped at the polite literature of the ancients, and by late hours gained some slight mastery of Greek and Latin. It has been my cherished wish to cleanse the Lord's temple of barbarous ignorance, and to adorn it with treasures brought from afar, such as may kindle in generous hearts a warm love for the Scriptures" (quoted in P. S. Allen, *Erasmus: Lectures and Wayfaring Sketches* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934], 42–43; cf. Ep. 124: 72–74, Mynors and Thomson, 1:252).

<sup>67</sup> See David Bentley-Taylor, *My Dear Erasmus: The Forgotten Reformer* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2002). For more on Erasmus's role as a forerunner to the Reformation, see Lillback, "The Forerunners of the Reformation," 96–99.

# The Ximenez Polyglot

FRANCES LUTTIKHUIZEN

## Abstract

The Ximenez Polyglot Bible was part of a larger educational project—the University of Alcalá—implemented by Cardinal Cisneros at the turn of the sixteenth century in order to revive learning and encourage the study of the Scriptures. Following a brief biography of Cisneros, his reforms, and the social-religious context in which the Bible was produced, this article goes on to discuss the project itself, the manuscripts consulted, the printing, and the scholars involved. Cisneros’s focus on biblical studies at the University of Alcalá developed into an interest in Christian humanism and the writings of Erasmus, which would later bring forth fruit in the evangelical movements in Seville and Valladolid in the 1550s.

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## Introduction

**W**e cannot fully understand the significance of the Ximenez Polyglot Bible if we do not first look into the complex personality of the man behind the project.<sup>1</sup> As a young man, Francisco Ximenez de Cisneros (1436–1517)—better remembered as Cardinal Cisneros

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been published in Spanish regarding Cardinal Cisneros—also known as Ximenez de Cisneros—and his polyglot Bible, but little in English. One of the first biographical sketches in English was compiled by the book collector James P. R. Lyell, *Cardinal Ximenes: Statesman, Ecclesiastic, Soldier and Man of Letters, with an Account of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible* (London: Grafton, 1914; repr., Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 2001). Recent studies are those of Erika Rummel, *Ximenez de Cisneros: On the Threshold of Spain’s Golden Age* (Tempe,

—studied canon and civil law at the University of Salamanca. In 1459 he traveled to Rome to work as a consistorial advocate and through a colleague became acquainted with the Franciscan order of Friars Minor, or “observants.” On his return to Spain in 1465, he first occupied a chaplaincy at Sigüenza and was soon named vicar general of the bishopric by Cardinal Mendoza. In 1484 at the age of forty-eight, he decided to become an observant Franciscan friar. He first entered a monastery in Toledo and shortly afterwards transferred to the observant convent of La Salceda, where he lived in extreme austerity for the next ten years. Meanwhile, Cardinal Mendoza, now archbishop of Toledo, had not forgotten Cisneros, and in 1492 he recommended him to Queen Isabella as her confessor. When Cardinal Mendoza died three years later, Queen Isabella procured a papal bull nominating Cisneros to Mendoza’s vacant archbishopric.

### I. Reforms

From his new influential position as archbishop of Toledo, Cisneros set about introducing reforms in the Franciscan order, which was at the time experiencing a bitter conflict between the “conventuals,” who had diverged considerably from the austere regulations of St. Francis, becoming feudal lords and indulging in worldly pleasures, and the strict “observants.” In 1497 Cisneros convoked a synod, in which he addressed the issue of religious education. One specific regulation required parish priests to catechize the children, that is, to teach them the doctrines of the church as they were found in the official *Doctrina Cristiana*. Another of his reforms required the monks to engage daily in one and a half hours of mental prayer.

To make this experience meaningful, Cisneros began commissioning Spanish translations of medieval mystical texts that would raise the cultural and spiritual level of both the clergy and the common people. He especially encouraged the reading of Jean Gerson’s *Contemptus mundi*. The books printed at the request of the cardinal constituted an introduction to contemplation and mystical life. They included translations into Spanish of St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, John Climacus, Angela of Fuligno, Catherine of Sienna, Hugh of Balma, and others. Prior to this, Cisneros had also been instrumental in commissioning a translation into Spanish of *Vita Cristi*

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AR: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), and José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero et al., eds., *V Centenario de la Biblia Poliglota Complutense: La Universidad del Renacimiento: El Renacimiento de la Universidad* (The Fifth Centennial of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible: The University of the Renaissance: The Rebirth of the University) (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014).

(*Life of Christ*) by the Carthusian monk Ludolph of Saxony, as well as a new translation of the *Epistles and Gospels for the Liturgical Year*.<sup>2</sup>

The cardinal's reforms came at a time when people were asking questions such as, How should God be worshiped? The enthusiasm for things spiritual created by his reforms also developed into deep spirituality among many sectors of society, especially those that gravitated around Diego Hurtado de Mendoza in Guadalajara, and it would find its greatest expression in the *alumbrado-deixado* movement in Escalona. These reforms required priests to reside in their parishes and to preach every Sunday. Many of them did not know Latin, hence, *Epistles and Gospels* gave them material for their sermons. Indeed, *Epistles and Gospels* was a sort of manual, in Spanish, of pastoral theology from which these priests, as well as devout laypersons who wanted to meditate on them, greatly benefited. The work enjoyed many reprints until it was put on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1559 as a result of the decree that banned the printing of the Scriptures in the vernacular.

Cisneros also encouraged the diffusion of the writings of his Italian contemporary Girolamo Savonarola even after the Florentine monk had been condemned and burned at the stake. Savonarola's commentary on Psalm 51—*Devotissima exposicion sobre el psalmo de Miserere Mei Deus*—was printed in Alcalá in 1511 by Arnao Guillen de Brocar, the same printer who would begin printing the polyglot Bible the following year.<sup>3</sup> Cisneros never quoted Savonarola by name; nevertheless, their similarities do not cease to draw attention: austerity of life, desire to educate the clergy, desire to reform the church, and more. We could also draw a parallel between Savonarola's "Bonfire of the Vanities" and Cisneros's order to burn thousands of Arabic manuscripts in Granada.<sup>4</sup> The period was clearly a turning point. Gonzalo Sanchez-Molero offers the following explanation for Cisneros's drastic behavior:

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<sup>2</sup> *Epistles and Gospels* contained the passages of Scripture read in Latin in the churches each Sunday interspersed with commentaries and sermons by Hugo de Prato, Johann Herolt of Basel, Walafriid Strabo's "Glossa ordinaria," Anselm of Laon's "Glossa interlinearis," Nicholas of Lyra's "Postilla litteralis," etc.

<sup>3</sup> Savonarola's work was reprinted in Valladolid in 1512 and in Seville in 1513, 1514, and 1527. In the 1540s, Savonarola's works again became popular in Spain. They were printed in Antwerp in one volume: *Las Obras que se hallan romançadas del excelente doctor fray Hieronymo Saunorola de Ferrara* (Antwerp: Martin Nucio, 1558).

<sup>4</sup> In 1499 Cisneros accompanied the monarchs to Granada. Discontented with the moderate missionary approach of the archbishop, Hernando de Talavera, Cisneros ordered the burning of all religious texts written in Arabic. This led to an open revolt, suppressed with the *moriscos*—Muslims—given a choice of exile or baptism.

If there was a collective sensation that Spain was being punished by God, how was this to be interpreted? And, above all, how were the consequences to be alleviated? Cisneros's severe intervention in Granada (1499–1500) has greatly surprised his biographers, but his concerns have to be understood in this context, that is, that men had to find a response to divine wrath. Coinciding with this, Cisneros began work on his two great projects: the University of Alcalá (1498) and the Polyglot Bible (1502). In our opinion the idealism and mysticism so prominent in the cardinal's mentality led him to think of the College of San Ildefonso and the publication of the Bible as tools to bring about Spain's social, religious and political renewal.<sup>5</sup>

The French historian Joseph Perez suggests that Cisneros found his inspiration in three basic sources: the Franciscan Friars Minor, Ramon Llull, and Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>6</sup> I would go further and add a fourth source, namely, the Spanish mystic Francisco de Osuna. To the Franciscan observants Cisneros owed his efforts in favor of a religion not limited to the outer forms of worship but concerned with developing an authentic spirituality amidst the laity, often neglected by the clerical elite. To Llull he owed his missionary zeal, which culminated with his crusading project in North Africa in 1505 and 1509.<sup>7</sup> To Savonarola he owed his determination to found an institution of higher learning that would prepare young men for the mission field. Both Llull and Savonarola considered the study of oriental languages of utmost importance to the preaching of the gospel and the conversion of the infidels. These men envisioned the project; Cisneros brought it to fruition. Indeed, Cisneros's best-known answer to the question of education was the creation of the University of Alcalá and the publication of the polyglot Bible. Cisneros's fourth source, Fray Francisco de Osuna, may have been one whom he admired more than one who inspired him. Osuna, who had received his preliminary education at a convent in Torrelaguna founded in 1507 by Cisneros, entered the University of Alcalá in 1517. Osuna was a "model observant" who practiced *recogimiento* (withdrawal) in the strictest tradition, and Cisneros must have seen in him the ultimate culmination of his aspirations: a young man instilled with mystic principles, trained in the humanities, and desirous to acquire theological instruction in his newly founded university.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, *V Centenario de la Biblia Poliglota Complutense*, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Perez, *Cisneros, el cardenal de España* (Madrid: Taurus, 2014), 226–227.

<sup>7</sup> A preliminary expedition, equipped at Cisneros's expense, captured Mers El Kébir, a port town in northwestern Algeria near Oran. Another expedition, accompanied by Cisneros in person, captured Oran in 1509.

<sup>8</sup> Osuna would later become one of the foremost proponents of *recogimiento*, formulated maxims for meditation that he arranged alphabetically and published: *Tercer Abercedario* (1527), the *Primero* (1528), the *Segundo* (1530), etc. *Recogimiento* tenets spread rapidly and even influenced the *alumbrados-deixados*. However, whereas *recogimiento* functioned alongside

## II. *The University of Alcalá*

Cisneros's project to create a center of higher learning had several recent precedents in Spain. When Cisneros became archbishop of Toledo in 1495, he saw this as the right moment to implement his own project. The project began with the College of San Ildefonso, the main college or *colegio mayor*. Next came a number of lesser colleges or *colegios menores*. The institution opened its doors on July 26, 1508, and by 1510 there were eighteen *colegios menores*. Two were devoted to grammar, where Latin and Greek were studied; another offered a two-year course in Aristotelian dialectics and philosophy; another offered a two-year course in physics and metaphysics. In 1514 the theological college was added, and in 1528, the Trilingual College was organized, to which thirty students were admitted: twelve studied Latin and rhetoric, twelve Greek, and six Hebrew.

From the beginning Alcalá was different from other institutions. Firstly, it had no faculty of civil law because Cisneros considered legal studies detrimental to the study of theology. Secondly, the university offered a three-fold approach to theology, with the teaching of Thomism, Scotism, and Nominalism centered on the texts of the German theologian Gabriel Biel. Thirdly, Alcalá emphasized the direct study of the Bible with the help of ancient languages and the study of patristic literature. Cisneros, like Gerson a century earlier, wished to banish scholastic subtleties from university studies and to put evangelical warmth into them, giving them a more spiritual and practical focus. His interest in biblical studies may have taken root during his time in Italy, where he could not have failed to notice the growing interest in Greek studies.

One of the great contributions of the Italian Renaissance was to encourage the study of oriental languages. Even before the massive arrival of Byzantine scholars in Italy, with their ancient Greek scrolls under their arms, fleeing the advance of the Turks after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Italian humanist philosopher Lorenzo Valla (1406–1457) was busying himself with philological issues. Valla's comparison of St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible with the Greek text of the New Testament laid the foundations of critical biblical scholarship.

Valla had defended the critical revision of the Bible in the University of Pavia. Some years later, Pedro de Osma (1430–1480) did the same in the

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traditional Catholic practices and concerned itself with active seclusion in order to achieve union with God, *deixamiento* rejected these practices, as well as the Catholic concept of justification, and called for passive submission to God's will.

University of Salamanca. He found more than eighty divergences between the text of an ancient Vulgate Bible he found in the university library and the 1455 Mazarin Vulgate.<sup>9</sup> Antonio de Nebrija, who had been one of Osma's students at Salamanca and who formed part of the original team of philologists working on the polyglot, tried to persuade Cisneros that the Latin text of the Vulgate should be revised, but Cisneros would not give in. He was willing to collate and correct the Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic texts, but he would make no changes in Jerome's Latin text. The tension between scholastic theologians and philologists was not new, but when humanists began applying philological methods to the sacred text, the debate became more intense, and what began as literary debates turned into turf wars.<sup>10</sup> Cisneros's reluctance to revise the Vulgate has puzzled many historians. Gonzalo Sanchez-Molero explains Cisneros's position thus:

What Nebrija proposed was politically unacceptable. It must be remembered that one of the main aims of the College of San Ildefonso when it was founded was to facilitate the religious assimilation of Jewish converts and Moriscos. Admitting that the Latin version of the Bible, attributed to St. Jerome, was not correct would have involved too great a risk. Indeed, in connection with this issue, we may well ask whether the preparation of the Polyglot Bible was also an attempt to favor the assimilation of Jewish converts.<sup>11</sup>

### III. *The Ximenez Polyglot*

The founding of the University of Alcalá cannot be separated from Cisneros's other great project, namely, the publication—and financing<sup>12</sup>—of the first complete polyglot Bible, the *Biblia Sacra Polyglota*, known today as the Ximenez Polyglot<sup>13</sup> or the Complutensian Polyglot.<sup>14</sup> The two projects were

<sup>9</sup> Pedro de Osma's findings were condemned by the Inquisition, and copies of his book—*De confessione*—were publicly burned after High Mass on June 15, 1479.

<sup>10</sup> Erika Rummel, ed., *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 2–3. Also see Natalio Fernández Marcos, *Filología bíblica y humanismo* (Madrid: CSIC, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, *V Centenario de la Biblia Poliglota Complutense*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> According to Lyell, "Gomez [Alvaro Gomez de Castro], whose life of Ximenez is the chief authority for most of the existing information about his life, tells us that the Cardinal spent no less than 50,000 gold ducats upon the work. As an illustration of the lavish nature of the expenditure, he recounts how 4,000 ducats were paid for seven Hebrew manuscripts alone. ... How far these were used it is now impossible to say, and indeed one writer (Quintanilla) alleges that these particular manuscripts arrived too late to be employed" (Lyell, *Cardinal Ximenes*, 34, 38).

<sup>13</sup> When in 1522 Christopher Columbus's son Hernando sent one of his assistants to Alcalá for a copy to add to his library, he called it the Cardinal's Bible. It was also called the Trilingual Bible of Alcalá or the Alcalá Bible in Six Volumes or the Bible in Four Languages.

<sup>14</sup> "Complutensian" is from *Complutum*, the Latin name for Alcalá, which in turn was an

carried out simultaneously. Preliminary work on the Bible began in the summer of 1502 when Cisneros summoned Antonio de Nebrija, Diego Lopez de Zuñiga, Herman Nuñez de Guzman, Pablo Coronel, and Alonso, a physician from Alcalá, to Toledo to discuss his project. They were commissioned to collect as many ancient manuscripts—both Greek and Hebrew—as possible to be used as source material both for his polyglot Bible and for teaching material for the university. This may have taken some time; it seems that work on the Bible did not begin in earnest until 1508, the same year the university opened its doors. There is evidence that in 1503, and again in 1507 and 1509, Cisneros’s secretary Jorge de Baracaldo was busy purchasing books and manuscripts—grammars, Greek and Hebrew glossaries, etc.—from book dealers in Salamanca, Medina del Campo, and Valladolid.<sup>15</sup> Taking into consideration that these men had to divide up their time over the next decade as professors and editors, it is understandable that progress was slow. In the meantime, Cisneros himself also had serious matters of state to attend to. In 1504 Queen Isabella died, and he had to organize the state funerals. In 1506 the ruling prince, Philip the Handsome died suddenly and, in the light of the power vacuum left by the declared insanity of the new Queen Juana—and Ferdinand’s absence—Cisneros became regent governor of Castile until Ferdinand’s return the following year.<sup>16</sup> Despite all these distractions, by 1508 Cisneros was back in Alcalá to open his new university and to reunite with the scholar-editors he had selected for his project and to discuss editing procedures.

The six large folio volumes of Cisneros’s polyglot Bible came off the press gradually between January 10, 1514, and July 10, 1517. The first volume to be printed was volume five (New Testament), which appeared in January of 1514.<sup>17</sup> A few months later, May of 1514, volume six (glossaries) came off the press. It took another three years for volumes one, two, three, and four (Old Testament) to appear, and still another several years before the work was put in circulation.

The delay had several causes. Once the sanction of Pope Leo X was obtained, on March 22, 1520, copies had to be sent off for the pope’s examination, but the ship carrying the copies suffered shipwreck en route to Italy

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Arabic word meaning fortification or citadel. “Alcalá de Henares” means “Alcalá on the Henares River.”

<sup>15</sup> Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, *V Centenario de la Biblia Políglota Complutense*, 223. Also see Elisa Ruiz García, *Preparando la Biblia Políglota Complutense: los libros del saber* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> That year—1507—Cisneros was given the cardinal’s hat.

<sup>17</sup> Had this first volume (printed in January 1514) been put in circulation immediately, it would have pre-dated Erasmus’s New Testament.

and the copies were lost. This meant that new copies had to be sent, which took time. The volumes for the pope finally entered the Vatican Library on December 5, 1521, and the Bible was officially put on the market early the following year.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the intense battles fought in that area of Castile during the *Comunero* uprising (1520–1521) put a halt to both commercial and academic activity, and this may also have delayed marketing plans.

The title page of the first volume contained the title and Cisneros's coat of arms, printed in red, set within a woodcut border composed of flower pots, flower baskets, and floral arabesques. Next came a prologue addressed to Pope Leo X by Cisneros, followed by a series of prefatory notes and St. Jerome's preface to the Pentateuch, all in Latin. On the verso of the last leaf of this preliminary matter was Leo X's bull sanctioning the printing of the work, followed by a short address to the reader by the Bishop of Avila, Francisco Ruiz, to whom Leo had addressed his bull.<sup>19</sup> In the dedicatory to Pope Leo X, Cisneros expressed his purpose in publishing the work:

There are many reasons, Holy Father, that impel us to print the languages of the original text of Holy Scripture. These are the principal ones. Words have their own unique character, and no translation of them, however complete, can entirely express their full meaning. This is especially the case in that language through which the Lord himself spoke. The letter here of itself may be dead and like flesh, which profits nought ("for it is the spirit that gives life" [2 Cor. 3:6]) because Christ concealed by the form of the words remains enclosed within its womb. But there is no doubt that there is a rich fecundity so astonishing and an abundance of sacred mysteries so teeming that since it is ever full to overflowing "streams of living water shall flow out from His breast" [John 7:38]. And from this source those to whom it has been given "to behold the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face and thus be transformed into that very image" [2 Cor. 3:18] can continually draw the marvelous secrets of His divinity. Indeed there can be no language or combination of letters from which the most hidden meanings of heavenly wisdom do not emerge and burgeon forth, as it were. *Since, however, the most learned translator can present only a part of this, the full Scripture in translation inevitably remains up to the present time laden with a variety of sublime truths, which cannot be understood from any source other than the original language.*

Moreover, wherever there is diversity in the Latin manuscripts or the suspicion of a corrupted reading (we know how frequently this occurs because of the ignorance and negligence of copyists), it is necessary to go back to the original source of Scripture, as St. Jerome and St. Augustine and other ecclesiastical writers advise us to do, to examine the authenticity of the books of the Old Testament in the light of the correctness of the Hebrew text and of the New Testament in the light of the Greek copies. *And so that every student of Holy Scripture might have at hand the original texts themselves and be able to quench his thirst at the very fountainhead of the water that*

<sup>18</sup> Of the six hundred sets printed, less than a hundred are known to have survived (Lyell, *Cardinal Ximenes*, 49–50).

<sup>19</sup> The pope, who was informed that Cisneros had died, sent the bull to Cisneros's executor, Francisco Ruiz, the bishop of Avila.

*flows unto life everlasting and not have to content himself with rivulets alone, we ordered the original languages of Holy Scripture with their translations adjoined to be printed and dedicated to your Holiness. And we first took care to print the New Testament in Greek and Latin together with a lexicon of all the Greek expressions that can help those reading that language. Thus we spared no effort on behalf of those who have not acquired a full knowledge of the Greek tongue. Then before we began the Old Testament we prepared a dictionary of the Hebrew and Chaldean words of the entire Old Instrument.<sup>20</sup> There not only the various meanings of each expression are given, but (we believe this will be most useful to students) the place in Scripture where each meaning occurs is cited.*

We now send this entire work to your Holiness, for to whom should all our vigilant efforts be dedicated than to that Apostolic See to whom we owe everything? Or who with greater joy ought to accept and embrace the sacred books of the Christian religion than the sacred Vicar of Christ? May your Holiness receive, therefore, with a joyful heart this humble gift, which we offer unto the Lord *so that the hitherto dormant study of Holy Scripture may now at last begin to revive.*

We beseech your Blessedness most earnestly, however, that you examine these books that now prostrate themselves before you and pass the most severe judgment on them so that, if it seems they will be of use to the Christian commonwealth, they may receive permission from your Holiness to be published. We have held them back until now, waiting to consult that sacred oracle of the Apostolic Office. But let this suffice for your Blessedness. We turn now to instruct the reader about the make-up of this work.<sup>21</sup>

The Vulgate text between the Greek and Hebrew texts in the Old Testament had a special symbolic significance: the Christian version (the Vulgate) placed between the Synagogue (the Hebrew version) and the Orthodox Church (the Greek version) was allusive to the way as Jesus was placed between the two thieves.

The biblical content was divided up as follows. The Old Testament took up the first four tomes. Volume one contained the text of the Pentateuch arranged in three columns per page, one with the Masoretic Hebrew text, the other the Greek text of the Septuagint, with the official Latin Vulgate between the lines, and in the middle—in a column narrower than the others—the Latin text of the Vulgate. The lower section of the page was divided into two columns: the left containing the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch known as the *Targum Onkelos*, the right containing the Latin translation of that text. Volumes two, three, and four contain the remainder of the Old Testament arranged in the same way: the Masoretic Hebrew text,

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<sup>20</sup> Erasmus entitled the first edition of his New Testament in 1516 *Novum Instrumentum*. The term *instrumentum* means a written document stipulating a pact or covenant.

<sup>21</sup> Translation by John C. Olin, italics mine. John C. Olin, *Catholic Reform: From Cardinal Ximenes to the Council of Trent, 1495–1563*, 4th ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 62–64.

the Greek text of the Septuagint with the Latin translation between the lines, and the Latin Vulgate text in the middle.

Volume five contained the Greek and Latin texts of the New Testament printed in two columns: the Greek on the left and the Latin Vulgate on the right. The Book of Acts followed the Epistle to the Hebrews, a variation also found in the Codex Sinaiticus. Immediately before the Epistle to the Romans there were six leaves containing Greek prefaces to the Epistles. These were an insertion and were obviously printed later. They are missing in some copies, but their presence is frequently alluded to in sale descriptions in catalogues. The type used for these six leaves has the ordinary accents and breathings, which are lacking elsewhere, and this is another indication that they were printed at a later date than the rest of the New Testament.<sup>22</sup>

Volume six contained a reverse vocabulary in which the Latin headword led to its Hebrew or Aramaic equivalent in the previous vocabulary. It also contained an index of translations (interpretations) of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek names that appear in the Old and New Testaments, an index of proper names whose form had been corrupted in the text's transmission, and, finally, an elementary Hebrew grammar attributed to Alonso de Zamora.

#### **IV. The Scholar-Editors**

The men commissioned to edit the polyglot Bible were also professors at Cisneros's newly founded university. Paul Coronel, Alphonso de Zamora, and Alfonso, a *converso* (converted Jew) physician from Alcalá, were entrusted with the Hebrew and Aramaic dictionaries and the Hebrew grammar. After the polyglot Bible was completed, Alfonso de Zamora continued to teach at Alcalá for many years. He also compiled an interlinear translation of the Hebrew Bible, of which at least two manuscript copies survive.

Demetrius Ducas was a Greek scholar from Crete who had worked previously in Venice with the printer Aldo Manuzio. He arrived in Spain in 1508, invited by Cisneros.<sup>23</sup> Although Ducas did not initiate the study of Greek in the Iberian Peninsula, he had the honor of being the first professor of Greek at the University at Alcalá.<sup>24</sup> Ducas may have been slightly disappointed: in the postscript to his 1514 interlinear edition of Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras's grammar *Erotemata*, he states, "I was called to Spain by the Rev. Cardinal Cisneros to teach Greek, and finding such scarcity, or better

<sup>22</sup> Lyell, *Cardinal Ximenes*, 36–37.

<sup>23</sup> Julian Martín Abad, *La imprenta en Alcalá de Henares* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 1991), 67.

<sup>24</sup> A chair of Greek studies had already been established at the University of Salamanca in 1495 by the Portuguese humanist Ayres Barbosa (1460–1540), who had studied at Florence.



de Zamora professor of Hebrew. When Ducas left Alcalá for Salamanca, Nuñez took his place as Greek professor, but only until 1521, when he also left for Salamanca.<sup>26</sup> Nuñez was succeeded by Francisco de Vergara, one of Erasmus's most committed followers in Spain.

Another scholar who collaborated in editing the Ximenez Polyglot was Diego Lopez de Zuñiga, known also by his Latin name, Jacobus Stunica. When Erasmus's New Testament reached Alcalá in 1516, Lopez de Zuñiga collated it carefully with the Complutensian text and found several errors. Cisneros discouraged him from publishing his findings and suggested he communicate them privately to Erasmus, but Zuñiga disagreed. As soon as Cisneros died, however, which was the following year, Zuñiga gave vent to his anger and published his criticisms in *Annotationes contra Erasmum Roterodamum* (Annotations against Erasmus). Zuñiga, who had solid linguistic and theological training, was suspicious and averse to innovation, and he became involved in controversies in defense of the Vulgate tradition against both Lefèvre d'Étaples (Jacobum Fabrum Stapulen) and Erasmus that went on for years.<sup>27</sup> It appears that Zuñiga left Alcalá for Rome around 1520. Had he remained, he would have had to contend with the growing number of Erasmian enthusiasts who were gaining foothold in Alcalá.

## V. The Manuscripts

In addition to distinguished scholars, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin manuscripts were also needed if the project was to succeed. There was no lack of Hebrew manuscripts and scholars in Spain. Until the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, the flourishing Jewish synagogues had jealously guarded valuable Hebrew codices. In this respect, the editors of the Ximenez Polyglot had access to the Alba Bible produced by Moses Arragel from Guadalajara in 1422–1433, the Lisbon Pentateuch of 1491, and an Old Testament Hebrew edition printed by Soncino at Naples in the same year.<sup>28</sup> Manuscripts in Greek for the New Testament were much harder to find. There was no Hellenist tradition in Spain, and one had to go to Italy to find manuscripts. Several codices were

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<sup>26</sup> Many of the professors at Alcalá were actively involved in the Comunero Revolt in 1521, and when the comuneros were defeated, they found themselves *personae non gratae* at Alcalá.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Preston and Allan K. Jenkins, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church: A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 59–65. Also see Guy Bedouelle, "Attacks on the Biblical Humanism of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples," in *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed. Erika Rummel (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 129.

<sup>28</sup> In 1488, a complete Hebrew Bible was printed at Soncino, in the duchy of Milan, by Yehoshúa Shlomó Soncino, the head of an Italian Ashkenazic family of Jewish printers. In 1492, smaller-size editions of the Torah were printed by Yehoshúa's nephew, Gershom Soncino.

purchased in Venice and others in Florence and Rhodes. The Cardinal also managed to have several codices kept in the Vatican library sent on loan with the permission of Cardinal Giovanni di Lorenzo de Medici, who a short time later would become Pope Leo X. Most of these Greek codices have been lost or have never been identified. It must also be remembered that Pablo Coronel, Alonso de Zamora, and Herman Nuñez had many books and old manuscripts in their own private libraries.<sup>29</sup>

Cisneros speaks of “very ancient codices of both the Old and New Testament which Pope Leo had sent, and which had aided them very much in their work.” Domingo Malvadi’s recent research has identified most of the early manuscripts employed in editing the Ximenez Polyglot:

Pope Leon X authorized Abbot Alfonso Garcia de Alcala to loan several codices from the Vatican Library for use in the edition of the Polyglot Bible. These codices have been identified with the Vatican Greek codices Vat. Gr. 330 and Vat. Gr. 346, both from the 13th century, containing the entire Old Testament with the exception of the Psalms and the Prophets. The volumes were returned in 1519. The Venetian Senate also sent a manuscript containing part of the Old Testament produced from one of the codices donated by Cardinal Besarión to the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Gregorio de Andrés identified the Venetian manuscript with the codex V and the copy that remained in Alcala with BH MSS 2216. Another of these codices is the Greek manuscript, which has not survived, known as the Rhodes codex, as it was produced on the island of Rhodes, and which contained the canonical epistles. Its existence is documented primarily because it is mentioned by one of the collaborators in the Polyglot Bible, Diego Lopez de Zuñiga, in his controversy with Erasmus. Gregorio de Andrés also matched it with one of Zuñiga’s manuscripts that appeared together with another two Greek New Testament manuscripts in the inventory of the library at College of San Ildefonso, dated 1512 (AHN. Universidades, Libro 1090 F, f. 33), specifically with the one that appeared under the title “Actus Apostolorum et canonicae epistolae.” These three manuscripts together with the copy of the Old Testament sent by the Senate of Venice also appear in the School inventory dated 1523 (AHN. Universidades, Libro 1091 F, f. 12). Lastly, the manuscript BH MSS 23 containing the Psalms in Greek, although acquired in 1517, was also used for editing this part of the Old Testament.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Juan Signes Codoñer, *Biblioteca y epistolario de Hernán Nuñez de Guzmán (El Pinciano): una aproximación al humanismo español del siglo XVI* (Madrid: CSIC, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Arantxa Domingo Malvadi, “The Greek Language Sources of the Polyglot Bible,” in *V Centenario de la Biblia Políglota Complutense. La Universidad del Renacimiento. El Renacimiento de la Universidad*, ed. José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero et al. (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014), 270–272. See also Gregorio De Andres, “Catálogo de los códices griegos de las colecciones: Complutense, Lázaro Galdiano y March de Madrid,” *Cuadernos de filología clásica* 6 (1974): 221–266, and Ignacio Carbajosa and Andrés García Serrano, *Una Biblia a varias voces. Estudio textual de la Biblia Políglota Complutense* (Madrid: Ediciones Universidad de San Dámaso, 2014).

Today twenty-one Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts, two Greek manuscripts, and several Gothic Bibles that served to establish the text of the polyglot Bible are kept in the Complutense University Library in Madrid.<sup>31</sup>

## VI. *The Printer*

The printing was done by Arnao Guillen de Brocar, one of the most prestigious printers at the time. Brocar had first set up a shop in Pamplona and later moved to Logroño. In 1511 he was invited by Cisneros to come to Alcalá to print the polyglot Bible. In Logroño, Brocar had printed several works by Antonio Nebrija, who in turn may have recommended the printer to the cardinal.<sup>32</sup> Bruce M. Metzger describes Brocar's undertaking in detail:

The Greek type used in the New Testament volume was modeled after the style of the handwriting in manuscripts of about the eleventh or twelfth century and is very elegant. It is printed without rough or smooth breathing marks and accented according to a system never heard of before or since: monosyllables have no accent, while the tone syllable in other words is marked with a simple apex, resembling the Greek acute accent mark. Each word or group of Greek words is coded to the adjacent column of the Latin Vulgate by small supralinear roman letters, thus assisting readers with little Greek to find the equivalent words in each column. The Septuagint is printed with the familiar cursive style of Greek characters popularized by Aldus Manutius, the famous Venetian printer.<sup>33</sup>

Although Brocar's printing of the Ximenez Polyglot was unanimously praised, the content was not exempt from criticism. The editors were accused of willfully distorting the Greek text in order to make it coincide with the Latin Vulgate. One specific accusation was that they had left out the last five words of 1 John 5:7, which are present in the Vulgate.<sup>34</sup> The Ximenez

<sup>31</sup> Marta Torres Santo Domingo, "In the Wake of the Polyglot Bible: the Bible Collection in the Complutense Library," in *V Centenario de la Biblia Poliglota Complutense. La Universidad del Renacimiento. El Renacimiento de la Universidad*, ed. José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, et al. (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014), 163–90.

<sup>32</sup> Rummel, *Ximenez de Cisneros*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 140.

<sup>34</sup> "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." This final clause, originally a marginal note, seems to have had its origin in a fourth century Latin homily in which the text was allegorized to refer to members of the Trinity. From there, it made its way into copies of the Latin Vulgate. The Trinitarian formula "and these three are one," known as the *Comma Johanneum*, is familiar in the English-speaking world because it was also inserted in the King James translation. Erasmus left the words out in his first two editions (1516 and 1519), but on Lopez de Zuñiga's insistence that he justify the exclusion, he promised to insert it if any Greek manuscript could be produced in its favor. For this, the Codex Montfortianus (Evan. 61), now in Trinity College, Dublin, was produced with

Polyglot editors justified the omission in a note. Other annotations include a reference to the omission of the Doxology in the Lord's Prayer—"For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." (Matthew 6)—and two alternative renderings of 1 Corinthians 13:3 and 1 Corinthians 15:31.

## VII. *The Antwerp Polyglot*

Some fifty years after the publication of the six-volume Ximenez Polyglot appeared the eight-volume Antwerp Polyglot, or *Biblia Regia* (1572), printed in Antwerp by Christopher Plantin under the auspices of Philip II. One of the great innovations of the Antwerp Polyglot was the inclusion of the Syriac text along with the Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldean/Aramaic texts. In the fifty years between the publication of the two polyglots, philological studies had advanced greatly. One step forward was the printing of the Syriac New Testament, or Peshitta, in Vienna in 1555.<sup>35</sup> The German orientalist Johann Albrecht Widmannstetter, editor of the 1555 Peshitta, had had Diego Lopez de Zuñiga as his Arabic teacher when both men were in Rome in the 1520s. Widmannstetter continued to have correspondence with Zuñiga up until the Spanish scholar's death in 1531. There could hardly have been talk of a new polyglot Bible at that time; nevertheless, Zuñiga may have already had a special interest in updating the Ximenez polyglot with older manuscripts, if for no other reason than to triumph over Erasmus, whom he criticized severely for lacking a good command of Hebrew and Aramaic.

## Conclusion

After the cardinal's death, the influence of Lull's thinking and Savonarola's mysticism, which Cisneros sought to instill in his newly founded university, was replaced by the ideas of Erasmus, many of whose objectives coincided with the philosophical and religious currents that prevailed in Spain as the century got underway. Cisneros's emphasis on biblical studies and ancient languages, and the departure from staunch scholasticism and return to the

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the passage, and Erasmus inserted the words in his third edition of 1522. Luther's German translation, which was based on Erasmus's second edition (1519), lacked the *Comma*. The King James translators, who based their work mainly on Theodore Beza's tenth edition of the Greek New Testament (1598), popularized the *Comma* for the English-speaking world. The clause is found only in eight late manuscripts, four of which have the words in a marginal note. Lyell, *Cardinal Ximenes*, 42–44.

<sup>35</sup> For an account of the arrival of the Peshitta in Europe and its publication, see Frances Luttkhuizen, "El siríaco en la transmisión de documentos bíblicos," *Tu Reino* 13 (2006): 9–37.

church fathers, had brought with it a growing interest in Christian humanism and enthusiasm among the faculty and students for Erasmus and his writings. But this was short lived. Despite their enthusiasm, there were others who opposed Erasmus and accused him of heresy.<sup>36</sup> By the early 1540s, Erasmianism was no longer an articulate force in Spanish intellectual life. What had begun at the beginning of the century as an attempt on the part of Cisneros to reform the church and the clergy had turned into a counter-reformation. The traditionalists—with the support of the Spanish Inquisition—had won the day. Following the pronouncement of the Council of Trent (April 8, 1546), anyone possessing a Bible was suspected of heresy and was to be dealt with accordingly. In 1552 some three hundred Latin Bibles were confiscated in Seville alone. Cisneros must be remembered, nevertheless, for having planted the seed of inquiry that would later bring forth fruit in the evangelical movements in Seville and Valladolid in the 1550s.<sup>37</sup>

The epitaph that adorns Cisneros's tomb in the San Ildefonso Church in Alcalá de Henares, executed two years after the cardinal's death by Bartolome Ordoñez, reads thus:

In this humble sarcophagus lie I, Francisco, who raised a University in honor of the Muses. I wore the purple and the sackcloth, the helmet and the cardinal's hat; I was a friar, leader, minister, and cardinal. At one time, through no seeking of my own, I wore the crown and cowl, and Spain obeyed me as it would a king.

The words recount the highlights of his life, but how could Ordoñez have left out something as noteworthy as the publication of the first complete polyglot Bible, the *Biblia Sacra Polyglota*? Was Cisneros the author of the epitaph or did Ordoñez, less sympathetic towards—or ignorant of—this great achievement, write it?

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<sup>36</sup> Alejandro Coroleu, "Anti-Erasmianism in Spain," in *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed. Erika Rummel (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 73–92.

<sup>37</sup> See Frances Luttikhuisen, *Underground Protestantism in Sixteenth Century Spain: A Much Ignored Side of Spanish History* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

# Humanism and the Bible: The Contribution of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples

STÉPHANE SIMONNIN

## Abstract

The French humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (ca. 1460-1536) enjoyed in his lifetime a notoriety second only to Erasmus himself. His numerous works of biblical scholarship, his commentaries and homilies, and his translation of the Bible into French make him one of the most significant forerunners of the Reformation in Europe. His scholarly achievements as well as his profound piety deserve to be better known. While an in-depth study of Lefèvre's scholarly achievements and theology is obviously not possible here, I propose to highlight his main contribution to biblical scholarship and hermeneutics.

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## I. *Introduction*

**O**n August 15, 1427, Bernardino of Siena, one of Italy's most famous late medieval preachers, preached a sermon about the Virgin Mary, the official protector of Siena. His text was Psalm 132:8.<sup>1</sup> He read out the verse from the Latin Bible and translated it into vernacular Tuscan with the following words: "Dearest brethren, the words just read are from the prophet David ... Speaking through the Holy Spirit, he says of Mary, who was ascending

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<sup>1</sup> "Arise, Lord and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might" (NIV).

to heaven to God the Father, ‘Arise, Lord, in your rest, you and the ark of your sanctification.’”<sup>2</sup> Two things strike us immediately. The first is Bernardino’s text: he preaches from the Latin Bible, which he has to translate orally, and the Latin reads “ark of sanctification” instead of “ark of your might,” as in our modern versions. The second is that Bernardino applies the verse to the Virgin Mary with no apparent justification. These things strike us because of the intellectual and theological revolution that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: the rise of humanist scholarship, characterized by a desire to go “back to the source” (*ad fontes*) of ancient texts by ridding them of medieval glosses and errors.

It is often thought that the Bible was “rediscovered” by humanists and reformers after centuries of neglect. The reality is much more complex, and numerous works have demonstrated that the Bible was thoroughly studied by theologians<sup>3</sup> and was central in matters of doctrine and preaching throughout the medieval period.<sup>4</sup> However, what humanism did was to raise three fundamental questions about the Bible: the accuracy of the original text (the textual criticism issue), the accuracy of the Vulgate (the translation issue), and the proper understanding of the text (the hermeneutical issue).

