

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF REFORMED THEOLOGY AND LIFE

# UNIO CUM CHRISTO<sup>®</sup>

UNION WITH CHRIST



## The New Testament: Gift to the Reformation



Westminster  
Theological  
Seminary  
Philadelphia

International  
Reformed  
Evangelical  
Seminary



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# The New Testament: Gift to the Reformation

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# Freedom of Conscience: The Reformers' and Ours

PAUL WELLS

**T**his issue of *Unio cum Christo*, in the year preceding the five hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's 1517 posting of the Ninety-Five Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, presents several articles that touch on reformational issues and also on New Testament themes related to them.

A central issue at the time of the Reformation was freedom of conscience in the worship of God, and it is important to recall the words of Luther before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in April 1521 that ring across the years. Interrogated by Johann Eck and requested to answer “without horns” and repudiate his books, Luther rejoined in German:

Since Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason (I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other), my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither safe nor right.

The earliest printed version of these words adds, “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.” There is, however, no indication of this finale in the transcripts of the Diet, although Roland Bainton suggests in his classic work on Luther that perhaps the witnesses were too moved at the time to record them, and no doubt confusion ensued as Luther left the scene.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon; New York: Cokesbury, 1950), 185–86.

So what is meant by a conscience captive to the Word of God? In spite of the enigmatic nature of the expression, there is no doubt that for Luther a conscience captive to God's Word was one that is truly free, and especially free from all human authorities. Conscience was an important item on the agenda at the time of the Reformation, following on from the debates about the rights of erroneous conscience instigated by Abelard and then Aquinas. It is often assumed that what the Reformers meant by freedom of conscience was the same as the values that make up the democratic baggage of today. So they are either presented in a favorable light as forerunners of modern liberties, via the Enlightenment, or negatively because they were supposedly the first to set foot on the slippery slope leading to free thinking, the French Revolution, and the contradiction of accepted authority. But are we actually talking about the same thing in the two cases?

Freedom of conscience is a core value in open societies, with its siblings, freedom of speech and of action. Today however, it is coming under increasing pressure from groups that limit it to things that do not give offense. This raises delicate questions in many areas as to where the limits lie. Can a Muslim advocate radicalization at Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park when atrocities are being committed in that name? In the past such a speaker would just have been shouted down, but now the law will be set in motion against those who are thought to advocate hate crimes.

These values are ones we trace back to the Reformation, and rightly so. One of the earliest expressions of freedom of conscience was the Edict of Nantes signed by Henry IV of France in 1598, putting an end to the bloody religious conflict between Roman Catholics and Protestants that had plagued France for thirty years. The Huguenots, who were a minority, accepted the settlement, which granted a measure of religious tolerance and some social and political equality. They were to be entitled to worship freely in private, as well as publicly in two hundred towns and on the estates of Protestant landowners. Those who penned the document held the view current at the time, that it was wrong to force compliance in the worship of God upon free individuals against their conscience, which was seen as something sacred that must be respected.

The link may be made between this embryonic manifesto and the process it set in motion: the revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789, the First Geneva Convention in 1864, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, drafted in 1950. In its preamble and in articles 1 and 18 the 1948 Declaration unequivocally proclaims the inherent rights of all human beings: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought,

conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”(18). These are noble aspirations indeed, and those freedoms are not to be taken lightly, out of respect for the humanity of our fellow beings.

However, in so far as the Reformation is concerned, we should be on our guard against both the dangers of hagiography and facile links between the Reformers and modern ideals, including freedom of conscience. Who could affirm today with Philip Schaff that “the principles of the Republic of the United States can be traced, through the intervening link of Puritanism, to Calvinism, which, with all its theological rigor, has been the chief educator of manly characters and promoter of constitutional freedom in modern times”?<sup>2</sup> A bald statement such as this seems incomprehensible today not only in North America, but also in Europe, and might lead the rest of the world to think the West is still marked by those same Christian influences. So prudence is called for in tracing the effects of the Reformation, including in freedom of conscience.

Social historians tend to see some filiation, but often refer to the “unintended consequences” of Reform. We cannot naively suppose that the freedom of conscience to which the Protestant Reformers aspired is one and the same thing as modern freedom of conscience. The fact that the 1948 text quoted above places the right to freedom of thought before conscience and religions already shows which way the wind is blowing. In fact, in the spirit of 1789 freedom was upheld as a natural right of man, whereas freedom as desired by the Reformers was motivated by a different goal and had other objects in view. The service of God was far more important to them than any human right, precious though such a right may be. If the idea of conscience as such was highlighted by the Reformers’ reliance on the New Testament, and the apostle Paul in particular, freedom of conscience, as it is put forward in modern terms, is another kettle of fish.

We might well wonder whether the modern idea of freedom of conscience has much at all to do with what the Reformers were speaking about when they used the expression “the liberty of the Christian man.” Maybe we have been seduced by the half-truth that freedom of conscience is the *summum bonum* of human flourishing. But freedom of conscience is deadly when it leads to the supposition that human beings can legitimately use their

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 1:218–19, note 1.

conscience to justify thoughts or acts that are against God's law. When this freedom becomes an alibi for anything that goes, it is a mutant freedom, more of a freedom to think and do whatever we please, rather than something that involves the workings of conscience as such. Riding roughshod over right and wrong, good and bad, as expressed by God's law, this is no longer the noble, biblical freedom of conscience of the Reformed fathers, but an ersatz imitation, a dumbed-down free thinking that is ultimately self-serving. Perhaps this consideration explains why people often seem to confuse freedom of conscience with tolerance or a tolerant attitude towards everything, whereas the two are opposite poles of the same question, freedom of conscience being taken to be the right to think or do anything and tolerance meaning having to put up with it.

Two considerations may be introduced in this perspective regarding the modern notion of conscience. These describe attitudes that profoundly condition our ideas about Christianity in general and freedom of conscience in particular.