Erasmus is the symbol of that humanist challenge, and his publication of the New Testament in Greek in 1516 is rightly regarded as a landmark. However, other scholars before him and during his lifetime made important and often neglected contributions. Among those was the French humanist and biblical scholar Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (ca. 1460–1536)—usually known by his Latin name, Faber Stapulensis—who in his lifetime enjoyed a notoriety second only to that of Erasmus himself. In the first two decades of the sixteenth century, Lefèvre published a series of scholarly studies and commentaries on the Bible, a translation of the Bible into French, and, at the end of his life, a series of devotional meditations on the New Testament. Lefèvre’s achievements deserve to be better known, and I believe that both his contributions and limitations illustrate the strength and limits of humanism with regards to its influence on the Reformation.

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<sup>2</sup> Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche Volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427* (Milan: Rusconi, 1989), 1:85 (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Alistair McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 34–66.

## II. Lefèvre's Career in Context

A full account of Lefèvre's life is obviously outside the scope of this study, but a brief summary of his career and its historical context will help us appreciate his contribution to the study of the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

We know very little about the first part of his life. Most scholars agree, on the scanty evidence available, that he was born around 1460 in Étapes in Picardy (northeastern France). That means that he was very much a fifteenth-century man in his education, more so than Luther or even Erasmus. Therefore, he must have been around 80 years old, an advanced age for the time, when he died in 1536. He studied in Paris and was ordained priest at an unknown time. He taught philosophy in Paris from 1490 to 1507. In the early part of his life, he was significantly influenced by Italian humanists and by mystics. In 1492 he traveled to Italy and met some of the most famous humanists of the time.<sup>6</sup> He admired their zeal to recover the authentic text of ancient Greek philosophers by working on the original text and ridding that text of medieval glosses, and he was also struck by their application of the same zeal to their study of the Scriptures.

Under the influence of mystical writers, Lefèvre also seriously considered withdrawing to a monastery. He did not do so for various reasons, mainly because he did not want to abandon his scholarly activities. However, the desire remained with him ever after and, unlike most other humanists, he kept a close relationships with mystics influenced by the *Devotio Moderna*.<sup>7</sup> This is an interesting difference from Erasmus: Erasmus was a monk by necessity who did all he could to escape from the monastic life, whereas Lefèvre was a secular scholar who longed all his life for the monastic life. This Italian and mystical influence proved decisive in the sense that in Lefèvre the humanist could never be separated from the mystic and Bible exegete. Lefèvre's intense piety struck his contemporaries. As Luther wrote

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<sup>5</sup> The best overview of Lefèvre's life and achievements remains Guy Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Étapes ou l'intelligence des Écritures* (Geneva: Droz, 1976). See also Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre, Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). Hughes's work is the most detailed study of Lefèvre's theology, but his thesis of Lefèvre as a proto-Lutheran is unconvincing. See the review of his book by Douglas H. Shantz, "Lefèvre: Pioneer of the Ecclesiastical Renewal in France: A Review Article," *Calvin Theological Journal* 20.2 (November 1985): 263–67.

<sup>6</sup> Especially Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), and Ermolao Barbaro (1410–1474).

<sup>7</sup> For Lefèvre and mysticism, see Jean Dagens, "Humanisme et Évangélisme chez Lefèvre d'Étapes," in *Courants religieux et humanisme à la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> et au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle: Colloque de Strasbourg, 9–11 mai, 1957* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 121–34.

to a friend in 1517, “I am afraid Erasmus does not exalt Christ and God’s grace enough and in this he is much more ignorant than Lefèvre.”<sup>8</sup>

Until 1507, Lefèvre dedicated himself to the publication of scholarly editions of ancient Greco-Roman texts. Then, in the second period of his life (1507–1521), he turned all his attention to the Bible and began to publish scholarly commentaries and textual critical works for which he is widely admired throughout Europe to this day. During that period Lefèvre took part in all the controversies about the Bible between humanists and the church, and he also began to be concerned about the spiritual education of ordinary people who could not read Latin. He reached the peak of his fame in Europe sometime around 1519. The later part of his life was the most difficult. From 1520 onward, Lefèvre was increasingly attacked by the religious authorities, most notably the Sorbonne, for his opinions and writings. Despite his scholarly abilities and his piety, which were widely recognized, he was increasingly suspected of heresy. In 1521 he accepted an invitation to help Bishop Briçonnet reform the teaching and piety in his diocese of Meaux (twenty-five miles northeast of Paris). During those fruitful few years Lefèvre worked closely with many interesting characters like Guillaume Farel, who considered Lefèvre his mentor and stayed close to him until the end. The work in Meaux soon faced dangerous opposition, and Lefèvre fled to Strasbourg and led an itinerant life until he found refuge in southwest France at Nérac with Marguerite of Navarre (the King of France’s sister), who was sympathetic to the new evangelical ideas. He stayed there until his death in 1536. In 1534 Calvin visited Nérac when he had to flee from Paris and met with Lefèvre. Neither of them left an account of that meeting, but Beza did: “This good old man ... was delighted with young Calvin and predicted that he would prove a distinguished instrument in restoring the kingdom of heaven to France.”<sup>9</sup>

During that final period, Lefèvre’s intellectual activity remained intense and was exclusively focused on the Bible. In particular, he published a commentary on the four Gospels (1522); a commentary on the Catholic Epistles (1524); the *Epistles and Gospels for the Fifty-two Sundays of the Year* (ca. 1525), a series of simple meditations on selected passages of the New Testament published anonymously and written with several collaborators but unanimously attributed to Lefèvre; and the whole Bible in French (published in Antwerp in 1530). Lefèvre’s contribution to the humanist

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, WA, Br. 1:90.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore Beza, *Life of Calvin*, quoted in Bruce Gordon, Calvin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 38.

challenge to the church can be summarized under two headings: his challenge to the Vulgate and his contribution to biblical hermeneutics.

### III. *Challenge to the Vulgate*

To appreciate the value and audacity of scholars like Lefèvre we must bear in mind that the Latin translation of the Bible (later called the Vulgate) reigned supreme. The Vulgate had never been officially “authorized” by the church, and no standard text existed until the church authorities produced one in 1592. There were some variations in the Vulgate text, but it seems that they were simply ignored, most probably because scholars and exegetes did not have the requisite knowledge of biblical languages to assess them. Let us recall that the Council of Trent, in its fourth session on the canonical scriptures (April 1546), decreed that the Vulgate was “approved by the church” and “held authentic,” and that “no-one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it.”<sup>10</sup>

It was only from the middle of the fifteenth century that Italian scholars began to challenge cautiously the authority of the Vulgate, most notably Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), one of the unsung heroes of the rediscovery of biblical scholarship. Valla spent months comparing the Latin New Testament with the Greek text and proposed a series of corrections in his scholarly work *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum*. He never dared publish them; they were only published by Erasmus in 1506. No matter how bold Erasmus was in publishing this work, it was Lefèvre who was the first to put Valla’s ideas into practice, as Erasmus himself admitted.<sup>11</sup> He first did so in his *Quintuplex Psalterium* (Fivefold Psalter) written in 1508 in Paris for a group of monks and published in 1509.<sup>12</sup> The *Quintuplex* was a critical edition of the Psalms with five Latin versions, including the *Psalterium Hebraicum*, a separate version translated by Jerome from the Hebrew. That stunning work of scholarship was carefully read by Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli.<sup>13</sup> After each psalm, Lefèvre included a brief commentary that set out the historical or, more often, the spiritual context of the psalm.

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<sup>10</sup> Anyone doubting the enduring authority of the Vulgate may look at Pope Leon XIII’s encyclical “*Providentissimus Deus*” (1893) and Pius XII’s encyclical “*Divino afflante Spiritu*” (1943). These make interesting reading.

<sup>11</sup> Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d’Étaples*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> A copy of a 1513 edition is available online at the Bibliothèque nationale de France website: gallica.bnf.fr.

<sup>13</sup> Luther’s annotations of Lefèvre’s *Quintuplex* occupy sixty pages in the Weimar edition of his complete works (vol. 4).

Significantly, Lefèvre approached the text as he had approached Aristotle's works a few years before: he first established an accurate text, not in the original Hebrew language, which the monks did not understand, but in Latin, which was the language of their daily devotion. Nonetheless, the translation inconsistencies between the different versions were there for all to see. For example, in Psalm 132:8 mentioned in the introduction, the inconsistency is clearly laid out: the main Latin versions read "the ark of your sanctification" (*arca sanctificationis tuae*) but the *Psalterium Hebraicum* correctly reads "the ark of your strength" (*arca fortitudinis tuae*). It should be noted that the simple act of putting alternative texts in several columns next to the official Latin text was in itself audacious.

How much Hebrew did Lefèvre really know? It seems not a great deal: he usually argues from the *Psalterium Hebraicum* rather than the Hebrew text itself. Lefèvre himself, with his characteristic humility, did not claim great fluency with the language. However, like all other humanists at the time, he was fully supportive of Johannes Reuchlin's efforts to promote the study of biblical Hebrew and Jewish studies, and he undoubtedly learned some Hebrew from Reuchlin's groundbreaking grammar of biblical Hebrew.<sup>14</sup> He felt the importance of recovering the *veritas hebraica* and, although the result is not always acceptable by modern standards, the *Quintuplex* certainly showed the way ahead.

Lefèvre's next serious challenge to the Vulgate came in his commentary on Paul's Epistles published in 1512, which one commentator called "perhaps the first ever Protestant commentary since it is the first in modern times to be based on the original text without reference to the Church Fathers."<sup>15</sup> In that work Lefèvre not only provided explanations that included corrections of the Latin version but also made new translations of his own. Generally speaking, Lefèvre was much less prolix than Erasmus and did not always explain the rationale behind his changes. His concern seems to have been to stay closer to the Greek text and keep his own interpretations to a minimum. However, he sometimes felt the need to add words where he thought clarification was needed, and some of his interpretative choices are surprising. For example, he added the word *solum* (only) in his translation of Galatians 2:16: while the Vulgate says, "We know that man is not justified by works of the law but on the contrary through faith in Christ Jesus," Lefèvre writes, "but *only* through faith in Jesus Christ." No justification is

<sup>14</sup> *De rudimentis Hebraicis*, published in 1506.

<sup>15</sup> Jean de Savignac, "Commentaires de Lefèvre d'Étaples sur certains textes de Paul," *Études théologiques et religieuses* 53.3 (1984): 301.

provided in the commentary, which shows that Lefèvre thought his change was self-explanatory. Even more interesting is his translation of the same verse in the New Testament in French eleven years later (1523). This time, Lefèvre has removed the “only” but translated *pistis christou* as “the faith of Jesus Christ.” It seems clear that Lefèvre had come to believe that Christ’s own faith was the foundation of justification. While it is difficult to draw any categorical conclusion about Lefèvre’s theology from these translations, they do give an insight into his constant meditation on the Scriptures and his willingness to challenge conventional translations and traditions.

Lefèvre was well aware of the audacity of his challenges to the received text. He ingenuously tried to mitigate it not only by printing his own translation in smaller type but also by claiming, somewhat foolishly, that the Latin version used in the church was not Jerome’s translation but an older one that Jerome himself had criticized. It is not necessary to delve into the controversy aroused by those statements and his proposed changes, but it is indicative once again of what was at stake.<sup>16</sup>

From then on, Lefèvre would continue providing his own translations in his commentaries and devotional works every time he felt it necessary, and with growing confidence. One could quote many examples in his works, but I shall mention only one that is significant and sums up the whole new atmosphere of the 1520s. It is found in his devotional work *Epistles and Gospels* published in 1525, which contains a series of simple homilies of a devotional nature on selected passages of the New Testament.<sup>17</sup> This work shows that Lefèvre’s understanding of Scripture was increasingly influenced by Luther’s theology, as is clearly shown by the forty-eight statements condemned as heretical by the Sorbonne! Commenting on John 1:19–28, Lefèvre mentions in passing that the name “Bethania” (v. 28) is the result of a corruption and the right name is “Bethabara.”<sup>18</sup> That affirmation was vehemently condemned by the Sorbonne, which called it “scandalous,” “odious,” and “not to be preached to people.” This example is significant precisely because of its insignificance. Lefèvre’s casual correction in passing of a town’s name in the Gospel and the vehement reaction that it caused illustrates the growing gulf between humanists like him and the ecclesiastical authorities.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview, see Richard Cameron, “The Attack on the Biblical Work of Lefèvre d’Étaples, 1514–1521,” *Church History* 38.1 (March 1969): 9–24.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples et ses disciples, *Epistres et Évangiles pour les cinquante et deux dimanches de l’an*, ed. Guy Bedouelle and Franco Giacone (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> The reading “Bethania” is marked with a “C” in the fourth edition of the United Bible Society New Testament in Greek indicating that the committee had difficulty in deciding which variant was correct.

Lefèvre's translation options were not always as bold as we would want today. For example, the way he deals with the Greek verb *metanoëō* is interesting. That verb was famously translated in the Vulgate "do penance" (*poenitentia agere*). Erasmus had already claimed that this was a wrong translation, and in his *Annotationes* (1519) he proposed "*ad mentem redite*," which could be translated something like "come back to your senses." Lefèvre did not deem it necessary to change the traditional translation. However, in his commentary on Paul's epistles he showed that he perfectly understood the etymology of the word: "Penance means thinking again and coming back to one's senses."<sup>19</sup> Lefèvre evidently thought it was not always necessary to change well-known words or expressions provided they were reinterpreted properly. That Luther had his most decisive theological insights reading the Bible in Latin shows that Lefèvre was probably right on that point.

The translation of the Bible in French is the one work for which Lefèvre is remembered today outside the narrow circle of Reformation and humanism scholars. This is the work that occupied the last fifteen years of his life, and he worked relentlessly to improve and modify his translation. The publication dates themselves witness to his labor: the four Gospels in French, June 1523; the complete New Testament, November 1523; the Psalms, February 1524; the whole Old Testament except the Psalms, 1528 (in Antwerp); the complete Bible in one volume, 1530 (again in Antwerp). Again, this activity was audacious and frowned upon by many at the time, and Lefèvre never lost an opportunity in his prefaces to repeat that he had the express assent of King Francis I. Indeed, the king, under the influence of his sister Marguerite of Navarre, wanted, in Lefèvre's own words, "the Word of God and the true and pure Gospel of Christ to be freely available in his wide kingdom."<sup>20</sup> Lefèvre's translation is essentially from the Vulgate, but with the help of other documents: a French translation (also from the Vulgate) published by Jean de Rély, a French humanist, in 1487 and, most probably, the Latin version of the Old Testament translated directly from the Hebrew by the Italian Hebraist Sante Pagnini and published in Lyon in January 1528. In 1534 Lefèvre published an edition of the Bible (his last) in which the translation of the Old Testament has been improved, most notably in the Psalms. Despite the fact that Lefèvre's Bible was censored in 1541, its legacy was continued in Pierre Robert's 1535 translation, which became the foundational Bible of the French-speaking Reformed church.

<sup>19</sup> Lefèvre's commentary on Heb 6:1, cited in Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Étaples*, 172 (my translation).

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, "Dedicatory Preface to the Commentaries to the Catholic Epistles (1524)," in *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Related Texts*, ed. Eugene F. Rice Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 481.

Apart from the scholarly achievement that this translation represents, Lefèvre's motivations are even more interesting. His passion was to make the Word of God available to people who had neither formal education nor understanding of Latin. Therefore, the Bible needed not only to be translated but also to be preached and explained in simple terms. This idea was the driving force behind the relentless work that cost him so much time and energy. It was also the drive for various innovations in the printing, which Lefèvre wanted as readable as possible. For example, an edition of his French New Testament was published in Neuchâtel in 1534 with large fonts for elderly people and readers with limited ability.<sup>21</sup> He also understood that the Bible in the vernacular language was an indispensable tool for faithful preaching, which was itself one of the keys for the reformation of the church. In fact, we know that distribution of free copies of the New Testament took place in Meaux in 1525 "for the honor of God to those who do not have the means to buy them."<sup>22</sup> This is what Lefèvre says with palpable joy to Guillaume Farel when telling him about his new edition of the New Testament in French being put to good use in Meaux: "Now, in our whole diocese, on festive days and especially on the Lord's day, the Gospel and the Epistles are read to the people in the vernacular, and if any exhortation is given, it is based on the Epistle, or the Gospel, or both."<sup>23</sup> But Lefèvre's clearest stance on this is best seen in his prefatory epistle to the four Gospels in French written at Meaux and dated June 8, 1523, in which he clearly sets out his program:

So that all those who know the French language but not Latin may be better able to receive that grace [the gospel of salvation] ... the Gospels are made available to you in the vernacular tongue from the Latin version that is read everywhere, without adding or removing anything, so that the simple members of Christ's body may be as certain of the evangelical truth as those who have it in Latin.<sup>24</sup>

He then carries on boldly: "Let us know that men and their doctrines are nothing if not corroborated and confirmed by the Word of God. But Jesus Christ is everything; is all man and all deity; and all men are nothing if not in him; and all words of men are nothing if not in his Word."<sup>25</sup> He then goes

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<sup>21</sup> Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Étaples*, 112, n. 52.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 113, n. 56

<sup>23</sup> Letter of Lefèvre d'Étaples to Guillaume Farel, July 6, 1524, in *Correspondance des Réformateurs de langue française*, ed. Alphonse Herminjard (Geneva: Georg, 1866), 1:221 (letter 103; my translation).

<sup>24</sup> Lefèvre, *Prefatory Epistles*, 450.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

on answering at length all the most common arguments against the translation of the Bible in vernacular languages. Firstly, some argue that it would be better to give “the simple” a simplified paraphrase of the Bible rather than the text itself, which is too complex. Lefèvre responds with a simple and powerful argument that has perhaps been forgotten by some translators today: paraphrase is unacceptable because it risks communicating a meaning different from the one the Holy Spirit communicated to the evangelists and “mixing the words of man with the Word of God.” Secondly, many argue that it is not advisable to make the gospel available in vernacular languages because they contain many complex and obscure points that will be misunderstood and thus be the cause of many errors. If this is the case, responds Lefèvre, then the evangelists should not have made the Gospels available to the Greeks nor Jerome to the Latins because there are many obscure things in the gospel that neither could have understood. These points simply have to be believed, as the Lord said: “Believe the gospel.” Besides, Lefèvre points out, all the famous heretics of the ancient world like Arius and Sabellius were scholars, not simple people, and they fell into heresy while reading the Scriptures in Greek or Latin!

Lefèvre drives the point home passionately in one of his finest exhortations:

If some want to prevent Jesus Christ’s people from having the gospel in their own language, let them know that Christ speaks against them through Saint Luke when he says “Woe to you doctors of the law because you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not come in and you prevented them to come in.” And doesn’t he also say through Saint Mark “go through the world and preach the gospel to all creatures”? And through Saint Matthew “teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you”? And how will they teach them to keep Christ’s commandments if they don’t want the people to see and read the gospel of God in his own language? They will have to give account of this before the tribunal of the great judge on the day of judgment and also if they have preached certain things to the people making them believe that they were words of God while they were not.<sup>26</sup>

What is really interesting in all this is Lefèvre’s faith in people’s ability to understand the Scriptures. His conviction may sound banal nowadays, but it was particularly modern at the time, and it contrasts with the reticence of other humanists and of even the Reformers themselves. This actually points to an interesting contradiction at the heart of the humanist movement: the desire on the one hand to make the Scriptures available in vernacular languages and the conviction on the other hand that an accurate interpretation

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 454–55.

required a knowledge of the original languages. Erasmus was clearly more reticent than Lefèvre on this point. Many quotes could be produced, but this one from the 1515 edition of his celebrated *Adages* is revealing. Commenting on the adage “*illotis manibus*” (“with unwashed hands”) and another similar adage, Erasmus says,

Both proverbs are to be used of those who rush into an undertaking either recklessly, or else without sufficient knowledge of the important facts ... as if an attempt to interpret Divine Scripture were made by one who was unschooled and ignorant of Greek, Latin and Hebrew, and of the whole antiquity—things without which it is not only stupid, but impious, to take on oneself to treat the mysteries of Theology.<sup>27</sup>

Even if Erasmus’s target was ignorant monks or university theologians, the thought is still revealing. The Reformers themselves have also shown ambivalent attitudes on this point. While denouncing the erroneous teachings of the Roman church and calling for the Bible to be made available to all, they have sometimes taken a different stance when responding to radical Reformers. One thinks, for example, of Zwingli dismissing the Anabaptists’ arguments because of their lack of knowledge of biblical languages.<sup>28</sup> We find none of this reticence in Lefèvre but only a sincere, perhaps naïve, faith in people’s ability to understand Scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit, as we will see in what follows.

#### **IV. The Hermeneutical Issue**

As mentioned in the introduction, the humanist challenge to the church was not only at the level of textual criticism and translation into vernacular languages, but also at a hermeneutical level: assuming we have a correct text, how are we to interpret it? This is a question on which Lefèvre left one of his most characteristic marks, although I would suggest that his main insights have generally been misunderstood.

In the early sixteenth century, the hermeneutical rules inherited from Augustine via the medieval scholastic theologians defined four classic senses of Scripture: a literal sense and three nonliteral or “spiritual” senses: the “allegorical” (what must be believed), the “tropological” (what concerns moral conduct), and the “anagogical” (what is hoped for).<sup>29</sup> At the risk of

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<sup>27</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Erasmus on His Times: A Shortened Version of the ‘Adages’ of Erasmus*, ed. Margaret Mann Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 75.

<sup>28</sup> McGrath, *European Reformation*, 129–30.

<sup>29</sup> For a brief summary of the medieval fourfold sense of Scripture, see McGrath, *European Reformation*, 148–50.

oversimplifying, we can say that this fourfold sense of Scripture raised a twofold challenge: firstly, how does one keep the nonliteral senses (especially the allegorical one) from degenerating into arbitrary personal interpretation? This was not always avoided, but medieval theologians tended nonetheless to give priority to the literal sense, at least in theory.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, how does one carry out a literal exegesis of the Old Testament without falling into the trap of “Jewish exegesis”? The return *ad fontes* advocated by humanists made that problem particularly acute, and Erasmus warned against it.<sup>31</sup> The twofold trap of fanciful allegorical interpretations and mere “Christian midrash” was a real issue for sixteenth-century exegetes. It is in this context that Lefèvre left his mark.

The starting point is, again, his *Quintuplex* (1509). In that work, as is commonly asserted, Lefèvre made a decisive step toward “modern” or “Protestant” hermeneutics by replacing the fourfold sense of Scripture with one “literal-Christological” sense. In other words, according to Lefèvre, the only true and real sense of Scripture is christological. The Scriptures are about Christ, so the christological sense is the one intended by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it can be defined as the true “literal” sense, as opposed to a “Judaizing” literal sense that only sees and expects a literal-historical fulfillment of the Scriptures. In the preface he explains that he was prompted to reflect on this by hearing the monks in Paris complain that they struggled to go beyond the literal meaning of the Psalms, which they found unhelpful and discouraging. Interestingly, Erasmus had made the same observation in his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* a few years before.<sup>32</sup> Lefèvre then started wondering whether there was another sense and concluded that there was: it is “the sense that the prophet intended and of the Holy Spirit speaking in him ... I call this sense literal but it coincides with the Spirit.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Lefèvre posits a “dual literal sense,” a proper one focused on Christ and the “letter that kills” that the Jews follow. Then Lefèvre gives several examples of this in the preface itself and many more in the main part of the work. For example, the anointing of the Lord in Psalm 2 is understood by the Jews to be only peoples rebelling against King David, whereas the apostles, filled

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas’s discussion of the literal sense in his commentary on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, Question 1, Paragraph 5.

<sup>31</sup> Letter to Wolfgang Capito, quoted in McGrath, *European Reformation*, 243, n. 19.

<sup>32</sup> “I believe that there is no other reason for the disappearance of monastic devotion, piety, and fervor everywhere than this, that they stick as long as they live to the letter and do not search for the spiritual understanding of Scripture” (quoted in Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Medieval Thought*, trans. Paul L. Nyhus [New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966], 292).

<sup>33</sup> Lefèvre, *Prefatory Epistles*, 193.

with the Holy Spirit, understood the passage in the “literal” sense of rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ.

Identifying the true literal sense with the christological sense of Scripture was certainly an interesting idea, but it is not, I suggest, where Lefèvre made his most innovative contribution. Firstly, that idea was not entirely new. In the early fourteenth century, Nicolas of Lyra had expressed a similar idea in his massive commentaries on the Bible (*Postilla Litteralis et Moralis*). Lyra concentrated on the literal sense using both Christian and rabbinic traditions, saying in particular that it was sometimes the Old Testament author’s intention to prophesy about Christ, which implied a twofold literal sense, one relating to the time of the prophet and one to the time of the fulfillment of his prophecy.<sup>34</sup> Lefèvre seems to have gone further than Lyra only insofar as his twofold literal sense included only one “proper” literal sense: the christological one. The purely historical sense was discarded as the “letter that kills.” It is nonetheless true that Lefèvre certainly gave a whole new vigor to the idea of christological interpretation of the Old Testament. One wonders whether Calvin would have been less reluctant to point to Christ in his sermons on Job had he been more confident of the validity of Lefèvre’s idea.

Secondly, it has to be said that Lefèvre was only talking about the Psalms, that he never discarded the fourfold sense of Scripture, and that he did not follow his own rule consistently. In a key passage in his commentary on Galatians 4:24, in which Paul famously refers to “allegory,” Lefèvre explains in detail how he wants to combine his “literal spiritual” sense with the fourfold sense:

These four senses must not be sought everywhere ... Therefore, let us not confuse these senses: those that require a literal sense, let us interpret them literally; those that require allegory, let us interpret them allegorically; if they require both, let us concede them both as in the story of Abraham and his sons, since the Spirit intended both history and allegory. Let us keep the anagogical interpretation only for those texts that express themselves in this way. Indeed, bringing dignified things down to the undignified ones is worse than lifting inferior ones to the superior.<sup>35</sup>

In other words, the distinction between the letter and the spirit does not nullify the fourfold sense, and different texts have different requirements. Following this principle, Lefèvre always interprets Christ’s parables allegorically. The result is often not acceptable by modern interpretative

<sup>34</sup> Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 286.

<sup>35</sup> Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d’Étaples*, 183–84 (my translation).

standards, as, for example, the parable of the woman hiding three measures of flour till it was all leavened (Matt 13:33), which for Lefèvre represents God's wisdom that has hidden Christ in the three great regions of the world (Europe, Africa, and Asia). The other important principle that comes out from the above quote is the dignity of Scripture. Lefèvre is always worried about not attributing enough dignity to the Word of God; this seems to be for him the major sin of the exegete. The above quote makes it clear that for Lefèvre the most dignified sense of the Scriptures is the anagogical one. In that sense, he is still very much in agreement with the medieval exegetes.<sup>36</sup>

Ultimately, what is significant in Lefèvre's exegesis is not the discovery or recovery of a "literal-christological" sense of Scripture, but rather the deeply spiritual and individual emphasis of his exegesis. Henri de Lubac summed it up perfectly in his assessment of Lefèvre in his seminal work on the medieval exegesis of Scripture.

His exegesis is much less historical than theological, and not a scientifically or impersonally objective theology but one entirely oriented toward the exegete's spiritual life. In other words, Lefèvre d'Étapes examines his text recognising the Word of God which, at this very moment, speaks to him. If he reads St Paul, it is not in order to reconstruct the thoughts of a man at a given time, it is in order to listen to "Jesus Christ who speaks through Saint Paul."<sup>37</sup>

I believe Lubac is right and pays Lefèvre the best possible compliment. Lefèvre's scholarly efforts were aimed at hearing Christ speak directly to him through the Holy Spirit. We sense that he is close to Luther's decisive breakthrough that another great Catholic theologian called "the personal and spectacular relationship created by the Word of God."<sup>38</sup>

That leads us directly to what I believe is Lefèvre's most insightful contribution to the hermeneutical debates of his day: his view on the role of the Holy Spirit and the comparative absence of any reference to the tradition of the church. We saw earlier the remarkable faith Lefèvre had in the ability of ordinary believers to understand the Scriptures in their own tongue. That faith was rooted in his faith in the Holy Spirit who, for Lefèvre, is self-evidently the author of Scripture and therefore also its interpreter. Mere grammatical and philological analysis will not reveal the true literal sense of Scripture. What is needed is not a grammar or a dictionary but the Holy Spirit. The same applies to commentaries.

<sup>36</sup> See Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Lyon: Aubier, 1964), 2.2:419.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.2:420–21.

<sup>38</sup> Yves Congar, *L'Église de saint Augustin à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 353.

One principle that Lefèvre articulated was that one has to believe in order to understand. However, I believe he meant much more than the classic Augustinian *credo ut intelligam*. He meant rather two things. First, you must believe even if you do not understand; this is part of the humble submission of the believer to God. Secondly, you must believe to understand because one must have the Holy Spirit in oneself for a proper understanding of Scripture, and one cannot have the Holy Spirit if one does not believe. In fact, said Lefèvre, the problem with the Jews is not that they do not believe because they are stuck with the “letter that kills,” but quite the opposite: they are prisoners of their wrong literal interpretation precisely because they do not believe. The same principle applies to commentaries: they are helpful only because they are themselves enlightened by the Word! As Lefèvre says in his preface to his commentary on the four Gospels,

No matter how fine they [commentaries on the Gospels] may be, they cannot add any light to the Gospels, something which is as impossible as adding light to the sun. Rather, the Gospels shed light on the commentaries themselves. Otherwise, they are like colours in darkness and like thick clouds in the mind.<sup>39</sup>

The idea that the Holy Spirit interprets Scripture is an idea that Lefèvre pushed very far, to the point of making the Holy Spirit the interpreter of Scripture “in us.” He developed that idea, which is perhaps one of his finest insights, in his commentary on John 16:25–26. Talking about the mystery of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, he notes that if the apostles could understand it, it was because of “the Spirit who understood in them,” adding, “If someone wants to understand, let him ask the Spirit so that it may not be he himself who understands but the God who understands in him.”<sup>40</sup> In his comment on 1 John 5:7 he will repeat the idea and push it further: “The Spirit of God alone can do everything and does everything in us.”<sup>41</sup> Again, the context is the testimony of the Holy Spirit about the generation of the Son. That sentence was immediately censored by the Sorbonne.

What is important to see here, however, is that for Lefèvre the Holy Spirit speaks to the individual believer more than to the church. Indeed, Lefèvre

<sup>39</sup> Lefèvre, *Prefatory Epistles*, 440.

<sup>40</sup> “Eam Spiritus intellegebat in ipsis ... Si quis ergo illam intelligere velit, poscat id a Spiritu, ut ipse non sit qui intellegat sed Deus in ipso” (quoted in Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Étaples*, 187, my translation).

<sup>41</sup> “L'esprit de Dieu seul peut tout et fait tout en nous” (Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Épîtres et Évangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giaccone, 172).

is mainly concerned with nurturing the piety of individual believers.<sup>42</sup> The “spiritual meaning” does not coincide with the “church” meaning. In this he clearly contradicts the opinion of most medieval scholars, most notably Gerson and, closer to Lefèvre himself, Prieras, who had affirmed exactly the opposite a few years before. A century before Lefèvre, Jean Gerson (1363–1429), the chancellor of the University of Paris, opposed the Hussites’ doctrines, which they claimed were based on the literal sense of Scripture, a doctrine that they call “Scripture alone,” as Gerson pointed out. To this Gerson opposed the “true” literal sense of Scripture, which was revealed by Christ and the apostles and handed down by the tradition of the church: “The literal sense of Scripture is not to be defined in terms of the insights of any given individual but in terms of the decisions of the Church, inspired and governed by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>43</sup> In 1503 Prieras, in his famous hermeneutical treatise *Aurea Rosa*, sided with Gerson and rejected Lefèvre’s ideas in advance as untenable. For Prieras, if there is a twofold literal sense, one results from mere human investigation and the other is derived from the teaching authority of the church. Consequently, as Prieras clearly spells out in his attack against Luther in 1518, whoever does not submit to the teaching of the Roman Church is a heretic.<sup>44</sup>

The contrast with Lefèvre’s ideas is clear. Does that mean that for Lefèvre the Scriptures have pre-eminence over church traditions? It would seem so despite what many scholars have claimed. When it comes to Lefèvre’s idea of the church, most scholars insist that he never challenged the ecclesiological presuppositions of the Roman church; this is indeed true. However, in several instances he seems to have moved toward affirming the pre-eminence of Scripture over the church. One scholar has recently highlighted a very good example.<sup>45</sup> In 1517 Lefèvre was caught in a controversy about the identity of Mary Magdalene: it was traditionally thought that Mary Magdalene, who is mentioned in the resurrection narratives, was also Martha’s sister and the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7. Lefèvre went against the church tradition in claiming that they were different women.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lefèvre’s focus on explaining the Scriptures to individual believers is probably driven to some extent by his mystical conception of Christianity, which was influenced by Cusa and the *Devotio Moderna*. See Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d’Étapes*, 60–70.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 289.

<sup>44</sup> “Decalogus ... in praesumptuosas Martini Lutheri Conclusiones de Potestate Papae.” See Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 291–92.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Reid, *King’s Sister: Queen of Dissent, Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549) and Her Evangelical Network* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 147–48.

<sup>46</sup> Contemporaries were shocked by Lefèvre’s opinion, and he felt the need to publish no less than four treatises on that subject. The tradition and liturgy of the church was at stake. For

He had to defend himself against criticism, and he affirmed his respect for the church, saying that “wherever the church is there is the spirit of God,” and he affirmed his desire “not to deviate from the position of our mother the holy church by a hair’s breath.” Nonetheless, he later added,

Clearly those authors [who refute Lefèvre’s views] are influential, and there is a great crowd of them. But the gospel is stronger than an infinite number of authors. Old habits die hard, even when they are false, and usually, although false, they claim the authority of the church.<sup>47</sup> But the truth is stronger still.<sup>48</sup>

One cannot help thinking that Lefèvre affirms, as cautiously as he can, his conviction that church traditions have to be challenged by a proper exegesis of Scripture. This is confirmed by Lefèvre’s surprising conception of the church. Some scholars have wondered what exactly Lefèvre meant when he spoke about the church. He seems to refer more to the body of individual believers united through their love of Scripture than to the church as an institution. In the *Epistles and Gospels*, the church is always defined as the community of believers incorporated into Christ, “the body of Christ,” and not in terms of hierarchy.<sup>49</sup>

This is further confirmed by what may be the most striking aspect of his exegesis: the almost complete absence of reference to church traditions, something that becomes clearer with time. One example among many will suffice: Lefèvre’s defense of the doctrine of purgatory. In his commentary on the Gospels, he attempts to defend the doctrine of purgatory from a text not usually used at the time for such a defense: the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. Lefèvre thinks that the rich man is not in hell but in purgatory. He argues this with an imaginative exegesis of the rich man’s request that Lazarus be sent to his family to warn them (v. 27). For Lefèvre, that the rich man still desires the well-being of people in this world is proof that he cannot be reprobate and therefore is not in hell. From that hypothesis he develops a careful demonstration that the rich man is in purgatory and then gives traditional descriptions of heaven, purgatory, and hell, adducing other passages of Scripture.<sup>50</sup> However, significantly, he only argues from

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more details about this controversy, see Cameron, *The Attack on Lefèvre*, 13–15.

<sup>47</sup> Not “Old habits die hard, even when they are false, and especially when, though false, they claim the authority of the church,” as translated in Reid, *Marguerite of Navarre*, 148.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 148 (my translation). “Certes les auteurs sont puissants, et nombreuse est la foule des auteurs. Mais l’Evangile est plus fort qu’une infinité d’auteurs. Puissante aussi est une vieille habitude, même si elle est fausse, et, d’ordinaire, bien que fausse, elle revendique l’autorité de l’église. Mais la vérité est plus forte encore.”

<sup>49</sup> See “Introduction,” *Epistles et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, xlix–l.

<sup>50</sup> Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d’Étaples*, 202.

Scripture without any reference to the tradition of the church, which he could not have ignored! That is perhaps what captures Lefèvre's originality best. If one wonders what a "forerunner of the Reformation" might look like, one need look no further than a humanist trying to defend the doctrine of purgatory from Scripture alone! It is interesting to note that Lefèvre's thought about this text evolved; only three years later, in his homily on Luke 16 in the *Gospel and Epistles*, all references to purgatory are gone. Instead, the emphasis is on the supremacy of Scripture and the futility of the prayers for the dead. Lefèvre declares, in a sentence condemned by the Sorbonne as "impious heresy,"

In that place [where the rich man is] there is no remedy, and God's justice must be accomplished, as shown from the fact that no prayer for him or others, for the dead or the living, could obtain anything. He thought he could be answered by Abraham and that Abraham could do something, but ... Abraham directs him back to the Word of God. For this is where we must go. It is through the Word that God, by giving faith, wants to save us, and not through those who passed away from this world.<sup>51</sup>

This shows a remarkable evolution in the thinking of a humanist who started publishing scholarly works on the Bible less than twenty years before. Who knows where Lefèvre would have ended up had he been twenty years younger?

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<sup>51</sup> *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 232 (my translation).

# ***Historicus Practicus:* Calvin's Use of Josephus in the *Commentaries* and *Lectures***

**WILLIAM DEN HOLLANDER**

## **Abstract**

This article contributes specifically to the filling in of a lacuna in scholarship regarding the reception of Josephus's writings among the Reformers and contributes generally to investigations into the humanist scholarship of the Reformation. It analyzes the use of Josephus's writings in Calvin's *Commentaries* and *Lectures* in order to bring about a better understanding of both the nature of his reception of Josephus and the character of his historical enterprise. The picture that emerges is of Calvin as *historicus practicus*: i.e., his role as historian was subordinated to his responsibility as theologian to edify the church. Calvin's specific attitude towards the writings of Josephus is best explained by competing historical factors, especially Josephus's earlier positive reception by the early church and the negative attitudes toward Jews present in the sixteenth century.

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**T**he writings of the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus have long been highly valued by the church, perhaps even from the time they were first delivered piecemeal to an audience in the city of Rome.<sup>1</sup> In fact, his works owe their very survival to the Christian scribes who saw fit to laboriously copy them out, since the majority of the Jews of following centuries largely abandoned their native son. In terms of his influence, much work has been done on the reception of his work by the early church writers,<sup>2</sup> in particular the prominent church historian Eusebius of Caesarea.<sup>3</sup> The significant impact of Eusebius himself on later Christian writers ensured that Josephus's writings were not forgotten, but maintained a place of importance through the medieval period and into the time of the Reformation. Josephus's impact on later eras has, however, rarely been vigorously pursued.<sup>4</sup> In his monumental

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<sup>1</sup> The gospel writer Luke has been imagined as a possible member of the audience for Josephus's writings; see Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, Treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, and Dates* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 558; cf. H. St. John Thackeray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1929), 128.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Gustave Bardy, "Le souvenir de Josèphe chez les Pères," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 43 (1948): 179–91; Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 68–171; *Rezeptionsgeschichtliche und Textkritische Untersuchungen zu Flavius Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 13–43; "The Works of Josephus and the Early Christian Church," in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Louis Feldman and Göhei Hata (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 315–24; Wataru Mizugaki, "Origen and Josephus," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Göhei Hata (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 325–37; Steven Bowman, "Josephus in Byzantium," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Göhei Hata (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 362–85; Michael Hardwick, *Josephus as an Historical Source in Patristic Literature through Eusebius*, *BJS* 128 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Heinz Schreckenberg and Kurt Schubert, *Jewish Historiography and Iconography in Early and Medieval Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1992), 7–138; Tommaso Leoni, "Translations and Adaptations of Josephus' Writings in Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Ostraka* 16 (2007): 481–92.

<sup>3</sup> On Eusebius's use of Josephus as a source, see Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition*, 79–88; Hardwick, *Josephus*, 69–90, 100–102, 121–24; Schreckenberg and Schubert, *Jewish Historiography*, 63–71; Göhei Hata, "Eusebius and Josephus: The Way Eusebius Misused and Abused Josephus," in *Patristica: Proceedings of the Colloquia of the Japanese Society for Patristic Studies*, PSS 1 (n.p.: Shinseisha, 2001), 49–66; "The Abuse and Misuse of Josephus in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Books 2 and 3," in *Studies in Josephus and the Varieties of Ancient Judaism: Louis H. Feldman Jubilee Volume*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, Shaye J. D. Cohen, and Joshua J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 91–102.

<sup>4</sup> The question of the "use and abuse" of Josephus's writings has been addressed more broadly; see, e.g., Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 7–19; Leoni, "Translations," 481–92. An exception for the sixteenth century is Betsy Halpern Amaru, "Martin Luther and Flavius Josephus," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Göhei Hata (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 411–26.

bibliography published in 1984, the dean of Josephan studies, Louis H. Feldman, remarked regarding the sixteenth century in particular, "The subject of Josephus' influence remains to be traced."<sup>5</sup> Nearly ten years later he could still pronounce that "the place of Josephus in the history of the Protestant Reformation remains to be documented."<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, nearly twenty years has elapsed and much the same could still be said.<sup>7</sup>

This is not to say that Josephus has been ignored entirely by scholars of the Reformation. In fact, he has appeared relatively frequently in scholarly studies of the use of the church fathers by Reformers such as John Calvin,<sup>8</sup> and occasionally in other contexts as well.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, his influence remains to be traced systematically and precisely in the writings of the Reformers. The present study will contribute to the filling in of this lacuna in scholarship by focusing on Calvin's use of Josephus's writings in his *Commentaries* and *Lectures*. I will begin by analyzing a selection of citations under the following categories: a) general evaluation of Josephus; b) use of Josephus for filling out the biblical text; and c) rejection or criticism of Josephus's description or interpretation of events. Subsequently, I will evaluate the manner in which Calvin used Josephus as a source with the aim of contributing to the ongoing investigation of Calvin's attitude towards history and his historical method.<sup>10</sup> I will argue that Calvin's purposes in using Josephus were primarily practical—i.e., he was above all a *historicus*

<sup>5</sup> Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship, 1937–1980* (New York: de Gruyter, 1984), 803.

<sup>6</sup> Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 239.

<sup>7</sup> Exceptions: Amaru, "Martin Luther," 411–26; Pauline M. Smith, "The Reception and Influence of Josephus's Jewish War in the Late French Renaissance with Special Reference to the Satyre Menippée," *Renaissance Studies* 13.2 (1999): 173–91.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Anthony N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Use of the Fathers and the Medievals," *Calvin Theological Journal* 16.2 (1981): 149–200; *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999); Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian: The Shape of His Writings and Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); R. Ward Holder, *John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation. Calvin's First Commentaries*, SHCT (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Riemer Faber, "Scholastic Continuities in the Reproduction of Classical Sources in the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*," *Church History and Religious Culture* 92.4 (2012): 561–79, esp. 562 (n. 5), 577.

<sup>10</sup> R. J. Mooi, *Het kerk-en dogmahistorisch element in de werken van Johannes Calvijn* (Wageningen: Veenman, 1965); Danièle Fischer, *Jean Calvin, historien de l'Eglise: sources et aspects de la pensée historique et de l'historiographie du Réformateur* (Diss., Strasbourg, 1980); Lane, "Calvin's Use," 149–200; Irena Backus, "Calvin's Judgement of Eusebius of Caesarea: An Analysis," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22.3 (1991): 437; James R. Payton, "Calvin and the Libri Carolini," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 467–80; Lane, *John Calvin*, passim; Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378–1615)*, SMRT 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 115–16; Zachman, *John Calvin*, 119–21; Holder, *John Calvin*, 260–68.

*practicus*, as Mooi put it<sup>11</sup>—and that his controlling aim was the edification of the church. I will also suggest that his harsh portrayal of Josephus the man and his utilitarian approach to Josephus the historian, which seem at odds, are best explained by a complex interplay of factors, including the ecclesiastical legacy of Josephus, Calvin’s interactions with the writings of the church fathers, and broader sixteenth-century attitudes towards the Jews and Jewish literature.

## I. Calvin’s Citations of Josephus

### 1. General Evaluation of Josephus

Before we consider the ways in which Calvin appealed to or interacted with the writings of Josephus, it is useful to consider three instances in which Calvin commented more generally on the value of the Jewish historian. The most extreme judgment occurs in connection with the opening verse of the book of Daniel. In his version of this account, Josephus synchronizes the events with the close of Zedekiah’s reign, suggesting that Daniel’s deportation should be connected with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. rather than the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign (606 B.C.), as the book of Daniel reports.<sup>12</sup> This is not the place to enter into an extended discussion of this divergence, but it should be noted that the precise dating has long troubled biblical commentators, as Calvin himself also observes, so Josephus’s attempt to rescue the biblical narrative from what he saw as a chronological infelicity was not unusual. The judgment of Calvin comes, therefore, as somewhat of a shock:

Interpreters make many mistakes in this matter. Josephus, indeed says this was done in the eighth year, but he had never read the Book of Daniel. He was an unlearned man [*tam brutus homo*], and by no means familiar with the Scriptures; I think he had never read three verses of Daniel. It was a dreadful judgment of God for a priest to be so ignorant a man as Josephus.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the fact that Josephus never mentions the eighth year, Calvin’s conjecture that Josephus had not read the book of Daniel is demonstrably untrue. Josephus’s account follows the biblical narrative far too closely to

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<sup>11</sup> Mooi, *Het kerk-en dogmahistorisch element*. I have been unable to consult Mooi, but see Johannes van Oort, “John Calvin and the Church Fathers,” in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2:697; *De Kerkvaders in Reformatie en Nadere Reformatie* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1997), 81.

<sup>12</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 10.195; cf. 10.186.

<sup>13</sup> *Calvini opera* (hereafter, *CO*) 40:534 (Dan 1:1).

suggest that he was unfamiliar with the book itself.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as modern scholarship has amply shown, any reader of Josephus cannot fail to be impressed by the degree to which the figure of Daniel served as a type for the Jewish historian himself.<sup>15</sup> Far more surprising than Calvin's apparent unfamiliarity with Josephus's version of the biblical narrative, however, is his startlingly harsh condemnation of the Jewish historian. He pulls no punches. In particular, the accusation that the priest was generally ignorant of Scripture was a low blow and patently false.<sup>16</sup>

This was, moreover, not the only occasion on which Calvin directed rather harsh criticism at Josephus's level of learning. In his discussion of the etymology of the name Gilgal in the book of Joshua, Calvin follows the biblical explanation, translating it "rolling off."<sup>17</sup> Josephus, conversely, claims that the name meant "liberty," since the people recognized that they were now free from the Egyptians and their wanderings.<sup>18</sup> Calvin's judgment of the historian for taking liberties with the text is, again, excessive and unfair: "The interpretation of liberty, adopted by Josephus, is vain and ridiculous, and makes it apparent that he was as ignorant of the Hebrew tongue as of jurisprudence."<sup>19</sup> Josephus was likely not, in fact, ignorant of the Hebrew language.<sup>20</sup> As for the criticism of Josephus's knowledge of jurisprudence, it is unclear exactly why Calvin mentions this here. Perhaps he is thinking of his rejection of Josephus's division of the Law into two equal tables.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the case may be, Calvin's judgment of the Jewish historian is again striking in its negativity.

A far more balanced view appears in the final passage under this category. It occurs in the context of Calvin's explanation of the "seventy weeks" in

<sup>14</sup> See Geza Vermes, "Josephus' Treatment of the Book of Daniel," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42.2 (1991): 149–66; cf. Christopher Begg and Paul Spilsbury, *Judean Antiquities 8–10*, Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), *excursus* at *Ant.* 10.186–281.

<sup>15</sup> For references, see William den Hollander, *Josephus, the Emperors, and the City of Rome: From Hostage to Historian*, *AJEC* 86 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 103.

<sup>16</sup> See Josephus, *Life* 418; cf. *J.W.* 3.352; *Ag. Ap.* 1.54; Etienne Nodet, "Josephus and the Pentateuch," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods* 28.2 (1997): 191–92; "Josephus' Attempt to Reorganize Judaism from Rome," in *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method*, ed. Zuleika Rodgers, *SJSJ* 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 111–12; Den Hollander, *Josephus*, 172–74.

<sup>17</sup> *CO* 25:460 (Josh 5:9).

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 5.34; "liberty" serves as a leitmotif for Josephus throughout the *Antiquities*; see Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 148; Christopher Begg, *Judean Antiquities 5–7*, Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), n. 101 ad loc.

<sup>19</sup> *CO* 25:460 (Josh 5:9).

<sup>20</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 6.96; cf. den Hollander, *Josephus*, 142, 154–55, 292.

<sup>21</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 3.101; cf. 3.138; Calvin, *CO* 24:602 (Exod 20:12); *Institutes* 4.9.12.

Daniel's prophecy, which Jewish commentators in particular had interpreted in ways that excluded the possibility that the advent of Jesus Christ was here being predicted. Calvin criticizes a certain Rabbi Barbinel for his easy rejection of the evidence of Josephus, by which he appears to mean the general chronological framework provided by Josephus that Calvin himself used to confirm his particular interpretation.<sup>22</sup> More important for our purposes, however, is his subsequent admission: "I candidly confess that I cannot place confidence in Josephus either at all times or without exception [*non semper, nec absque exceptione*]."<sup>23</sup> While he does not here comment on the man Josephus, we receive a much more balanced reflection on the usefulness of the Jewish historian, an assessment that fits much more closely with Calvin's general approach to Josephus's works.

## **2. Use of Josephus for Filling out the Biblical Text**

It is immediately apparent that Calvin placed a high value on the testimony of Josephus, belying the harsh pronouncements quoted above. By far the most common form of citation was a simple reference to Josephus's writings, often to the specific book, where he had information that either supported or filled out the biblical narrative.<sup>24</sup> More substantial are those instances in which he used Josephus's writings, not altogether uncritically, to bolster the account of Scripture. For example, in the account of Gamaliel's speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5, the leading Pharisee specifically mentions two figures, Theudas and Judas the Galilean, in a chronological order that conflicts with Josephus's account. Calvin observes, "If we credit Josephus [*si fidus habetur Iosepho*], Gamaliel alters in this place the true course of history. ... The former history [Judas the Galilean] is recorded in the 18th book of *Antiquities*; and the other in the 20th."<sup>25</sup> Calvin reconciles the apparent discrepancy by suggesting that Gamaliel was speaking synchronically rather than diachronically, thereby upholding the corroborating nature of Josephus's accounts. Further on, Calvin uses Josephus to defend the historicity of the Egyptian man who led four thousand revolutionaries into the desert with

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Zachman, *John Calvin*, 121–22.

<sup>23</sup> CO 41:168 (Dan 9:24).

<sup>24</sup> CO 23:136–37 (Gen 8:3), 325 (Gen 23:11); 31:476 (Ps 48:7), 776 (Ps 83:6–9); 36:109 (Isa 5:10); 41:234 (Dan 11:13–14); 43:3 (Amos 1:1); 44:99 (Hag 2:2–6); 45:353 (Matt 12:42), 736 (Matt 26:57), 763 (Matt 27:29); 47:48 (John 2:20), 84 (John 4:20), 136 (John 6:17); 48:266 (Acts 12:1), 275 (Acts 12:21), 354 (Acts 15:13), 518 (Acts 24:2); 52:46 (Phil 3:5).

<sup>25</sup> CO 48:114 (Acts 5:36); cf. Judas the Galilean: Josephus, *Ant.* 18.4–10, 23; *J. W.* 2.118; Theudas: Josephus, *Ant.* 20.97.

whom the commander Claudius Lysias confused Paul.<sup>26</sup> Calvin is answering those who would conflate this figure with the Theudas mentioned above, creating issues with one of the two texts. Although Calvin himself questions details of Josephus's description of Theudas, he points to Josephus's account of the different Egyptian revolutionary prophet as "putting the matter out of doubt [*omnem dubitationem eximit*]" since "the history was fresh in memory [*recens erat historia*]."<sup>27</sup>

In his commentary on the Gamaliel episode, we can see how Calvin allowed the evidence of Josephus to affect his interpretation of the biblical narrative. He does so similarly with his explanation of Luke's description of Annas as high priest at Acts 4:5.<sup>28</sup> Since Josephus reports that the position of high priest was not taken from Caiaphas, who presided over Jesus's trial, until after Pilate was commanded to report to Rome some three years after the trial,<sup>29</sup> Calvin raises the question whether this passage in Luke needs to be dated significantly after the resurrection of Christ, which would appear to contradict the general flow of the narrative in the early chapters of Acts. It is now commonly understood that the title of high priest was not strictly applied only to those whom the Romans appointed, but that a figure such as Annas, who had ceased to be high priest *stricto sensu* in A.D. 15,<sup>30</sup> could continue to hold the title popularly and be referred to as such for purposes of prestige.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it is significant that Calvin esteemed Josephus's testimony enough to cause him to rethink the obvious sense of this passage.

One other way in which Calvin used Josephus should be singled out, namely, to demonstrate the fulfillment of prophecy. This could take the form of a brief reference—such as the dating of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prediction of Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of the Egyptians<sup>32</sup>—or a more lengthy treatment. In the latter category we can include Calvin's use of Josephus to defend the literal interpretation of Ezekiel's prediction that fathers would eat their sons and sons their fathers.<sup>33</sup> Some commentators, according to Calvin, had suggested that this should be understood allegorically, since they could not find external historical evidence for such an event. Calvin, however, pointed to Josephus's famous account of the "cannibal"

<sup>26</sup> Acts 21:37–38.

<sup>27</sup> CO 48:489 (Acts 21:37).

<sup>28</sup> CO 48:82 (Acts 4:5).

<sup>29</sup> See Josephus, *Ant.* 18.95, 123;

<sup>30</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 18.26, 34.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Helen K. Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 75.

<sup>32</sup> CO 39:276 (Jer 44:29–30).

<sup>33</sup> CO 40:126 (Ezek 5:9–10); cf. CO 38:329 (Jer 19:9); CO 39:560 (Lam 2:20).

Mary, who cooked and ate her own son during the later siege of Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> It is important to note here that for Calvin Josephus's account is merely corroborating evidence. The real argument is found in the biblical support of Jeremiah. Thus Scripture clearly stands far above the external historical evidence. At the same time, there is a clear place for the latter as well.

For the prophecies of Daniel, Calvin turns again to Josephus, among others, to demonstrate the accuracy of the prophet's predictions. Regarding the "forsakers of the holy covenant" who made agreements with Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Calvin writes,

Profane authors [*profanos scriptores*] inform us accurately of these occurrences, and besides this, a whole book of Maccabees gives us similar information, and places clearly before us what the angel here predicts. Everyone who wishes to read these prophecies with profit, must make himself familiar with these books, and must try to remember the whole history.<sup>35</sup>

Calvin demonstrates here his philosophy of the role of history in theology more generally, but he uses Josephus specifically after this general observation. He refers to the account of the construction of Onias's temple in Egypt, including Onias's claim to be fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of an altar in Egypt,<sup>36</sup> a detail found in a letter from Ptolemy to the Jewish leader that is cited explicitly by Josephus.<sup>37</sup> Thus Josephus's narrative serves as a prime example for Calvin of the usefulness of "profane authors" in explicating and filling out the biblical text.

Perhaps Calvin's favorite episode in Josephus's narratives for this purpose is the meeting between Alexander the Great and Jadus the high priest.<sup>38</sup> Calvin twice relates this story at length to illustrate God's gracious protection of his people, "to show that the church of God is preserved in the midst of dangers by strange and unusual methods."<sup>39</sup> The didactic value he placed on this episode is highlighted by its use in a sermon on Daniel 7:1–6 as well.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately for Calvin, though he had no doubt of its truthfulness, as indeed none of his contemporaries did, the account is almost certainly

<sup>34</sup> Josephus, *J. W.* 6.201–13; cf. Zachman, *John Calvin*, 119.

<sup>35</sup> CO 41:252 (Dan 11:29–30).

<sup>36</sup> Isa 19:19.

<sup>37</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 13.69–73.

<sup>38</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 11.325–39.

<sup>39</sup> CO 37:131–32 (Isa 45:4); see also CO 44:283 (Zech 9:16); cf. Zachman, *John Calvin*, 119.

<sup>40</sup> Sermon 11, CO 41:439; see E. A. De Boer, *John Calvin on the Visions of Ezekiel: Historical and Hermeneutical Studies in John Calvin's Sermons Inédits, Especially on Ezek. 36–48*, KB 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 211.

entirely legendary.<sup>41</sup> Calvin can hardly be criticized for accepting the historicity of this account, given his pre-Cartesian context, but it is important to recognize his general willingness to take Josephus's narratives at face value where they did not offer any challenge to Scripture.

### **3. Rejection or Criticism of Josephus's Description or Interpretation of Events**

Calvin did not, however, read Josephus's writings entirely uncritically. He was not only comfortable with criticizing Josephus for omitting what he saw as important historical details,<sup>42</sup> but also with rejecting Josephus's account outright in favor of (what he thought to be) Scripture's clear testimony. Thus Calvin rejects Josephus's addition to the narrative of Daniel that some of the youths entrusted to Ashpenaz, called in the biblical account the chief eunuch or chief of the eunuchs, were themselves castrated.<sup>43</sup> This tradition, which appears also in rabbinic literature,<sup>44</sup> was apparently derived from 2 Kings 20:18 and Isaiah 39:7, where the prophet prophesies to Hezekiah that, "some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away; they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (NIV). Calvin does not appear to be aware of this connection or the general rabbinic tradition since he focuses on reinterpreting the characterization of Ashpenaz as "chief eunuch" to mean simply "chief of the officials of the court," a more general use of the term that has support elsewhere in Scripture.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, he mischaracterizes Josephus's account by stating, "Josephus ignorantly [*inscite*] declares these Jewish children to have been made eunuchs,"<sup>46</sup> ignoring the fact that Josephus only claims that *some* had been castrated.

Other instances in which Calvin rejects Josephus's version of the biblical narrative can be adduced as well. In his *Commentary* on Exodus, Calvin

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<sup>41</sup> For discussion of this legendary account, see, e.g., Arnaldo Momigliano, "Flavius Josephus and Alexander's Visit to Jerusalem," *Athenaeum* 57 (1979): 442–48; Gerhard Delling, "Alexander der Grosse als Bekenner des jüdischen Gottesglaubens," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 12.1 (1981): 1–51; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Alexander the Great and Jaddus the High Priest According to Josephus," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 7 (1983): 41–68.

<sup>42</sup> Regarding the well-known "Murder of the Innocents," "Josephus makes no mention of this history. . . . Josephus certainly ought not to have passed over a crime so worthy of being put on record" (CO 45:99 [Matt 2:16]).

<sup>43</sup> CO 40:537 (Dan 1:3); re Josephus, *Ant.* 10.186.

<sup>44</sup> B. Sanh. 93b; cf. Jerome, *Explanatio in Daniele* on Dan 1:3; *Adversus Iovianum libri II* 1.25; Origen, *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 14:14; *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 15:5.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Gen 37:36; 40:2, 7.

<sup>46</sup> CO 40:537 (Dan 1:3).

writes, “Josephus falsely conjectures [*falso existimat*] that the midwives were Egyptian women, sent out as spies; whereas Moses expressly [*diserte*] says, that they had been the assistants and attendants of the Hebrew women in their travail.”<sup>47</sup> Although he is fair in rejecting Josephus’s alteration of the ethnicity of the midwives, which the Hebrew text does not allow,<sup>48</sup> Calvin’s rendering of Josephus’s account is hardly charitable here. First of all, his use of the word “spies” to characterize Josephus’s description of these women is misleading. Josephus simply reports that the Pharaoh wanted them to observe the births closely.<sup>49</sup> As for his claim that these were Egyptian rather than Hebrew midwives, Josephus may have found it difficult to believe that Pharaoh would have counted on Hebrew midwives to carry out his orders, as is suggested by his gloss, “For he ordered that they should be delivered of children by these who because of kinship were not likely to transgress the wish of the king.”<sup>50</sup> Calvin, for his part, does not address this issue, demonstrating instead a clear readiness to reject any interpretation that is not strictly faithful to the biblical account.

On another occasion Calvin reports the apparent discrepancy between Josephus’s dating of the census under the Syrian governor P. Sulpicius Quirinius to the “thirty-seventh year after the victory at Actium” (A.D. 6),<sup>51</sup> and the account of Jesus’s birth in Luke, which is said to have occurred in the midst of a census that took place while Quirinius was indeed governor of Syria but also during the reign of Herod the Great, long dead in A.D. 6.<sup>52</sup> As Calvin points out, a birth in A.D. 6 would also complicate another time reference provided by Luke, namely that it was in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar that John the Baptist began his public ministry.<sup>53</sup> In Calvin’s view the two accounts are irreconcilable and the solution to the historical problem clear. He writes, “As the age of Christ is too well known to be called in question, it is highly probable that, in this and many other passages of Josephus’ *History*, his recollection had failed him [*memoria lapsum fuisse*].”<sup>54</sup> Here again, then, Calvin chooses to dismiss Josephus’s divergent

<sup>47</sup> CO 24:17 (Exod 1:15).

<sup>48</sup> Exod 1:15; *contra* Etienne Nodet, *Flavius Josephus, Les Antiquités Juives, Vol. 1: Livres I à III* (Paris: Cerf, 1992), ad loc.

<sup>49</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 2.206; see Louis H. Feldman, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*, Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), n. 583 ad loc.

<sup>50</sup> See Josephus, *Ant.* 2.207. The translators of the LXX may have shared this supposition, since they leave the ethnicity of the midwives unspecified in the Greek and do not follow the precision of the original.

<sup>51</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 18.26; cf. Acts 5:12.

<sup>52</sup> Luke 2:1–2; cf. 1:5.

<sup>53</sup> CO 45:71–72 (Luke 2:1); cf. Luke 3:1.

<sup>54</sup> CO 45:71–72 (Luke 2:1).

account out of hand in order to maintain the straightforwardness of the biblical narrative.

A final example concerns the imprisonment of John the Baptist, covered in both the Synoptic Gospels and Josephus.<sup>55</sup> While Josephus names Herodias's previous husband Herod, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark call him Philip. This sharp discrepancy must have seemed to Calvin to be insurmountable, since he writes, "As [Josephus's] recollection appears to have failed him [*memoria lapsus deprehenditur*] in this matter, and as he mentions also Philip's death out of its proper place, the truth of the history will be obtained with greater certainty [*certior historiae veritas*] from the Evangelists, and we must abide by their testimony."<sup>56</sup> A better example of Calvin's approach cannot be offered than this.

## II. Evaluation: Calvin, Josephus, and History

Evaluating Calvin's attitude towards history on the basis of the foregoing examination of his citations of Josephus is a relatively simple affair, largely because his use of Josephus fits squarely within his general approach to history. For Calvin history was, above all else, useful. Its usefulness was, however, directly contingent on the extent to which it deepened the knowledge of Scripture. Thus, the characterization of Calvin as *historicus practicus* rings true also for the Reformer's approach to the writings of Josephus. Inasmuch as these works allowed him to unlock meaning in the text or confirm its contents, they were highly esteemed. Whenever and wherever he felt they detracted from the message of Scripture, however, they were readily rejected. The goal was the edification of the church. Thus Holder's observation serves equally well here: "John Calvin used history for his own purposes. His mind was far removed from the Rankean ideal and belonged to the sixteenth-century world of thought. For Calvin, the reading of history belonged to the sphere of theology."<sup>57</sup> There is a clear parallel, then, between Calvin's use of Josephus and his use of the *testimonia patrum* in that both are subordinated as authorities to Scripture itself, in keeping with the Reformers' principle of *sola Scriptura*.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Matt 14:3–12; Mark 6:17–29; Luke 3:19; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.109–19, 136–37.

<sup>56</sup> *CO* 45:137 (Luke 3:19).

<sup>57</sup> Holder, *John Calvin*, 263. See also, Fischer, *Jean Calvin*, 386; Payton, "Calvin," 467; van Oort, "John Calvin," 697; *De kerkvaders*, 81; Backus, *Historical Method*, 2; Zachman, *John Calvin*, 119, 121.

<sup>58</sup> On Calvin and the church fathers more generally, see Lane, "Calvin's Use," 149–205; van Oort, "John Calvin," 661–700; Lane, *John Calvin*; Jean-François Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, trans. Karin Maag (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2005), 156–78.

As with the church fathers, then, Calvin's use of Josephus is also highly selective and practical. He was interested in Josephus's works not so much for their own sake, but for what they could offer the interpreter of Scripture. Consequently, he may have been content to rely at least in part on intermediaries for his citations of Josephus. In the case of the church fathers, handbooks of quotations such as the *Decretum Gratiani* or Peter Lombard's *Libri IV sententiarum* were very useful, particularly early on in Calvin's writing career.<sup>59</sup> As for the writings of Josephus, we can imagine that Calvin received some of his citations filtered through the writings of others, either early or contemporary, such as Jerome, Luther, Erasmus, and Bucer, and even opponents such as Pighius and Westphal.<sup>60</sup> We cannot necessarily assume from his citations that Calvin had read Josephus's writings in their entirety.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time, we should not discredit the possibility that he did read all of Josephus's corpus. Among the records of the catalogue of books in the public library in Geneva of 1572, eight years after Calvin's death and thirteen years after the foundation of the Genevan Academy, are a Greek and a Latin copy of at least a portion of Josephus's works.<sup>62</sup> Much of Calvin's impressive personal collection went to this library after his death.<sup>63</sup> It is impossible to say whether these editions of Josephus's works originated in Calvin's library, since the Greek copy is now lost, and the now fragmentary Latin edition, published by Erasmus and Sigismond Gelenius, has nothing to indicate ownership.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, what can be said is that copies of Josephus's writings were readily available in Geneva during Calvin's day, as another Greek copy that remains today in the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire of Geneva also attests.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the period from 1450 to 1700 more generally saw a virtual explosion of editions and translations of Josephus, surpassing those of Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch, or any

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<sup>59</sup> Lane, *John Calvin*, 47–49; John L. Thompson, "Calvin as Biblical Interpreter," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 65; Gilmont, *John Calvin*, 160, 166.

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, "Calvin," 65; Esther Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>61</sup> See Lane, *John Calvin*, 1–13. This would explain the incorrect citations or mistaken readings that are present in the commentaries, which space does not permit me to include in the present study; see, e.g., CO 24:319 (Lev 13:2); 45:526 (Luke 9:52), 648 (Matt 24:1); 48:264 (Acts 11:28); 49:40 (Rom 2:17).

<sup>62</sup> See Alexandre Ganoczy, *La bibliothèque de l'Académie de Calvin* (Geneva: Droz, 1969), 167, no. 25; 179, no. 60; cf. de Boer, *John Calvin*, 212, n. 49.

<sup>63</sup> Gilmont, *John Calvin*, 135–53.

<sup>64</sup> Ganoczy, *La bibliothèque*, 179.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

other Greek historian.<sup>66</sup> Printings of these editions and translations were in even greater numbers and demonstrate clearly Josephus's popularity during this time period. It would not be surprising, therefore, if Calvin also had first-hand access to Josephus's writings. He himself assumed that they were available to his readers, since he suggests that they read further on their own on at least a couple of occasions.<sup>67</sup> We should likely imagine, therefore, that Calvin's exposure to Josephus was at least in part direct. That is not to say, however, that he had a copy of the *Antiquities* on his desk as he was writing his *Commentaries*. The mistaken citations would suggest that, as with the church fathers,<sup>68</sup> Calvin was content to rely on his prodigious memory. The interpretation of the text and the edification of his readers were his main goals, not the accuracy of his citations. He was, after all, a *historicus practicus*.

But this does not yet provide the whole picture. We have not yet reconciled the tension between the harsh characterizations of Josephus himself and the generally high value that was placed on his writings. I would argue that the explanation can be found in a number of competing historical lines. First of all, the high regard for Josephus, apart from the inherent usefulness of his narratives, can be explained by the legacy of the Jewish historian. Largely abandoned by his compatriots, Josephus was quickly adopted by the church and was highly esteemed by the early writers.<sup>69</sup> Most importantly, however, he was elevated to a quasi-Christian status that afforded him room among the church fathers. Jerome included a chapter on Josephus in his catalogue of Christian literature,<sup>70</sup> while the influential Cassiodorus included Josephus among the church writers Eusebius, Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret.<sup>71</sup> As Schreckenberg put it, he possessed the *ecclesiastica gravitas* of a church father.<sup>72</sup>

The pinnacle of his acceptance in Christian circles must be the Syrian translation of his *Jewish War* in the fourth and fifth centuries, of which the sixth book was incorporated largely into the Syrian Vulgate (*Peshitta*) as the

<sup>66</sup> Peter Burke, "A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450–1700," *History and Theory* 5.2 (1966): 135–52 (esp. 138, Table 3); cf. Feldman, *Studies*, 239; Leoni, "Translations," 481–92.

<sup>67</sup> *CO* 45:652 (Matt 24:8); *CO* 48:177 (Acts 8:5).

<sup>68</sup> Thompson, "Calvin," 65.

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., Jerome, *Epistulae* 22.35.

<sup>70</sup> Jerome, *De Viris illustribus* 13; see Schreckenberg and Schubert, *Jewish Historiography*, 77, "he has become, as it were, a Christian author."

<sup>71</sup> Cassiodorus, *Institutes* 1.17.1; cf. Eva M. Sanford, "Propaganda and Censorship in the Transmission of Josephus," *Transaction and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 66 (1935): 131; Schreckenberg and Schubert, *Jewish Historiography*, 77.

<sup>72</sup> Schreckenberg and Schubert, *Jewish Historiography*, 77.

“fifth book of the Maccabees.”<sup>73</sup> Thus Harnack observes, “Here Josephus has truly become part of the canon.”<sup>74</sup> This was exceptional. More typical are the illustrations in manuscripts of Josephus’s works from the eleventh and twelfth centuries that depict the Jewish historian in a uniquely Christian manner.<sup>75</sup> One, in a Latin manuscript of the *Antiquities* from the Stavelot abbey, has Josephus pictured in precisely the same manner as the Church Father Jerome, similar to the Old Testament prophets, evangelists, or other church fathers. The other shows Josephus standing before a seated Christian scribe/monk holding open the *Antiquities* to the beginning of the famous *Testimonium Flavianum*,<sup>76</sup> cast in the form of the biblical prophets, who in medieval illustrated Bibles are frequently depicted presenting the Christ prophecy in their own writings.

It is not surprising, then, that during the sixteenth century we also find Josephus firmly ensconced among the church fathers. In his *Ratio formandorum studiorum*, Stephan Praetorius (1536–1603), a theologian and pastor, advised young men interested in studying theology to read the church fathers, beginning, in Greek, with the ecclesiastical histories of Josephus, Eusebius, Theodoret, and Nicephorus Callixtus, followed by the other fathers roughly according to date of composition.<sup>77</sup> We can fully understand, therefore, that Josephus should serve as an authority alongside these church fathers also in the writings of Calvin, for whom direct citations indicated a measure of respect. Scholastic and contemporary authors were not generally afforded that dignity, nor were all those anonymous writers included under such umbrella terms as “the Jews” or “the ancients.”<sup>78</sup> Josephus was special, much in the way that the church fathers were.

Whence then Calvin’s more critical, and even opprobrious, use of Josephus? This can best be explained by two significant elements of Calvin’s contemporary situation. The first of these relates to sixteenth-century humanist scholarship, in particular the work of Sebastian Castellio.<sup>79</sup> Castellio valued

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>74</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893), 1.859.

<sup>75</sup> See Schreckenberg and Schubert, *Jewish Historiography*, 90 and Plate 2, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 18.63–64.

<sup>77</sup> Stephan Praetorius, *Ratio formandorum studiorum*, 30–31; cf. Backus, *Historical Method*, 272–73.

<sup>78</sup> Thompson, “Calvin,” 65; see also Lane, “Calvin’s Use,” 159–65; *John Calvin*, 28–32; Gilmont, *John Calvin*, 157.

<sup>79</sup> See Irena Backus, “Moses, Plato and Flavius Josephus. Castellio’s Conceptions of Sacred and Profane in his Latin Versions of the Bible,” in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars, and their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 143–66; cf. Bernard Cottrett, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 127–32.

the writings of Josephus highly. His first publication was a bilingual (Greek-Latin) collection of excerpts of Josephus's writings for young scholars to teach them not only the languages but also piety. He also made excellent use of Josephus as an aid and guide for biblical chronology. This much was unobjectionable. Where he raised the ire of certain Genevan circles, however, was in producing a Latin Bible that included extracts from Josephus to create chronological continuity, particularly for the period between the testaments.<sup>80</sup> While he clearly separated the Josephan excerpts from Scripture by printing the former in smaller characters without commentary and in a stilted translation, the fact was that his cavalier approach to the letter of Scripture did serious damage to the concept of canonicity, the Reformers' principle of *sola Scriptura*, and the long-standing tradition of the early church.<sup>81</sup> He was not, moreover, the first to attempt this.<sup>82</sup> Although Calvin's objections to Castellio cannot be tied directly to this specific abuse of Scripture,<sup>83</sup> it may have played a role in his conflict with the humanist scholar. One can well imagine that such misuse of Josephus's works would have left a bad taste in Calvin's mouth, so that he himself took pains to prevent his readers from receiving the wrong impression of the relative significance of the Jewish historian.

This certainly would explain Calvin's caution in citing Josephus and his readiness to explicitly reject his interpretation of the biblical narrative. It does not, however, fully account for the level of aversion towards Josephus that Calvin displays on the two occasions quoted above. This might best be explained by the widespread anti-Semitism of that period. For, as much as he may have been adopted into the ranks of the church fathers, Josephus remained a Jew. Calvin was not, therefore, entirely free from the anti-Semitism of the period. While it is not possible here to consider the degree to which Calvin himself was complicit in this anti-Semitism, a debated point,<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *La Bible nouvellement translätée, avec la suite de l'histoire depuis le temps d'Esdras jusqu'aux Maccabées: et depuis les Maccabées jusqu'à Christ* (Basel: Jean Hervage, 1555).

<sup>81</sup> Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 231; Backus, *Historical Method*, 119, 128; "Moses," 164.

<sup>82</sup> Backus, "Moses," 158–59.

<sup>83</sup> A copy of the *Biblia Castilionis* is listed on the 1572 catalogue of the Geneva Academy Library; see Ganoczy, *La Bibliothèque*, 174, no. 43; cf. Gilmont, *John Calvin*, 141.

<sup>84</sup> See, e.g., on the more sympathetic side, Horst Krüger, *Erben des Evangeliums: Calvin und die Juden* (Kampen: Kok, 1985); Calvin Augustus Pater, "Calvin, the Jews, and the Judaic Legacy," in *In Honor of John Calvin: Papers from the 1986 International Calvin Symposium*, ed. E. J. Furcha (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1987), 256–96; Jack Hughes Robinson, *John Calvin and the Jews* (New York: Lang, 1992); on the more critical side: Jacques Courvoisier, "Calvin und die Judentum: Zu einem Streitgespräch," in *Christen und Juden: Ihr Gegenüber vom Apostelkonzil bis heute*, ed. Wolf Dieter and Karl Thieme (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1961),

it will be helpful to provide two examples of Calvin's own comments regarding the Jews that provide a clear background for his characterization of Josephus.<sup>85</sup> Calvin writes, "The Jews are not only very ignorant of everything, but are also very stupid—then they have no sense of shame, and are endowed with a perverse audacity ... they neglect all history, and mingle and confound things perfectly clear and completely distinct."<sup>86</sup> And elsewhere, "God has so blinded the whole people that they were like impudent dogs. I have had much conversation with many Jews: I have never seen either a drop of piety or a grain of truth or ingenuousness—no, I have never found common sense in any Jew."<sup>87</sup>

While we cannot and should not downplay the distastefulness of these outbursts, it is important to recognize that Calvin's judgment arises within the context of his defense of a Christian interpretation of biblical prophecy. For Calvin, as we have seen, the truth of Scripture is paramount and must be upheld at all costs. It is at these defensive moments that his passion gets the best of him and he resorts to the anti-Semitic rhetoric of his age. We should not be entirely surprised, then, that Josephus, who could be seen to make equally objectionable interpretations of Scripture, should be the object of such vitriol. Thus, also in the estimations of Calvin, Josephus failed to escape the polarizing sentiments he has always seemed to inspire.

## Concluding Thoughts

Even with these negative pronouncements against Josephus, the overwhelming impression that this study of Calvin's use of Josephus leaves is that the theologian placed a high value on the testimony of the historian, an assessment inherited from the early church. What made Calvin's reception of this legacy doubly significant was Calvin's own profound influence on the children of the Reformation. His vision was that all Christians were to be students of Scripture, daily committed to plumbing its depths.<sup>88</sup> For him, a

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141–46; Anne Jippe Visser, *Calvijn en de Joden* ('s Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1963); Salo W. Baron, "John Calvin and the Jews," in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 380–400. For a balanced approach, see Achim Detmers, "Calvin, the Jews, and Judaism," in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 197–217; David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 207–34.

<sup>85</sup> See Zachman, *John Calvin*, 119–21.

<sup>86</sup> CO 41:217–18 (Dan 11:2).

<sup>87</sup> CO 40:605 (Dan 2:44–45).

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Sermon 25, CO 51:55 (Eph 4:11–12).

thorough knowledge of history could only enhance that understanding and, thus, the inheritance was passed on. One scholar has even suggested that Josephus was placed on a list of acceptable Sunday readings in Calvin's Geneva.<sup>89</sup> If this was the case, it was a tradition that continued for some time. For among the Puritans the writings of Josephus also held a special place of honor, often occupying a special place on the shelf alongside the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>90</sup> Apparently their Sabbath regulations also made Josephus an exception to the ban on reading anything but the Bible.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, when they made the trek to the New World, the book most likely to be tucked away among their worldly possessions was Whiston's translation of Josephus.<sup>92</sup> And so the legacies of Calvin and Josephus continued to intertwine.

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<sup>89</sup> Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Jews: History, Memory, and the Present*, trans. David Ames Curtis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 53.

<sup>90</sup> Norman Bentwich, *Josephus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1914), 141.

<sup>91</sup> Sanford, "Propaganda," 145; Louis H. Feldman, "Editor's Preface," in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 14; cf. *Josephus and Modern Scholarship*, 802, 973; Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Flavius Josephus: Eyewitness to Rome's First-Century Conquest of Judea* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 229.

<sup>92</sup> Ben Zion Wacholder, "Josephus, Flavius," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael David Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 384.



# Calvin and Later Reformed Theologians on the Image of God

SEUNG-GOO LEE

## Abstract

Even though John Calvin, in contrast with other theologians, presented a biblical view of the image of God, several aspects of his thought raise questions, including his language about the body as the prison of the human soul and his view of women as the image of God in a subsidiary sense. Several Reformed theologians have learned from Calvin's understanding of the *imago Dei* and corrected his concept by refining it. This paper proposes a theological development in our understanding of the *imago Dei*.