*Firstly*, we are continually assailed by an interpretation of history that propagates two big myths. First, the liberties of Greco-Roman antiquity are much more conducive to human flourishing than the restrictive anti-libertarian inhuman Judeo-Christian beliefs that replaced the glory of classic Rome. Second, the liberties of the Enlightenment overcame the authoritarianism of the Reformation and of the Christian church in general with free thinking procured by the liberating use of reason. In both cases Christianity is presented as a miserable substitute for, and a restriction of, real human flourishing, equality, and freedoms, including that of conscience. The impression is repeatedly given in the media and by modern and postmodern critics that Christianity is the source of all our ills. This approach often goes hand in glove with secularization theories in the Weberian mold that present the inevitable progress of the disembedding and disappearance of religion in modern times, on the assumption that today it is more feasible to be an unbeliever than not. In biblical terms, however, present unbelief is not an absence of faith but an idolatrous faith in something other than God's truth. This is always hidden behind the illusion of neutrality or other factors of what Charles Taylor calls "buffering."<sup>3</sup>

Anyone who is impressed by the glories of pagan antiquity might be pulled up short by Oxford professor Larry Siedentop's recent monograph, which is a salutary debunking of the ethos of pagan antiquity. It may come as a surprise that

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2007), 37–42, etc.

Paul's conception of Christ overturns the assumption on which ancient thinking had hitherto rested, the assumption of natural inequality. Instead Paul wagers on human equality. It is a wager that runs on transparency, that we can and should see ourselves in others, and others in ourselves. A leap of faith in human equality reveals ... the universal availability of a God-given foundation for human action, the free action of love ... a challenge to the ancient belief that humans are subject to an immutable order of "fate."<sup>4</sup>

It is a pity that Siedentop's cultural history does not extend beyond the late Middle Ages to the Reformation, but it is sufficient to expose the myth that classical paganism was the "big rock candy mountain" and that Christianity replaced it with a desert of inequalities and injustices. The opposite is closer to the truth. Christianity brought with it freedoms and justice, including a new view of the individual and a freedom of conscience unknown in pagan culture, and this profited Western liberties.

Cultural interpretations of the Enlightenment are based, as the word suggests, on the idea that it delivered human beings from religious darkness, by secularizing the Reformers' *Post tenebras lux*. These interpretations seem to work with the supposition that the bonus was enormous and the malus was correctible. People are taken in by the rhetoric of the humanistic Condorcets who prophesied of the day when tyrants and slaves would disappear together with priests and their hypocritical baggage, and humans would be free with no master other than reason: *Ni dieu, ni maître* (no god, no master). So man would progress inevitably toward a utopian society.<sup>5</sup> The Reformation was not so much undone as lost because it was buried by the spirit of Enlightenment, with its accent on reason and progress. It was overwhelmed by the humanistic beliefs, which generated their own illusions. But as one recent commentator has stated, "the philosophical efforts to contrive a universal, self-sufficient, rational replacement for religion ... were self-deceived from the outset, and those intellectuals who continue today to carry on likewise are engaged in a similarly self-deceived enterprise."<sup>6</sup>

In particular, the Reformational doctrine of original sin was varnished over by Rousseauism, complemented by the idea that modern man is more developed, scientific, and advanced than our primitive predecessors. This is

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Sadly, Condorcet himself fell foul of progress after the Revolution and was probably murdered while under arrest in 1794. Cf. David Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2012), 383.

true only when scientific is understood in the sense of technological, and advanced in that of the material quality of life. Otherwise people in the West today are afflicted by a one-dimensional moral misery that our Christian ancestors would have found distressing, and which we do when we reflect on it. By eliding the doctrine of sin from its understanding of human nature the Enlightenment countered what was true in the Reformation, and with it the need for grace, and replaced the biblical motifs of perdition and salvation with the illusions of modern history. Christianity is constantly berated for its antihumanity, its violences and past failures, while it is forgotten that the slaughterhouses of the twentieth century were the offspring of the illusions of ideological humanism, whether Marxist or liberal. And so it remains down to the present, when any number of social policies in progressive democracies are based on the blind supposition of the innate goodness of human beings and their right to fulfill whatever they consider to be their legitimate desires. Religion of any kind is thought to be primitive and unsophisticated, while all around us the fabric of society falls apart, with nothing to hold it together.

*Secondly*, let us consider what freedom of conscience really is. It differs considerably from what it is generally understood to be today, since it must have a reference point outside itself in order to function. Rousseau at least understood something of that when he defined it as the voice of nature in man, considering it to be in some way divine and useful when loosed from the constraints of social convention. But without a transcendent reference, freedom of conscience becomes a form of in-house quality control for fallen man, an inner self-reference, which may in the best of cases accuse sinfulness, but in the worst case will simply excuse it, and let the sinner off the hook. It may be altogether moribund, and as far as God's law is concerned its voice may be muted altogether. When this is the case, conscience as such is dead and moral blindness ensues, the freedom of "conscience" becoming simply the wandering of man's thought in a situation of lostness. Enlightenment without light is the blind leading the blind, and the plight of unidimensional man and his solitude is glossed over with rhetoric about how things are getting better and better.

The conscience of human beings is created and therefore it can never be free from God's standards of judgment, whatever humanists understand freedom to be, and whatever man does, good or evil. Natural law is not natural; it is God working through man's conscience in a variety of human expressions. So, in a certain respect, there is no such thing as freedom of conscience. God remains man's reference point and standard whether man recognizes it or not. A conscience that pretends to be free of God is enslaved

by its own false pretenses, leading to death, but it can never escape God and his judgment. In this respect freedom of conscience is comparable to so-called freedom of the will. It does not exist as an independent factor determined by man in his autonomy. Human nature exists in one of its fourfold states: created, fallen, redeemed, or glorified, to use the classic language. A fallen conscience can never be free, no more than a fallen will can be free, as Luther argued against Erasmus. Fallen conscience must be sinful, and to be free once more it must find liberty through the law leading to Christ and then by serving the law of love for God in Christ. Outside of Christ conscience is reduced to a function of self-exoneration whether it be in micro behavioral patterns or in all inclusive theories.

Fundamentally this means that man's conscience is never free from God and his standards, in spite of all that man might dream up about freedom. That is an objective reality: man remains a creature in the image of God, even in fallenness. Subjectively, freedom of conscience receives its ethos from the worldview in which it functions. In service to God and his law it is really free, in Christ, to function in such a way as to encourage human beings in their vocation as servants of the living God. Over against this, in the context of idolatrous worldviews, freedom of conscience metamorphoses to take on the apparel of many different perspectives. It can function in the context of a worldview that is rationalistic or romantic, it may become historical conscience as a form of materialism, or it can be nihilistic in denial of Christian ethics. Existentialism will transform freedom of conscience from an expression of the essence of man to an authentic action because it is man's destiny to be alone and free. And in political correctness, objective facts will tend to be replaced by what one wishes to believe because that seems most acceptable to the subjective, relativistic, and self-centered outlook. In all these variations of one-dimensional humanism, and many other similar cases, it is not ultimately *conscience* that is in view, but *self-consciousness* in the context of autonomy, as man worships at the altar of a stagnant pool, rather than at the cross from which flows the rivers of living water. Self-consciousness means self-absorption, self-satisfaction and self-centeredness. No wonder social media are so trivial, unconvivial, and uncivil: they represent what we have become.