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**T**his article presents how the *imago Dei* developed from the medieval understanding through Calvin's theological contributions, leading on to later Reformed presentations. Rather than an ahistorical approach to Calvin, his theological development will be considered from a Reformed perspective.

## I. Calvin's Contribution to the understanding of the Imago Dei

As is the case with other theological themes, Calvin's formulation of the *imago Dei* is an important contribution to the development of theology.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a very thorough and precise investigation of this issue, see Jason Van Vliet, *Children of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and His Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

The following points are important for our understanding of this concept.

Firstly, for Calvin “image” and “likeness” mean the same thing. This is not typically a Calvinian but a Protestant contribution, for both Calvin and Luther, as well as many of their followers, are of the same opinion.<sup>2</sup> They differ from the Roman Catholic understanding of the “image” and the “likeness” of God, as do some Jewish scholars. So this is rather a Judeo-Protestant contribution to the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

Secondly, Calvin provides a foundation for the *imago Dei* as a reflection of God. He describes the *imago Dei* in Adam as “mirroring” God’s righteousness: “Adam was at first created in the image of God, so that he *might reflect, as in a mirror*, the righteousness of God.”<sup>3</sup> In order to have a rounded definition of “image” we have to think of “the reflection of God’s glory.”<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, Calvin finds the *imago Dei* in the whole person, a view especially opposed to that of Andreas Osiander (1498–1552). Calvin says, for example, that “there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.”<sup>5</sup> This is why he says in the first part of his discussion of the *imago Dei* in the *Institutes* that “God’s glory shines forth in the outer man.”<sup>6</sup> The *imago Dei* concerns the whole person, despite Calvin’s tendency to see the soul as being superior to the body. In this respect, Calvin is more biblical than earlier theologians, from Irenaeus to Abelard, and his contemporaries, such as Bullinger and Melancthon.<sup>7</sup>

Fourthly, Calvin describes the *imago Dei* in narrower and broader senses, saying that it “can be nowhere better recognized than from the restoration of his corrupted nature.”<sup>8</sup> In this respect Calvin draws out true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness from Colossians 3:10, as well as Ephesians 4:24, as the “original righteousness” (*justitia originale*) that was totally destroyed in

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<sup>2</sup> For Martin Luther’s view of the image of God, see his *Lectures on Genesis*, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:60ff. Also Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 7, 67; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 203–4; Seung-Goo Lee, *What Is the Christian World-View?* Revised Korean edition (Seoul: SFC, 2005), 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), Eph 4:24 (296); cf. 2 Cor 3:18 (49). Henceforth “Calvin, *Comm.*,” followed, as here, by the Scripture reference and the page number in parentheses.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.15.4 (189). Henceforth Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (189). The number in parentheses is the page number of the Battles edition. See also Calvin, *Comm.* Col 3:10 (211–12), *Comm.* 1 Cor 11:7 (357).

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (186).

<sup>7</sup> For this, see Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 258.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (189).

the fall of Adam but restored in Christ.<sup>9</sup> But Calvin does not think that “original righteousness” alone is the *imago Dei*, for he says “these forms of speaking are synecdoches.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, “this likeness ought to be sought only in those marks of excellence with which God had distinguished Adam over all other living creatures,”<sup>11</sup> and “the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man’s nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures.”<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Calvin makes a redemptive-historical presentation of the *imago Dei*, beginning by considering the original state. Calvin then emphasizes that the original upright nature in which the human being was created is marred by sin, evidenced in the corruption and deformity of our nature: “There is no doubt that Adam, when he fell from his [original] state, was by this defection alienated from God.”<sup>13</sup> This is Adam’s spiritual death. “God’s image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity (*horrenda sit deformitas*).”<sup>14</sup> However, he adds, “We are restored by this regeneration through the benefit of Christ into the righteousness of God; from which we had fallen through Adam.”<sup>15</sup> And again, “Therefore in some part it [the image of God] now is manifest in the elect, in so far as they have been reborn in the spirit; but it will attain its full splendor in heaven.”<sup>16</sup> We can now know what that original state was like and what it is to be the image of God now only on the basis of restoration through the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Hence it is clear that Calvin’s concept of the *imago Dei* is a redemptive-historical one.<sup>17</sup>

## II. *Problematic Aspects of Calvin’s Concept of the Imago Dei*

Nobody, however, has a complete understanding of the themes of the *loci communes*, and Calvin’s concept of the *imago Dei* is a case in point, since he was a child of his times, as the following considerations illustrate.

### 1. *The Soul as the Primary Seat of the Imago Dei*

In spite of Calvin’s contribution of finding the *imago Dei* in the whole person, he emphasizes that the soul is the primary seat of the *imago Dei*:

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94). See also *Institutes*, 1.15.4 (189–90).

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (189). See also *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94).

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.12.6 (471).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (189).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.3.9 (601).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>17</sup> See also Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 259.

“*The primary seat* of the divine image is in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers.”<sup>18</sup> He adds, “Therefore, although the soul is not man, yet it is not absurd for man, in respect to his soul, to be called God’s image,”<sup>19</sup> and again, “For although God’s glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul.”<sup>20</sup> For Calvin, therefore, “the soul and its endowments—is called God’s image.”<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps Calvin’s assertions that “the spirit must be the seat of this intelligence”<sup>22</sup> and that “God’s image is properly to be sought within him, not outside him, indeed, it is an inner good of the soul”<sup>23</sup> also reflect this perspective. He explains in many places that the function of the soul is to understand and to will: “God’s image was visible in the light of the mind, in the uprightness of heart, and in the soundness of all the parts.”<sup>24</sup> So his explanation of the *imago Dei* is related to what Thomas Aquinas thought of the *imago Dei*, as both of them closely related the image of God to the soundness of the mind and the uprightness of the heart. Observe Calvin’s following description of Adam: “The integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word [*imago*], when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affection kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.”<sup>25</sup> However Calvin’s position is more redemptive-historical than that of Thomas, who had a more static understanding of the image of God, failing to recognize the noetic effects of sin, whereas Calvin is adamant on this point.

Calvin was emphatic about the spiritual aspect of the *imago Dei* and goes so far as to affirm that it is unscriptural to find the *imago* in the body.<sup>26</sup> But there is a more serious problem in Calvin’s thought at this point.

## **2. The Soul as the “Nobler Part” and the Body as “Prison of the Soul”**

Calvin calls the soul “the principal part” of the human being, “his nobler part.” Calvin even says that “the soul is *endowed with essence*” and what the body does is “*a motion devoid of essence*.”<sup>27</sup> Even though we can understand

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (186).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.2 (185).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (189).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (188); this citation contains assertions with Platonic connotations.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94).

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.2 (184–85).

why he said this from the context, it is quite natural to ask what he had in mind. This question reaches its high point on the many occasions when he uses the expression “prison of the body”:

For so long as we live cooped up in this prison of our body, traces of sin will dwell in us; but if we faithfully hold fast to the promise given us by God in baptism, they shall not dominate or rule.<sup>28</sup>

But no one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength to press on with due eagerness, and weakness so weighs down the greater number that, with wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble rate.<sup>29</sup>

Since we hope for what we do not see [Rom. 8:25], and, as is elsewhere stated, “faith is the indication of things unseen” [Heb. 11:1], so long as we are confined in the prison house of the flesh (*carnis ergastulo ... inclusi*), “we are away from the Lord” [2 Cor. 5:6].<sup>30</sup>

Following this line of thinking, Calvin even said that “when the soul is freed from the prison house of the body, God is its perpetual guardian,” and that “unless souls survive when freed from the prison house of their bodies, it would be absurd for Christ to induce the soul of Lazarus as enjoying bliss in Abraham’s bosom.”<sup>31</sup> This Pythagorean and Platonic expression<sup>32</sup> comes to Calvin through Neoplatonism and Augustine. This is vivid evidence that Calvin was of his time. He even uses the words that look like what we can find in the writings of Plato: “If to be freed from the body is to be released into perfect freedom, what else is the body but a prison?”<sup>33</sup>

In the same way Calvin spoke of human body as “an earthly vessel”: “God willed it [the body] to be the abode of an immortal spirit.”<sup>34</sup> For Calvin, the body is the habitation of the nobler part of human being, the soul.<sup>35</sup> He could also say that the regeneration of the soul does not affect the body before the resurrection.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>28</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 4.18 (98); Calvin, *Institutes* 4.15.11 (1312).

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.6.5 (689).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.25.1 (987).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.2 (184, 186).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 62 B, 81 E, 82 E, 83 A; *Cratylus*, 400.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.9.4 (716). Cf. Plato. *Phaedo* 64 A, 80 E. For this I rely on information provided by Battles in his edition.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.1 (184).

<sup>35</sup> For a good discussion that for Calvin the body is basically the habitation of the soul, see Margaret R. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74.3 (1981), 310–11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 311 on this point. When Miles quotes *Institutes* 2.3.1 saying that “he is not teaching a rebirth as regards the body” (p. 311, n. 42), she fails to respect the context of the passage.

In many places Calvin treats the body negatively or regards it as something evil that must be checked. But when he refers to the resurrected body, this negative approach is overcome. In this sense, Jason Van Vliet is quite right when he says that “Calvin the reformer is not as negative about the body as Plato the philosopher was.”<sup>37</sup> However, some Platonistic expressions are still there, even though they are marginal.

### 3. Angels as Also Created According to God’s Image

Although Calvin is more cautious than Thomas Aquinas,<sup>38</sup> he thinks that angels are also created in the image of God and so stands in the same tradition:

And indeed, we ought not to deny that angels were created according to God’s likeness, inasmuch as our highest perfection, as Christ testifies, will be to become like them [Matt. 22:30]. But by this particular title Moses rightly commends God’s grace toward us, especially when he compares only the visible creatures with man.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of Calvin’s caution and his desire to be biblical, it cannot be denied that he says that “the dignity that had been conferred upon man belonged also to the angels. ... The image of God belongs to them [angels] also.”<sup>40</sup>

### 4. Woman as the Image of God in a Secondary Degree

Against the opinion to the contrary, Calvin makes it clear that he considers woman to be created in the image of God.<sup>41</sup> However, he claims that the woman is the image of God “in a secondary degree” (*secundo gradu*).<sup>42</sup>

What does he mean by this secondary degree? Calvin seeks to take into account the context of 1 Corinthians 11:7. But he takes the expression “man is the image and glory of God” *too* literally when he says that “there is some sense in which woman does not share” the image of God.<sup>43</sup> He adds, “But the statement in which man alone is called by Paul ‘the image and glory of God’ and woman excluded from this place of honor [the image of God] is

<sup>37</sup> Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 259.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.93.3. Here Thomas says that the image of God is found more perfectly in angels, since the intelligence of angels is more perfect than the intelligence of human beings. For a discussion and critique of this point, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 36.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3 (188–89).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.12.6 (471). Calvin uses image sometimes in the less technical sense of a reflection or mirror of God’s character. Contrast this with later Reformed theologians’ views.

<sup>41</sup> See Calvin, *Comm.* Gen 1:27 (97); *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190); and *Comm.* 1 Cor 11:7 (232).

<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* Gen 2:18 (129).

<sup>43</sup> John L. Thompson, “*Creata as Imaginem Dei, Licet Secundo Gradu*: Woman as the Image of God According to John Calvin,” *Harvard Theological Review* 81.2 (1988): 134–35.

clearly to be restricted, as the context shows, to the political order.”<sup>44</sup> This is why in his letter to Bullinger he says, “A gynecocracy ... is like tyranny, which is to be endured until it is overthrown by God.”<sup>45</sup> He also says, “Because [female government] deviates from the first and original order of nature, it ought to be counted among those punishments which are inflicted upon mankind for neglecting [that order], just like slavery.”<sup>46</sup> It is clear that he excludes women from the honor of imaging God in some aspects of life. He “excludes woman from the image of God only with respect to ‘the political order’ (*ad ordinem politicum*) or ‘the domestic state’ (*oeconomicum statum*) or ‘the conjugal order’ (*ad ordinem coniugalem*).”<sup>47</sup>

It is, however, an open question whether this scriptural passage (1 Cor 11:7) has a connotation that excludes woman from the image of God in any sense. It deals with the question of the headship of the male representative of humanity. We can interpret this passage as presupposing that human beings—whether male or female—are all created in the image of God. Indeed, there is room for interpreting Calvin’s words in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:7 as supposing that all human beings are created in the image of God. From this perspective woman is equal with man in God’s eternal design and shares the image of God with man. Only from the human perspective related to the present life (*ad praesentam vitam*) does Calvin emphasize male headship.<sup>48</sup>

In this sense, Mary Potter’s discussion of Calvin’s shifting theological perspectives in his concept of the *imago Dei* is worth considering.<sup>49</sup> For, according to Calvin, the present order demanding the subordination of woman is “part of the form of this world which is passing.”<sup>50</sup> This is a better interpretation of Calvin’s ideas than that of John Thompson, who suggests that Calvin has two different definitions of the *imago Dei*: “Calvin, in fact,

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>45</sup> Calvin’s Letter to Bullinger [3 May 1554], quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 137, n. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Calvin’s Letter to Cecil [May 1559], quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 137, n. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, “*Creata*,” 131. I follow Thompson’s discussion on this point. These three phrases come from respectively Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190); *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (96); and *Comm. 1 Cor* 11:7 (232).

<sup>48</sup> The human perspective that is related to the present life does not have any meaning in eternity. For example, Calvin makes it clear that the marriage relationship has legal effects only in this world. For a good discussion on this point in the thought of Calvin, see Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Last Things*, trans. Harold Knight (Richmond: John Knox, 1955), 175: “[Marriage] is merely a temporal, not an eternal, fellowship”; Jane Dempsey Douglas, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 34.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Potter, “Gender Equality and Gender Hierarchy in Calvin’s Theology,” *Signs* 2 (1986): 731–32, quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 132, n. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Serm.* 1 Cor 11:4–10, quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 140.

has two distinct definitions of *imago Dei*. The first pertains equally to man and woman and has to do with the invisible, ‘inner good of the soul.’ ... Calvin’s second definition of *imago dei* pertains exclusively to man.”<sup>51</sup>

F. F. Bruce’s explanation of this passage contains a good insight: “Paul does not deny that woman also bears the image of God; indeed, he implies that she does by carefully avoiding complete parallelism in the following statement, ‘woman is the glory of man.’”<sup>52</sup>

In spite of his efforts to be faithful to scriptural ideas, Calvin appears to speak of woman in a demeaning way. Although he sets a time limit for this situation (“till the end of the world”), it is true that he says that “woman is a part of and like an accessory to man,”<sup>53</sup> and that “woman is by nature ... born to obey.”<sup>54</sup> In some aspects of life man is superior to woman and in some sense woman does not fully bear the image of God. This is another problematic aspect of Calvin’s concept of the *imago Dei*.

### III. *The Later Reformed Imago Dei Developed from Calvin*

Later Reformed theologians are not universally agreed in their explanations of the *imago Dei*, as might be expected. Several of them, however, do develop the Reformed tradition in a biblical way in their doctrines of the *imago Dei*. They tackle vulnerable aspects of Calvin’s thought by using what they learned from him and following him consistently to a logical conclusion. Four contributions are thus made to our understanding of the *imago Dei*.

#### 1. *The Imago Dei as the Whole Person*

Several later Reformed theologians are consistent in saying that the whole man is the *imago Dei*. Herman Bavinck is representative of this view:

a human being does not [simply] *bear* or *have* the image of God but ... he or she *is* the image of God. ... It follows from the doctrine of human creation in the image of God that this image extends to the whole person. Nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God. While all creatures display *vestiges* [traces] of God, only a human being is the *image* of God. And he is such totally, in soul and body, in

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<sup>51</sup> Thompson, “*Creata*,” 133. See also 142–43, where Thompson suggests that there is, for Calvin, “the *imago* as spiritual possession of both male and female” and also “the *imago* as the external possession of the male alone,” which is “a penultimate institution.”

<sup>52</sup> F. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians*, New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 105.

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *Serm.* 1 Tim 2:13–15, translated and quoted by Douglas, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin*, 55–56.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* 1 Tim 2:12 (67–68).

all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is truly human, and he is truly and essentially human because, and to the extent that, he is the image of God.<sup>55</sup>

In this way Bavinck makes it clear that both the human body and soul belong to the *imago Dei*. In another place he says, “Even the body is not excluded from the image of God.”<sup>56</sup> Again, critically alluding to Calvin’s view of the body, he says,

The human body belongs integrally to the image of God. ... The body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul. ... It is so integrally and essentially a part of our humanity that, though violently torn from the soul [in death] by sin, it will be reunited with it in the resurrection of the dead.<sup>57</sup>

For Bavinck, as we can clearly see, “the whole human person is the image of the whole Deity.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, “the whole human being is image and likeness of God, in soul and body, in all human faculties, powers, and gifts. Nothing in humanity is excluded from God’s image.”<sup>59</sup>

Francis Nigel Lee, a South African Reformed theologian now living in Australia, also makes this point clear. Following Bavinck, Lee says, “We would expect the image of God to cover the whole man, body *and* soul.”<sup>60</sup> Lee adds the following explanation:

The Bible teaches that man *is* the image of God, so that the whole man is the whole image, and the whole image is the whole man. Man does not just *bear* that image, as a porter bears a burden, for the image is not something *tacked onto* man as an afterthought, as it were, as if man ever did or ever could exist for a single second *without* the image. Nor is the image part of God, or only a reflection of *some* of the attributes of God, so that man only resembles God in *some* respects. No, rather does man resemble God in *all* aspects: *Everything* God has, man has too; but everything God has in a creative and independent way, man has only in a dependent and *creaturely* way.<sup>61</sup>

Together with Bavinck, Lee clearly maintains that human body is included in the image of God.

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<sup>55</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 554–55.

<sup>56</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 212.

<sup>57</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:559.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:533.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:561.

<sup>60</sup> Francis Nigel Lee, *The Origin and Destiny of Man* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 34.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

John Murray also says that people wrongly relate the *imago Dei* only to the soul, for God has no body: “But it is man in his unity and integrity who is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:7; 9:6). Man is body, and it is not possible to exclude man in this identity from the scope of that which defines his identity, the image of God.”<sup>62</sup>

Louis Berkhof, introducing Francis Turretin’s understanding of the *imago Dei*, is also of the opinion that the image consists in the soul or spirit of man, in the psychical powers or faculties of man as a rational being in the knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and in man’s bodily dominion over the earth.<sup>63</sup>

Anthony Hoekema, also agreeing with Bavinck, says, “If it is true that the whole person is the image of God, we must also include the body as part of the image. . . . When we think of man in connection with the various relationships in which he functions, we are confirmed in the conclusion that the image of God in man does not concern only a part (the ‘soul’ or the ‘spiritual’ aspect) but the entire person.”<sup>64</sup> It is true that not all of the later Reformed theologians are very clear on this point.<sup>65</sup> But there are many Reformed theologians who belong to the mainline Reformed party who are developing their concept of the *imago Dei* in a way that enables them to overcome Calvin’s ambiguous approach to the *imago Dei*.

## 2. A Positive Understanding of the Human Body

There are many later Reformed theologians who have completely overcome the Neoplatonic phrase “the body as the prison house of the soul”—and the dualistic tendency that can be developed from such a phrase—and speak of man as a psychosomatic unity.<sup>66</sup> Hence the ultimate state of the true believer is that of resurrection, not of uniquely spiritual existence in heaven. These

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<sup>62</sup> John Murray, “Man in the Image of God,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 39.

<sup>63</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 207.

<sup>64</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 68.

<sup>65</sup> For Reformed theologians who hold another view, see J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 169 (= *The Christian View of Man* [London: Banner of Truth, 1965], 145), who holds that the image of God refers to man’s soul. Ursinus, Polanus, Leydecker, Wollebianus, A. Diest, Marck, and Walaeus held a view similar to Machen’s. Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 234–37. Mastricht, Martinus, and Trelcatius found the image of God primarily in the soul, but also in the body as well (pp. 236–37).

<sup>66</sup> See especially John Murray, “Trichotomy,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:33; Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 217–18; and Henry Stob, *Ethical Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 226.

theologians affirm that the intermediate state where human beings do not have a body is “incomplete and provisional.”<sup>67</sup>

It is certain that later Reformed theologians highlight the positive nature of the human body, considering the body from the light of creation and also from the perspective of resurrection.

### 3. *Imago Dei in the Narrower and Broader Sense*

Most later Reformed theologians, following Calvin, consistently speak of the double aspect of the *imago Dei* in their presentation, indicating true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, as well as the rest of the image of God. Unlike the ideas of the *imago Dei* as the whole person and of the human body as a positive thing, this is taken from what Calvin suggested and developed with greater clarity. In the narrower sense (*sensu strictu*) the image is understood as “original righteousness” (*justitia originale*). Following the scriptural understanding of the *imago Dei*, the image in the narrower sense of original righteousness has been completely blotted out in the fall,<sup>68</sup> but the rest of the *imago Dei* is still there, although in the broader sense it has become deformed.<sup>69</sup>

In Christ, however, original righteousness is restored in principle, and at the same time the *imago Dei* in the broad sense is also renewed. In this way the later Reformed theologians help us to a proper understanding of what happened in the fall and what is restored in redemption.

### 4. *Imago Dei and the Exercise of Dominion*

One of the more important contributions of later Reformed theologians is their provision of a more complete understanding of the relationship between the *imago Dei* and dominion over the world. Calvin criticizes the view of those who understand the *imago Dei* as merely the exercise of dominion,<sup>70</sup> especially John Chrysostom, who identifies the *imago Dei* with “dominion” (*imperium* or *dominatus*). Calvin rejects Chrysostom’s explanation, arguing that the *imago Dei* is not the exercise of dominion over the world as God’s vice-regent, even though he allows that dominion is one aspect of the image of God.<sup>71</sup> In this way Calvin stands against the Socinian

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<sup>67</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 218; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), chaps. 17 and 20; and Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 722–23.

<sup>68</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 213; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 204, 207.

<sup>69</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 210; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 204.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>71</sup> Calvin, *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94).

understanding of the *imago Dei*;<sup>72</sup> he also stands against the functional approaches of more recent theology that consider the *imago Dei* as consisting principally in dominion even before these interpretations made their appearance.<sup>73</sup>

John Murray says that some Reformed theologians regard dominion as an element in the divine image but that “it would appear preferable, however, to regard dominion as a function or office based upon the specific character defined as the image of God.”<sup>74</sup> Sinclair Ferguson also comments that “in the exegesis of Gen. 1:26 given in 1:27–28, dominion is a *function* of man as God’s image, rather than a *definition* of the image itself.”<sup>75</sup> Hugh McDonald also points out that “our dominion is not the image, but we rule over the world because we are the images of God.”<sup>76</sup> Bavinck also makes clear that “such dominion is not a constituent element of the image of God. Nor does it, as some have maintained, constitute the whole content of that image.”<sup>77</sup> Rather, “the image comes to expression in the dominion and by means of it must more and more explain and unfold itself.”<sup>78</sup> So we must conclude, in agreement with Lee, that “man’s dominion is a necessary *result* of his being God’s image.”<sup>79</sup> Such an understanding of the relationship between the image of God and dominion over the world seems more accurate than the one that tries to see dominion as an element of the image of God.

## Conclusion

The issues raised by this article are meaningful primarily in the historical sense of how the development of Reformed theology in relation to the *imago Dei* has been carried out in light of Calvin’s influence; it is also meaningful in that it shows ways in which our theology might develop. Reformed theologians are not to simply repeat what their predecessors have said. Rather, they are to follow Calvin in correcting the church fathers’ and medieval

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Catechismus Racoviensis* (1574), 42; quoted in Lee, *The Origin and Destiny of Man*, 41, n. 41.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less than God: The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 27; and Walter Harrelson, *Interpreting the Old Testament* (New York: Holt, Reinhart & Weston, 1964), 51.

<sup>74</sup> Murray, “Man in the Image of God,” 41.

<sup>75</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Image of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 328.

<sup>76</sup> Hugh D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 36.

<sup>77</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 215.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>79</sup> Lee, *The Origin and Destiny of Man*, 41.

theologians' understanding of the *imago Dei* by providing a deeper biblical understanding of it. True Reformed theology is done only when it is faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures and correcting what is lacking in the previous generations' understanding of theological themes. Later Reformed theologians corrected Calvin's understanding using what they learned from Calvin himself in the case of the *imago Dei* as being the whole person and in the presentation of a positive biblical understanding of the human body. It is problematic both to disregard the biblical tradition and to merely reiterate the interpretations of past tradition. In light of this article, we look forward to the future of theology with an attitude similar to that shown by Calvin and later Reformed theologians in their own time.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For another suggestion regarding the way that theology should develop properly, see Seung-Goo Lee, "Proposal for an Apostolic, Biblical, Eschatological Theology: From a Korean Context," in *Religion without Ulterior Motive*, ed. E. A. J. G. Van der Borgh (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 164–68.



# The Enlightenment Bible in Antebellum America (1812–1831): Archibald Alexander’s Appraisal

ANNETTE G. AUBERT

## Abstract

This essay addresses the pioneering biblical scholarship of Archibald Alexander (1772–1851), the founding father of Princeton Theological Seminary, in the contexts of biblical criticism and the academic Bible that were being discussed and created at German universities. Alexander was among the first nineteenth-century American Presbyterian professors to interact with innovative research emerging from Europe, especially the work of Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791). He is worthy of research attention for establishing a central position for Princeton Theological Seminary in the field of biblical studies, as well as for interacting with the creators of the Enlightenment Bible while defending Calvinist theology and epistemology.

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In his description of modern biblical criticism and the “academic Bible,” Michael Legaspi discusses the ways that German universities in general and Johann Michaelis in particular re-created the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The enthusiasm that made the Protestant Reformation such a prolific period of biblical translation in Germany “still drove the early eighteenth-century invention” of critical scholarship—what one modern historian has called “the Enlightenment Bible.”<sup>2</sup> As innovative German critical scientific scholarship spread throughout Europe, and eventually crossed the Atlantic to America, the best theological minds in New England and Princeton became engaged with biblical criticism.<sup>3</sup> However, scholars disagree on precisely when North American academics engaged with the work of their European counterparts.<sup>4</sup> During the early nineteenth century, a small number of Princeton

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For providing access to manuscript collections, I am grateful to the archivist Kenneth Henke of the Archives at Princeton Theological Seminary.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5, 169.

<sup>2</sup> For a solid account of the modern history of European biblical scholarship, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry W. Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 8.

<sup>4</sup> In his essay, “The Higher Criticism Comes to America,” Ira Brown argues that discussions regarding historical criticism “did not begin until after 1880.” Ira V. Brown, “The Higher Criticism Comes to America, 1880–1900,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 38.4 (December 1960): 193–212. Jerry Brown associates the product of American biblical criticism in New England with American graduate students studying in Germany. Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America*, 8. Michael Lee’s *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty* argues that scholars were already examining the Bible critically in eighteenth-century America. Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4. In his excellent recent account on Jonathan Edwards, Douglas Sweeney notes that Edwards was familiar with early Bible critics such as Richard Simon and Jean LeClerc. Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19. Cf. Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Other recent historical research suggests that German critical scholarship had been considered and debated in the early decades of nineteenth-century America. Americans were introduced to German biblical scholarship via Unitarianism during that period, with the Unitarian pastor and scholar Joseph Stevens Buckminster, who was influenced by Johann Michaelis and introduced other German critical scholars and their works, including Johann Jakob Griesbach’s edition of the New Testament, to America. James Turner and Michael Lee assert that Griesbach’s publication of the American edition was a significant juncture—“a turning point in American church history in general and at Princeton in particular.” James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 216; Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty*, 108, 111, 124, 130. See also James P. Byrd, “The ‘New World’ of North America and Canada and the Globalization of Critical Biblical Scholarship,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø et al., vol. 3.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 171–202; Richard A. Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics*:

faculty members gave the first American responses to the new movement known as *neology*, which was associated with the Enlightenment Bible.<sup>5</sup>

Historiographical research on engagement with Bible criticism in the early decades of nineteenth-century America merits greater attention. Of particular interest in this essay is the early engagement of Archibald Alexander (1772–1851) with new trends in biblical criticism emerging from German universities. As inaugural lectures are important sources of academic genres, I will use the text of Alexander’s inaugural lecture to explain his engagement with biblical scholarship and enthusiastic interactions with his European peers.<sup>6</sup> Though practically forgotten today, in his 1812 inaugural lecture at Princeton he expressed what he believed were the key tenets of biblical scholarship and the essential epistemological aspects of the Enlightenment Bible and rational theology. I will use this lecture, unpublished texts of class lectures, and *The Canon of the Old and New Testament* (1826) to explain Alexander’s biblical scholarship and his interactions with critical scholarship while defending Calvinism.<sup>7</sup> As a conservative scholar, Alexander was interested in applying current discoveries and academic tools to arrive at a precise understanding of the Bible. My analysis of Alexander avoids what Robert Moore-Jumonville has called “the bipolar paradigm” of religious interpretation by modern scholars that attempts to place nineteenth-century biblical scholars into either “anti-critic” or “liberal” camps.<sup>8</sup> I will show that, unlike others, Alexander was ready to interact with modern biblical criticism.

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*Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the Bible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 62. For research on later biblical criticism in America, see Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (Vancouver, BC: Regent, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> For studies on the early interactions of Princeton professors with historical biblical criticism, see John William Stewart, “The Tethered Theology: Biblical Criticism, Common Sense Philosophy, and the Princeton Theologians, 1812–1860” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990), 82; see also Marion Ann Taylor, *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School (1812–1929)* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 1–87; Annette G. Aubert, “Nineteenth-Century Princeton Theology and European Scholarship,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Carl R. Trueman (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Archibald Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse, Delivered in the Church at Princeton, New Jersey, in the Presence of the Directors of the Theological Seminary, on the 12th of August 1812,” in *The Sermon Delivered at the Inauguration of the Rev. Archibald Alexander, P. P., As Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology: In the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, and Philip Milledoler (New York: Whiting & Watson, 1812).

<sup>7</sup> Archibald Alexander, *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained: Or, the Bible Complete, Without the Apocrypha & Unwritten Traditions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1826).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Moore-Jumonville, *The Hermeneutics of Historical Distance: Mapping the Terrain of American Biblical Criticism, 1880–1914* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), xxii, xxv, 2. Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 1:20–21.

## I. *Developments at German Universities: The Enlightenment Bible*

Understanding early nineteenth-century biblical scholarship in North America requires familiarity with developments occurring in eighteenth-century German universities. When Alexander started teaching at Princeton, American biblical studies were at an elementary stage, with no American scholars having spent time at German universities where biblical scholarship prospered outside of church control.<sup>9</sup> German scholars in various fields were under the influence of Immanuel Kant’s “philosophical distinction between the real and phenomenal worlds” and were interested in comprehending the real world by means of detailed empirical studies and rational investigations of “observed phenomena.”<sup>10</sup> Scholars working at the Prussian universities of Halle and Berlin acknowledged “the rational philosophy” of that period and supported the continuation of critical and rational “German philosophical scholarship.”<sup>11</sup>

The University of Halle, where leading Princeton professors studied, was at one time considered the focal point of “evangelical piety.” Leading German rationalist scholars, such as Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791) and Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791), received pietistic educations at Halle, but as their outlooks underwent fundamental changes, and as key foundational ideas of the Christian faith were challenged,<sup>12</sup> Halle faculty gradually unlocked the doors to rationalism,<sup>13</sup> thereby in turn opening the door for the formation of an Enlightenment Bible and the emergence of a neologist harmonization of biblical “revelation and reason.”<sup>14</sup> In the 1760s and 1770s, Semler and Michaelis, the founding fathers of German biblical criticism, directed “the Neologist reformation of theology and hermeneutics.”<sup>15</sup> Some biblical scholars of the neologist school were involved in

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<sup>9</sup> Lefferts A. Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), 214. From 1815 on, Edward Everett, George Ticknor, George Bancroft, and Joseph Green Cogswell were among the first Americans to study in Germany. Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 3–4. See also Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking, and Jurgen Herbst, eds., *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 202.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship*, 54.

<sup>12</sup> “Historical Notices of Berlin,” *Christian’s Penny Magazine* 223 (September 10, 1836): 291.

<sup>13</sup> Ted Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 166.

<sup>14</sup> Mogens Müller, “Kierkegaard and Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship: A Case of Incongruity,” in *Kierkegaard and the Bible: The New Testament*, ed. Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 286.

<sup>15</sup> Peter H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 171.

“detheologiz[ing]” the Protestant Bible, discarding “the *textus receptus*,” and creating an “Enlightenment Bible.”<sup>16</sup>

Semler, considered the father of neology, rejected a “supernatural understanding” of the Bible and instead called for “a biblical interpretation” without theological “presupposition.”<sup>17</sup> He emphasized the idea of “Enlightenment optimism” by describing Christianity as an “ongoing revelation,” and he advocated a purely scientific explanation of the Bible.<sup>18</sup> He is considered a “pioneer of modern biblical science” who secured “the independence of exegesis.”<sup>19</sup> Semler, who championed a scientific explanation of the Bible, proposed a strictly “historical exegesis of the text.” According to his historical method and influences, differences between theology and dogma were considered incompatible, thus preparing the way for Johann Gabler’s distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Alexander on Critical Biblical Scholarship***

As a professor of didactic and polemic theology, Archibald Alexander was trained in seventeenth-century Reformed theology and Scottish philosophy under his Virginia preceptor, William Graham.<sup>21</sup> At Princeton Seminary he was the first to engage in arguments regarding “radical biblical criticism” while pushing for “biblical studies” to be given a principal position in the seminary’s core curriculum.<sup>22</sup> Before being offered a position at Princeton, Alexander had read books on

every thing connected with the criticism and interpretation of the sacred text ... taking Hebrew lessons of a learned Jew, perusing the Septuagint, collating other versions, and pushing more deeply those researches which he had long before commenced, into the original of the New Testament.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 30, 96.

<sup>17</sup> David R. Law, *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2012), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Müller, “Kierkegaard and Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship,” 286.

<sup>19</sup> Roy A. Harrisville, *Pandora’s Box Opened: An Examination and Defense of Historical-Critical Method and Its Master Practitioners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 111.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Jacob van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. John W. Watson and M. J. Evans (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1874), 44. Joachim Schaper, “The Question of a ‘Biblical Theology’ and the Growing Tension between ‘Biblical Theology’ and a ‘History of the Religion of Israel’: from Johann Philipp Gabler to Rudolf Smend, Sen.,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø et al., vol. 3.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 635.

<sup>21</sup> For biographical information on Alexander’s life, see John A. Mackay, “Archibald Alexander (1772–1851),” in *Sons of the Prophets: Leaders in Protestantism from Princeton Seminary*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 3–21.

<sup>22</sup> Marion Ann Taylor, “Can These Dry Bones Live?” *Theology Today* 69.3 (2012): 261, 263.

<sup>23</sup> James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander, D.D.: First Professor in the Theological*

According to his biographer, Alexander was well acquainted with the Greek New Testament, and had routinely been reading “a beautiful Glasgow edition of Griesbach” that was usually “in his hands during all the private hours” of Sunday.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Alexander was familiar with Griesbach’s notion of “critical study,” which reflected Semler’s “critical empiricism” as well as John Mill’s and Johann Jakob Wettstein’s “text-critical material for the New Testament.”<sup>25</sup>

Arguably one of the most significant texts that Alexander purchased was the “Michaelis Edition of Halle” (1720), a critical edition of the Old Testament that he claimed to read daily for almost “half a century.”<sup>26</sup> Alexander’s list of revered texts explains his profound preoccupation with “Criticism and Hermeneutics” that he shared with his Princeton colleagues and students, along with his interests in biblical languages, hermeneutical methods, and archaeology.<sup>27</sup> Alexander went out of his way to familiarize his students with background information on contemporary conflicts between critical research and traditional biblical interpretations,<sup>28</sup> though basing his own responses on traditional approaches.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Alexander never visited Europe, yet there is evidence to indicate that he nevertheless was very interested in European critical developments. The outline of his 1818–19 course on “Biblical Criticism” includes lectures based on the work of German scholar Georg Lorenz Bauer (1755–1806), who taught at the Universities of Altdorf and Heidelberg—evidence of Alexander’s early familiarity with German biblical criticism.<sup>30</sup> In his lectures, Alexander defined biblical criticism as “signify[ing] any application of learning” to the Bible, “whether the object be to determine the true reading or the true sense of any particular

*Seminary, at Princeton, New Jersey* (New York: Scribner, 1870), 279.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Orchard and Thomas R. W. Longstaff, *J. J. Griesbach: Synoptic and Text-Critical Studies, 1776–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68. For a helpful discussion on Johann Jakob Griesbach, see Werner G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (New York: Abingdon, 1973), 74.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 319.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander’s personal library was filled with various folios. He restricted the temptation to limit his collection to theological texts, while focusing mostly on biblical and exegetical studies. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 320, 350.

<sup>28</sup> Archibald Alexander, “Biblical Criticism, No. 1, Old Testament,” (Princeton, n.d.) Manuscript 21.18, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library; Archibald Alexander, “Biblical Criticism of the New Testament, No. 1,” (Princeton, n.d.) Manuscript 23.4, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, “Can These Dry Bones Live?” 263.

<sup>30</sup> Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism*, 221.

passage.”<sup>31</sup> Due to his concern about grammatical and philological aspects of textual interpretation, Alexander had to engage with the work of critical scholars. He introduced his students to the works of Richard Simon (1638–1712), Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), and Michaelis, among others.<sup>32</sup> In his lectures he especially praised Eichhorn’s work on Old Testament codices, declaring that “he deserves to be ranked among those Hebrew Critics and Philologists who hold the very first place.”<sup>33</sup> He conveyed to his students that “Eichhorn has cultivated this department of theological Literature more assiduously than any other man.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, he gave special praise to the German philologist and orientalist and Göttingen professor Michaelis for his contributions to the Enlightenment Bible. For Alexander, Michaelis was “one of the greatest Biblical critics .... By him the impulse was given to this sphere of literature in Germany.”<sup>35</sup>

A key Michaelis project was his reply to Semler’s questions regarding “canonicity” and studying the “authenticity” of New Testament books through “historical research.”<sup>36</sup> Alexander joined the discussion with his own book, *The Canon of the Old and New Testament*, in which he vehemently disagreed with Michaelis’s position that the inspiration of New Testament books rests entirely on “proof of the inspiration made by Christ to his apostles.”<sup>37</sup> Michaelis argued that only New Testament books written by the apostles could be viewed as inspired. Alexander faulted Michaelis for not appealing to the witness of both the “Universal Church” and “the apostles,” which he felt provided stronger testimony to scriptural inspiration

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Hodge, “Lectures Notes of Archibald Alexander on Biblical Criticism,” (Princeton, December 31, 1817) Manuscript 12.2, The Charles Hodge Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

<sup>32</sup> Archibald Alexander, “Biblical Criticism No. 7,” (Princeton, n.d.) Manuscript 23.3, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

<sup>33</sup> Hodge, “Lecture Notes of Archibald Alexander on Biblical Criticism.” Cf. Stewart, “The Tethered Theology,” 108.

<sup>34</sup> Hodge, “Lecture Notes of Archibald Alexander on Biblical Criticism.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Alexander relied heavily on English translations of German texts for his research, especially the translations of Herbert Marsh (1757–1839), the Lady Margaret Professor of Cambridge and Bishop of Llandaff, who had studied with Griesbach and Michaelis in Leipzig and Göttingen. Marsh was responsible for translating Michaelis’s *Introduction to the New Testament*, with commentary. See Johann D. Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Herbert Marsh, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1793–1801).

<sup>36</sup> William Baird, *From Deism to Tübingen*, vol. 1 of *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1972), 131.

<sup>37</sup> Archibald Alexander, *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained: Or, the Bible Complete, Without the Apocrypha & Unwritten Traditions* (London: John Miller, 1831), 198.

than “the promise made by Christ to his apostles.”<sup>38</sup> When arguing that Scripture was written under “the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” Alexander made clear his disagreement with Michaelis’s proposition that the Gospels were simply “human productions, and by degrees came to be considered as inspired writings.”<sup>39</sup> Alexander especially disapproved of Michaelis’s questioning of “the genuineness of some of the books, as well as the inspiration of some of the writers.”<sup>40</sup> This is one of the examples of Alexander expressing respect for German scholarship while challenging modern biblical criticism that questioned orthodoxy and inspiration.

## **II. Alexander’s 1812 Inaugural Address and His Ideas on the Biblical Canon**

Alexander’s own theological scholarship was based on a Calvinistic presupposition of faith and biblical authority, ideas that he clearly expressed in his inaugural address. Similar to current traditions at some British universities, the function of inaugural addresses in the nineteenth century was to provide platforms for new professors or administrators to describe their work and guiding principles.<sup>41</sup> Alexander’s inaugural address had a particularly interesting context: it was given the year when, according to Brooks Holifield, “Modern American critical scholarship had its symbolic birth.”<sup>42</sup> Alexander gave his address at the official opening of Princeton Seminary in August 1812. The topics of biblical hermeneutics and biblical canon that he covered in the talk, entitled “Search the Scriptures,” he later expanded into a book-length treatise on biblical canonicity.<sup>43</sup> Mark Noll has argued that this lecture merits “careful attention” because it can be viewed as central to “the inauguration of Princeton Theology.”<sup>44</sup> In his lecture, Alexander criticized not only

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 199. Alexander cited Michaelis’s acknowledgment: “I must confess that I am unable to find a satisfactory proof of their inspiration, and the more I investigate the subject, and the oftener I compare their writings with those of St. Matthew and St. John, the greater are my doubts.” Ibid., 194. Johann D. Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Herbert Marsh, 3rd ed. (London: Rivington, 1819), 1:87.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander, *The Canon*, 246.

<sup>41</sup> Natalia Kovalyova, “Presidential Inaugural Addresses,” in *Opening Windows on Texts and Discourses of the Past*, ed. Janne Skaffari (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2005), 41.

<sup>42</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 191.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander, *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained*.

<sup>44</sup> Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (1983; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 72.

the Catholic Church and deistic thinkers, but also rationalistic theologians, Socinians, and mystics.<sup>45</sup> His emphases on divine revelation, inspiration, doctrine, and piety would become central themes in the work of Princeton faculty members, along with their employment of Baconianism and emphasis on scientific religion. In his lecture he championed traditional Calvinism and the application of rigorous scholarship to theological efforts, both of which characterized the work of early and later nineteenth-century Princeton faculty members.<sup>46</sup>

In the months and years following his lecture, Alexander emphasized biblical authenticity and inspiration when responding to the critical scholarship that was emerging from Germany. To this end he addressed questions tied to the biblical canon, specifically its traditional formation of the canon. An important text on the canon during this period was Johann Semler's *Treatise on the Free Examination of the Canon* (1771–75), in which he argued that traditionally held notions on “the building of the Canon” were misguided.<sup>47</sup> Semler insisted that the canon must be viewed as “human literature” that was not “divine, but human” (*nicht götlich, aber menschlich*).<sup>48</sup> Alexander quickly responded with his belief that the books in the Old and New Testament “contain the truths of God” and “ascertain what these truths are.”<sup>49</sup> He never wavered in his support of the traditional Protestant doctrine of inspiration,<sup>50</sup> insisting “that the canon of the Old Testament has undergone no change since the introduction of Christianity.”<sup>51</sup> When responding to new ideas about the formation of the canon, Alexander relied on historical evidence from sources such as the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, the early church fathers, and the general councils to support his position that “the books of the New Testament were received by the ancient church, in all its parts.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 74–76, 78–79.

<sup>46</sup> Annette G. Aubert, “J. Gresham Machen and the Theology of Crisis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64.2 (2002): 337–38.

<sup>47</sup> Henry S. Nash, *The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament: Being the History of the Process Whereby the Word of God Has Won the Right to Be Understood* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 103, 106.

<sup>48</sup> Johann Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon: Nebst Beantwortung einiger Recensionen des ersten Theils* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1772), 2:491.

<sup>49</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 62; *The Canon* (1826), 248.

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion on Johann Semler and the Canon, see Bernhard Weiss, *Lehrbuch der Biblischen Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Hertz, 1873), 18. See also Gottfried Hornig, “Hermeneutik und die Bibelkritik bei Johann Salomon Semler,” in *Historische Kritik und Biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow, Walter Sparr, and John Woodbridge (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988), 219–36.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 63.

<sup>52</sup> His argument was later adopted by B. B. Warfield, who was critical of the idea regarding

As regards criteria for canonicity, Alexander held fast to the traditional argument “that the Bible is the word of God, and an authoritative rule”<sup>53</sup>—a direct challenge to Semler’s suggestions that “the Word of God and Holy Scripture are not identical” and that not all Scripture is authoritative, as well as his question regarding whether the reason why any “book belongs to the Canon” is entirely “historical.”<sup>54</sup> However, Alexander did acknowledge that the canon deserved investigation regarding the question, “What belongs [in] the Bible?”<sup>55</sup> Reflecting his concerns on method, Alexander used a historical approach that accepted the “testimony of history” when responding to the question, “How to decide the canonical books?” In this regard, Alexander was clearly in agreement with the French bishop and Renaissance scholar Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721), who also used a historical argument when writing about the canon. Alexander was familiar with Huet’s *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679),<sup>56</sup> an apologetic text that defended the certainty of Christianity according to beliefs based on “the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.”<sup>57</sup> Huet argued that ancient heritage and internal “illumination” represented the gist of religion. Similar to Huet, Alexander believed that new ideas and arguments required support in the form of ancient testimony in order “to carry conviction.”<sup>58</sup> Alexander cited Huet when asserting “that all those books should be deemed Canonical and inspired, which were received as such, by those who lived nearest to the time when they were published.”<sup>59</sup> To refute Michaelis’s ideas that the books “were useful human productions,” Alexander noted “the universal reception of these books by the whole primitive church” when arguing “that they were not mere human productions, but composed by divine inspiration.”<sup>60</sup> In his book on the

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“gradual formation of the canon.” B. B. Warfield, “Recent Theological Literature,” *Presbyterian Review* 9 (1888): 677. Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 65.

<sup>53</sup> Alexander, *The Canon* (1831), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Kümmel, *The New Testament*, 63.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander, *The Canon* (1831), 3. Alexander taught his students that “biblical criticism includes whatever may be necessary to the setting of the canonical authority of the books of the Sacred Scriptures.” Archibald Alexander, “Compendium of Lectures: Biblical and Jewish Antiquities and Oriental Customs, Number 1 undated,” Manuscript 21.16, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

<sup>56</sup> Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Petri Danielis Huetii Demonstratio Evangelica ad Serenissimum Delphinum* (Parisiis: Apud Stephanum Michallet, 1679).

<sup>57</sup> Henning Reventlow, *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, vol. 4 of *History of Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 114.

<sup>58</sup> Susanna Åkerman, “The Forms of Queen Cristina’s Academies,” in *The Shapes of Knowledge from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Donald R. Kelley and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1991), 166.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander, *The Canon* (1826), 206.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

canon, Alexander gives countless examples of his willingness to apply the testimony of history in response to new assertions being made by critical biblical scholars such as Michaelis. However, current scholarship describes Alexander's approach as flawed and primarily serving popular interests.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Biblical Authenticity and Criticism***

After emphasizing "the perfection of the canon" in his inaugural lecture, Alexander had to address issues about the truthfulness or integrity of biblical texts.<sup>62</sup> Although he challenged the presuppositions that underlay the historical-critical method, he partly agreed with its agenda in terms of investigating and testing the authenticity of biblical books without rejecting their biblical authority.<sup>63</sup> He believed that making this distinction was essential to proving that the Bible, during its transmission, did not undergo what he called "material injury," either by purposeful deception or scribal mistakes.<sup>64</sup> Alexander was aware of the belief among some eighteenth-century scholars that the Bible had been significantly corrupted, and he acknowledged that such a view "led to a more extensive and accurate examination and collation of the manuscript *codices* than had been [done] before ... g[iving] rise to that species of Biblical criticism."<sup>65</sup> Eichhorn, one of the creators of the rationalistic methods of hermeneutics and whose work Alexander discussed in class lectures, believed that all Old Testament stories were corrupted myths. Armed with new critical research, Eichhorn concluded that "all recitals of divine interpositions in the Mosaic history must be reduced to natural events, which were reported in legends that afterwards became disfigured."<sup>66</sup> While Alexander acknowledged and respected new biblical scholarship, he resisted many of their critical readings, claims of verification, and findings. He especially resisted the historical-critical method's refutation of "divine causation either of the biblical history or the biblical writings."<sup>67</sup>

In light of Alexander's interaction with critical scholarship, it is important to consider recent scholarship that challenges the notion of a "bipolar paradigm ... [that forces] American biblical criticism into a dualistic mold," in which progressive theologians favor new "historicist patterns" that

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, *The Old Testament*, 26.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 65.

<sup>63</sup> Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), 18.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 66.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> John Blackburn, "A Course of Systematic Theology.—Theological Institutes," in *The Popular Biblical Educator: Devoted to the Literature, Interpretation, And Right Use of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Cassell, 1854), 277.

<sup>67</sup> Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 18.

conservatives are likely to reject.<sup>68</sup> Alexander appears to be a good example of someone taking a middle path, speaking positively at times about new trends in critical scholarship while still considering the ancient church fathers as authoritative voices. Even though it is true that a significant portion of nineteenth-century American ministers generally rejected biblical criticism, most traditional scholars gave criticism its due in their interpretive work.<sup>69</sup> However, for the most part American Protestant professors carefully selected only a few features of critical scholarship, and as Elizabeth Clark has observed, they energetically resisted ideas “they found offensive to the evangelical sympathies.”<sup>70</sup>

It is therefore easy to recognize that in terms of cutting-edge scholarship, tensions were bound to emerge between critical historical awareness and church tradition, with strong tensions surfacing when Alexander attempted to defend traditional views while adopting certain “tools of human learning” used in new scholarship.<sup>71</sup> One example is his praise of the Near Eastern trips made by German scholars (including Michaelis’s voyages and discoveries), and his comment that remote “countries were visited, the dark cells of cloisters and monasteries explored, and all important libraries ransacked, in search of the copies of the scriptures.”<sup>72</sup> For Alexander, such explorations of oriental research provided a model to be imitated, and he praised those who, as “learned men, with unparalleled diligence, employed their whole lives in the collation of manuscripts, and in noting every, even the smallest variation, in their *readings*.”<sup>73</sup> Although he described such endeavors as being useful “to the cause of truth,” Alexander was swift to voice his reservations about critical processes that were used to challenge the reliability of some “ancient manuscripts.” In the end, Alexander proved to be a traditional Protestant scholar who seriously resisted certain new discoveries and who considered new findings about “disputed texts” to be trivial, and who regularly quoted the church fathers when arguing against critical interpretations and challenges to the integrity of some biblical texts.<sup>74</sup>

Alexander used a broad range of sources to support his positions. He kindled interest in the work of the patristic scholar William Cave (1637–1713),

<sup>68</sup> Moore-Jumonville, *The Hermeneutics of Historical Distance*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 102.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor, *The Old Testament*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 66.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Cf. Michael Ledger-Lomas, “Conder and Sons: Dissent and the Oriental Bible in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in *Dissent and the Bible in Britain, c. 1650–1950*, ed. Scott Mandelbrote and Michael Ledger-Lomas (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 210.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 66–67.

especially his *Historia literaria*. Alexander praised “the comparative excellence of the editions of the Fathers” and approved Cave’s dictum “that the older editions are, by so much the more faithful.”<sup>75</sup> To Alexander, the early church fathers had sufficiently settled most questions about the canon in terms of authenticity and integrity<sup>76</sup>—two topics that he felt were paramount in light of the new scholarship he encountered. In addition to the ancient church fathers, he found other sources of evidence for verification. For example, with the help of the inductive method associated with Baconianism, Alexander attempted to verify certain truths by collecting biblical “facts” from Scripture, especially facts that were miraculous in character. He appealed to George Campbell’s argument in *A Dissertation on Miracles* (1762) in his defense of miracles against David Hume.<sup>77</sup> Instead of giving up the supernatural nature of Scripture, Alexander turned to prophecies and their fulfillment to verify biblical texts. Alexander also found evidence in the character of the Christian religion, which he described as “extraordinary and superlatively excellent.” When rejecting a critical description of the apostles, Alexander declared that Christianity “could not have been the production of imposters, nor of unassisted fishermen; nor indeed, of any description of uninspired men.”<sup>78</sup> In his defense of inspiration, Alexander argued that even the Bible had accommodated “human circumstances” when depicting imprints “of divinity in its face,”<sup>79</sup> thereby affirming both the human and the divine elements in the production of the Bible that were often identified as “concurus”—a concept that was essential to the later doctrine of inspiration that emerged from Princeton Seminary.<sup>80</sup>

### III. *Alexander’s Response to Modern Interpretations*

Alexander discouraged rational theology in his attempts to maintain a connection between biblical studies and dogmatic theology. He defended the early church’s assertion that the Bible consisted of inspired texts expressing

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Clark made this observation about Henry B. Smith, indicating that in general, traditional antebellum American Protestant scholars appealed to the church fathers in defense of the biblical canon. Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, 118.

<sup>77</sup> For a helpful study of George Campbell, see Jeffrey M. Suderman, *Orthodoxy and Enlightenment: George Campbell in the Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 71.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> In his essay “The Divine and Human in the Bible,” Warfield discussed in detail the topic of concurus that he related to the concept of inspiration. Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Divine and Human in the Bible,” *Presbyterian Journal* 19.18 (May 3, 1894): 280.

God's revelation and should therefore always be acknowledged as regulative for faith and practice. In the spirit of traditional Christian scholarship, Alexander agreed with a description of the Bible as "the hermeneutical *regula fidei*."<sup>81</sup> In hindsight, Enlightenment scholars challenged and misused in many ways the rule of faith.<sup>82</sup> Alexander had particular disdain for the combination of faith and philosophy that some modern interpreters of his time espoused, especially the ways that some of them discarded Christian doctrines. Alexander noted that such rationalistic thinkers found specific references in the Bible to key doctrines such as the Trinity, original sin, or vicarious suffering, but rejected them as "contrary to reason."<sup>83</sup> Though he is known for using common sense realism in his defense of Christian religion, he disagreed with both neologist and Socinian attempts to use reason to establish Christian doctrines. He set strict boundaries regarding his willingness to study the Bible according to the rationalistic assumptions of the neologists.

In light of Alexander's response to rationalistic assumptions, one cannot overstate the importance of Alexander's biblical hermeneutic, with its insistence on Scripture as the guiding principle for doctrinal formulation. In this regard he stood in agreement with the traditions of Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, hermeneutical models of exegesis and dogma were closely linked, with dogmatic works produced in support of biblical interpretation.<sup>84</sup> Protestant systems of theology were shaped by the exegetical undertaking of biblical texts. Common to Protestant dogmatics was the notion that the single rule of dogma is the Bible.<sup>85</sup> In line with post-Reformation dogmatics, the Bible served for Alexander as the source of theology. He believed that biblical revelation should be viewed as a guidebook for the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, Christology, and eschatology. For Alexander, the entire Bible "may be considered as a history of Redemption."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 95, 103, 110. On the concept and application of "regula fidei," see especially Bengt Hägglund, "Die Bedeutung der 'regula fidei' als Grundlage theologischer Aussagen," *Studia theologica* 12 (1958): 1–44.

<sup>82</sup> John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and "Early Enlightenment" Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>83</sup> Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 75.

<sup>84</sup> Ferenc Szücs, "Reformed Dogmatics as a Hermeneutical Circle Between Exegesis and Preaching," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Petr Pokorný and Jan Roskovec (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 350.

<sup>85</sup> Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 52–53.

<sup>86</sup> Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 97–98.

In addition to his interactions with rationalist hermeneutics, Alexander engaged with those scholars whose hermeneutics supported a natural theology associated with the High Church Anglican promotion of a scripture-based “natural philosophy.”<sup>87</sup> While the “Hutchinsonian circle” (named after John Hutchinson) opposed “anti-rationalist” and “anti-Socinian teachings” and emphasized the essence of the Trinity, they merged “natural philosophy and theology.”<sup>88</sup> Alexander opposed not only their natural philosophy, but also their approach, which analyzed the Trinity in light of “the natural world.” When discussing Hutchinson’s work, Alexander wrote that “the high mystery of the Trinity is supposed to be exhibited by the material fluid, which pervades the universe.”<sup>89</sup> Alexander apparently was a gentler critic of the Hutchinsonian circle than of the rationalists, in the end he nonetheless concluded that their premise was “too deeply enveloped in clouds and darkness.”<sup>90</sup>

During Alexander’s lifetime, publishing houses were printing and selling texts by the Swedish scientist and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772),<sup>91</sup> and like some other American intellectuals, Alexander was interested in analyzing mystical Bible interpretations linked to Swedenborg, who believed that all sentences in the Bible were related to specific “spiritual” principles, like all things in “the natural world,” and contained concealed “religious meaning.”<sup>92</sup> Although Alexander was willing to discuss various aspects of spiritual and mystical interpretations, he expressed disapproval about their guiding principles, noting that “as there is no certain key to this mystical or spiritual meaning, every man makes it out according to the liveliness of his own imagination.”<sup>93</sup> He also faulted them for promoting mystical interpretations of the “*celestial, spiritual, and natural*” in Scripture.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Richard G. Olson, *Science and Religion, 1450–1900: From Copernicus to Darwin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 131.

<sup>88</sup> Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation, and Reform, 1660–1828: Archbishops of Canterbury and Their Diocese* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 58.

<sup>89</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 77.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Summary Exposition of the Internal Sense of the Prophetic Books of the Word of the Old Testament: And Also of the Psalms of David. With a Two-Fold Index* (London: T. Plummer, Seething-Lane, under the inspection of R. Hindmarsh, Printer to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, 1800); Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell: And of the Wonderful Things Therein, As Heard and Seen, by the Honourable and Learned Emanuel Swedenborg*, Translated from the Original Latin (Chester: C. W. Leadbeater, 1800).

<sup>92</sup> Marilyn Masler and Marina Pacini, *Carl Gutherz: Poetic Vision and Academic Ideals* (Memphis: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 71.

<sup>93</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 78.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

As he stated in his initial lecture, Alexander sought to answer the core question of “how ... the Scriptures [should] be interpreted, in order ... [to] arrive at their true and full meaning.”<sup>95</sup> While he sometimes considered “grammatical” issues and “literal” interpretations of the Bible, he repeatedly speculated about whether literal readings of biblical text should be considered as containing final meanings. In this regard, Alexander believed that biblical exegetes should follow “a middle course” between Johannes Cocceius and Hugo Grotius with the help of “sound sense and just criticism.”<sup>96</sup> He cited the popular axiom of his day “that Grotius could find Christ nowhere in the Bible, Cocceius everywhere”<sup>97</sup>—an axiom he adopted from a work written by the eighteenth-century church historian Johannes Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern*, which was used as a core textbook at Princeton Seminary.<sup>98</sup> In it, Mosheim wrote that Cocceius alleged “that the whole New Testament history exhibited a kind of mirror of Christ ... and that the predictions of the ancient prophets in their literal import treated of Jesus Christ.”<sup>99</sup> While far removed from Cocceius’s excessive view, Alexander diverged even further from some of his American peers, who condensed “the contents of levitical typology to a minimum.”<sup>100</sup> Even as Alexander acknowledged that Cocceius’s principle was vastly misused, he agreed with some aspects of Cocceius’s hermeneutical rule and perceived some of his followers (among them Herman Witsius, Campegius Vitringa, and Salomon van Til) as leading biblical expositors. But in the end Alexander seized the occasion to express his basic rule of interpretation,

That every particular passage of scripture should be interpreted according to the peculiar circumstances of the case: the literal should be considered as the true and only meaning, unless some remoter sense be indicated by some peculiar aptitude, correspondence, or fitness, in the words and ideas of the text; or unless it be referred to something else in the Scriptures themselves.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 78, 81.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>98</sup> Johann Lorenz Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern: From the Birth of Christ, to the Beginning of the Present Century: in which the Rise, Progress, and Variations of Church Power, Are Considered in Their Connection with the State of Learning and Philosophy, and the Political History of Europe during That Period*, trans. Archibald Maclaine, D.D., vol. 5 (Charlestown: Samuel Etheridge, 1811).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 5:345.

<sup>100</sup> Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 328.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 81.

In short, Alexander was convinced that both common sense and “the analogy of faith” served as useful guides for a balanced biblical interpretation.

#### **IV. Tools of Biblical Interpretation**

Alexander was especially enthusiastic about introducing practical tools for biblical interpretation to his students. Without advocating the historical-critical method, Alexander nonetheless felt that biblical scholars must be familiar with ancient Jewish history and customs. Like Semler and Michaelis, he felt that he could not disregard Jewish culture and history when attempting to comprehend the “Hebrew Scriptures.”<sup>102</sup> For this reason, Alexander taught a course on Jewish antiquities, defined as “an account of the religious institutions and ceremonies of the Jews: their manners and customs, their houses, dress, food, marriages, funerals, agriculture ... in short everything relating to peculiar people in ancient and modern times which can in any measure illustrate the holy scriptures.”<sup>103</sup> In the course, Alexander appealed to various sources such as Josephus, Philo, the authors of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, and ancient secular authors, as well as the Talmud and Rabbinical writings. Alexander believed that the Bible must be studied in its historical context in the same manner as other works of literature.<sup>104</sup> Yet he was particularly concerned about sharing the work of historians working on ancient Jewish and Roman periods, believing that such knowledge would help biblical students not only to understand the background of the text they were studying, but also to understand the fulfillment of prophecies recorded by ancient historians. In addition, Alexander was clearly fascinated by chronology and geography, which he felt would help him understand specific sections of the Bible. Although Alexander emphasized the importance of historical and geographical studies, unlike Semler and Michaelis, he did not consider the Bible as a mere “historical document” to be analyzed by “secular means.”<sup>105</sup>

Given the Enlightenment culture of the time, it is not surprising that Alexander was willing to apply scientific knowledge to biblical hermeneutics.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Archibald Alexander, “Compend of Lectures: Biblical and Jewish Antiquities & Oriental Customs,” (Princeton, n.d.), Manuscript 21.16, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library. Turner, *Philology*, 113.

<sup>103</sup> Alexander, “Compend of Lectures.”

<sup>104</sup> According to Alexander, “Many passages would be quite unintelligible, without some acquaintance with Jewish antiquities. The customs and manners of that people should, therefore, be studied with particular attention.” Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 83.

<sup>105</sup> Turner, *Philology*, 114.

<sup>106</sup> For a study on the application of science, see John Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the*

The faculty members at Old Princeton were very much in tune with links between science and religion. According to Alexander, “there is scarcely any science or branch of knowledge, which may not be made subservient to theology”<sup>107</sup>—a view that Alexander shared with many of his Princeton colleagues. He claimed that natural history, chemistry, and geology could provide essential support for interpreting complex biblical passages, and therefore suggested that theologians should become familiar with “the whole circle of science.”<sup>108</sup> One of his students, Charles Hodge, adopted his mentor’s views when ardently describing analogies between science and theology in his *Systematic Theology*.<sup>109</sup>

But Alexander did much more than simply stress historical and scientific sensibility in biblical interpretation—he challenged rationalist theologians and critical scholars to consider a doctrine of “illumination and assistance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>110</sup> Even in his opposition to skepticism, Alexander emphasized the trustworthiness of human rational capacities, although he resisted applying them to “special revelation.”<sup>111</sup> Guided by a Calvinistic anthropology, Alexander mistrusted reason in the realm of special revelation because of what he described as “the weakness of the human intellect” and therefore believed that biblical exegetes “must be convinced, that without divine assistance, there is little hope of arriving at the knowledge of truth.”<sup>112</sup> The underlying assumption of Alexander’s approach was that students of the Bible should be pious and regenerated, a view cultivated by the traditions of Pietism and Puritanism that were popular at Princeton. It is worth mentioning in this regard that Alexander described the English Puritan John Flavel (1630–1691) as the author who had most influenced him, and he borrowed from Flavel’s ideas to build a case about the importance of the inward illumination of the Spirit.<sup>113</sup> Alexander believed that with the help of the Holy Spirit the biblical “text is opened and illustrated.”<sup>114</sup> This is another example of Alexander prioritizing the concept of illumination regarding

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*English Enlightenment: Useful Knowledge and Polite Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>107</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 84.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> For a fuller treatment, see Annette G. Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 177. Cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1872), 1:573.

<sup>110</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 90.

<sup>111</sup> William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 294.

<sup>112</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 91, 95.

<sup>113</sup> Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 42, 46.

<sup>114</sup> Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 93.

biblical interpretation.<sup>115</sup> As it had been for the Protestant Reformers, the topic of the Spirit's internal testimony was very important to Alexander and other Princeton professors in terms of biblical interpretation, and deserves additional evaluation by modern scholars.

## Conclusion

Alexander was one of the first professors at Princeton Seminary to interact with the Enlightenment Bible and the neological hermeneutics associated with German biblical criticism. However, his work in these areas is still overshadowed by the modern historical emphases on Edward Everett and George Ticknor, who began their studies in Germany in 1815.<sup>116</sup> Although he did not spend time at a German university, Alexander was willing to engage with and respond to German critical scholarship and to defend traditional beliefs. His willingness resulted in various lectures on biblical studies and the publication of a book on the biblical canon, *The Canon of the Old and New Testament*, which was well received on both sides of the Atlantic. In North America, this volume was the first textbook to deal exclusively with the biblical canon.<sup>117</sup>

While expressing respect and praise for German critical scholarship, Alexander energetically addressed what he viewed as its shortcomings, and he went out of his way to introduce his students and anyone else interested in theology to what he believed were the proper elements of biblical scholarship and canonical criteria. As part of his own approach he employed the notion of illumination, the inductive method, cultural studies, and grammatical and philological tools to analyze biblical texts as well as historical apologetics in the defense of the canon. Alexander, alongside some other American nineteenth-century biblical scholars, believed that some scientific biblical criticism generated interpretations that were unacceptable to traditional principles.<sup>118</sup> While he appreciated new historical findings and

<sup>115</sup> He never modified this view; nearly three decades later he wrote: "I hold that no unregenerate man is, while in that state, any more capable of spiritual perception than a blind man is of a perception of colours." Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841), 83.

<sup>116</sup> Lydia Willisky-Ciullo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma: The Conundrum of Biblical Authority* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 107.

<sup>117</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xxi. For a solid account regarding the question of canonicity in early North America, see David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 122.

<sup>118</sup> Herbst, *The German Historical School in America*, 82. Herbst's interpretation of Moses Stuart applies as well to Alexander.

expressed a desire to use science for hermeneutics, he resisted a Kantian framework and neological approach. Still, in light of his view that it was important for American students to be familiar with German biblical studies and criticism,<sup>119</sup> he was willing to address the ideas of leading neologists such as Michaelis, and encouraged one of his best students, Charles Hodge, to study at Halle and Berlin Universities.

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<sup>119</sup> Archibald Alexander, "Survey of Modern German Works on Interpretation," *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 5.1 (1833): 9–19.

# The Sermon and the Greek New Testament

**R. KENT HUGHES**

## **Abstract**

This article is a primer for pastors on how to engage the Greek text of the New Testament and faithfully construct a sermon that is true to the thrust and shape of the original in its ancient context and, as such, freighted with gospel power and wholly relevant and applicable to modern cultures. It provides instructions on engaging the Greek text, discerning the theme and symmetries of the text, consulting commentaries, finalizing the outline, and applying and illustrating the text.

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**T**he purpose of this essay is *to demonstrate how to go from the Greek text of the New Testament to the preparation of a sermon derived from that text*, so that the sermon preached is faithful to the original. Such a task involves much more than defining Greek words, or assembling explanations of obscure issues uncovered by grammatical nuance. It involves both grasping the theological message of the text and inviting the message to inform and harrow the souls of those who preach week in and week out.

The following is written for preachers around the globe who faithfully labor under the divine call to preach the Word—some of whom have a working knowledge of Greek, others who have little knowledge of the language. And because this is addressed to busy pastors who may, at best, have a limited number of hours a week to spend on sermon preparation, the following advice recognizes the necessary time restraints of the pastorate.

Whereas the Reformers labored under the imperfections of Erasmus's Greek text, today's preachers have the *UBS Nestle-Aland 28* as a dependable text, notwithstanding some variant readings.<sup>1</sup> Bruce Metzger's *The Text of the New Testament* provides a clear, accessible guide to understanding the rationale for the retention and rejection of the variants.<sup>2</sup>

It must be noted here that the following advice is based upon the exalted view of Scripture voiced by the two Moses: the first Moses who, upon penning the words of the law and singing his final song, declared of the Torah, "It is no empty word for you, but your very life" (Deut 32:47 ESV), and then the second Moses (Christ Jesus), who declared in the same wilderness, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; cf. Deut 8:3). The two deliverers together thus declared that God's Word is the very *life* and very *food* of his people and, as such, totally sufficient and massively potent. This being so, it is the preacher's duty to hold forth the bare Word, the *verbum nudum* (as Calvin termed it), so that the Word does the work of feeding and sustaining God's people.

## I. **Necessary Caution**

There are inherent dangers in studying the Greek text, especially for those with a rudimentary knowledge of Greek and who have not been schooled in the disciplines of exegesis. And these pitfalls have been fueled by the proliferation of Bible software programs that afford access to many resources. While access is certainly good, bad scholarship is not. Among the bad things that can happen are 1) the taking of a rare lexical form of a word and building a sermon around its scarce meaning; 2) the assumption that the same Greek word has the identical meaning in every context—sometimes termed a "concordance mentality"; 3) the utilization of "wooden" reductionist understandings of Greek tenses, especially the aorist and perfect tenses; and 4) the encouragement of a prideful ignorance that imagines deeper truths await those who carry Greek testaments. Here two proven books will enlighten preachers and protect them against abusing the very Word they

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<sup>1</sup> Eberhard Nestle and Kurt Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed., ed. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Münster/Westphalia (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), which provides a fine entry-level introduction to the subject.

so desire to honor: D. A. Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies*<sup>3</sup> and Moisés Silva's *Biblical Words and Their Meanings: An Introduction to Lexical Studies*.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Before Going to the Greek

It is of utmost importance that the preacher possess a good grasp of the New Testament book from which the Greek text is chosen. The folly of exegeting a Greek passage from, for example, 2 Corinthians, apart from the knowledge of the book's theme and contours, is readily apparent if we imagine delivering a report on one of the speeches or acts in *Hamlet* without an implicit understanding of what Shakespeare's play is about: its theme, characters, and acts. Yet many sermons have been preached (yes, from the Greek text!) with only a superficial understanding of the book from which it comes.

The remedy for this is simple and so accessible: read and re-read the sacred text of the book in which your preaching text is embedded. And this need not be done in Greek; it can be done in your mother tongue, provided you have an adequate, essentially literal, translation like the *English Standard Version*. This was my practice in my later years, as I matured in my homiletic understanding. For example, the summer before I preached a series on Philippians, I read this (admittedly) small book some thirty-five times, mostly in English, sometimes out loud so I could hear and see by the ear, and a few times in the Greek. I carefully observed the motifs and themes so that I could articulate the transcending theme or "melodic line" of the book—the coherent, sustained theme, the predominant message that unifies the book.<sup>5</sup> Of course, reading the introductions of respected commentaries on Philippians (like those of P. T. O'Brien, Marcus Bockmuehl, or Frank Thielman) will further document the symmetries and themes of the book and provide insights that the reader would have not seen on his own, and, happily, some needed correctives.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994). Carson helpfully catalogues common exegetical errors under these headings: 1. Word-Study Fallacies, 2. Grammatical Fallacies, 3. Logical Fallacies, and 4. Presuppositional and Historical Fallacies.

<sup>4</sup> Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> David Helm (*Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014], 47) explains: "A melodic line is a short sequence of notes that form a distinctive portion of a song. It may be part of the main melody that gets repeated and varied. Books of the Bible work the same way. Each book has a melodic line, an essence that informs what the book is about. And each passage in the book, then, will serve that melodic line in some way. So, in preaching, we might ask, what is the essence of my book? And how is my particular passage informing it and informed by it?"

Nevertheless, there is primary joy and spiritual ownership in discovering the melodic line and structures for oneself.

### **III. For Those Who Do Not Know Greek**

For those who have no knowledge or training in the Greek language but desire to access the riches of the Greek text, there are several avenues available.

The first requires the purchase of one or two trustworthy commentaries on the Greek text of the book to be preached on that have been written for those who do not have a mastery of Greek. Here an invaluable resource for the preacher is Carson's *New Testament Commentary Survey*,<sup>6</sup> which evaluates the commentaries on each book of the New Testament, beginning with the more complex and detailed commentaries, moving through the more accessible and less technical commentaries, and ending with the homiletic commentaries.

The second path to accessing the Greek text is the pastoral community. Many pastors are acquainted with other pastors who have had access to theological education and/or are gifted in language, and most will gladly help their fellow pastors in biblical understanding. A wise pastor will seek out other skilled pastors who can elevate his understanding of the text and biblical knowledge. This was a time-honored practice long before there were seminaries and Bible colleges. In fact, it was the preferred way to train pastors in Puritan times. And the truth is that such relationships are two-way streets: the learner will possess knowledge and expertise that will enrich his mentor's life and ministry. In some regions, pastors arrange to meet weekly in personal community (or online) to go over the same text together as they prepare to teach it to their congregations.

A third way to aid access to the original is to take an online course in Koine Greek such as that offered by Dr. Bill Mounce on [www.billmounce.com/greek](http://www.billmounce.com/greek). The course is structured to help the student increase his understanding of the text through the use of better Greek tools and word studies. Mounce's free online instruction is designed to move through three levels: Foundational Greek, Church Greek, and Functional Greek. Also, Tyndale House, Cambridge, UK, offers free online the *STEP Bible* which provides access to Hebrew and Greek word search tools, multiple versions of the Bible in ancient and modern languages, and interlinears for some translations at [www.stepbible.org](http://www.stepbible.org).

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<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, *New Testament Survey*, 7th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

#### IV. *Two to Three Hours Tackling the Greek*

I begin working through the Greek text employing a minimum of tools because I want to freshly encounter the text untrammelled by numerous resources.

So I first clear my desk and place a pad of paper before me. Next to it I place *The Greek English New Testament*, which displays on facing pages the Nestle–Aland 28 Greek text (left) and the English Standard Version (right).<sup>7</sup> The other tools on the desk are *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*,<sup>8</sup> the second edition of *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG),<sup>9</sup> and my English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV). Of course, my collection of lexicons, grammars, theological dictionaries and translations is at hand if I need them.

Alongside the pad of paper, I lay a photocopy of the Greek text that I can then freely mark up without defacing my personal copy. It is important to note here that commentaries are purposely excluded because I want to attempt thinking through the text for myself. The next couple of hours, working through the Greek without the commentaries, is the *hardest* work in the process of preparation—and the most rewarding.

As I move through the text, I mark and annotate my photocopy circling the *key words*, the *often-repeated words*, and the *connectives*. While doing this I observe the tenses and constructions, drawing arrows between related thoughts and constructions, indicating my uncertainties with squiggles, asterisks, and question marks. I then take colored felt marking pens and highlight words—for example, the *key words* in green, the *repeated words* in orange, the *connectives* in blue—so that I can visually survey something of how the text works. During this process, I consult my lexicon for alternate renderings and nuances.

At the same time, I fill my blank pad with free-flowing jottings of what comes to mind, which I begin to arrange in clusters on the page to which I give headings like *Parallels?* – *Theme?* – *Structure?* – *Cross References?* – *Applications?* – *Illustrations?* – *Christ?* – *Theology?* – *Cruxes?* – *Insights?* – *Culture?*

<sup>7</sup> *The Greek–English New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, Unabridged, Revised Edition in One Volume (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., trans. and rev. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

Much of what I gather under these headings will be discarded, but important thoughts will begin to emerge.

I also ply the text with four tried-and-true diagnostic questions:

1) *Why is this text here?* This question requires me to think about the context for myself. The insights gathered here can inform and sharpen my understanding of what the text is about. And sometimes my own conclusions may be fresher and even better than those in the commentaries. But even if they are wrong, the process of thinking for myself is salutary.

2) *What is the text actually saying?* The lens through which I view Scripture is unabashedly Reformed, but for the moment I attempt to set it aside and listen to the words of the text because my presuppositions may blind me to its primary significance and penetrating application. Put another way, theology always informs my thought and helps maintain my orthodoxy, but I don't want assumptions to keep me from seeing the text afresh.

3) *Why is the text saying it in this way?* For example, in the Sermon on the Mount the substance of the eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2–12 could be expressed in a different order and without their repeated literary symmetries. In fact, in Luke's gospel, in the so-called Sermon on the Plain, Jesus gives only three Beatitudes in a different order and in a compacted literary form. Why are these texts saying it in these ways?

4) *What is surprising about the text?* Our familiarity with the biblical text, especially those texts that are often visited, can serve to blind us to what is actually being conveyed. For example, the surprise in Jesus's encounter with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21–28 is threefold: first, in Jesus's ignoring of her pathetic pleas (v. 23); then, second, his telling her that he was sent only to Israel (v. 24); and, lastly, Jesus's apparent rudeness in telling her that it's not right to take children's bread and throw it to (Gentile) dogs (v. 26). This isn't Jesus as we commonly encounter him in the Scripture! And in these surprises there is some majestic Christology, as well as insight into the silence of God and his sovereign bestowal of grace. How much is missed here if this text is preached (as is commonly done) only from the perspective of the woman's persistence.

## **V. Discerning the Theme and Structure of the Greek Text**

During all of these questionings, scribblings, and color-coding of the copy of the Greek text, and grouping of thoughts on the pad of paper—while I look up references and chase ideas around the Scriptures—the driving concern is to discern the structure and the central theme of the passage so that I can begin to form my message. And, eventually, one or both appear.

Sometimes it happens minutes into the process, and other times only after hours of intensive prayer and labor.

And quite often, it is difficult to know what comes first. The experience is sometimes like looking through binoculars at a forest as the binoculars are slowly brought into focus so that the blur dissolves and vivid contours and detail are revealed.

Whatever the sequence in discerning the theme and symmetries of the passage, the crucial task is to state the theme of the passage in a clearly articulated sentence. This sentence has been helpfully termed the *central theme*, the *thrust*, the *focus*, the *big idea*, the *telos*, the *unifying theme*—all incisive terms that indicate the sentence’s crucial importance to the sermon. Indeed, this one sentence is what will give unity and energy to the sermon.

Once the central theme is clear and concisely articulated, and the symmetries of the passage are in focus, the preacher can begin to construct the outline using the shape of the text as a guide. The main points in the outline will derive coherence and power if they accurately reflect the structure underlying a well-articulated theme.