True freedom of conscience is found in obedience to God, as the Reformers defined it. For them it is synonymous with the liberty of the Christian person, whose freedom it is to serve God without the imposition of human authorities, whether churchly, political, or other. Martin Luther wrote eloquently about it in his early writings, particularly in his commentary on Galatians. Philip Melancthon developed the idea in his *Loci communes*. Following

them, Calvin penned the magistral chapter 19 in book III of the *Institutes* and the *Westminster Confession* devoted a chapter (20) to defining it. Outside of the liberty of the Christian conscience in Christ, other forms of freedom of conscience are falsehood at best and idolatrous at worst. That is why the Reformers and Puritans were concerned with freedom of conscience as a God-given grace, rather than as a human right. In the light of the greatness of God's grace, and knowing him as Lord and Savior, human rights pale into insignificance in the light of eternity. After the Reformers' time the notion of conscience was secularized, transformed into a human right as conscience before God gave way to free thinking.

Few of us would desire to live in a pre-Enlightenment world; I have no desire to decry the good done in many areas, and truth must be treasured wherever it is recognized. We have enormous material comforts that it would be difficult to live without, and the progress we benefit from reveals the complex wonder of the image of God in man. However, technological progress has paradoxically been accompanied by moral regress, and if it is not quite dark yet, it is certainly getting there. Some good has come from all this, in spite of man's sinfulness, but any forms of human freedom that have arisen from the spirit of humanism fall far short of the glorious freedom of the children of God in Christ, the freedom now revealed in the gospel through faith, which is a rumor of glory to come. As Abraham Kuyper concluded on the theme Calvinism and politics:

in the French Revolution a civil liberty for every Christian *to agree with the unbelieving majority*; in Calvinism, a liberty of conscience, which enables every man to serve God *according to his own conviction and the dictates of his own heart.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 109.

# An Exhortation to the Diligent Study of Scripture<sup>1</sup>

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

## Introduction

**T**he importance of the *Paraclesis* (*Exhortation*) for understanding Erasmus should not be underestimated. James McConica states, while exposing Erasmus's central theme of "the philosophy of Christ," that "it is really sufficient to read the *Paraclesis* to grasp the heart of Erasmus' personal faith and concerns. All the great issues are there."<sup>2</sup> And, according to Margaret Mann Phillips, "A simple way to discover just where Erasmus stood at this important junction of his life is to analyse the famous preface to the first edition of Erasmus's New Testament (1516), called the *Paraclesis*."<sup>3</sup> Later she adds that it "became famous, and rightly so, as it is almost a summary of Erasmus's contribution to the Renaissance."<sup>4</sup> She singles out three characteristics of the *Paraclesis*: humanist optimism in contrast to the Reformers' pessimism with regard to human nature, "distrust of intellectual subtlety," and the fact that its arguments "were almost all to become the arguments of the Reformers."<sup>5</sup>

The structure and genre of the *Paraclesis* is debated. Erasmus composed it rather hastily to be one of the introductory texts in his 1516 edition of the

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<sup>1</sup> The text presented here (Desiderius Erasmus, *An Exhortation to the Diligent Study of Scripture, made by Erasmus Roterodamus. And translated into English* [1529]) is modernized and edited by Bernard Aubert and Paul Wells.

<sup>2</sup> James McConica, *Erasmus, Past Masters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 46.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Mann Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), 77.

<sup>4</sup> Mann Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance*, 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 81–84.

New Testament. The haste of composition partly explains its unclear structure. Pierre Mesnard suggests that it contains ten peaks (themes) organized around the gospel. Gerhard Winkler, for his part, discerns in this preface a twofold elaborate rhetorical structure (introduction [I], part one [II–V], part two [VI–VIII], conclusion). Both authors discover symmetry between the first and second halves, as themes either repeat themselves or contrast with one another. This text, with its repetitions and exhortative character, is considered by many to belong to the homiletic genre.<sup>6</sup> The title, *Paraclesis*, the Greek meaning “summons,” “exhortation,” or “consolation,” indicates the rhetorical or homiletic character of the text. In the New Testament it is used in the context of the church (Rom 12:8; Heb 13:22), but it is also employed in classical rhetoric, an example being the description of Dio Chrysostom, the philosopher, addressing the emperor Trajan (Dio Chrysostom, *Kingship* 1.9). So Erasmus may well be following both biblical and classical paradigms.

There is in Erasmus a paradox between his desire to reach ordinary Christians and his own complex literary style. Silvana Seidel Menchi expresses this well:

A glaring contradiction is in fact apparent in the high-profile manifestos. In the first and most famous one—the *Paraclesis*—Erasmus declares that his objective is to put the New Testament into the hands of the simple Christian: the weaver, the peasant farmer, the *muliercula*. But then what does he do? He formulates this programme in refined Latin, he locks his idea in complex syntax, he lards his periods with sophisticated erudition.<sup>7</sup>

A similar contradiction appears in the consideration of the genre of the *Paraclesis*. In the introduction, Erasmus claims to restrict himself to the persuasion of Christ, yet in his style he does not separate himself entirely from the rhetoric of orators and the power of poets.

The central and recurring theme of this short work is the philosophy of Christ. In it Erasmus adopts a polemic stance against the scholastics and the monastic life, and the philosophy of Christ is defined in contrast to pagan philosophy (Delègue). Further, the exhortation ends with a commendation of the teaching of Christ in the Gospels and epistles in opposition to popular piety and superstition.<sup>8</sup> He reacts against the dogmatic and philosophical

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Ch. Béné in Desiderius Erasmus, *Opera Omnia*, 5.7 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 282.

<sup>7</sup> Silvana Seidel Menchi, “How to Domesticate the New Testament: Erasmus’ Dilemmas (1516–1535),” *Basel 1516*, 218.