Again, at this point, the commentaries have been scrupulously avoided.

Here is how a sermon outline on the Greek text of 2 Corinthians 4:7–12 developed. Early in my concentrated observations of the text, I saw that the opening sentence of verse 7—“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us”—clearly voiced the central theme (the big idea) of the text, which is this: *We, as frail weak followers of Christ, have been given the treasure of the gospel, in all its creational power, to show that its surpassing power belongs to God alone.* The uncovering of this unifying theme rested on three observations: First, *ostrakinois skeuesin*, “clay vessels,” refers to fragile household vessels (the shards of which litter ancient ruins) and, as such, is a penetrating metaphor for human weakness. Second, *thēsauron*, “treasure,” is defined by the preceding context in vv. 4–6 as God’s mighty creational power that illuminates dark hearts with the light of the gospel. And third, the rest of Paul’s paragraph (vv. 8–12) is an exposition of the truth that God’s power is manifested in our weakness. The shortened, working form of the central theme was this: *Our weaknesses are meant to show forth God’s gospel power.*

I also saw that the flow of Paul’s reasoning, as he explains the power-weakness theme, could be represented with this tentative outline:

- I. THE DECLARATION OF POWER, v. 7
- II. THE PARADOXES OF POWER, vv. 8–9
- III. THE SOURCE OF POWER, vv. 10–11
- IV. THE SURPRISE OF POWER, v. 12

I then spaced these typed, bolded headings over several sheets of paper so as to leave plenty of room for hand-written notes, and began to record my ample observations with the help of my restricted tools. Happily, I did not have to adjust this working outline in my pre-commentary studies, or when I went to the commentaries. The following is an orderly presentation of my messy jottings.

## **Pre-Commentary Working Outline of 2 Corinthians 4:7–12**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“clay jars” is a penetrating metaphor for weakness.

Disposable containers for the ancient world.

Starbucks cups!

**Theme:** *Our weaknesses are meant to show forth the gospel power of God.*

This idea is in line with the Melodic Line of 2 Cor which is *power in weakness*.

See: 1:8–9; 2:14–16; 3:4–6; 6:3–10; 11:30–33; 12:7–10.

### **I. THE DECLARATION OF POWER, v. 7**

Extended thoughts on the theme of power through weakness ...

Note that human power is not in view here, only *God's*.

### **II. THE PARADOXES OF POWER, vv. 8–9**

Note that the paradoxes are polished, and all feature the adversative *all' ouk*, “but not.” They each represent an ascending level of intensity.

The paradoxes all have biographical referents in Paul’s personal experience, and have their counterparts in the lives of all committed believers. But it is Christ who ultimately lived out all the paradoxes of power.

#### **Paradox 1: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed”**

Both of these participles are passive.

“afflicted” (*thlibomenoi*) carries the sense of: 1) press upon, crowd as on a narrow confined road, 2) press together, compress, make narrow (BDAG 457).<sup>10</sup>

“despair” (*stenochōroumenoi*) bears the sense of confinement and restriction.

(BDAG 942–43) offers this gloss for the participles in 4:8: *hard-pressed but not crushed*.

**Paradox of power:** compressed but not crushed.

**Paul?** “hard-pressed” is a descriptive that could well describe Paul’s entire apostolic life. Outtakes from Paul’s litany of suffering in 2 Cor 11 all indicate the pressure-cooker of tribulation; the eight repetitions of «danger» in v. 26; and Paul’s escaping in a fish basket through a window in the wall of the city of Damascus (vv. 30–32). All this, and Paul was never crushed. gospel resiliency!

**Applications ...**

#### **Paradox 2: “perplexed, but not driven to despair”**

Both of these participles are middle.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

These participles also rhyme in Greek, suggesting that this may have been an everyday phrase.

“perplexed” (*aporoumenoi*) bears the sense of being at a loss, in doubt, uncertain (BDAG 119)

“despair” (*exaporoumenoi*) has the idea of despair, and is used this way in 1:8 to describe Paul’s despairing of life, and provides this gloss for the two participles perplexed but not despairing (BDAG 345).

**Paradox of power:** Perplexed but not despairing.

**Paul?** 2 Cor 1:8 that records Paul actually thinking that he was going to die, being “utterly burdened beyond our strength.” But he didn’t succumb to ultimate despair as verses 9–10 indicate.

**Applications ...**

**Paradox 3:** “persecuted, but not forsaken”

These two participles are passive, as was the first set.

“persecuted” (*diōkomenoi*) has the sense of to pursue, track down, persecute (BDAG 254).

“forsaken” (*enkataleipomenoi*) connotes to be left behind—but not left behind, not abandoned (BDAG 273).

**Paradox of power:** Pursued but not abandoned.

**Paul?** Acts 23 records Paul’s being pursued by some 40 of his enemies who had bound themselves with an oath to kill him, but on the eve of the plot Jesus let him know that he was not abandoned when he stood by Paul and declared, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome” (v. 11).

**Applications ...**

**Paradox 4:** “struck down, but not destroyed”

Again, two passive participles.

“struck down” (*kataballomenoi*) signifies to strike down, throw down, and this gloss is offered for both the participles together is *struck down, but not destroyed* (BDAG 514).

**Paradox of power:** Struck down but not destroyed.

**Paul?** Paul’s near death in Lystra by stoning (Acts 14:19–23).

**Applications ...**

CHRIST! How the incarnate Christ, in taking on the weakness of human flesh, demonstrated the power of God in perfectly fulfilling the paradoxes of power.

- 1) Compressed, but not crushed
- 2) Perplexed, but not despairing
- 3) Pursued, but not abandoned
- 4) Struck down, but not destroyed

**III. THE SOURCE OF POWER: CHRIST JESUS, vv. 10–11**

Paul goes on to explain that his experiences of power through weakness was like that of Jesus in his death (weakness) and his resurrection (power) which he sums up by saying: “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (v. 10).

Note: *nekrōsin* (not *thanatos*, the usual word for death) is used. Significantly, the lexicon offers this gloss: *we always carry about in our body the putting to death of Jesus* (BDAG 537).

How is this?

Paul's bearing in his body the *nekrōsin* of Jesus was not a personal end in itself, but that "the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (v. 10b). Those who observed Paul saw the life of Jesus in the amazing power manifested through Paul's weaknesses, just as the paradoxes emphasize. This is the way that Jesus is manifested in the bodies of those who truly follow him.

To drive home this great truth, Paul repeats himself in stronger terms: "For we who live are always being given over to death (*thanatos*) for Jesus's sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (v. 11).

It is always God's will that his frail jars of clay be used to show that the surpassing power belongs to God.

#### IV. THE SURPRISE OF POWER, v. 12

Paul ties a bow on his thoughts here with an unexpected twist because, by the way Paul has structured his thought in the paragraph, we would expect him to say something like: "So death is at work in us, but, but life is at work in us too." But surprisingly, he says, "So death is at work in us, but life in you" (v. 12).

This is the great principle of the cross: Christ died that we might live.

#### CONCLUSION

Concluding applications...

### VI. Consulting the Commentaries

Now, with the pre-commentary study completed, what remains to be done is a) consult the commentaries, b) finalize the theme and outline, c) seek out appropriate illustrations, d) write out the sermon manuscript or outline, e) submit one's soul to the truth of the text, and f) preach in full dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

The seasoned preacher understands that commentaries must be both respected and disrespected. But what foolishness to dispense with commentaries—as some have done who pride themselves in needing little beyond their testaments and lexicons. The truth is, we all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before and can profit from those preachers and scholars whose technical skills far exceed ours. This said, commentaries must not be over-reverenced. Indeed, those in the tradition of the old historical-critical school may be hindered by its shuttered ignorance, as Eta Linnemann poignantly wrote in her *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?*<sup>11</sup> As it stands today, we have a wealth of

<sup>11</sup> See Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand

commentaries on 2 Corinthians that can be mined for their grammatical and historical insights and theologizing.<sup>12</sup>

High among the advantages of having studied the Greek text with basic tools for yourself, before engaging the commentaries, is that you will be better able to navigate the grammatical-exegetical arguments. And more, you will be better able to discern their accuracy and feasibility. Your studies will also help your move faster through dense commentaries like those of Murray Harris and Margaret Thrall.<sup>13</sup>

When I examined the commentaries and monographs on 2 Corinthians, I gained three crucial insights: 1) The four paradoxes in verses 8 and 9 are extraordinarily intense in their triumphant emphasis. As Tim Savage explains, “The two participles in each antithesis are joined by the particle οὐκ (rather than the customary μή) which indicates that Paul is emphatic about this interpretation—‘we are hard pressed, but by *no means* crushed.’”<sup>14</sup> 2) The unusual word for death (*nekrōsin*) in verse 10 refers to the process of dying. As C. K. Barrett piquantly explains, “Paul’s meaning is that one who observed his life as a Christian apostle ... would see constantly repeated a process analogous to the killing of Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed! Observe this process repeatedly in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. 3) The very language of verse 11, “For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake ...” is the same language used to describe Jesus’s being handed over to his enemies (cf. Mark 9:31: 10:33).<sup>16</sup> Such solidarity with Christ! These three insights were inserted in the working outline under the appropriate headings, and would serve to enrich the sermon. I would never have seen them apart from the commentaries.

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Rapids: Baker, 1990), 87, 88, 154, where she describes her experience of critical ideology as a former member of the guild.

<sup>12</sup> At the forefront of excellent commentaries are those of Murray J. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2000); David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999); Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); James M. Scott, *2 Corinthians*, NICNT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998); and, of course, John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. A. Small (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964; repr., 1973).

<sup>13</sup> Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Timothy B. Savage, *Power Through Weakness*, SNTSMS 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 171.

<sup>15</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 128.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), 131.

## VII. *Finalizing the Theme and Outline*

There have been times, after hours of labor over the Greek text without commentaries, that I am not sure as to the text's controlling theme and outline. Other times I have opened a good commentary, and felt, frankly, embarrassed at what I did not see on my own. But, again, my time spent in the text was not wasted because as I prayed I was observing and *thinking*. And, my study allowed me to appreciate and evaluate what is found in the commentaries.

In my study of 2 Corinthians 4:7–12, where the theme and contours of thought are fairly transparent, I was able to see the controlling theme early on, as well as the symmetries of the text. Therefore, my provisional outline and theme, as represented in the working outline above, did not need to be adjusted, and the outline thus served me well when I was collecting and arranging my scribbled observations of the text, and storing the insights gleaned from the commentaries.

It must be said here that discerning the theme and outline of the text is essential to effective expository preaching. Without them, “biblical exposition” is reduced to a running commentary or exegetical lecture. Outlining is at the heart of expository preparation.

Few people have ever looked at a beautiful home and exclaimed, “Oh my, what a beautiful job of framing!” And it is equally doubtful that any of us (or our people) have ever described a sermon in such terms—unless the sermon structure was so ostentatious that the outline was what the sermon was about: “Oh, pastor, what a beautiful outline!” However, we must understand that if the framing of the house is not right, the house will not work. If the framers err—if the corner walls are not set at ninety-degree angles, or if the door frames are not squared—the doors and windows won't open. The house will be a failure. And that is just how and why so many expositions fail. The text is before the preacher, he sees the building material, but he cannot summarize what it is about, nor does he see its contours, and the resulting sermon is diffuse and unworkable because the sermon outline is as important to the sermon as framing is to a house.

When the controlling theme (the big idea, the thrust) of the sermon is true to the text and the outline represents the thought flow of the text, they will mutually energize one another so that the central idea receives sustained power and the outline proceeds with compelling force in homiletic synergism.

That is why the preacher must give ample time up-front to hard thinking about the matters of theme and structure.

### VIII. *Applying the Text*

Both the preacher and his people are concerned that the sermon be relevant and easily applied. And this valid concern can lead to abuse in cases where the preacher begins by searching the text for applications without taking the time to find out what the text actually says. In actuality, however, the preacher who truly expounds the text need not be overly anxious about application because *the Bible is an application* from Genesis to Revelation.

When Moses penned the Torah in the Sinai after the Exodus, virtually every line was of immense relevance to the Israelites, as it told them who God was, where they came from, what God expected of them, and where they were going. And when Israel's prophets prophesied to Israel, they were, by and large, applying the Torah to the people's conduct. Every one of the 150 Psalms was meant to be sung and applied. The apostle Paul's declaration that the Scriptures are God-breathed is coupled to his declaration of their comprehensive fourfold applicability: they are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). The history, pericopes, and parables of the Gospels unfold application upon application from the life of Christ. As to the relevance of the Epistles, each letter addresses problems in the church. As has been said, there would be no New Testament as we know it if the New Testament churches had not been not so naughty!

The truth is that if we understand what the application was in Sinai or in Jerusalem, or in Galilee or Corinth or Ephesus or Rome, it will be relevant today in Singapore and New York and Rome. The scholarly anxiety about "the pastness of the past" and the bringing of the two horizons of ancient culture and contemporary culture together is not as daunting as is supposed when we remember that God is the author of Scripture and that he had a future audience in mind when he caused the Scripture to be written, as Peter Adam so persuasively argues in *Speaking God's Words*.<sup>17</sup> And, as Scott

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Adam (*Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996], 101–2) offers nine cogent reasons for contemporary application: "The problem of 'the pastness of the past' is often put to the preacher in terms of the 'two horizons', one of the original author, and the other of the modern reader. I think that the problem can be overstated, with paralysing results. I try to work on the problem with the following correctives in mind. First, I assume that my common humanity with the Bible writers will result in some instinctive resonance of understanding. Second, I recognize that a 'horizon' is subjectively determined, and try to reduce the limitations of my horizon by study and imagination, and by my understanding of their horizon as well. Third, I believe that in some cases at least, the human authors of Scripture had a future audience in mind (see, e.g., 1 Pet. 1:1–10). Fourth, I recognize that to speak of human authors is to give only half the picture. If God is in some sense the author of Scripture, was his horizon limited? Fifth, I believe that God

Hafemann has written, “The very fact that God has chosen to reveal himself in a space and time-bound collection of writings means that cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, cross-temporal communication is possible.”<sup>18</sup>

Of course, while understanding the text’s application in Corinth and believing that it will apply in Chicago is the necessary first part of the work, careful contemporary application is the other. We must be astute observers of culture like the choice men of “Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chr 12:32). We must read the culture through its newspapers and bestsellers and media outlets. We must understand its pop and corporate idolatries, as well as the prevailing intellectual and political currents. And we must intimately know the existential needs of our people, which can only come by daily shepherding our church families amid the joys and woes of life.

In all of this, the person of Jesus must be at the center of our application, just as he was for the apostolic church. He is the only one who can satisfy the longings of today’s culture and save and satisfy our souls.

## **IX. Seeking Appropriate Illustrations**

The inerrant text of Scripture is sovereign, and as such wholly sufficient and massively potent. This is why we study the Greek text so assiduously—so as to be true to the sacred text when we preach. And this is also why great care must be taken in sermon illustration.

Preachers must understand that there is no such thing as a “good illustration.” There are only good illustrations of what one is saying. An illustration is valuable only to the extent that it calls attention to the point being made and contributes momentum, clarity, and force to the sermon. If the illustration does not precisely illustrate the point, don’t use it—no matter how gripping it may be.

This is an intensely ethical matter when God’s Word is opened. If the illustration doesn’t clarify and focus the truth of God’s holy Word, forget it.

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had a future audience in mind when he caused the Scripture to be written—or better, we are the same audience, the one people of God, the one household and temple of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles, fellow heirs of God’s promises to Israel, members of one body, sharers together in the promises in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:19–3:6). Sixth, although we emphasize the real gap between ourselves and the first century AD, from God’s point of view we live in the same age, the ‘last days’ between the first and second comings of Christ. Seventh, God the author, is still alive, and can still use his words by his Spirit. Eighth, I am not an individual reader, but part of a community of faith—and together we hear the words of God. Finally, words and ideas can be culturally expressed without being culturally limited.”

<sup>18</sup> Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 169.

Better to preach a sermon with no illustrations than to employ misleading or inaccurate illustrations.

In searching out illustrations, the preacher should first mine the treasure trove of redemptive history and writings of the Old Testament. In respect to the *strength in weakness* theme, we see Moses, the meekest man on earth (Num 11:2), withstand Pharaoh, the mightiest man on earth (Exod 7–12). Then there is Gideon’s embrace of weakness as he, at God’s direction, assembled an absurdly small force of men and armed them with trumpets and empty jars containing torches, and then at the cry “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” (v. 20), he witnessed the awesome power of God as he defeated the hordes of Midian (Judg 7:1–24).

A sermon illustration is something that throws light on the text. So an illustration may be anything: an anecdote, a quotation, a historical reference, a story, a line of poetry, or references from the news media to politics, sports events, and pop culture. As I searched my files I found a quotation from Oswald Chambers that is particularly apropos, as it declares that throughout history God uses the weak and powerless.<sup>19</sup> I also was given a brilliant unpublished translation of the paradoxes of 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 by Dr. Merrill Tenney:

Squeezed, but not squashed,  
 Bewildered, but not befuddled,  
 Pursued, but not abandoned,  
 Knocked down, but not knocked out.

Indeed, Tenney’s pulsing translation confirmed and encapsulated my lexical observations about the four paradoxes.

These illustrations were duly noted on my sermon worksheet to be used in the preparation of the exposition.

## **X. Writing a Sermon Manuscript or a Detailed Outline**

The decision whether to preach from a manuscript or from a full outline or from a sparse outline featuring only headings and a few notes or totally without notes must be left to the individual preacher because the need of

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<sup>19</sup> “Man’s Weakness—God’s Strength,” *Missionary Crusader* (December 1964), 7: “God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.”

an *aide-mémoire* will vary according to a preacher's abilities and predilections. Some preachers have the ability to type out a sermon manuscript, read it once before leaving the study, and deliver it almost word-for-word! This said, the call to preach the Word demands accuracy and, whatever one's ability, Francis Bacon's dictum—"*Reading maketh a man full: writing an exact man*"—should be heeded. In fact, the preacher who preaches without notes may very well be the man who should write himself a clear manuscript so that when he freely delivers God's Word he does so with exactness.

In any case, preachers must write out certain parts of their messages, especially those sections that need precise explanation. Indeed, if a preacher cannot write his thoughts out clearly, it may be because he does not fully understand what he thinks that he understands. And more, the labor of writing himself clear may help him actually understand what he thinks he knows!

### **XI. Submitting One's Soul to the Truth of the Text**

I once heard John Piper tell a group of pastors among whom we were ministering that the reason that he was called to the ministry was so that he could be saved—weekly. It was an intentional "teaser" from my Calvinist friend: when asked how that could be, he genially turned us to 1 Timothy 4:16 and read, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in doing this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." The saving that Piper was referencing was not weekly regeneration, but the elevating and salutary effect on his soul of studying and preaching the Word from week to week.

Some preachers can give five hours to study, others ten hours, others fifteen or twenty hours. I have been privileged to have been provided at least twenty hours a week for sermon preparation. And I have said this many times: sermon preparation is twenty hours of prayer; it is twenty hours of repeatedly asking the Holy Spirit for insight; it is twenty hours of the harrowing of my soul as the Word plows deep bleeding furrows in it; it is twenty hours of ongoing repentance; it is twenty hours of utter dependence upon Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and then, it is a singing heart!

Whether our pastoral situations allow us five or twenty-five hours to prepare, as we submit ourselves in prayer to the sacred text, we find ourselves being "saved" along with our hearers.

## **XII. *The end of the matter***

The preacher has done his work when

- he has discerned and stated the theme of the book from which he is to preach;
- he has prayerfully interpreted the preaching text in its context, using the established canons of interpretation (lexical, grammatical, and syntactical);
- he understands the text's application in its historical setting, and in the whole of Scripture;
- he has discerned wherein the text is a revelation of Jesus Christ and has made the appropriate inter-canonical connections;
- he has made the trip from Jerusalem or Rome or Sinai to his own setting and understands its present relevance;
- he has stated the central unifying theme of the text;
- he has articulated the aim of the exposition;
- he has outlined his exposition using the literary structure of the text as a guide;
- he has employed stories and illustrations that really do illuminate the text;
- he has written or outlined his sermon using clear language that effectively communicates in his culture;
- he has submitted himself to the text so that it has so plowed his soul that he is sympathetic to and desires the truths of the text to be active in his life;
- and he stands in the pulpit in full dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and the exposition of God's Word flows from the inward affections of his heart without affectation.



# Practical Principles for Church Leaders and Church Members from Hebrews 13

ALBERT J. COETSEE

## Abstract

In the final chapter of his letter, the writer of Hebrews charges his hearers to remember, imitate, obey, and submit to their leaders. From these exhortations we can deduce what he expected from both the church leaders and members of the local church to whom he wrote. In this study some of the expectations of the writer of Hebrews are spelled out, and from them practical principles are given for church leaders and members today.

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## Introduction

In the final chapter of his letter-sermon<sup>1</sup> the writer of Hebrews gives a few final commands. Among other things, he charges his hearers to remember, imitate, obey, and submit to their leaders:

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Heb 13:7)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The writer of Hebrews calls his own work a “word of exhortation” (*logos tēs paraklēseōs*) in 13:22. A comparison with Acts 13:15, where the same phrase is used, as well as extensive research on Jewish-Hellenistic sermons in early Christian circles, has led many scholars to accept that Hebrews is a Christian Jewish-Hellenistic sermon with a letter ending. Cf. Gareth L. Cockerill (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 11–15) for a good discussion in this regard. Consequently, along with Cockerill, in this article Hebrews is referred to as a sermon, and the addressees as hearers.

<sup>2</sup> Unless indicated, the Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb 13:17)

From these commands, and from the words in Hebrews 13:7–9 and 13:17–19, we can deduce what the writer of Hebrews expected from both the church leaders and members of the particular local church to whom he wrote. In this study some of his expectations are spelled out, and from them practical principles are given for church leaders and members today.

## **1. *The Framework of These Exhortations***

In order to deduce what the writer of Hebrews expected from both the church leaders and the members it is important to keep the overall message of Hebrews in view, as well as the place of these exhortations within the sermon.

### **1. *The Overall Message of Hebrews***

Throughout his sermon the writer implores his hearers to persevere in the faith. Because of external circumstances (some form of persecution; cf. 10:32–34), some of the hearers' faith has deteriorated to such an extent that they have begun to be apathetic towards God's revelation in his Son, and he warns them of the dangerous course they have taken by highlighting the excellence of this revelation and the excellence of the Son himself through whom God gave this revelation (cf. 1:1–4). He is the eternal Son of God who became man, suffered, and died to be man's unique and perfect high priest. Consequently, one with an unbelieving, unfaithful, and nonchalant attitude toward God's revelation in his Son can expect nothing less than God's judgment and punishment. The hearers should therefore respond all the more with reverent faith and obedience to what God says through his Son (cf. 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:14–29).

### **2. *The Place of Hebrews 13 within the Sermon***

Hebrews 13 can be divided into two pericopes, namely 13:1–21 and 13:22–25. The former is about service and sacrifices pleasing to God, while the latter contains the sermon's final greetings.<sup>3</sup> A closer examination of 13:1–21

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<sup>3</sup> William L. Lane (*Hebrews 9–13*, WBC 47B [Dallas: Word, 1991], 497), among others, makes a strong case that although these final greetings were almost certainly part of the original book of Hebrews, they were probably added when the book as a whole was sent via courier to the hearers. This means that the writer of Hebrews closes his sermon with the benediction in 13:20–21.

makes it clear that verses 1–6 contain some general and shorter exhortations (regarding brotherly love, hospitality, and marriage), while verses 7–19 give specific instructions regarding leaders and going “outside the camp,”<sup>4</sup> while verses 20–21 contain a benediction and doxology. In 13:7–19, three paragraphs can be distinguished:

- In 13:7–9 the writer charges his hearers to remember their leaders and affirms the reality of Christ’s eternal faithfulness with a warning against strange teachings.
- In 13:10–16 the writer for the last time touches on Jesus’s high priestly sacrifice, in this case with specific reference to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) from Leviticus 16.<sup>5</sup> He explains that as Jesus suffered outside the gate (of Jerusalem), believers should be willing to “go outside” and bear the reproach he endured, continually offering up sacrifices to God through him.<sup>6</sup>
- In 13:17–19 the writer charges his hearers to obey, submit to, and pray for their leaders.

From this analysis it appears that verses 7–9 and 17–19 embrace and emphasize the climactic verses 10–16. This implies that although they concern charges for the hearers concerning their leaders, the writer’s focus is still on Christ (as depicted in 13:10–16). Consequently, the exhortations he gives in verses 7–9 and 17–19 should be viewed as exhortations given to the hearers (and by implication to their leaders) *on the basis of* the sacrifice of Christ. In other words, the exhortations concerning leaders are not things church members ought to do, but things they must do in obedience to Christ.

This conclusion fits well with the overall message of Hebrews, namely, that the hearers should respond with reverent faith and obedience to what God says through his Son.

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<sup>4</sup> The unity of 13:7–19 is confirmed by the inclusio formed by “leaders” (*hēgoumenoi*; 13:7, 17) and “behavior/conduct” (*anastrophē/anastrephō*; 13:7, 18).

<sup>5</sup> The specific prescript from Leviticus 16:27 that the writer of Hebrews refers to is that the bodies of the animals whose blood the high priest brought into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement should be burned outside the camp. The characteristic terms that bind 13:10–16 together all have to do with sanctuary and sacrifice (e.g., altar, tent, serve, blood, sin, holy place(s), high priest, sacrifice, and sanctify).

<sup>6</sup> The phrase “outside the camp/gate” (*exō tēs parembolēs/pylēs*) runs like a refrain through 13:11–13.

## II. The Meaning of the Word “Leader”

From our modern-day context it is important to note that “leader” in Hebrews 13 is not the common New Testament word used to describe a pastor, elder, or evangelist. The word here is *hēgoumenos*, derived from the verb *hēgeomai*. Originally the verb referred to the action of going before, leading the way, or guiding. In ancient texts it is used, among other things, for guidance in music, war, and politics.<sup>7</sup> In the Septuagint it is mostly used to refer to military leaders or leaders of people.<sup>8</sup> The second usage of *hēgeomai*, which originated at a later stage, indicates the action of thinking, considering, or regarding.<sup>9</sup>

In Hebrews, as throughout the New Testament, both senses of *hēgeomai* are found: it refers either to guiding (Heb 13:7, 17, 24) or thinking (Heb 10:29; 11:11, 26). When the verb *hēgeomai* is used to refer to someone who guides or leads, it is always found in the present participle form, namely *hēgoumenos*. Outside of Hebrews the participle *hēgoumenos* is used five times: for a leader of men (Luke 22:26), for a leader of a nation (Matt 2:6; Acts 7:10), for a religious leader (Acts 15:22), and for a chief speaker (*ho hēgoumenos tou logou*, Acts 14:12).

From the context of Hebrews 13 it is clear that *hēgoumenoi* refers to the religious leaders of the local church (Heb 13:7, 17, 24).<sup>10</sup> Although it is difficult to deduce much concerning the specific status and function of these leaders, the context of Hebrews 13 makes the following clear:

- The distinction in verse 24 to greet “all your leaders and all the saints” indicates that the congregation was “divided into those who lead and those who are led.”<sup>11</sup>
- The writer’s charge in verse 7 that his hearers should “remember” their leaders indicates that they were well known to church members.
- The writer seems to distinguish between leaders who have already passed away (7)<sup>12</sup> and the current leaders of the congregation (17).

<sup>7</sup> Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 763 (hereafter LSJ).

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Büchsel, “ἡγέομαι κτλ.,” *TDNT* 2:907.

<sup>9</sup> BDAG 434.

<sup>10</sup> This title for church leaders is also found in 1 Clement 1:3 and 21:6, a document that like Hebrews is traditionally associated with Rome. Cf. William L. Lane (*Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A [Dallas: Word, 1991], lviii).

<sup>11</sup> *TDNT* 2:907. Büchsel states in a footnote that the interest of the writer of Hebrews in these leaders is “ethical and religious rather than ecclesiastical.”

<sup>12</sup> Various words and phrases in 13:7 seem to indicate that these specific leaders have already

- The leaders are called “those who spoke to you the word of God” in verse 7. That this is the first statement made regarding their ministry seems to indicate that this was their most important function.
- They were examples in conduct and faith, as is clear from the charge the writer gives his hearers to imitate them (7b).
- They had a certain authority and consequently status, as indicated by the exhortation to the hearers to obey and submit to them (17a).
- They kept watch over the church’s spiritual life and did so with the knowledge that they would one day have to give an account of this to God (17b).
- The writer’s exhortation in verse 18 to pray for “us” makes it clear that he viewed himself as one of the leaders.<sup>13</sup>

With the amount of data available, it is difficult to come to more specific conclusions.<sup>14</sup> In light of this, we should be careful not to equate these leaders with later church offices or modern-day ecclesiastical positions. But the fact that they “spoke the word of God,” a task biblically and traditionally connected to any leader of the Old Testament people or New Testament church, makes it difficult not to see parallels between the past and the present.

### III. *What the Writer of Hebrews Expected from the Church Leaders*

In light of these considerations concerning “leaders,” attention can now be turned to the specific expectations the writer had regarding church leaders. Three practical principles can be deduced:

#### 1. *Speak the Word of God (13:7a)*

The first qualification the writer looked for in church leaders concerns speaking the word of God. This can be deduced from verse 7: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.”

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passed away: the hearers are commanded to “remember” their leaders; these leaders “spoke” (past tense) the word of God; the hearers are commanded to “consider the outcome of their way of life.”

<sup>13</sup> Paul Ellingworth (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 725) is almost certainly correct when he argues that the switch between “us/we” and “I” in 13:18 and 13:19 makes it unlikely that “we” is an epistolary plural. Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 396. Contrast Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 402.

<sup>14</sup> Attridge (*Hebrews*, 391) cautiously states that these leaders “are certainly unlikely to have been monarchical bishops, and some sort of presbyterial group is probably involved.”

The verb rendered “speak” (*laleō*) refers to the simple act of talking.<sup>15</sup> What these leaders talked about is “the word of God,” probably meaning that they spoke “the word spoken by God.”<sup>16</sup> Reference to “speaking the word of God” is found elsewhere in the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts (4:29, 31; 8:25; 11:19; 13:46; 16:32; cf. Phil 1:14). In these parallels the act of “speaking the word of God” refers to the preaching of the gospel. In Hebrews 13:7 it seems that it should be interpreted in the same way: the brief confession in verse 8 (“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”; cf. Rev 1:4) hints that the “word of God” that the leaders spoke had to do with Christ. The church leaders in their “speaking the word of God” proclaimed the timeless truth about Jesus Christ to the members of the local church.<sup>17</sup>

However, this does not mean that the leaders did not also proclaim the Old Testament Scriptures to their hearers. Throughout Hebrews the emphasis is on the one word of God that came in the two stages of salvation history (1:1–2a; cf. 4:12; 5:12–13; 6:1, 5). Also it is clear that throughout the letter the writer interprets the New Testament message in light of God’s Old Testament revelation, which makes it probable that the leaders spoke God’s one Old and New Testament word to the members.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, this “word of God” is indirectly contrasted in 13:9 with “diverse and strange teachings” that could lead the hearers astray. From the context it seems that these teachings had to do with “foods,” probably referring to traditions that became obsolete with Christ’s sacrificial offering.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the “word of God” the leaders spoke had to do solely with

<sup>15</sup> Although the verb *laleō* in ancient Greek originally referred to informal communication like chattering or babbling, in later Greek literature it is mostly equated with *legō*. Cf. BDAG 582.

<sup>16</sup> Within the phrase *ton logon tou theou* the genitive *tou theou* can either be a subjective genitive (“the word spoken by God”) or a genitive of origin (“the word coming from God”). The possibilities overlap considerably. Within the context the explanation of *tou theou* as a subjective genitive fits better. The remark of Craig R. Koester (*Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 36 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001], 566) in this sense is very fitting: “Hebrews affirms that God spoke to the community (1:2), but not in an unmediated way. Human messengers brought the divine message that engendered a community of faith (2:3–4).”

<sup>17</sup> In a sense a parallel is found between the leaders who spoke the word of God to the hearers in 13:7 and the reference to those who attested “such a great salvation” to them in 2:3.

<sup>18</sup> Contrast Gerhard Kittel (“λέγω κτλ.,” *TDNT* 4:113), who says that “it is hard to say whether those who have the rule have spoken and taught the OT Word, the NT Word, or both in one.”

<sup>19</sup> Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 708) comes to a similar conclusion by doing exegesis of the word “foods” in Hebrews 9:10—the only other occurrence of the word in Hebrews. Cf. Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 695–96.

Jesus Christ and not with obsolete teachings far removed from the truth of the gospel.<sup>20</sup>

In light of this we can conclude that the writer expected church leaders to speak the word of God, namely to proclaim God's unique<sup>21</sup> Old and New Testament word with its timeless truth about Jesus Christ and how salvation is found in him alone. Proclaiming the word was their most important function and specific task, and it is what distinguished them as church leaders. It does not strain the interpretation to say that the word proclaimed was most probably the single source of their authority.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. *An Example in Conduct and Faith (13:7b)*

The second principle that the writer expected of church leaders is that they should be examples in conduct and faith, as in verse 7b: "Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." Although this primarily aims at church members and concerns the kind of behavior expected of them, it is not difficult to imagine what the writer also expected of their leaders.

The Greek word translated "way of life" (*anastrophē*) is "conduct expressed according to certain principles,"<sup>23</sup> and it can be translated as behavior, way of life, or conduct. This noun refers to the leaders' moral behavior, namely their metaphorical "walk" according to certain principles. That he exhorts his hearers to consider the outcome of their leaders' way of life implies that the conduct of the leaders was blameless, as was to be expected.

Furthermore, in Hebrews 13:7 the writer seems to refer to former church leaders who have already passed away. This implies not only that the congregation's previous leaders had been excellent examples to the end of their lives, but also that he expects the same lifelong blameless example from the current leaders of this church.<sup>24</sup>

This expectation is also found in his request for prayer in verse 18: "Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act

<sup>20</sup> Although the commentary of James Moffatt (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924], 231) is outdated, his words still ring true: "Human leaders may pass away, but Jesus Christ, the supreme object and subject of their faithful preaching, remains, and remains the same; no novel additions to his truth are required, least of all innovations which mix up his spiritual religion with what is sensuous and material."

<sup>21</sup> The uniqueness of the word of God that the leaders proclaimed is also emphasized indirectly by the contrast between the multiple "strange teachings" and the singular "word of God."

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 526.

<sup>23</sup> BDAG 73.

<sup>24</sup> The reference to the "outcome" (*ekbasis*) of their way of life does not necessarily mean that these leaders died as martyrs, as some commentators have suggested. What it does indicate is that these leaders remained faithful to their way of life to the very end.

honorably in all things.” The phrase “to act honorably” contains the verb form (*anastrephō*) of the noun translated in verse 7 as “conduct” (*anastrophē*). As in the case of previous leaders, the writer is convinced that the current leaders, himself included, were conducting themselves soundly—as they should—and that they should continue in this way. The former leaders had also been examples of faith. The verb “imitate” (*mimeomai*) in verse 7 refers to the action of using something or someone as a model to be imitated, emulated or followed.<sup>25</sup> Current leaders—and by implication future ones—like the past departed, are to be examples of faith.

Church leaders should therefore be blameless examples in both conduct and faith; they should practice what they preach, as the previous leaders had done, by obeying the gospel they preached.

### 3. Keep Watch over the Church’s Spiritual Well-being (13:17b)

Verse 17 is an exhortation to the hearers: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” A third principle can be deduced from this: they are to keep watch over the church’s spiritual well-being.

The verb translated as “keeping watch” (*agrypneō*) literally means to lie awake.<sup>26</sup> In the New Testament the verb is only used figuratively for being alert or vigilant.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, all three other occurrences in the New Testament have a nuance of eschatological vigilance (cf. Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36; Eph 6:18). From the context of Hebrews 13 it is clear that it has the same nuance here. The leaders keep watch over church members’ souls with the knowledge that they will one day “have to give an account.” The combination of the verb (*apodidōmi*) and noun (*logos*) in this phrase implies “paying (out),” in the sense of fulfilling a responsibility. It can be translated “to give an account,” by implication to God (ESV; NIV; KJV; cf. Matt 12:36; Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40; 1 Pet 4:5).<sup>28</sup> The souls of believers are entrusted to them by God, and one day they will have to give an account of their keeping watch to him. They therefore have a “divinely given pastoral authority and responsibility.”<sup>29</sup>

This makes it clear that the phrase “keeping watch over your souls” refers to the leaders’ vigilant, eschatological concern for the spiritual well-being

<sup>25</sup> BDAG 651.

<sup>26</sup> LSJ 16.

<sup>27</sup> BDAG 16.

<sup>28</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 57.153 (hereafter L&N).

<sup>29</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 555. In the Greek text this responsibility is further highlighted by the emphatic pronoun *autoi* (“they themselves”) at the beginning of 13:17b.

and eternal welfare of the members in their care.<sup>30</sup> The overall context of Hebrews shows that leaders have an urgent and challenging calling, since some of the members in their care threaten to become apostate. No wonder this is one of the qualities the writer expected of church leaders.

#### **IV. What the Writer of Hebrews Expected from Church Members**

Keeping in mind the specific expectations the writer had for church leaders, his expectations for members are easy to see. Four practical principles become clear:

##### **1. Remember What Your Leaders Teach You (13:7a)**

The first principle that the writer looked for in church members relating to their leaders is in verse 7: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.” He expected them to remember their leaders—and to keep on remembering them.<sup>31</sup>

The verb “remember” (*mnēmoneuō*) means “to recall information from memory, but without necessarily the implication that persons have actually forgotten.”<sup>32</sup> But what should they remember concerning their deceased leaders? The parallel “remember” (*mnēmoneuō*) and “consider” (*anatheōreō*) in verse 7 indicates that they should remember their leaders’ example of conduct and faith. This is probably the primary meaning intended by the writer of Hebrews.<sup>33</sup> But another secondary interpretation is that they should remember what their leaders taught them from Scripture. The arguments for this interpretation are the following:

- The fact that the members are explicitly exhorted to consider the leaders’ example of conduct and faith in verse 7b makes the interpretation of the exhortation “remember your leaders’ conduct and faith” superfluous.
- The phrase “those who spoke to you the word of God” is closer to the exhortation “remember your leaders” and syntactically dependent on it.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 385. Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 723) fittingly states: “No separation of soul and body is implied, but the author’s concern is clearly the spiritual good of the community.”

<sup>31</sup> The present imperative “remember” (*mnēmoneuete*) indicates a command to continuous action.

<sup>32</sup> L&N 29.7.

<sup>33</sup> This is the interpretation of Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 702) and Cockerill (*Hebrews*, 690), among others.

<sup>34</sup> The relative pronoun *hoitines* has *tōn hēgoumenon* as its antecedent.

If this secondary interpretation is accepted, members are called to continually recall what their previous leaders taught and what their current leaders are teaching them from the word of God, because the word of God never gets outdated. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8), and it is he who gives permanence and continuity to the congregation. Their previous leaders proclaimed exactly the same Christ as their current leaders. Remembering is thus all the more urgent in light of the “diverse and strange teachings” that threaten them.

## **2. Imitate Your Leaders’ Conduct and Faith (13:7b)**

The second principle is that they should imitate their leaders’ example of conduct and faith. This is clear from verse 7b: “Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

Much has already been said about this, and we can summarize: The writer expected leaders past and present to be blameless and sound examples in conduct and faith to the end of their lives; he expected members to imitate or emulate their leaders’ conduct and faith—and to do this until the end (cf. 6:12).<sup>35</sup>

## **3. Obey and Submit to Your Leaders (Heb 13:17a)**

The third principle is found in verse 17: “Obey your leaders and submit to them.” The writer directs attention from previous leaders to their current leaders. Both the verbs “obey” (*peithō*) and “submit” (*hypeikō*) are found in the semantic field of obedience,<sup>36</sup> and the form of both implies a continuous action.<sup>37</sup>

The reasons for continuous obedience and submission are twofold. The first reason is stated explicitly in verse 17: leaders keep watch over the church’s spiritual well-being (17b). God has appointed them for this and entrusts the souls of believers to them. If members do not respect their leaders as they keep vigilant watch over the congregation, with all that it entails, they are disobedient to God.<sup>38</sup> Stated positively: by submitting they show obedience to God.

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<sup>35</sup> Again, the present participle “consider” (*anatheōrountes*) and the present imperative “imitate” (*mímeisthe*) in 13:7b indicate exhortations to continuous action.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. L&N 36.12; 36.18; Timothy M. Willis (“Obey your Leaders’: Hebrews 13 and Leadership in the Church,” *Restoration Quarterly* 36 [1994]: 323) makes a strong case for translating 13:17 as “be persuaded by your leaders [in what they teach] and yield yourselves [to them, because you have been persuaded by what they teach].” He argues that these leaders wielded traditional authority, and not a “legal-rational” type of authority.

<sup>37</sup> Both “obey” (*peithō*) and “submit” (*hypeikō*) are present imperatives.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *TDNT* 2:907.

Secondly, from the context of verse 7 it is clear that church members should submit to their leaders because they preach the authoritative word of God. Leaders do not have any authority in themselves; the word of God is their authority. Since they proclaim God's word, they are proclaiming the authority of God with the authority of God. Authority "derives directly from the authority inherent in the word of preaching";<sup>39</sup> it "rests on the proclamation of God's word as fulfilled in Christ (1:1–4)";<sup>40</sup> "heeding and yielding to the leaders means adhering to the word of God that they speak."<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, members are called to obey their leaders and to submit to them in obedience to God and Christ in Scripture—unless, of course, they promote conduct and confession in conflict with the revelation of God.<sup>42</sup> If the members are obedient, verse 17 continues, their leaders are able to keep watch "with joy and not with groaning." For ministry to be hard labor "would be of no advantage to you." This euphemism makes the dreadful consequences of unfaithfulness perfectly clear.

#### **4. Pray for Your Leaders (vv. 18–19)**

The fourth and final principle is found in verse 18: "Pray for us." Again, the form of this verb in Greek indicates an exhortation to continuous action.<sup>43</sup> Believers should pray for their leaders, and keep on doing so, because they are not only speaking the word of God (13:7a) but also setting an example in conduct and faith (13:7b), keeping watch over the church's spiritual well-being (13:17), and showing their desire to act honorably in all things (13:18).<sup>44</sup>

### **V. Practical Principles for Church Leaders and Church Members Today**

Now that we have seen the expectations of the writer for both leaders and believers in the local church to whom he wrote, it is fitting to conclude with some practical pointers for today.

<sup>39</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 555.

<sup>40</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 690.

<sup>41</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 578.

<sup>42</sup> As Koester (*Hebrews*, 578) states: "Hebrews assumes that the leaders' integrity is not in question."

<sup>43</sup> The exhortation, "pray" (*proseuchesthe*), is once more a present imperative.

<sup>44</sup> As indicated above, the writer's exhortation to pray for "us" makes it clear that he viewed himself as one of their leaders. From the exhortation to pray for their leaders in general in verse 18 flows the personal request of the writer of Hebrews for prayer in verse 19: "I urge you the more earnestly to do this [i.e. pray] in order that I may be restored to you the sooner."

### **1. *What's in a Name?***

First and foremost, it is vital that the description “church leader” be renewed in the sense of Hebrews 13. They are not called to lord it over the flock or to enforce authority. Rather they are called “to go before,” “to lead the way,” and “to guide,” in service and ministry, showing the right direction by administering with the authority of Christ. They are not more important than others; they only have the specific calling and function to lead.

Equally important, Scripture makes it clear that leaders can only show members the way in service and ministry; they cannot do service and ministry for them. They do not believe, hope, trust, or work in the place of the members. They simply lead the way for others to follow. The age-old saying is also true: “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” Therefore, members should reconsider their calling to service and ministry based on the input they receive from their leaders (Eph 4:11–12).

### **2. *Proclaiming the Word and Remembering It***

The primary task of any church leader was, is, and will be to proclaim the word of God. It is the most important characteristic of any leader’s ministry, and the single source of their authority, ministering the authority of God through his word (cf. 2 Tim 3:16–17). Moreover, the focus of proclamation of the one Old and New Testament word of God is always the timeless truth about Jesus Christ, and salvation in him alone. Proclamation shuns focus on arcane teachings far removed from the truth of the gospel.

On the other hand, believers are to continually do their utmost to remember their leaders’ teaching of the word, not forgetting the teaching of Scripture, but treasuring it in their hearts. God’s word is never outdated; rather, it edifies for growth in the likeness of Christ, to the glory of God (cf. Rom 8:29).

### **3. *Examples and Imitators***

Together with proclamation of the word, the secondary task of church leaders is to be examples of conduct and faith. They are to excel as people who glorify God by living blamelessly as he instructs and being examples of a godly walk. And this they should do continually to the end of their lives. They are also to be examples of faith, trusting fully in God and encouraging others to do likewise. In difficult circumstances they are to be the first to call others to trust.

Church members, on the other hand, should not only remember the proclamation of their leaders, but also imitate their blameless conduct and faith. This they will and should do if their leaders imitate Christ, and they themselves will become imitators of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

#### ***4. Watching and Obedience***

As well as proclaiming the word and being examples, leaders are to keep watch over the church's spiritual well-being, vigilantly ensuring that it grows in faith and seeks to glorify God. Theirs is the divinely given pastoral responsibility to ensure that no one drifts away from the faith, but perseveres to the end. This they do with the sober realization that they will one day give account of their keeping watch to God (Jas 3:1).

Members are to obey and submit to their leaders (1 Cor 16:15–16; 1 Thess 5:12), not because they have authority in themselves, but because they are appointed by God to keep watch over the church, and they derive authority from proclamation of his word. Members should therefore do everything in their power to ensure that their leaders live the ministry joyfully, as a privilege. They are to seek to make their ministry easy, not a trial, by their receptiveness, but with an exception: they cannot follow when and if they promote conduct or belief opposed to God's revelation in Scripture (Acts 5:29)

#### ***5. Praying for the Leadership***

Finally, believers are to continually pray for their leaders because they are not working for money, social standing, or the like, but heartily "as for the Lord and not for men" (Col 3:23).



## INTERVIEW

# Interview with Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.

**PETER A. LILLBACK**

(December 8, 2015)

**PETER LILLBACK:** It is a privilege today to interview Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. He has been a professor for many years at Westminster Theological Seminary here in Philadelphia, known for his work in New Testament, biblical theology, and systematics. He has been very active in the church and in the overseas missions committee of his denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Our interview celebrates his work as a theologian, Bible scholar, and exegete, and it is part of the broader remembrance of the five-hundredth anniversary of Erasmus's publishing of the first Greek New Testament in 1516. This year, 2016, is the five-hundredth anniversary of the original published version of the New Testament that is used around the world. It is quite a milestone.

**RICHARD GAFFIN:** Thank you, Peter. Great to be with you!

**PL:** *How many years in all did you teach at Westminster, and what were the primary fields in which you spent time in instruction?*

**RG:** I began teaching in the Fall of 1964 as a teaching fellow, and in that year I taught New Testament studies. At that time my former teacher and the primary New Testament teacher was John Skilton, and I served with him in the New Testament department. In the following year, I received a tenure track appointment as an instructor and taught New Testament topics for about twenty years till the mid-eighties, and at that point I made the transition to teaching systematic theology primarily, although my first love was

and continues to be New Testament theology, especially Paul's theology. I taught the course on Acts and Paul, and I continued to teach that after moving into systematic theology and until my retirement in 2008.

**PL:** *So have you enjoyed being retired?*

**RG:** I am retired with quotation marks and enjoying it very much. It's a more flexible schedule and a blessing because of the nature of the career I have had and continue to have. There are plenty of things to do, and I am not sitting around complaining or wondering what to do in "retirement." My wife would really laugh at the idea that I was hanging around the house looking for something to do.

**PL:** *What has been your main project in your retirement years?*

**RG:** Some writing. I will be brief, because I could speak at length on this. One of the servants of the Lord who has been of great influence, shaped my teaching and my understanding of the Scriptures, and also, as I have read his sermons, has been a rich blessing personally in my spiritual growth, life, and development, is Geerhardus Vos.

Anybody who knows me at all knows the high regard for Vos I share with many other people. Vos is primarily known for his work in biblical theology, which he taught at Princeton. And then Vos was very much influential on Westminster Seminary's curriculum. The teachers I had, Ned Stonehouse, Edmund Clowney, John Murray, Cornelius Van Til, and Meredith Kline, were all very much influenced by Vos's biblical theological approach. Vos was born in the Netherlands into a family that migrated to Western Michigan and belonged to the Christian Reformed Church in North America; he taught systematic theology at what is now Calvin Seminary at a time when the instruction was still in Dutch, before he made the move to Princeton and worked in biblical theology. His lectures were transcribed first in handwritten form, in Vos's own hand apparently; then a number of years later they were put into typescript in 1910 and have been around now for more than a century. At the initiative of the Logos Bible software people, I have been involved in translating them and finding that very rewarding. The first four of five volumes have already been published, and I am in the midst of translating the last volume. I could go into much more detail.

**PL:** *You have spoken of systematic theology, biblical theology, and also New Testament studies. What makes each of them distinct, and how are they connected?*

**RG:** What unifies them is that they are all ways of giving appropriate attention to the Scriptures as God's Word, which is ultimately one Word, his Word;

God is the primary author of the Scriptures. Now, of course the Bible, unlike the claims of Muslims for the Koran or of Mormons for the Book of Mormon, is not dropped straight down out of heaven, as it were. It was given on earth in history through a variety of human authors, true authors, engaging their personalities fully and in a variety of genres, different literary types, history, poetry, and epistles, just to mention some.

This model is given by the Bible itself in the opening words of Hebrews [1:1–2]: “God, having formerly spoken to the fathers, through the prophets at many times, in various ways, has in these last days spoken to us in his Son.” So revelation comes to us not at one shot, as it were, but over a long history, reaching its culmination in Christ. Systematic theology and biblical theology are not in any way competitive. Even when giving very careful attention to human authorship, ultimately you are dealing with one author, God and his total truthfulness, a unity in diversity. You can say biblical theology explores the diversity that is given its shape by the various human authors; systematic theology under appropriate topics brings to light the unity of the Scriptures, what God’s Word says overall about God, about creation, about man—male and female, created in God’s image—sin, salvation, the church, and eschatology as culminating God’s purposes in history. So those are some things that come to mind initially in answer to your question.

**PL:** *Even if Erasmus, a forerunner of the Reformation, did not see eye to eye with Luther on some key doctrinal points, the emphasis on the Scriptures in the original languages was very important for him. From your vantage point some five hundred years after his publication, how important is it for the church that there be pastors, Bible scholars, and teachers still wrestling with the original text? The Bible has been translated into English and so many languages—why do we still need the Greek Bible?*

**RG:** Important question. Before I address it, can I give a personal anecdote? Charles Ryrie, a professor at Dallas Seminary, was a collector of books and ancient copies of the Scriptures. On one occasion, in the early seventies, I was in Dallas, and a student arranged for us to meet. It turned out that he had an original 1516 Erasmus New Testament in his house, in a room with climate control. He made me put on gloves, so I held Erasmus’s 1516 edition in my own hands!

The God-breathed biblical materials have their origin as Scripture, as the Word of God, and come globally in Hebrew or Greek. So Paul as an apostle of Christ, writing the Word of God, expressed it in Greek, and the church must appreciate God’s wisdom in giving us the Scriptures, in the way he

has, in the original languages. With the Westminster Confession we can be assured that God intends that they be translated [WCF 1.8], but for them to be translated, there has to be a base from which the church begins. So whether the Bible is translated into English, Korean, Dutch, or Indonesian, all translations need a point of reference, which is the original text. We don't claim, for instance, that the current English version used by a lot of folk, the ESV, is the Word of God in the sense that Galatians was when Paul first wrote it. If the ESV translation and other translations are reliable, it is as they are true to what we call the autographa, the original text.

At the time of the Reformation, there was renewed competence in and awareness of the original languages, Hebrew and Greek. The Bible translation that had been dominant in the church for a thousand years, the Latin Vulgate, was a reliable translation in many ways. If Erasmus was not committed to the Reformation in the way that Luther and others were, he served the cause of *sola Scriptura* by drawing attention to the need to go back to the original languages and make sure that the translations we have are true to them.

**PL:** *Those who have studied in the New Testament field realize that there are multiple texts and variations between them and the original. The autographa, as far as we know, do not exist anywhere, or at least if they exist, we do not know them, or they have long since vanished. So for the student who is wrestling, maybe in the early part of his studies, how do we know that we do have a reliable text if we do not have the original and if there are so many variations? How does a biblical scholar, let's say a New Testament scholar, address those issues?*

**RG:** I will stress two points. Not having taught in this area for a number of years, I hope not to miss something. Speaking of the New Testament in Greek, our earliest documents are from the second century, and they are just fragments; the fullest versions are from the fourth century, and it's a challenge to scholarship to reconstruct from the evidence that we have in hand. When a person is first told that there are all these variants, it can shake confidence in the Scriptures. In the course on New Testament Introduction I had as a student, Dr. Skilton put it in a way that left a lasting impression and put things into perspective. He said that if you apply any set of principles that are used to determine the original text, no matter how much they differ from each other, the result will be the same New Testament, except for a minimal number of differences that don't affect any substantial doctrine or the central message of the Scriptures. So we can confidently say, with the Westminster Confession, that God has kept the Scriptures pure and entire [WCF 1.8].

Another example is the way Van Til put it. He liked to use illustrations from the Second World War; he described how when the German army had occupied land west of the Rhine River and then had to retreat, they blew up the bridges. So when the Allies came, all you could see was water, but underneath the surface were the supports of the bridges, so they put down temporary tracking on what was below the surface and were able to drive across. So Van Til would say, that's the way the original text is: we can't see it, it's under the surface, but what is most important, it's there, so we can drive across on it. I think that's a helpful illustration.

**PL:** *As we think about New Testament studies, some say that all we really need is the New Testament, almost a New Testament-only Christianity. And biblical theology seemingly emphasizes the unity of the Bible, from Old to New Testament. What are the principles at work that create that unity of the testaments?*

**RG:** Well, in principle the Bible is a book about Christ. The central thread of the biblical message—the narrative theme, as a number of people have put it—is creation, fall, and redemption, and with redemption there is consummation, a new creation. The New Testament by itself would simply be a conclusion without what leads up to the conclusion. The Old Testament by itself would lack that conclusion and be without a clear statement of it, although it is unmistakable in pointing forward to Christ by way of promise, even though the fulfillment hadn't yet taken place. Hebrews 1:1–2 again shows a distinction, “God, having spoken to the fathers formerly in the past at different times and in various ways, has in these last days spoken to us in his Son.” The writer makes a distinction, which he will make clearer later in his letter, between old covenant (v. 1) and new covenant, what's arrived in Christ (v. 2), or the Old Testament and New Testament seen as an organic whole. The various parts of Scripture are an organic, unfolding historical whole.

**PL:** *So in covenant theology, the new covenant continues the covenant with Abraham as the covenant with the Christian. How does biblical theology demonstrate such a concept? How would you argue for that?*

**RG:** I think that as you look at the Scriptures, you can't help but be impressed by this. Look at the teaching of Jesus. The controlling theme, particularly clear in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus as an eschatological reality that *was not* before the coming of Christ and now *is*. Jesus maintains that the kingdom that has finally arrived with him is the fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers. Think, for instance, of Matthew 13:16–17, where Jesus is saying to the disciples, “Your eyes are blessed ... your ears are blessed because of what you

hear; what the many prophets and righteous men of old have desired to see but did not see and did not hear but they desired it.” The context that shapes their desires is the covenant that God makes with his people, particularly the covenant that structures the whole of Israel’s history, beginning with Genesis 12. You can even take it back to the inauguration of the covenant of grace given to Adam and Eve following the fall, which reaches its culmination in Christ.

So if I were to develop things biblically, theologically, making sure to do justice to the diversity, I would highlight the connection between kingdom and covenant and say that covenant and kingdom entail each other. Kingdom means basically the lordship of God, God as Lord over his creation, particularly as he exercises lordship in a saving way in Christ, in which his kingdom, his eschatological rule in creation, comes to its culmination. And what leads up to that is the promises God has made, which are covenant promises. The book of Hebrews is very helpful, particularly from a biblical theological or exegetical point of view, in bringing out a controlling common covenant idea.

**PL:** *You mentioned Adam and Eve. There are many today who say that this is a concept we can no longer maintain. Would you say theologically that this is a safe position, and if not, why not?*

**RG:** It is decidedly not a safe position. I don’t want to oversimplify the issue of the relationship among various sciences, what the Bible teaches and how theology appropriates that teaching, or science and faith, as it is sometimes put. Studies in genetics claim to show that we can no longer believe in the common descent of all human beings from an original first pair, as the Bible very clearly teaches. From the science side of the discussion, we need people competent to address those issues. In this discussion I believe myself to be quite competent where I remain true to what the Bible clearly teaches.

I don’t think that there can be any question as to what the Scriptures claim—not so much by simply going back to the opening chapters of Genesis, but by keeping in mind that what the Bible gives us is a history of revelation in which the later revelation interprets earlier revelation. The apostle Paul in Romans 5 and in 1 Corinthians 15 is absolutely clear about the matter of descent. You cannot explain human sin, original sin, apart from the descent of all human beings from an original first pair, and that in Adam all sin and fall. That is a nonnegotiable; it becomes clear in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul connects Christ as not only last but also as second in relationship to Adam as first. If you try to relinquish Adam as a

real historical being and not only a real historical being but the first, then Paul's argument unravels as to the significance of Christ's person and work. The common descent of all human beings from Adam and Eve, particularly the understanding of sin that comes with it, sets the agenda for the work of Christ as our Savior, and without it the gospel begins to unravel. Scientists who assure us that we can abandon common descent without it affecting the gospel really need to look more carefully at their Bibles than they have. They need to recognize that they cannot do with the Scriptures what they want to do.

**PL:** *The Old and New Testaments both speak about man being justified before God. Is the justification of the Old Testament the same as that of the New Testament? How are they connected and how are they different, looking at it from the vantage point of the history of redemption?*

**RG:** A number of people reading this are aware of John Murray's very helpful book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. As we look at our salvation, we have to make a distinction between what Christ did, a once-for-all redemption accomplished, a finished salvation, and then the ongoing application of that salvation.

More recently, in terms of biblical theological developments, the distinction between redemption accomplished and redemption applied has been formulated by Herman Ridderbos in terms of a distinction between *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*. *Ordo salutis* is a classical theological term for describing the order of salvation, how salvation is applied; *historia salutis* has the advantage of describing the once-for-all work of Christ as accomplished in history. Coming back to the opening verses of Hebrews again, the work of Christ comes at the end of a long history, the consummation of history. So if that *historia/ordo* distinction is applied to the question about justification, when it comes to application, justification in the Old Testament has the same structure as in the New Testament.

The clearest evidence for this is when Paul argues for justification and how justification is solely by faith. I am thinking of Romans 4 and Galatians 3, and the examples he chooses, although he could have well chosen a New Testament believer as he does in choosing himself in Philippians 3. However, the examples he chooses are David and Abraham; the structure of justification is the same, as it involves faith resting in the salvation that God provides, not anything that we do ourselves. What marks Reformed theology is a common *ordo salutis*, a common application for the Old and New Testaments. The difference comes in at the dimension of *historia salutis*, or once-for-all fulfillment.

In an old Presbyterian catechism I was taught as a little kid (it's not the Shorter Catechism), a question reads: "How were pious persons saved before the coming of Christ?" and the answer is, "By believing in the Savior to come" [*Catechism for Young Children*, 61]. And there is the difference: Abraham and Old Covenant believers had their justification by mode of promise, by believing in the promised Messiah who would come and provide the propitiatory sacrifice that Isaiah 53 identifies, by looking forward to it. We are privileged, living as we are between the resurrection and the return of Christ, because our faith is in the same promise, but in that promise as it has now been fulfilled. Christ is always at the center. He is our justification.

**PL:** *That's great. We sometimes hear in biblical theology that somehow eschatology, end things, is already at work in the beginning of things and eschatology almost precedes salvation. What does a biblical theologian mean by that?*

**RG:** Let's be very careful. When God creates and looks at his finished creation in Genesis 1:31, he looks at the whole and says *tov meod*, very good. I like to say in light of the whole of Scripture, "That was very good, but that was not yet the best." And this is where covenant theology is helpful. There was a pre-fall covenant, often called, as the Westminster Confession does, the covenant of works [WCF 7.2], in which there was a well-meant offer of confirmed blessedness, which Adam did not yet have. As we know from the history that sadly follows, he falls, and so he fails the test of absolute fidelity, complete obedience, that God put him to. Obedience was to bring Adam, with whatever posterity he might have—we have to be careful not to get into undue speculation on this point—into a state of confirmed blessedness that could never be lost. An eschatology was held out to him and the fall involves forfeited eschatology.

So when people talk about eschatology preceding soteriology, what they mean is that there is an eschatological goal for the creation before sin enters the picture. Sin does all too sadly enter the picture, but as Paul says, "where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more" [Rom 5:20]. And that's where Christ comes in his Adamic identity as the second and last Adam, bringing the consummation, the eschatology he secures for his people. This has been discussed by any number of Reformed theologians: because Christ is now at its center, the consummation is greater than anything that Adam would have achieved if he had not fallen. The consummation now has a christological coloration, and it can't get any better than that.

**PL:** *Does the idea of the "already but not yet" character of the kingdom fit here or not?*

**RG:** Yes. This is why Vos's work is so helpful, as was Herman Ridderbos's a generation later—thinking of two people in the Reformed tradition, and there are others outside from whom you can learn in this regard—in pointing to a weakness in traditional systematic theological presentations. Eschatology tends to be the last chapter, dealing with undeniable eschatological realities, the return of Christ, the bodily resurrection, and what happens to believers at death. But Vos and Ridderbos and others have shown that the kingdom that Jesus comes to proclaim as present in his earthly ministry is an eschatological kingdom. So the eschatology has already arrived. It is a present reality for us living between the resurrection and the return of Christ, but it is yet to come in its fullness. So eschatology is to be defined not only by a future point of reference, what takes place when Christ returns, but also by the salvation Christ has already brought in his first coming. So our privilege is living as the church between the resurrection and the return of Christ.

**PL:** *So to my last question: It's clear that you care very much about the truthfulness of Scripture. You are part of a 1,400-page book called Thy Word Is Still Truth that I had the joy of editing with you. I think your last words are very sobering. The article that concludes actually says that as we look at the future of the church in regard to the Word of God, it is not a very rosy picture [p. 1348]. At the five-hundredth anniversary of the publishing of the first Greek text, is the church giving away a love of the Bible and belief in its authority and infallibility?*

**RG:** A statement like that needs to be kept in the larger context, which is ultimately very rosy: the gates of hell, as Jesus puts it, the opposition of the evil one, the kingdom of Satan, will never prevail against the church [Matt 16:18]. The concern is particularly in circles—and you wish it were not the case—where folk have lost confidence, and the Bible becomes a collection of documents by human authors who may or may not be right, and so we have to decide for ourselves whether or not they are speaking the truth. But God will preserve a church that recognizes what the Scriptures are. As the Westminster Confession has put it classically, God is the primary author and the Scriptures are God speaking [cf. WCF 1.4, 10]. It's a very sad situation where we see declension and decline, and that's not rosy at all, and it is a challenge to all of us not to become so preoccupied with the Scriptures as a collection of historical documents that we lose sight of their overall unity. And particularly that when you pick up your Bible and, for instance, read Galatians, ultimately it's not Paul but God talking to you, and you don't question that.

**PL:** *That's great. So as you think about the privilege you had to lead and teach and serve in so many ways and in your concluding years of ministry, what words would you like to share with those who have been blessed by your work, perhaps maybe in terms of the legacy you would like to leave with your work for the years to come?*

**RG:** First, I cannot begin to thank the Lord enough for the privilege that I have had of being part of this community, having studied at WTS first as a student, appreciating the unique tradition true to Scripture that the Lord has established in this institution, and building on the work of my teachers and those that preceded them. My legacy—and in a way, it is not the best comparison—would be like Paul with the Bereans: Do these things square with Scripture [Acts 17:11]? And then I pray that whatever the Lord has given me to say and the church to hear—true to his Word—I trust a rising generation will do it even better, with the Lord's blessing and grace.

**PL:** *Would you give us a concluding prayer, including what you mean by the usefulness of the cross and how you saw the cross as useful for the church?*

**RG:** [Prayer] Lord, we thank you for the privilege of belonging to you, the true and living God in our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for our union with him. We thank you for all that that union brings us: that we know ourselves to be brothers of the Lord Jesus, your firstborn, your only begotten Son, and that you are at work in your church, taking those that you have justified, for the sake of our Savior, and conforming them to his image. And we thank you, our God, that because of that, we are your heirs, coheirs with the Lord Jesus Christ, recognizing, as you have taught us, that this is the case only as we suffer with him. We thank you that we can be sure that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us [cf. Rom 8:17–18] when our Savior appears and fully completes our salvation. In the meantime, we pray that our lives might be shaped as you desire them to be, by the Lord Jesus, that we might, wherever we are serving in your church, be found in Christ, and as we do not have a righteousness of our own, but the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, that we might know him, the power of his resurrection [cf. Phil 3:9–10]. Particularly, as you have purposed that resurrection power take shape in the sharing of his suffering, may our lives be crossed, stamped, and shaped by you in every way. And we know that as you, Lord Jesus, are fulfilling the claim that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to you and that therefore we as servants go about confident that you are with us to the end of the age in building your church and discipling your nations [cf. Matt 28:18–20], we pray above all that you, our God, will continue to bring honor to yourself. In Jesus's name. Amen.

**PL:** *Dr. Gaffin, thank you so much for your long and faithful service and this wonderful interview today. We are greatly appreciative.*

**RG:** My privilege.



# Book Reviews

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Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, eds. *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 2014. Pp. xii + 884.

This volume is the second edition of a work that first appeared in 1995, but it has been so thoroughly revised and updated that it is substantially a new book. The book's twenty-eight chapters canvas relevant issues relating especially to the sources and methods of New Testament textual criticism. A new edition of this work is a welcome sight, since many new developments have arisen in the field of textual criticism since the first edition appeared. This newer edition features seven new essays, several essays revised by the original authors, and three essays revised by different authors. One essay (relating to the use of computers) has been omitted (not because computers are no longer used in textual criticism, but because the technology is constantly changing).

The first sixteen chapters are devoted to the major sources from which we derive the text of the New Testament. Readers will find chapters on the papyri, majuscules, minuscules, lectionaries, and other Greek sources (i.e., ostraca, inscriptions, amulets, etc.). Also included are informative surveys of Tatian's Diatesseron, versional evidence (Syriac, Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, and Gothic), along with chapters on Greek, Latin, and Syriac Fathers.

The final twelve chapters focus more on text-critical methodology and factors relating to the history of transmission. These include the social history of Christian scribes, the analysis of New Testament manuscripts, the identification of textual "clusters," the goal of New Testament textual criticism (i.e., "Initial Text" or "Original Text"), thoroughgoing eclecticism and

reasoned eclecticism, modern editions of the Greek New Testament, an assessment of the “Majority Text” position, and criteria for evaluating variant readings.

The scholars assembled in this volume comprise both established leaders and younger scholars in the field of textual criticism. The authors provide overviews and assessments of pertinent issues in their areas of expertise. Indeed, textual criticism is one of those fields in which scarcely anyone can master all the relevant data; therefore, assembling a guide to the state of the issues in a range of subfields is an exceedingly useful endeavor. Additionally, each chapter includes an up-to-date bibliography for those interested in reading further on a given issue. Readers may not agree with all that is included here, even as the contributors would not always agree with one another. But for those engaged in textual criticism and looking for more knowledge in particular subdisciplines, this book emerges as a go-to resource. Professors and upper-level graduate students should familiarize themselves with the topics addressed, and anyone who is interested in going beyond introductory studies in textual criticism will be stimulated from the wide-ranging discussions. Libraries that support biblical studies should consider investing in this volume. Mercifully, the book has recently appeared in paperback that, while not cheap (\$76.00), is much more affordable than the hardback edition (\$314.00).

Some noteworthy issues deserve specific mention. First is the need for readers of the Greek New Testament to be familiar with the emerging use of the Coherence Based Genealogical Method (CBGM), which has already been implemented in the Nestle-Aland 28th edition of the Greek New Testament for the Catholic Epistles and is slated to be used more thoroughly in forthcoming editions. Although the CBGM can be difficult to summarize, in brief it utilizes computers to identify genealogical relationships between readings in an effort to account for contamination. Several chapters address the CBGM to some degree in this volume. Second, and related to the CBGM, for many the traditional categories of “text types” are no longer helpful given the complexities involved in identifying distinct family relationships between manuscripts (E. J. Epp prefers “textual clusters”). Third, recent assessments of the early New Testament papyri, such as the study from James Royse, have caused many to question the standard text-critical canon *lectio brevior* (preferring the shorter reading) as a reliable rule, since papyri often seem to omit words or phrases. Fourth, Michael Holmes introduces readers to the ongoing debate as to whether the goal of New Testament textual criticism is to recover the “Original Text” or simply the “Initial Text” (or *Ausgangstext*, i.e., the earliest recoverable text that is not

necessarily identified with what an author actually wrote). Holmes is surely correct that terminological precision is needed, yet it seems to this reviewer that reports of the death of the original text are greatly exaggerated. Fifth, Daniel Wallace includes a spirited critique of the Majority Text theory, which holds that the best reading for any given variant is most likely the reading that is preserved in the majority of manuscripts.

Even those not particularly interested personally in textual criticism must be aware of the importance of the discipline, since our access to ancient books (including the New Testament) comes through the process and tools of textual criticism. An important aspect of the Reformation was the return *ad fontes*, most notably to Scripture itself in the original languages. Virtually concurrent with Luther's nailing of the ninety-five theses was Erasmus's first published edition of the Greek New Testament (1516). The last five hundred years have witnessed numerous editions of the Greek New Testament, but they are all possible because scholars are applying the tools of textual criticism to the array of evidence we have. Our knowledge of the text of the New Testament has only grown since the days of the Reformation. We should therefore be thankful that we do indeed find God's singular care and providence in preserving for us the text of the New Testament, just as we can also be thankful for those who have dedicated so much of their lives to investigating these matters so thoroughly. We can likewise be grateful to have so much fruit from their labors gathered together in one volume as we endeavor to give the text of the New Testament the careful attention it deserves.

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C. Clifton Black. *Reading Scripture with the Saints*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. Pp. xxvi + 263.

C. Clifton Black, who teaches New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary and is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, specializes in the study of the Gospels, Mark in particular. By engaging with the recent renewal of interest in theological interpretation and the history of the interpretation of the Bible, he intends in *Reading Scripture with the Saints* to build bridges between academia and the church.

With the historical-critical method, a strict separation between exegesis and theology was established, but lately a new movement of theological

interpretation has arisen that seeks to overcome this chasm. Werner Kümmel, in his seminal *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problem*, could already speak of a “new emphasis on theological interpretation” in relation to Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, but recent years have seen an intensification of the reading of the New Testament and the Bible theologically, as evidenced by numerous recent publications and the creation of the *Journal of Theological Interpretation*. Black wants to contribute to this renewal of theological interpretation, and indeed he asserts that “we now stand amidst the happy renaissance of a more deliberately theological interpretation of Scripture” (p. 15).

Most of the chapters of the book have been published separately as articles, and the genesis of the work explains its somewhat fragmented character. Black’s work considers a variety of interpreters through the ages, and the author compares his exposition to a series of galleries in a museum (p. 4).

Black acknowledges that he uses the word *saint* in an unconventional way (pp. 4–5). For readers familiar with the standard account of the history of biblical interpretation, Augustine (ch. 3), Thomas Aquinas (ch. 6), and Martin Luther (ch. 7) are familiar faces; yet by including Benedict’s rule (ch. 4) and the hymnody of Charles Wesley (ch. 9) in his own account, the author walks on less trodden paths. The most surprising selection of saints, however, is among the early moderns included: William Shakespeare (ch. 8), George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln (ch. 10)—the two presidential speeches discussed by Black are reproduced at the end of the book.

While most chapters focus on individual biblical interpreters, a few chapters offer a broader picture and define principles for theological interpretation. Chapter 2, for instance, proposes a Trinitarian approach, formulates ten theses, and presents Qohelet as a test case. In a balanced way, Black suggests reintegrating the Trinity into theological interpretation—in his discussion, he mentions the influential 1994 article by the Lutheran theologian David Yeago, “The New Testament and Nicene Dogma” (p. 10). Black advocates in his fifth thesis “a less sectarian, more comprehensive, and arguably less problematic framework” (p. 19), one in keeping with the ecumenical character of the current renewal of theological interpretation in a postmodern context. For example, Stephen Fowl, who wrote the foreword to *Reading Scripture*, teaches at Loyola University Maryland; evangelicals are also involved (see, e.g., the helpful *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* [2008] by Daniel Treier of Wheaton College). The reinjection of theology into biblical exegesis is certainly beneficial and welcome, as is a rediscovery of the history of biblical interpretation; however, room should be made for theological formulations

beyond the Trinity, and theological interpretation should spark individual traditions, such as the Reformed tradition, to explore anew the link between the Bible and the confessions.

At the end of chapter 2, Black illustrates his Trinitarian approach by applying it to Qohelet or Ecclesiastes. His proposal is to read the book in light of the definition of the triune God given by the traditional rule of faith (going back to the church fathers), rather than deriving the Trinity from the text. This approach is fitting, given the paucity of theological statements in Ecclesiastes. While the chapter presents not much about the Trinity per se, it does offer some great insights, such as, “Scripturally considered, Qohelet is Ephesians 1:3–14 turned inside-out” (p. 32). What is veiled, the mystery, in Qohelet is fully revealed in Ephesians, including the triune God. Further, Black distinguishes his approach from that of Brevard Childs in this way: “I am less interested in Scripture’s final, canonical shape than in God’s lively and forever surprising triune shape” (p. 34).

Interactions with later parts of Black’s book help to clarify the relation between the Bible and doctrine, and to shed additional light on the interpretation of Ecclesiastes. From Augustine’s exposition of 1 John the author concludes that interpretation is about “transformation, not information” (p. 45). Applied to Ecclesiastes, one can argue that this ancient wisdom is a truly powerful deterrent to trusting in earthly realities, but one should not too quickly put a wedge between transformation and information. Moreover, Black usefully uncovers Aquinas’s multifaceted, patristically grounded exegesis of John’s prologue, but we should perhaps not so quickly brush off Aquinas’s assumption “that the Bible may serve as an all-purpose doctrinal sourcebook” (p. 102). Back to Ecclesiastes, one can hardly derive the doctrine of the Trinity from this book. However, it has much to teach us about creation, the fall, and human existence; thus, it assists us in broadening our theological reflections beyond the Trinity.

The ten theses and the book as a whole also address the relationship between theological interpretation and the academic study of the Bible. On the one hand, Black leaves room for non-Christian, nontheological interpreters of the Bible; in other words, the Bible is a book open to all to interpret (thesis four, pp. 18–19). While rejecting the assumptions of Ernst Troeltsch’s historicism, Black integrates historical criticism as part of theological interpretation (thesis seven, pp. 22–25). Thus, he does not advocate an ahistorical/acritical theological reading. Further, there is in his mind no rupture “between scholarly and devotional reading” (thesis ten, p. 27).

On the other hand, Black attempts to rehabilitate traditional theological reading of the Bible. In chapter 5, Black compares and contrasts modern

interpretations of Jesus's transfiguration with those of the church fathers and the medievals. He both notes some of the shortcomings of the historical-critical method and acknowledges that even premoderns do at times distort Scripture, but he also notes that "distortion of biblical meaning is not the exclusive province of pre-Enlightenment interpretation, as a brief visit to any meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature should verify" (p. 83). His discussion concludes that ancient interpreters "were wiser in their perception that what God *ultimately* wants from us is not better scholarship, but us scholars ourselves" (p. 85). Likewise, at the end of the book, he makes a final pitch for traditional theological interpretation as a coherent reading valuable for the church (pp. 197–99).

Black's proposal for theological interpretation entails a personal relationship with God and deep spirituality. In his ninth thesis, he describes our relationship to Scripture as part of a love relationship to God (pp. 26–27). Erasmus, whom we commemorate in this issue of *Unio cum Christo*, argues in the introduction to his 1516 New Testament that Scripture ought to be valued more than any human letters; Erasmus's hint at Scripture as love letter concords with Black's proposal. Black also transposes Benedict's advice for community life to counsel on how to read the Bible (pp. 51–67). Thus, Benedictine spirituality is put to the service of Bible study in the church with emphases on listening, humility, mutual submission, and so on. Moreover, drawing upon his own ecclesiastical tradition, the author examines Charles Wesley's biblical interpretation as reflected in his hymns, in particular two based on the parable of the Good Samaritan (pp. 143–67). It illustrates how worship and interpretation are intertwined and how hymns can enrich our understanding of the Bible.

A few more words can be added on Wesley's hymnic interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Black reproduces the two hymns on the parable with Scripture references in the margins and admits that "Wesley's familiarity with scripture was greater than [his]" (p. 150, n. 14). We discern at the outset an understanding of the parable in light of the whole of Scripture. Black also underscores the Holy Spirit's illumination in Wesley's interpretive approach (pp. 147–49). However, Wesley's interpretation is christological, as he identifies the Good Samaritan with Christ in the following words "From heaven to earth he comes, / ... / Upon himself my nature takes, / And all my sins assumes" (p. 160). We cannot do full justice to the rich interpretation contained in these two hymns, but let us just note additionally that one ends on a moral note, a call to Christians to be merciful, and the other concludes with a prayer for Christ's care (pp. 161–62). Observe in passing that some Wesleyan emphasis emerges, with a refutation of

“Calvin’s doctrine of irresistible grace” and the “insistence on human repentance as prerequisite for God’s forgiveness” (p. 164). Finally, in contrast to the historical-critical approach to the parables that wishes to see only a single point in each parable, Wesley’s openness to allegory challenges one to read the parables in a more nuanced and rich way (pp. 165–66).

In his treatment of Aquinas and Luther, Black expands on matters of method as well. He explores the sophisticated exegetical approach Aquinas uses in the exposition of John 1:1–14, finding that the commentary draws explanations of words from various church fathers, refutes heresies, appeals to other Scriptures, and provides summary statements (pp. 90–91). Despite some reservations, Black views Aquinas as a model of exposition (p. 103) and concludes that anyone who does not explore his or her “rich exegetical heritage [beyond] the nineteenth century is an orphan” (p. 104). Next, Black compares three different expositions of Psalm 51 by Luther, which enables him to trace the development of Luther’s exegetical method in continuity and discontinuity with the Middle-Ages (pp. 121–22). In the process, key Reformation themes emerge: sin, justification, grace, and so on. Thus, both Aquinas and Luther contribute to exegetical method.