<sup>8</sup> Note that Erasmus had a fairly low view of the Old Testament.

theology of the scholastics and replaces it with a focus on life and Christ.<sup>9</sup> Jacques Étienne warns, however, that Erasmus's concept of the philosophy of Christ, though far from that of Martin Luther, should not be equated with a mere moral philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, a key to Erasmus's philosophy of Christ is the notion of rebirth or renaissance through Christ and his word.

The version of the *Paraclesis* printed here is a modernization of the first 1529 English translation by William Roye. Roye has a very different translation philosophy from that of modern translators.<sup>11</sup> For example, he often translates one Latin word by a pair of synonyms and adds explanatory phrases. He also adorns the original with biblical imagery. As a whole his translation is a faithful rendering of the Latin original; at points, however, he modifies the text in a more Protestant direction. For instance, the original title is simply *Exhortation*, while the translation renders it as *An Exhortation to the Diligent Study of Scripture*. On several occasions the translation emphasizes Reformed themes such as human depravity and grace, the glory of God, and faith alone. Besides modernizing the text, the present translation has removed some of the synonyms and redundant expressions and indicated some of the modifications of Roye's translation from the original.<sup>12</sup>

It is significant that the 1529 edition of the *Paraclesis* was published together with one of the first translations of a work by Luther, a commentary on 1 Corinthians 7. It was the first and last time that Erasmus and Luther were thus joined together.<sup>13</sup> Though the situation is more complex, it is an example of a publisher using Erasmus for the Protestant cause. In Erasmus we see a move from bold and optimistic advocacy of reform in 1516 to a more defensive stance in the face of an accusation of heresy in the ensuing years. Thus, the reform-minded *Paraclesis* was excluded from his 1527 and 1535 editions of the New Testament.<sup>14</sup>

The legacy of the *Paraclesis* lies primarily in its advocacy for the translation of the Bible into the language of the people and the reading of the Bible by lay Christians. It is also a program of educational reform for Christendom.

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<sup>9</sup> This nondogmatic stance perhaps manifested itself in another direction later in his debate over the bondage of the will with Luther.

<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Étienne warns against identifying Erasmus's teaching with Friedrich Schleiermacher's version of the Christian faith.

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see Douglas H. Parker, ed., *William Roye's An exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture and An exposition in to the seventh chapter of the pistle to the Corinthians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 28–36.

<sup>12</sup> Brackets have been used to mark out added elements in Roye's translation and supplementary information has been supplied in the notes.

<sup>13</sup> Parker, ed., *William Roye's An exhortation and An exposition*, 4–5.

<sup>14</sup> Seidel Menchi, "How to Domesticate the New Testament," 220.

Erasmus only wrote in Latin and labored more in scholarly endeavors. At the same time, the popularization of the message of the Bible was taken over by the Reformers.<sup>15</sup> However, Erasmus's manifesto and New Testament editions had a great impact on the flourishing of translations such as the German translation by Luther in 1522 and the 1525 New Testament in English by William Tyndale (see Robert Adams), who was assisted by none other than William Roye.

In short, Erasmus's *Paraclesis* is a vital summary of the thought of one of the leading Christian humanists and precursors of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. It conveys his view of the philosophy of Christ and advocates for the reading of the New Testament by all.

## An Exhortation to the Diligent Study of Scripture

### I. *Eloquence and Truth*<sup>16</sup>

Lactantius Firmianus, Christian<sup>17</sup> reader, whose eloquence Jerome greatly admires,<sup>18</sup> endeavoring to defend the Christian religion against the pagans, sought zealously to attain an eloquence akin to that of Cicero, as he thought it presumptuous to aspire to be his equal. As for me—if wishes could avail anything, at least while I exhort mortals to the most holy and salutary study of Christian teaching [*Christianae philosophiae*]<sup>19</sup>—I sincerely desire another type of eloquence be given to me, far greater than ever Cicero had. ... It is better and more fitting to desire that Christ himself would tune the strings of our instrument that this song may effectively attract and move the mind of all.<sup>20</sup> To this end, we have little use for the colored arguments and conclusions of the rhetoricians, for nothing can accomplish what we desire so well as the truth itself, which is most effective in persuasion when it is most plain.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 220–21.

<sup>16</sup> The headings in this text are not original but are added for ease of reading. The Latin is cited from Holborn's edition.

<sup>17</sup> Lit., "excellent."

<sup>18</sup> Lactantius (ca. 240–ca. 320) was a Christian apologist from North Africa. Cf. Jerome, "Letter LXIII. To Paulinus," 10 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 6:122); Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 3.1.1 (FC 49:164).

<sup>19</sup> The Latin adds here, "and I, as it were, summon them, sounding the bugle." Thus, Erasmus conceives his rhetoric as a trumpet call for battle.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ps 33:2. Some have suggested that the song is a reference to the Bible.

## II. *Lament over the Neglect of the Philosophy of Christ*

I do not consider it appropriate now to renew the sorrowful complaint [*querelam*]<sup>21</sup>—never more true than at this present time—that while much new knowledge is sought with great effort, yet only the immortal fountain of Christ’s pure teaching<sup>21</sup> is depreciated, even by those who profess to be Christians. These healthy springs are sought by few [*a paucis tractari*], and those who seek them do so unfruitfully.<sup>22</sup>

In all other sciences pursued by human enquiry, no mystery is so dark and secret that the quickness of our mind has not clarified it, nothing is so hard that diligent labor has not overcome it.<sup>23</sup> How is it then that we do not embrace with faithful hearts this pure teaching,<sup>24</sup> since we profess the holy name of Christ? Plato’s adherents, Pythagoras’s students, the Academics, Stoics, and Epicureans, Aristotle’s followers, and Diogenes’s disciples know by heart the traditions of their own school, and contend fiercely for them, ready rather to die than to forsake their patron. And why do we not give our minds much more to our master and prince, Christ? ... Should not we, who are in so many ways consecrated and bound to Christ by many sacraments, think it shameful to be ignorant of the [Scripture and] teaching that give us most sure consolation?<sup>25</sup> Is it not pure folly to compare Christ with Zeno and Aristotle, and his heavenly doctrine with their trifling traditions?

## III. *Christ the Only Teacher*

Let them say and dream up as much as they will about the founders of their schools. Only this teacher came from heaven: he alone could teach sure things, since he is the everlasting wisdom [of the Father], he alone taught saving doctrine [*salutaria*], being the only author of human salvation [*unicus humanae salutis auctor*],<sup>26</sup> he alone completely accomplished all that he taught, and he alone performs whatever he has promised.

<sup>21</sup> Lit., “Christ’s philosophy,” *Christi philosophiam*.

<sup>22</sup> The following sentence was added in the English translation: “By adding their own glosses and opinions, they seem to trouble and defile these springs of life rather than to drink of them sweetly, so that they might have in themselves floods of living water running into the everlasting life that should be to the glory of God and profit of the Christians.”

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Virgil, *The Georgics* 1.145: “Labor conquers all things.”

<sup>24</sup> Lit., “philosophy.”

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Matt 8:23–27. The ET adds here “and which are the anchor of the soul both sure and stable (Heb 6:19), preserving us from perishing in all tempests of temptation.”

<sup>26</sup> The ET has here, “the foundation of everyone’s health” (cf. 1 Cor 3:10–11; Jer 30:17).

If something is brought from the Chaldeans or Egyptians, we greatly desire to know it, because it comes from a foreign country. ... I wonder that this desire does not likewise entice Christian hearts, who know full well that this wholesome doctrine did not come from Egypt or Syria, but from heaven itself [and the seat of God]. Why do we not understand that this must be new and wondrous learning [*novum et admirabile philosophiae genus*], since he who was God became man [John 1:14], he who was immortal became mortal, and he who was at the right hand of his Father<sup>27</sup> descended into this wretched world to teach us it? It surely is a high and excellent thing, and no trifle, that this [heavenly and] glorious master came to teach openly. Why do we not endeavor to know, search, and discern this fruitful philosophy with godly curiosity?

Above all, this wisdom is so exceptional that it utterly confounds as foolishness the wisdom of this world,<sup>28</sup> and it may be gathered out of so few books, as from the most pure springs, and that with much less labor than the teaching of Aristotle out of so many contentious books, or from an infinite number of commentaries that simply disagree. ... The way to this true wisdom is easy and available [to all]. Only bring a godly and diligent mind [*animum*], endowed with plain and pure faith [*fide*], desirous to be instructed in this meek teaching,<sup>29</sup> and you will profit much. Your master and instructor (the Spirit of God), who is never more gladly present than with those of simple heart [*simplicibus animis*], will not be absent from you.<sup>30</sup> Human teaching and traditions<sup>31</sup> (besides promising false happiness) mislead the minds of many and make them despair because they are so obscure, subtle, and contradictory. But this [delectable] doctrine speaks equally to all, adapting to us when we are children [*parvulis*; cf. 1 Cor 3:1], modifying her tune according to our need, feeding us with milk [cf. 1 Pet 2:2], bearing, nourishing, sustaining, and doing all things, until we grow in Christ. It is simple and uncomplicated for the weak, but high and marvelous for the perfect; the more you dig into the treasures of this science, the farther you are from attaining her majesty.<sup>32</sup> To the young she is simple and plain, and

<sup>27</sup> The ET perhaps echoes the Apostles' Creed; Acts 7:55; and Rom 8:34. The Latin translates literally, "in the heart of the Father," *in corde patris*.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 3:19. Erasmus expands on this theme in his famous *Praise of Folly*.

<sup>29</sup> Lit., "in this philosophy," *in hac philosophia*.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Matt 5:8.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Mark 7:6–9; the Latin does not have this wording, but "the other disciplines," *illorum disciplinae*.

<sup>32</sup> Perhaps Erasmus is echoing the saying of Gregory the Great about Scripture, "It is as it were like a river, broad and deep, in which both a lamb walks and an elephant swims [*planus et altus, in quo et agnus ambulet et elephas natet*]; "Ad Leandrum 4," in *Moralia* (CCL 143.6).

to the greater she seems above their capacity. She turns away no age, sex, fortune, or condition.

#### **IV. All Christians Are Theologians**

The sun, like the teaching of Christ, shines forth for all, rejecting no one, except those who abstain willingly, interested only in their own gain. I greatly disagree with those who do not want the Scripture of Christ<sup>33</sup> to be translated into all tongues,<sup>34</sup> to be read diligently by the common men and women, as though Christ taught such dark things that they can only be understood by a few divines, or that the substance of the Christian religion [*religionis Christianae*] consisted mainly in what cannot be known. Perhaps it is fitting that the mysteries of kings should be kept secret, but Christ desires that his mysteries should be spread abroad as much as possible. I would that all women read the Gospels and Paul's epistles, and that they be translated into the common language so that they be read and known not only by the Scots and Irish, but also by the Turks and Saracens. Truly it is a great thing to have a little insight into Scripture, even if it is only a scant and incomplete knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

Some may smile, but others may be convinced. I would that the plowman sing a text of the Scripture at his plow, that the weaver at his loom use it to drive away the tediousness of time, or that the traveler make the time pass and rid his journey of weariness and, in short, that the conversations of the Christians be from the Scriptures, for we ourselves are what our daily stories make us. Let every one attain the level he can, and speak his mind openly to his neighbor.<sup>36</sup> Let those who are less advanced not envy the one in front; let also those in front encourage those who follow, ever exhorting them not to despair. Why do we restrict to a few the calling that is common to all? Neither is it fitting that doctrine should be banished from the common people and known only by a few divines or persons in orders [*vulgus theologos aut monachos*]; baptism, the first profession of the Christian religion [*Christianae philosophia*], is common to all Christians, the other sacraments are not private, and the reward of immortality belongs indifferently to all. I would with my whole heart that these divines and religious professionals (a

<sup>33</sup> Lit., "divine letters," *divinas litteras*.

<sup>34</sup> Lit., "the vulgar tongue."

<sup>35</sup> The Latin here translates literally, "Truly the first step is to understand one way or another."

<sup>36</sup> Lit., "express what he may." Some consider that the ET translation might suggest the Reformed view of good works (cf. Rom 15:2).

small company in comparison to the whole number that bear the name of Christ) be indeed what they are called.