In chapter 8, Black explores two monuments of English culture (p. 132), the King James Version and Shakespeare. He does not give an exposition of Shakespeare’s interpretation of the Bible, but rather compares one play, *King Lear*, with the Book of Job. The independence of the two makes their similarities all the more intriguing (p. 130). Black explores the themes of injustice and tragedy (p. 134–36) and the disruption of language in both (pp. 136–39). In conclusion, he notes that Shakespeare communicates to ordinary people (pp. 198–99) and thus helps to communicate the message of the Bible.

Washington’s and Lincoln’s speeches likewise speak not to academicians, but to the people. The author compares Washington’s farewell (1796), the first president’s expression of concern for the future of the young republic, to ancient and to biblical *Abschiedsreden* (farewell speeches) and to New Testament ethical codes (pp. 172, 174). Following the analysis of Mark Noll, Black asserts that Lincoln’s second inaugural (1865) offers a surprisingly deep analysis of providence in the context of the Civil War (p. 190), even greater than the reflections of theologians such as Charles Hodge (p. 187). Black’s final assessment is balanced and helpful: while both statesmen are strong on a providential reading of history, their understanding of Christology is rather weak (p. 193). Though issues such as democracy, slavery, and war are certainly relevant for an international audience, Black’s reflection could be expanded and enriched by including non-Western texts that relate the Bible to political issues.

All in all, the essays in *Reading Scripture with the Saints* offer varied, well-documented, and stimulating reflections on how to read the Bible theologically in the church. Though not in agreement with every single idea offered here, the present reviewer finds this journey into the past of the larger tradition of the church greatly rewarding.

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John W. de Gruchy. *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. Pp. 240.

Following on the five hundredth anniversary of John Calvin's birth, this book by theologian John W. de Gruchy attempts to restate Calvin's legacy in positive terms for the twenty-first century. De Gruchy points to the legacy of Calvin's Christian humanism to counter the caricature that Calvin was a grim moralist with a tyrannical God, to counter both Christian fundamentalism and secularism, to provide a transforming force that helps oppose the evils of slavery and apartheid, and to encourage struggles for liberation and transformation. His understandings of the weaknesses and strengths of Calvinist legacy were learned in the years of apartheid in South Africa and through his own wide study of modern Reformed theology. Without doubt, these understandings of Calvinism have also been shaped by his continuing interaction with Reformed theology in broader ecumenical conversations since the end of apartheid. This book on John Calvin was first published in South Africa in 2009 and is now reissued for a wider audience with Cascade books.

Early in the book de Gruchy sets up the following contrast: "Calvin, Calvinism and Reformed seem at first sight synonyms for dour, dull, puritanical and iconoclastic, quite the opposite of what Christian humanism is about" (p. 14). He notes that this picture of Calvinism is a caricature, but also that "it contains sufficient truth to keep sticking" (p. 14). To counter the part of this caricature that "keeps sticking," de Gruchy notes about Calvinism that "there is much to retrieve and celebrate that is of importance for the ecumenical Church and global society in the twenty-first century." At this point he points to the many stories from *Reformed World*, the journal of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, in which the "Reformed family of Churches are rethinking, restating and seeking to embody the Reformed faith tradition in the new millennium" (p. 14, n. 7).

The book is presented in two parts, the first sketching Calvin among the Reformers and the second exploring key themes in Calvin's legacy. Key to

understanding the book are the personal preface (pp. 11–20) and the epilogue on the experience of the Reformed tradition in South Africa (pp. 219–31). This frame helps the reader appreciate the book despite the notable weakness in the chapters of the first and second parts, which rely heavily on older Calvin or Reformation scholarship. (Besides the author's own books or republications of earlier works, only three books from the 2000s are listed in the bibliography.) Nonetheless, the interpretation of Calvin is helpful at many points and mostly consistent with scholarly studies from the last generation. The strength of de Gruchy's work is the lively prose and overt links to his South African theological history.

The Reformation for de Gruchy was inspired especially by humanism, and this is to be cherished. "My conviction," he writes, "is that when the Reformed tradition loses touch with its humanist origins and fails to maintain the creative tension between them, it becomes trapped in a dogmatic fundamentalism and moralism—to the detriment of the Church, humanity and society. This tendency has been responsible for the image of Calvinism as rigidly dogmatic, narrow-minded, hypocritical and iconoclastic" (p. 40). For this reason the Reformed tradition needs to study Calvin's humanism again: "Christian humanism helps keep the Reformed tradition vibrant and open to renewal and, in doing so, enables it to contribute to the transformation and humanization of society" (p. 40).

One who knows de Gruchy's own scholarly pursuits will not be surprised that much of the book is filtered through his experience in South Africa and especially through the works of a handful of modern Protestant theologians, especially Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth.

The former influence is important for de Gruchy, who cites a number of "Calvinist" theologians of the latter half of the twentieth century in South Africa who wanted to distance Calvinism from everything but the preaching of the gospel (p. 41). De Gruchy strongly argues against them, but he does not wish to reject that Calvinist tradition: "Tradition does not renew itself by jettisoning the past, but by critically retrieving it, for the past has made us who we are" (p. 220).

The latter influence—that of Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the historical theology influenced by them—runs throughout the book. Indeed, de Gruchy lets Barth or Bonhoeffer have the last word of synthesis or critique in many of the chapters, and so this work might just as easily be placed on a library shelf with scholarship on neo-Orthodoxy rather than Reformation studies. This is not necessarily a critique, for de Gruchy is quite overt in his interest in having Calvin converse with modern Reformed theology throughout.

In his conclusion de Gruchy wishes to affirm—as Calvin would have, were he alive, he argues—a “critical ‘African humanism’”: “By ‘critical’ is meant a humanism that is more chastened and sober than that which characterized the liberal secular humanism that arose out of the Enlightenment. By ‘African humanism’ is meant a social humanism that embodies relationality as central” (p. 229). De Gruchy writes, “We should affirm this, it is in continuity with Calvin’s legacy. In renewing contact with Calvin and Christian humanism, it can be in touch with the real human predicament, our fallenness, but also the hope we have in Christ” (p. 229).

Despite its over-reliance on older Reformation scholarship and the clear indebtedness to certain categories of modern Reformed theology that might not helpfully explain Calvin, this work does have a place. No doubt, in the few years between the five hundredth birthday of Calvin and the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, there have been many other studies of the Reformation, Calvin, and Reformed theology that have a much more nuanced grasp of Renaissance and Reformation scholarship. Yet, read as a kind of testimonial about how one theologian in the Reformed tradition reclaimed a helpful reading of Calvin—despite a good deal of pressure to jettison that part of his tradition—this volume is worth reading.

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Bruce Gordon. *Calvin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi + 398.

I was walking through the streets of Paris in 2009 during the flurry of conferences on John Calvin in celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of his birth. As was my habit, I wandered into a number of bookstores for the joy of browsing. Much to my surprise I found shelves full of works by or about Calvin—not only the classics, including, foremost, the *Institutes*, but fresh biographies by scholars not known to be personally Calvinists, such as Bernard Cottret and Olivier Millet, and even specialized studies on his sermons and his political views—all were apparently selling quite well. What had provoked this outbreak of interest?

Heretofore Calvin has been either ignored or disdained. The school I attended in Paris as a boy in the 1950s prided itself on the glories of French literature. The great classic textbook all of us used, Lagarde et Michard,

contains a fine volume on the sixteenth century. It features Clément Marot, Rabelais, Du Bellay, Ronsard, Montaigne, etc., but there are only two pages on Calvin (*le pape de Genève*), which briefly, and predictably, cite the sections in the *Institutes* on faith, depravity, and predestination. Suddenly, in the twenty-first century, he is in every bookstore. Most of the reasons for this are not strictly theological. In this Roman Catholic-turned-secular country, the new attraction to Calvin stems no doubt from the sudden realization that he was French, not Swiss! Certainly, also, he was one of the pioneers of modern French: his prose in the language and that of Blaise Pascal a century later are recognized as being eloquent, succinct, and clear in a way in which Rabelais and Montaigne were incapable. Indeed, as Bruce Gordon relates, Calvin's Latin was more than fluent, but when he took pains to translate himself into French, he was able to write in a way that respected the linguistic contours of his audience's tongue. Also, French people had been becoming more and more aware of the message of the Huguenots and the tragedy of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1698), which delayed modernization and principled pluralism for decades.

Who was this John Calvin, born Jean Cauvin (1509–1564)? At Harvard University, many years ago, I took the standard “Ren and Ref” course on the Renaissance and the Reformation. The new outlooks on the Renaissance by Wallace Ferguson and on the Reformation by Heiko Oberman, who was at Harvard at the time, were in the air. I clearly remember Oberman saying of Calvin, “He was the greatest mind of his or any era, but I quite hate everything he stood for!” Calvin was already despised in his own time by the likes of the Savoyard humanist Sebastian Castellio, the Carmelite friar Jérôme-Hermès Bolsec, and, of course, the infamous medical doctor Michael Servetus. The hostile biography by Bolsec, who confused Calvin's view of predestination with fatalism, and one even more hostile by Calvin's former secretary François Baudin, who accused his former master of being a monster, had impacts lasting into our own day. The imposing art deco militaristic image of Calvin on the Reformation Wall (1909) in the Parc des Bastions does not help.

The many recent biographies of Calvin are a great advance in determining the best overall assessment of the Genevan Reformer and his work. Among them none is more thorough, more considered, and more illuminating, than Gordon's Calvin. Gordon is extremely meticulous, leaving few factual stones unturned. He is also appropriately cautious. In sharp contrast to what is known of Calvin's German predecessor Martin Luther, we know next to nothing about Calvin's conversion, and Gordon does not speculate. Calvin left us only two accounts, the one as an aside in the *Letter to Sadoleto*,

where he remembers his torment before the prospect of divine judgment, and the other in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms (1557), where he likens himself to one of the prophets called to serve God. But some of the clearest hints of the nature of his conversion, Gordon suggests, are found in various remarks in his writings on the theme of the journey, specifically the journey from exile to union with God (p. 57).

What Gordon does particularly well is place Calvin and the Genevan Reformation within the larger context of what was happening in Europe, especially in Germany, France, and cities such as Strasbourg, Bern, and Basel. Since the present issue of *Unio* is devoted to Desiderius Erasmus, we might point out that the humanist scholar from Rotterdam appears several times in this account of Calvin. For example, as Gordon notes, early on, the young scholar traveled to Basel, the center of modern printing, a city where Erasmus had a great presence (although it seems the two never met). The impact of humanism on Calvin from a master such as Erasmus is patent. Gordon maintains that Calvin's relation to the apostle Paul was shaped by the Renaissance understanding of imitation, channeled through Erasmus (p. 110). Despite these allusions there is no substantive discussion of Calvin's views on Erasmus. It would have been interesting, for example, to consider the influence of Erasmus's popular *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (1503), particularly his views of images, or his putative Platonism, on Calvin.

As a good social historian Gordon considers not only circumstantial issues but cultural ones. The Bernese, he argues, held an attitude of superiority over the "French" from Geneva and Lausanne, causing Calvin to become both defender and diplomat (p. 74). He portrays Calvin as an adept statesman who knew how to bring other Reformers from different cities and different horizons onto his side. There is a good deal of psychological interest in this biography as well. Although he rejects attempts to have Calvin lie down on the therapist's couch, Gordon spends considerable time, in various places, commenting on his character. Some of his findings should go a long way toward dispelling the bromides about the irascible dictator of Geneva. By his own lights Calvin was quite timid, yet he was so dedicated to his cause that he could become bold when the situation called for it. He had a temper, as everyone knows. He had to apologize on more than one occasion for his rudeness and incivility (p. 91). He could be harsh on dissidents, but never harsher than on himself.

At the same time, he made enduring friendships that stood the test of various tensions and disagreements. He was deeply in love with his wife, Idelette, and leaned upon her more than we might expect of the stalwart

Genevan. He was cordial with Martin Bucer, but particularly close to Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret and then to Theodore Beza. His loyalty to them was not sentimental, but “framed by faithfulness to the cause of Christ’s Church” (p. 281). Such collegiality could be threatened when, in Calvin’s view, principle was at stake. For example, after some thirty-five years of close camaraderie with Farel, Calvin broke off relations when at age sixty-nine the senior missionary decided to marry a sixteen-year-old girl. An attempt was made at reconciliation just before Calvin died, but the damage was done. With Viret there was no abrupt breach, yet the two did develop disagreements, such as over the wisdom of entrusting the future leadership of the Genevan Reformation to Beza. These rifts were deeply hurtful to Calvin, who, in Gordon’s account, turned to the Psalms for comfort (p. 285).

Calvin held strong views on what we might call foreign policy today. He had a great burden for his homeland. Gordon rightly attributes the growth of the Reformation in France to factors including but well beyond the influence of Luther. At first, Calvin was close to the group from Meaux and appreciative of the role of Marguerite de Navarre, Francis I’s sister. His concern for France was over its need for the gospel. He tried everything he could to protect persecuted believers, as in the famous case of the five students from Lyon (pp. 195–97). But he took issue with those Protestants who, he believed, dissembled their identity. Some of his strongest polemics were addressed against what he called the *Nicodemites*, named for the Pharisee who came to Jesus by night. He eventually had little sympathy for the group protected by Marguerite, which he thought to be lacking in courage. Some of Calvin’s critics deemed this a cheap shot, attacking so-called compromisers from the safety of Geneva (pp. 190–95). But it is well to remember that Calvin was truly French, and his call for separation was born out of theological convictions, not false security. Indeed, he was never quite at home in Geneva, was often at odds with its magistrates, and only became a citizen in 1559. This made his consistent pleas for receiving refugees all the more remarkable.

Some of the most compelling portions of Gordon’s account are on Calvin’s attempts at ecumenism. Though unity with the Lutherans on the question of the Lord’s Supper was a lost cause, Calvin did try to bring harmony among the Swiss Reformers. He was ultimately unsuccessful, owing to the ghost of Zwingli living on in the Bernese Reformers, who so feared a return to Catholicism they belittled the real presence of Christ in the sacraments (p. 164). A sort of agreement was reached, with the Consensus Tigurinus (1551), but it never garnered the full support of all

the Bernese. Though a milestone, the agreement fell far short of what Calvin had hoped for (p. 180). Why was the Lord's Supper such a critical issue in the sixteenth century? As Gordon explains, not only was it the bone of contention in the dispute over the Mass, but it represented the very heart of Christian worship, the *verbum visibile*, along with the Word itself, the gospel preached and embraced.

Gordon is a historian, not a theologian. This is not, of course, a defect, but it does explain why throughout the book it is the historical circumstances, the personalities, and the relationships that are of major interest, not so much the doctrinal issues. Church government, city administration, the model of Strasbourg, discipline, book printing, and the like are well handled in these pages. And, since doctrine never arises outside of a context, getting the context right is of crucial importance. Gordon does take a stab at identifying the center of Calvin's theology. "The core of Christianity was the proper worship of God," he says of Calvin's approach, explaining why he was such a sharp critic of people he considered lukewarm (p. 195). Calvin was concerned for the glory of God, which is why he replies to Sadoletto that faith, or free access, is all important. But Gordon does not explore the fine points of Calvin's theological arguments against Sadoletto, or his remarkable exercise of the art of persuasion. Calvin's preaching is recognized, but there is little on the elements of his style. An entire chapter is spent on Calvin's commentary on Romans, and some of its content is helpfully covered, but there is nothing, for example, on justification by faith.

Reading this splendid biography, I was struck by the number of issues faced by Calvin that have become urgent concerns today. (1) Church unity: how may we exhibit the communion of the saints while we differ on secondary issues? (2) Separation: if we stay within a larger, mainline denomination are we compromising the gospel? (3) Facing persecution: when should we stand up and be counted? (4) Church and state: where do the legitimate authority of the one and the limits of the other collide? (5) The authority of the Bible: is it the Word of God, or does it only contain the Word of God? The Calvin that emerges from these excellent pages is the "man for all seasons," an epithet far better deserved by him than by Thomas More.

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David Puckett. *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995. Pp. ix + 179.

This book, now over twenty years old, remains relevant, addressing perennial hermeneutical issues in the history of interpretation. David Puckett profiles John Calvin's Old Testament exegesis by contrasting it with two extremes he believes Calvin eschewed, that of Christian allegorical reading of the Old Testament (OT), which undervalues OT historical context on the one hand, and Christ-less Jewish reading of the OT, which dismisses the assessment of the OT by the New Testament (NT), on the other. From the introduction (chapter one): "My approach in this study is based upon my belief that Calvin reveals his method most clearly in the reasoning he offers for rejecting the interpretations of others" (p. 13). Positively, Puckett believes that Calvin charted a "*via media*": "He attempts to chart a middle course—one which betrays neither his historical sensitivities [*pace* Christian allegory; see chapter three] nor his theological commitments [*pace* Jewish exegesis; see chapter four]" (p. 18).

Puckett devotes a foundational chapter (chapter two) to two presuppositions he declares vital for understanding Calvin's OT approach: the dual (divine and human) authorship of Scripture and the unity of Scripture. Regarding dual authorship, Puckett quotes Calvin's commentary on 2 Timothy 3:16: "All those who wish to profit from the scriptures must first accept this as a settled principle . . . . We owe to the scripture the same reverence as we owe to God, since it has its only source in Him and has nothing of human origin mixed with it" (p. 26). Puckett sees Calvin's view of human authorship as "far from mechanical" (p. 27): "the style and personality [of each human author] left their mark on scripture" (p. 29). Puckett then reflects upon OT hermeneutical implications of these commitments in subsections titled "The Holy Spirit's Intention as an Exegetical Concern," "The Human Writer's Intention as an Exegetical Concern," and "The Relation of Divine Intention and Human Intention." These sections amplify Calvin's statement from his 1540 dedicatory letter of his Romans commentary in which he claimed the goal of biblical interpretation was "to unfold the mind of the [human] writer." Summarizing, Puckett says, "It is apparent that Calvin is unwilling to divorce the intention of the human writer from the meaning of the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that for him, the intention, thoughts and the words of the prophet and of the Holy Spirit in the production of scripture are so closely related there is no practical way to distinguish them" (pp. 36–37). That is, according to Puckett, divine authorship involved functional, *not merely theoretical*, exegetical significance for Calvin.

With respect to the related matter of Calvin and the unity of the OT and NT, Puckett detects an unyielding positive appraisal in Calvin's *Institutes* and his biblical commentaries. In response to Anabaptist attempts to reduce OT Israel's hope to the earthly land of Canaan, Puckett states that Calvin believed "the Old Testament saints saw beyond the earthly promise to the spiritual reality" (p. 38). In fact, in chapter five Puckett distinguishes Calvin's view of typology ("true prophecy," "predictive prophecy") from many contemporary approaches, which only make "historical correspondences retroactively" and in which "persons/events/institutions are only seen to be typological 'in retrospect after the appearance of the antitype'" (pp. 114 and 135, n. 59). Puckett sees a direct connection between Calvin's commitment to the unity of Scripture and his approach to typology. He quotes Calvin: "It may be objected, 'Why is Christ appointed to a covenant which was ratified long before [with Abraham]?' I reply, the covenant which was made with Abraham and his posterity had its foundation in Christ .... And the covenant was ratified in no other manner than in the seed of Abraham, that is, in Christ, by whose coming, though it has been previously made, it was confirmed and actually sanctioned" (pp. 39–40). Puckett thinks Calvin acknowledged great diversity between the OT and the NT, as we will see below, but he concludes this seminal chapter with a quote from Calvin regarding controls upon that diversity: "Two things, therefore, must be observed: first, that the doctrine of God is the same, and always agrees with itself, that no one may now charge God with changeableness, as if he were inconsistent ... secondly, when ceremonies and shadows had been abolished, Christ was revealed, in whom the reality of them is perceived" (p. 44).

If chapters one and two provide the skeleton of Puckett's argument, in chapters three and four Puckett applies the flesh. Chapter three, "The 'Jewish' Appearance of Calvin's Exegesis," addresses Calvin's aforementioned rejection of Christian allegorical approaches to the OT. For example, Puckett cites Calvin's nuanced interpretation of Psalm 72: "We must always beware of giving the Jews occasion of making an outcry, as if it were our purpose, sophistically, to apply to Christ those things which do not directly refer to him" (p. 53). Calvin favored the "natural," "simple," "solid" meaning of the OT to the subtleties of allegory. Regarding Origen, said Calvin, "He searches everywhere for allegories and corrupts the whole scripture" (p. 54). Puckett cites Philip Schaff, who dubbed Calvin "the founder of modern historical-grammatical exegesis" (p. 56) because Calvin, trained as a humanist, prized knowledge of the Hebrew language, lexicology, and grammar—including the employment of Jewish commentators wherever

helpful—etymology, biblical usage of words and historical and literary context, and so on, for a right understanding of the OT.

But, says Puckett, any claim that Calvin's exegesis is "Jewish" is a misleading half-truth, as chapter four, "The 'Christian' Character of Calvin's Exegesis" demonstrates: "For Calvin, the Old and New Testaments are one book. The Hebrew Bible must never be interpreted as though it stood alone—it can only be properly understood when its interpretation is informed by the superior clarity of the New Testament . . . This chapter will examine the unambiguously Christian character of Calvin's exegesis as seen in his criticism of Jewish exegesis and his embrace of the New Testament as an exegetical guide" (p. 82). Puckett says that "most of [Calvin's] comments about Jewish exegesis are negative," criticizing its tendency to "invent fables," which Calvin saw as a departure from "the simple meaning of the text" (p. 83), just as he did with Christian allegory. Puckett says that Calvin's ultimate "critique [was] grounded in his belief that the Jewish rejection of Christ makes it impossible for them to understand the Old Testament" (p. 88). Puckett then provides another timely subsection, addressing the NT's use of the OT, citing the Reformation anthem "scripture interprets scripture" as a hermeneutical guide for Calvin. Puckett broaches a "problem" case of the use of Deuteronomy 32 in Romans 15:10 and quotes Calvin: "If we admit that Paul took this sentence from Moses, the same Spirit, who spoke both by Moses and Paul, is the best interpreter of his own words" (p. 91). Puckett comments, "While the Holy Spirit's authorship of scripture does not yield Calvin an unambiguous hermeneutic, it does have great hermeneutical significance." That is, Puckett sees in Calvin a recognition of the nettlesome nature of the NT use of the OT discussion, citing such examples as numerical discrepancies between OT and NT texts, apparent changes in meanings of OT passages by NT authors, and translation issues, including the NT's frequent use of the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew text. But, without being able here to enter into the details, we can say that Puckett sees in Calvin an application of the principles enumerated in chapter two to the complexities of the NT's use of the OT. According to Puckett, Calvin did not attempt to solve all of the difficulties, but neither was he willing to abandon his simultaneously contextual and Christian read of the OT text.

Chapter five, "Calvin's Exegetical *Via Media*," weaves together the themes of chapters three and four, explicating Puckett's thesis from the introduction. Says Puckett, "[Calvin] was unable to agree fully with either tradition [i.e., Christian or Jewish] concerning how best to handle allegorical interpretation, typology, and the interpretation of Old Testament prophecies"

(pp. 105–6). I encourage the reader to examine this chapter with an eye toward whether or not Puckett successfully proves his case via his examples from Calvin’s OT exegesis. I believe he does, though at times one might quibble that argumentation in this chapter is somewhat redundant with previous chapters. Says Puckett, “In his treatment of allegory, typology, and prophecy in the Old Testament, Calvin adopts a moderate position in which he has avoided the temptations that too often befell Jewish and Christian exegesis. He has not uprooted the Old Testament from its historical soil nor has he been content to look at the roots once the full flowering has taken place in Jesus Christ” (pp. 131–32).

In his conclusion, Puckett highlights the word “tension” to describe Calvin’s OT exegesis (pp. 140–42). Calvin, says Puckett, held divine authorship and human authorship of Scripture in tension as well as OT historical context and NT Christian fulfillment; Puckett believes we should honor these tensions, not explain them away. While generally well stated, Puckett seems to border on positing a dialectical tension for Calvin between divine authorship and divine employment of human agents, as if the unity of Scripture is rooted in divine authorship and the diversity is a result of human authors (see esp. p. 141); this would run counter to the 2 Timothy 3:16 quote above, not to mention words from Calvin in that same paragraph: “This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare.” Puckett also affirms the importance for Calvin of the presence of the Holy Spirit in proper biblical interpretation, a point he arguably should have made clearer earlier in the book. Related to concerns just mentioned, I question the idea that the Holy Spirit exists alongside the “rational side of Calvin’s exegesis” (p. 142), as if Calvin would incipiently have conceded ground to a modern historical-critical approach. Puckett then provides an Appendix, “The Preparation and Publication of Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries,” and a thorough bibliography.

The reader has perhaps surmised this reviewer’s basic sympathy with Puckett’s treatment of this aspect of Calvin’s work, notwithstanding minor qualifiers. One other disappointment: this reviewer would like to have seen explicit attention paid to Calvin’s Christology, given the centrality of Christ to Calvin’s OT program.

In conclusion, to the degrees that Puckett accurately portrays Calvin’s approach to the OT and that Calvin is correct (this reviewer resonates with Calvin’s commitments), the usefulness of Puckett’s book, not just for those

studying the history of interpretation but for those studying the Old Testament itself, can hardly be overstated. It reminds us that one's doctrine of Scripture will affect one's hermeneutic, for better or worse.

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David R. Law. *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: T&T Clark, 2012. Pp. ix + 332.

What you already think about historical criticism is what you will make of this book. Although it provides a mine of information and gives good account of the subject, it will probably not change any minds one way or the other. In fact, it could have a counterproductive effect by serving to illustrate what opponents of the historical critical method (HCM) have thought for many a day, that there is no single method in it, only a fascicle of conflicting opinions. Positively, the example of David Law's book encourages Reformed scholars to serious historical research, but on the basis of epistemologically self-conscious presuppositions and interpretations diametrically opposed to those of the critics.

For several decades now the foundations of this once unimpeachable method have been shaken by critics as diverse as James Barr and Wolfhart Pannenberg, or evangelicals whose scrutiny of the HCM goes back to the likes of Robert D. Wilson, O. T. Allis, or the early G. C. Berkouwer in the 1930s, to say nothing of those who preceded them. This book has nothing to do with them, nor is it the work of an uneasy evangelical of the Sparks-Enns-Hays-Ansberry ilk, the "new" generation of biblical scholars who identify themselves as evangelicals while dabbling with the methods and results of historical criticism.<sup>1</sup> No evangelical or Reformed scholar enters this account with a critical voice (or any other voice for that matter, a few footnotes aside), probably because none are deemed worthy of consideration, *academia oblige*. Nor does the noteworthy C. S. Lewis, who wrote scathing comments on biblical criticism in his famous essay "Fern Seeds and Elephants" get a mention in the sections where the HCM's fragility is in question, even though Lewis put his finger on the real problem in a way that the author seemingly has little desire to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Yarbrough, "Should Evangelicals Embrace Historical Criticism? The Hays-Ansberry Proposal," *Themelios* 39 (2014): 37–52. Cf. Christopher M. Hays and Christopher B. Ansberry, eds., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

Law is reader in Christian Thought at the University of Manchester in the UK. He has published hefty works on Kierkegaard.<sup>2</sup> Even though he writes in a neutral and objective way in this essay and does not reveal his hand, he is, to all intents, sympathetic to the Dane's approach to the relation of history and faith, as presented on pages 220–23: “Kierkegaard holds ... there is no direct transition from history to faith .... Faith belongs to an entirely different sphere from historical knowledge and is dependent on a non-rational personal leap of faith on the part of the individual.” Law seems to espouse the dichotomy of human knowledge as limited and relative, beyond which lies the transcendent. No doubt some intimations of the Other exist (“ciphers,” Law calls them in his 2001 book on inspiration), pointing beyond the horizons of our limited knowledge, and which allow intuitions about the beyond. But these are not in the same domain as the rational exercise of the HCM, which can get on with its work without bothering with interferences in things immanent. This seems to provide sufficient warrant for engaging with the HCM, which is, after all, the main way the Bible has been examined by majority scholarship for nigh on two centuries. It is a considerable enterprise, and Law has given a lot of careful and well-documented attention to it, although the reader does wonder about the magnitude of the investment over against the paucity of the outcomes, other than as a bona fide academic exercise.

This book is from a series of “Guides for the Perplexed.” One supposes that as such it aims at those who want to get deeper into the subject, but it contains such a wealth of information and detail, including almost 100 pages of notes, bibliography, and indexes, that it would probably give the uninitiated indigestion. It moves from an introductory definition of historical criticism and the HCM as “generic terms given to a cluster of related approaches which all focus in some way on the historical character of the Bible,” a method “developed in order to address historical questions posed by the Bible” (pp. 1, 4), to the issues raised by the name HCM, and its presuppositions. This shows the author is sensitive to the old quip that it is neither historical nor critical nor a method; in a certain sense he is on his guard from the start, aware of the recent widespread disaffection from the HCM and the claims that it is on its last legs, which occupy the closing chapter. There follows a chapter giving a brief history of historical criticism in which “forerunners” are found and an attempt is made to confer some

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<sup>2</sup> David Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* and *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 and 2013). Law also published *Inspiration of the Scriptures* (London: Continuum, 2001).

ecclesial pedigree. The four subsequent chapters present the standard approaches of textual, source, form, and redaction criticism, considered in layered succession, each building on the previous practice and incorporating its insights. In these chapters the presuppositions, the methods, and strengths and weaknesses are presented together with working examples, using Genesis 2:4b–3.24 and Matthew 15:21–28. The conclusion presents the strengths and weaknesses of historical criticism.

Three comments can be made about Law's book that do not detract from its usefulness, as it is detailed, and the presentation is clear and readable in spite of the difficulties of the subject.

Firstly, while recognizing the complexity and the controversial nature of the presuppositions of historical criticism, Law indicates five of those presuppositions that underlie historical approaches to the Bible and distinguish the HCM from other ways of reading it (pp. 20–24): probability, analogy, correlation, antisupernaturalism, and the bracketing out of inspiration. Are these all presuppositions? I think not. Law refers to the first three, which were presented in synthetic form by Ernst Troeltsch, as *principles* of historic method; this indicates that they are axioms rather than presuppositions. The last two, in contrast, are more obviously of the nature of presuppositions and not consequences of the first three, as Law would have it. The first three function differently in the context of a supernaturalist worldview allowing for the inspiration of Scripture. Nor do antisupernaturalism and indifference to inspiration in themselves distinguish the HCM from any other approach to the text that shares this double presupposition, such as structuralism. In other words, probability, analogy, and correlation only have the naturalistic, relativistic, and one-dimensional character that Troeltsch demands for them when placed in the context of antisupernaturalist presuppositions, or belief in naturalism, which serves as a pre-established criterion and determines their function.

Secondly, Law makes no use of the distinction, often found in discussions such as this, between modernism and postmodernism. Whatever the justification and value of this distinction, it is surprising that Law makes so little of the radical nature of the change that came in hermeneutics with the impact of deconstructionism and the influence of writers like Lyotard, Derrida, and Ricoeur, none of whom are so much as mentioned. This absence gives the impression that the status of the HCM is more secure than it actually is at present, when the big questions seem to be about not the archeology of the text, but what the text itself says in the light of the preoccupations of a rapidly changing world. Even though Law refers to the rise of "reader response" hermeneutics, he hardly does justice to the

radicality of this new form of subjectivism, which is just the opposite of the neutral objectivity often claimed for the HCM. For this reason alone, the HCM may well be doomed, rather than because of any opposition from evangelicalism or elsewhere. It has been overtaken and left behind. Law's failure to face this more squarely surely lessens the present value of his work.

Thirdly, Law broaches the question of the end of the HCM, referring to the title of Gerhard Maier's book on the subject. He indicates four frequent criticisms. The HCM fragments the message of Scripture; it brackets out its theological meaning; it is of little use in terms of practice; and, under the guise of objectivity, it hides immanentist ideological biases. Law replies to these criticisms, referring several times to John Barton's *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, but it is not particularly compelling stuff, nor is it new. In fact, a good many such criticisms and rejoinders can be found in James Smart's 1970 book *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, absent from Law's bibliography. Nor does Law reply to the more trenchant criticisms of the HCM that are of a theological nature; for example, that it is in dissonance with the nature of the object with which it deals, and so fails to do justice to the self-witness of the biblical corpus as Scripture; that it makes no allowances for the fact that human reason is sinful, not autonomous or ultimate; or that it bypasses the personal nature of Scripture as God's Word addressed to man.<sup>3</sup> Quite logically it brackets these out, but in so doing it creates a watered-down history that has a different shape and content from biblical history, a form of religiosity that preserves biblical vocabulary but changes its meanings. This is not Christian theology, but another belief that has cast off its moorings to the historical faith of the church and, more seriously, to the apostolic witness expressed in the teaching of the New Testament. It is in fact faith within the limits of an enclosed secular world. The hypothetical constructions of the HCM are secular allegories originating in imaginative minds reconstructing sources or traditions that may never have existed. Is it little more than a ploy to avoid the embarrassment of miracles?

It is only in the last paragraph that Law finally comes clean, and here the real problems of the HCM appear in the light of day. "My view is that its claims to *hegemony* must be renounced ... it should not be regarded as the sole correct 'objective' method that can bring about assured results" (p. 237). This is quite an admission, because if these claims are to be abandoned, they were surely made, and are no doubt still being made. What then is the

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<sup>3</sup> See on this subject Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

role of the HCM? It “can play an important role in *limiting* the range of interpretations possible when reading a text.” But what does this mean practically? Is it wrong to suppose, the HCM being what it is, that it will rule Bultmann’s view of bodily resurrection in and Donald Carson’s out? Also, it “can help protect the rights of the text.” But that, according to structuralism, is just what it does not do. “It is one of the voices to which we must listen if we are truly to hear God’s Word in this ancient collection of texts.” But has God’s Word not been bracketed out to begin with? Troeltsch seems to have thought so: “Give the historical method an inch and it will take a mile. From a strictly orthodox standpoint, therefore, it seems to bear a certain similarity to the devil.”<sup>4</sup>

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Timothy Keller. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Viking, 2015. Pp. 309.

Timothy Keller was instrumental in planting Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA), a multisite congregation in New York City and has served there ever since it began in 1989. Since the success of his books *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God* in 2008, Keller has published over two books a year. One of his latest endeavors, *Preaching*, will likely be influential because of the significant growth of Redeemer Presbyterian under his ministry.

The book is a good read. Keller writes well. His thoughts are vigorous and his sentences simple. He expresses himself with both depth and clarity. He uses gripping word-pictures: “A good sermon is not like a club that beats upon the will but like a sword that cuts to the heart” (p. 21). Thus there is value in this book merely for the benefit of exposure to excellent communication, which every preacher needs.

The endnotes are a small book unto themselves (69 pages!). The notes demonstrate Keller’s interaction with a wide body of relevant literature ranging from John Calvin and William Perkins to the latest books on homiletics and culture. However, the endnotes also contain a number of Keller’s comments, some of which extend to multi-page essays. If Keller

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<sup>4</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology” (1900), in *Religion in History*, Essays translated by James Luther Adams and Walter E. Bense (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 46.

deems these valuable, it would have been better to incorporate them into the text and to reserve endnotes for citations and brief asides.

The outline of the book, explained in the prologue, presents a threefold view of good preaching. First, we must preach the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Second, we must preach to the people, “engaging the culture, and touching hearts” (p. 21). Third, we must preach with dependence on the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit alone can make preaching great.

However, I would propose another outline, for there is a sense in which this is two books. In the first, we hear Keller the Reformed theologian and lover of the Puritans (chs. 1–3, 6–7). In the second, we hear Keller the apologist to the secular world (chs. 4–5), though with a cameo appearance from Jonathan Edwards (p. 101).

The first “book” is a very profitable discussion of preaching Christ from the Scriptures to the hearts of those who hear. This material is rich in Scripture and draws extensively from the Reformed and Puritan tradition. In the early chapters, Keller acknowledges that both expository and topical preaching are needed, but he argues that the regular diet of the church should consist of expository preaching. His counsel to avoid long expository series (as in a year or more) based on the high mobility of our culture seems more applicable to his context in New York City than to small town pastors in, say, western Nebraska or upper Michigan.

Since the Word centers on Christ, to preach the Word is to preach Christ. Keller helpfully illustrates this with an example of two different approaches to preaching the healing of the demoniac (pp. 63–65). These chapters contain a wealth of insights into how to faithfully preach Christ from the Scriptures and list a number of helpful resources in its endnotes for further reading. In the last chapters of the book, Keller gives helpful directions on preaching to the heart and preaching in the Spirit’s power. He links the latter to the spiritual character of the preacher and asks searching questions of whether we preach for the glory of our church, ourselves, or Christ (pp. 201–5). This Christ-exalting, heart-searching material is Keller at his best.

Contained within the first “book” in *Preaching* are the two chapters on preaching to the culture and “the (late) modern mind”—the physical center of the book, consisting of a quarter of his text. The shift in focus is so palpable that we might consider this a second book within his book. Here too he offers much sane and helpful advice, calling for a contextualization of the message, which he describes not as compromise but as “adapting in order to confront” (p. 96). He challenges preachers to avoid unnecessary evangelical jargon and to define terms like *covenant* so that hearers in our post-Christian

society can understand us. He calls preachers to acknowledge and address the doubts and questions that secular people have.

However, Keller's strength as an apologist to intellectuals places unwise expectations on the preacher. One of Keller's strategies for contextualization is quoting "respected authorities" that unconverted listeners trust. He offers an impressive collection of quotations that tend to support fragments of biblical truth, mostly drawn from atheists (pp. 106–10). This implies that the preacher must read widely and deeply in atheistic literature—unless he is to repeat from a list of quotations pulled out of context, which runs serious risks of misunderstanding or misattribution. Few preachers are called to be cultural apologists of this kind; the others would do better to invest their limited time in reading in the Scriptures and books on Christian doctrine, experience, and practice.

Though Keller's cultural analysis is penetrating, this central section of the book leans most heavily not on Scripture or Reformed writers, but on writers outside the core of Evangelical orthodoxy such as P. T. Forsyth (pp. 96–99, 121, 279–80), ecumenist Miroslav Volf (p. 114), and Roman Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor (pp. 125ff.). While these may be brilliant men, we must ask whether there are no cultural analyses available from the Reformed perspective, for surely one's analysis of the culture around one will be shaped by the worldview one holds. This suggests a danger in his apologetic method: deep engagement with unbiblical thinkers may begin to shift our minds from the foundation of the Word of God. For instance, some Reformed and Evangelical Christians are concerned about Keller's involvement with the *Biologos* organization and with it some kind of biological evolution. However, no such doctrinal shifts appear in this book.

Keller's *Preaching* is a tremendous encouragement for preaching Christ from the Scriptures. It also contains much insight into contemporary American culture, particularly in the intellectual circles in which Keller moves. Though it is not a primary textbook for homiletics, ministerial students and active pastors will find much here for fruitful consideration.

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Before submitting an article, contact Bernard Aubert (baubert@wts.edu) with a proposition of subject and an abstract (less than 200 words). Details concerning formal presentation will then be communicated to the author together with approval of the proposition (Guidelines of Style are available at <http://uniocc.com/journal/guidelines>).

Paul Wells  
*Editor in Chief*

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