I am afraid that one may find some among the divines who are unworthy of that name, who speak worldly things and not godly; and that also among those in religious orders<sup>37</sup> who profess the poverty of Christ and despise the world you may find only worldliness. I consider a true divine [*vere theologus*] to be one who in heart [*affectu*], appearance, and life teaches to despise riches without crafty and subtle reasons [*syllogismis*]. A Christian ought not to put confidence in the help of this world, but to hang only and wholly on heaven [cf. Matt 6:19–21]; not avenging injury, praying for those that say evil about us, and doing good against evil [Matt 5:39–42, 44]. Good people should be loved and upheld without respect of person as members of the one body; evil people, if they cannot be reformed, ought to be suffered; they who are despoiled of their goods and deprived of their possessions and mourn [in this world] are blessed and not to be pitied [cf. Matt 5:4, 10–12]; and death is to be desired for Christians,<sup>38</sup> since it is nothing but a passage to immortality. If someone inspired by the Holy Spirit [*spiritu Christi*] preaches and teaches these and other such things, if someone exhorts, encourages, and emboldens his neighbor in these things, that person is a true divine [*vere theologus*], though a weaver or a laborer. Those who do these things in this life are truly great doctors. Perhaps even someone who is not a Christian may speculate as to the way angels [*angeli*] think. However, persuading us to live here untainted by vice and to lead an angelic life [*vitam exigamus angelicam*], is the office of a Christian divine [*Christiani theologi*].<sup>39</sup>

## V. The Impact of Christ's Teaching on the World

If someone object that these are unlearned and elementary things, I answer nothing but that Christ taught these simple things, and that the apostles exhorted us in them.<sup>40</sup> Although this doctrine is unsophisticated, it has given us many good Christians and armies of faithful martyrs.<sup>41</sup> This unlearned (as they call it) philosophy has subdued under her laws the most noble princes, many kingdoms and peoples, something which no king's power [*vis*], no learning of the philosophers, was ever able to do. I will not

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<sup>37</sup> Lit., “monks,” *monachos*.

<sup>38</sup> Lit., “the pious.”

<sup>39</sup> Commentators see here a polemical allusion to Thomas Aquinas often called the *Doctor angelicus*.

<sup>40</sup> Lit., “that the apostles have inculcated them.”

<sup>41</sup> Lit., “distinguished martyrs.”

resist those who want to dispute subtle questions [*sapientiam istam*] among the more perfect [cf. 1 Cor 2:6]; however, the unlearned multitude of the Christians may be comforted, because truly the apostles never taught such things; whether they knew them or not, I let others judge.

But truly if princes would set themselves to practicing this simple learning with pureness of heart, if preachers in their sermons would expose this doctrine, if schoolmasters would instruct their children with this simple science rather than with the traditions of Aristotle and Averroes,<sup>42</sup> then Christianity would not be disturbed by perpetual storms of war; the unreasonable desire for gain, longing insatiably for riches, whether by fair or foul means, would be someday assuaged; contentious arguments over everything [sacred or profane] would have an end; we would differ not only in name and ceremony from the unfaithful<sup>43</sup> [but also in the pure conduct of our life]. And no doubt in the three orders of men—princes and officers who are their ambassadors; bishops and priests, who are their representatives; and those who educate tender youth, who are formed and reformed as their master instructs them—lies the possibility either to increase the Christian religion [*Christianae religionis*] or to restore it again [when it has long been in decay]. Now if they would put aside their own private interests for a while and lift up their hearts with pure intent to Christ [*ex animo conspirare in Christum*] [seeking only his glory and the profit of their neighbor], we should undoubtedly see in a few years a true and godly kind of Christian<sup>44</sup> springing up in every place, who would profess the name of Christ [*Christi philosophiam*] not only in ceremonies and words, but in heart and true conversation of life. With this armor we would much sooner prevail over<sup>45</sup> the enemies of Christ, than with force or threat.<sup>46</sup>

Join together all armies, there is nothing stronger than the truth! We cannot call anyone a Platonist unless he has read the works of Plato. Yet we call them Christians, and divines [*theologus*], who have never read the words of Christ [*Christi litteras*]. Christ says, “He that loves me keeps my sayings [*sermones*]” [John 14:23], which is the practice he has prescribed. Therefore, if we are true Christians in heart [*ex animo*], if we sincerely believe that he was sent down from heaven to teach us such things as the wisdom of the

<sup>42</sup> Averroes (1126–1198), Arabic scholar who first channeled Aristotle’s teaching to the West.

<sup>43</sup> Lit., “from those who do not profess the philosophy of Christ [*Christi philosophiam*].”

<sup>44</sup> The original has here, “a true, and as Paul says genuine [Gr., *gnēsion*] race of Christians” (cf. 2 Cor 8:8).

<sup>45</sup> Lit., “entice to faith in Christ.”

<sup>46</sup> Lit., “weapons.” Cf. Rom 13:12; Eph 6:11–12. The Pauline theme of spiritual warfare was dear to Erasmus as seen in his *Enchiridion militis christiani* or *Handbook of a Christian Soldier* (1501), a work that contained many themes also found in the *Paraclesis*.

philosophers could never attain, if we faithfully look for such things from him that no worldly prince can give us, why do we revere something more than his Scripture [*litteris*] [which he left here among us to be our consolation (cf. 2 Cor 1:5)]? Why do we consider something that dissents from his doctrine [*decretis*] to be wisdom? Why do we allow ourselves more liberty with this heavenly learning [*adorandis litteris*] than the profane interpreters with the civil law<sup>47</sup> or books of physics<sup>48</sup>? We treat as a trifling game, commenting, criticizing, and wrapping up whatever comes out of our mouths. We apply this heavenly doctrine [*caelestia dogmata*] to our life and measure it after our vain standards, as if it were flexible.<sup>49</sup> And we do this because we do not want to appear ignorant, but rather want to show that we have read much [secular literature, *profanarum literarum*]. I dare not say that we pollute these fruitful springs,<sup>50</sup> but no one can deny that we restrict to a few what Christ would have come to many. And this teaching consists in the thoughts of the heart [*affectibus*] rather than in subtle reasons [*sylogismis*]. It is living rather than disputations, inspiration rather than science [*eruditio*], and renewal rather than reasoning [*ratio*]. Learning is the exception, but it is possible for everyone to be a Christian, to live a godly life, and I venture to say, for everyone to be a divine.<sup>51</sup>

## VI. *Philosophy, Scholasticism, and Christ*

Now everyone's mind inclines to what fits their nature. And what is the teaching of Christ [*Christi philosophia*] which he calls regeneration [*renascentiam*],<sup>52</sup> if not a restoring of our nature which in its first creation was good?<sup>53</sup> One may find many things in pagan books that do not contradict this teaching, although no one has explained it so completely and with such power as Christ himself. For no school of philosophy, however primitive, ever taught that happiness [*felicem*] comes down to money, and none was so shameless as to affirm that the good life [*finem boni*] consists in this-worldly honor and pleasure. The Stoics acknowledged that no one might worthily be called wise unless good; that nothing was good and honest but virtue alone, and

<sup>47</sup> Lit., "laws of Caesar."

<sup>48</sup> That is, medical books.

<sup>49</sup> The original has here, "as if it was a Lydian rule [*Lydius lapis*]"; the Lydian rule "was made of lead, therefore flexible," Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 142, cf. 21, 146.

<sup>50</sup> Lit., "Christian philosophy," *Christiana philosophia*.

<sup>51</sup> Lit., "it is lawful for everyone to be a theologian," *nulli non licet esset theologum*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. John 3:3; Titus 3:5.

<sup>53</sup> Here Erasmus defines renaissance in terms of rebirth.

nothing was evil and to be abhorred but vice [*turpitudinem*]. Socrates, as Plato says, reasoned that injury should not to be avenged by injury.<sup>54</sup> He also taught that since the soul is immortal, those who depart are not to be mourned if they have lived well, because they have gone to a better life [*in vitam feliciorum*]. Finally, he taught all to subdue the desires of the body and to apply their souls to the contemplation of those things that are immortal and not seen [with these bodily eyes].<sup>55</sup> Aristotle writes in his *Politics* that only virtue delights us without displeasure.<sup>56</sup> Epicurus grants that there can be nothing pleasant in life unless the mind, from which all pleasure springs, is free from evil.<sup>57</sup> Besides, some have lived according to their teaching—above all Socrates, Diogenes, and Epictetus.

However, since Christ himself taught and did these things more perfectly than any other, is it not astonishing<sup>58</sup> that they are not only unknown to those who profess the name of Christ, but also despised and made a laughing-stock by them? If there is something that comes closer to Christianity, let us follow it. But since nothing else can make a true Christian, why do we consider this immortal doctrine more irrelevant than the books of Moses? The first point of Christianity is to know what Christ taught; the next is to practice it [as far as God gives us grace].<sup>59</sup>

I don't think that people should consider themselves Christian because they can reason with subtly tedious entanglements of words [*instantibus*], relations, quiddities, and formalities,<sup>60</sup> but because they acknowledge and practice what Christ taught and accomplished. I do not say this to condemn the labor of those who have exercised their minds in these subtle novelties, but rather because I believe that the pure and natural philosophy of Christ [*Christi philosophiam*] can be gathered nowhere more fruitfully than from the Gospels and epistles of the apostles. When people studies them attending more to prayer than arguing, desiring to be made a new creature rather than to be armed with Scripture for battle, they will without doubt find that there is nothing pertaining to happiness or conduct in this present life that is not proposed, explained, and brought out there. If we are to learn anything,

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Plato, *Republic* 1.335E.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 469B–C; *Phaedo* 63E–64C, 79C–D, 80E–811A, and 83A.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 7.1.3–5; and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8.14–15 (1099A), 10.3.8 (1173B), and 10.6.4 (1176A).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De finibus* 1.9.29–30.

<sup>58</sup> Or, “monstrous,” *prodigii*.

<sup>59</sup> This addition in the ET reflects for some a stronger view of human depravity and grace than in the original.

<sup>60</sup> These four words belong to scholastic technical terminology.

why should another instructor<sup>61</sup> be more pleasing than Christ himself? If we seek a pattern to live by, why do we embrace another example rather than the exemplar [*archetypus*] who is Christ himself? If we desire a medicine against the harmful appetites of our minds, why do we not seek here the most fruitful remedy? If we want to quicken with reading our dull and fainting mind, where shall we find such quick and fiery sparks? If we aspire to withdraw our minds from the tedious cares of this life, why do we seek any other pleasurable pastimes? Why do we prefer to learn the wisdom of Christ from human books rather than from Christ himself? It is he who in this Scripture accomplishes what he promised when he said that he would continue with us to the end of the world [Matt 28:20]. So in this his testament [*in his litteris*] he speaks, breathes, and lives among us more effectively than when he was bodily present in the world. The Jews did not see and hear as much of Christ as you may daily hear and see in the evangelical writings [*in euangelicis litteris*]; there nothing is wanting if you bring the ears and eyes [of faith] with which he may be heard and seen.<sup>62</sup>

## VII. *Human or Divine Authority?*

What a strange world this is! We keep letters written by our friends, we treasure them and carry them about, we read them over again and again. Thousands of Christians esteem great literature and yet have not once in their lives read over the Gospels and epistles of the apostles.<sup>63</sup> The followers of Mohammed are all well instructed in their own school, and the Jews to this day, even from a tender age, study Moses diligently. Why do we not give such honor to Christ [embracing his precepts, which bring eternal life]? Those who follow the rule of Benedict (a rule written by a man of small learning and for the unlearned) observe it, learn it by heart, and drink it in. Augustine's followers are not ignorant of their rule.<sup>64</sup> Francis's friars observe and promote<sup>65</sup> their patron's precepts and carry them about wherever they go, thinking they are safe only when their book is with them. Why do they live more by their rule, written by a man, than the whole of Christianity by the Holy Scripture, which Christ preached openly to all and which we have

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<sup>61</sup> Lit., "author."

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Matt 13:15. Here again, perhaps the addition "of faith" in the ET goes in the direction of a Reformed understanding of *sola fide*.

<sup>63</sup> Lit., "the evangelical and apostolic books."

<sup>64</sup> Lit., "the rule of their founder [*auctoris*]." The Rule of Augustine is followed for example by the Augustinians and Dominicans.

<sup>65</sup> Lit., "adore and embrace."

all professed in baptism? And to sum up, it is still most holy among all other precepts, even if you gathered hundreds of others together. As Paul wrote: I would that the law of Moses had no glory in comparison to the glory of the gospel that succeeded it,<sup>66</sup> and that the Gospels and epistles [*omnibus euangelia et apostolorum litterae*] would be esteemed so holy by Christians that the doctrines of men in comparison might not seem holy at all.

I accept that everyone should promote their beliefs to their own satisfaction. Let them extol Albert, Alexander, Thomas, Aegidius, Richard, and Occam.<sup>67</sup> I do not want to diminish anyone's glory or to belittle the old method of study. Let them be subtle [*subtilia*] or evangelical [*seraphica*],<sup>68</sup> but they must admit that the ancient doctors are most true.<sup>69</sup> Paul [and John]<sup>70</sup> recommend that we judge the spirits of the prophets whether they are of God [cf. 1 Cor 14:32 and 1 John 4:1]. Augustine read all the books of others with discernment, and he claimed no special authority for his own books.<sup>71</sup>

Only in the Scriptures [*In his solis litteris*], when I cannot understand something, I submit myself to it.<sup>72</sup> And our doctor (who is Christ) was not authorized by the schools of theologians, but by the heavenly Father's own divine voice bearing witness and that twice: first, at the Jordan when he was baptized [Matt 3:17], and later in his transfiguration on Mount Tabor, when God said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am pleased, hear him" [Matt 17:5]. O, the certain authority which has no contradiction! What does this mean, "Hear him"? If he is the only true instructor,<sup>73</sup> we ought to be his disciples alone. Now let everyone praise their authors as they will, only this voice spoke of Christ [our Savior], upon whom the Holy Spirit descended in the likeness of a dove, confirming the testimony of the heavenly Father [Matt 3:16]. Peter was endowed with this Spirit by the over-shepherd when Christ three times committed his sheep to be nourished, with nothing other than [that he should instruct them with] the [heavenly] food of Christian doctrine [*Christianae doctrinae pabulo*].<sup>74</sup> In Paul, called by Christ himself a

<sup>66</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 3:7–8 and Heb 3:3.

<sup>67</sup> That is, Albertus Magnus (1193–1280), Alexander of Hales (ca. 1170–1245), Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), Giles of Rome (ca. 1243–1316), Richard of Middleton (d. ca. 1300), and William of Ockham (ca. 1280–ca. 1349); all these are medieval philosophers or theologians.

<sup>68</sup> John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) was nicknamed "Subtle Doctor" and Bonaventura (1221–1274) "Seraphic Doctor."

<sup>69</sup> That is, Christ and the apostles.

<sup>70</sup> Added in the ET.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichaeon* 11.5 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 4:180) and *The Trinity* 3, Preface, 2 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 3:56).

<sup>72</sup> Lit., "I worship," *adoro*.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Matt 23:10.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. John 21:15–17.

“chosen vessel” [Acts 9:15] and a pure<sup>75</sup> preacher of his name [and glory], Christ seemed in a way to be born anew. John expressed in his writings [*litteris*] what he had brought out of the holy fountain of Christ’s bosom.<sup>76</sup> What is there to compare with this in Scotus<sup>77</sup> (I do not want you to think that I speak out of envy), or what is there in Thomas?<sup>78</sup>—although I commend the one’s holiness<sup>78</sup> and marvel at the subtle wit of the other. Why do we not all apply our diligent study to these great authors [I mean, Christ, Peter, Paul, and John]?<sup>79</sup> Why do we not carry about these in our hearts? Why do we not have them ever in our hands? Why do we not hunt for and seek out these things with diligence? Why do we give a greater portion of our life to the study of Averroes than to the gospel of Christ?<sup>80</sup> Why do we respect human decrees and vain opinions which differ among themselves? Perhaps great divines made these constitutions, yet only in Christ’s word consists the exercise of the one who aspires to be a great divine before God.

### VIII. *Christ Teaches through the Scriptures*

It is fitting for all who have professed the name of Christ, if we have promised with mind and heart,<sup>81</sup> to be instructed with the teaching of Christ [*Christi dogmatis*] while yet [tender infants] in our parents’ arms and in our nurses’ care. What the rude and unformed clay of our soul has initially received is deeply impressed on them and cleaves to them. I would then that our first inarticulate speech should sound Christ. I would that our ignorant<sup>82</sup> childhood be so informed with Christ’s gospel and that Christ be taught to children so that they might be enflamed to love him<sup>83</sup> and that later they should progress little by little, and that they might imperceptibly grow from the ground up to be strong in Christ.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Lit., “distinguished,” *insignem*.

<sup>76</sup> Lit., “out of his heart,” *illo pectoris*.

<sup>77</sup> Duns Scotus.

<sup>78</sup> That is, Thomas’s holiness.

<sup>79</sup> The ET added the reference to Christ and the apostles. The Latin original translates literally, “Why do we not all philosophize (*philosophamur*) with these great authors?”

<sup>80</sup> Lit., “the Gospels.”

<sup>81</sup> The first half of this sentence translates literally, “As much as in baptism we have sworn the words of Christ, if nevertheless we have sworn out of the heart (*ex animo*).”

<sup>82</sup> Lit., “earliest.”

<sup>83</sup> In the 1522 version, the following sentence was added here: “For just as the austerity of certain tutors makes pupils hate letters before they become acquainted with them; thus there are those who make the philosophy of Christ sad and morose, while it is nothing but sweet.”

<sup>84</sup> Lit., “That from being occupied with these studies, then by quiet growth they might grow up (*adolescant*) into robust men in Christ.”

Other human traditions are such that many regret having invested so much effort on them. And often it happens that those who have most vigorously sought throughout their life, even to death, to defend human teachings, yet at the point of death they [have abandoned their defenses and] make a clean break with their received wisdom. But blessed is he whom death assails when his heart is taken up with wholesome doctrines [*in hisce litteris*]. Let us therefore with fervent desire seek these spiritual springs. Let us embrace them. Let us be studiously familiar with them. Let us embrace the sweet words of Christ with a pure affection. Let us be transformed anew into them, for our lives are such as our studies are.<sup>85</sup> And to be short, let us die in them. If someone cannot attain to them (but who cannot, if they wish) let him submit to them, considering them as the treasure of God's own mind<sup>86</sup> [from whence comes all goodness].

If someone were to show us Christ's footprint, good Lord, how would we kneel and worship it! And why do we not rather honor his living and breathing image which is expressly contained in these books? If someone would bring us Christ's coat, where would we not run headlong to kiss it? Even if you brought out all his household stuff, nothing more truly and really represents Christ than the Gospels and epistles.<sup>87</sup> We adorn an image of wood or stone with gold and precious stones for the love of Christ. But why are these writings not garnished with gold and gems even more precious, since they present us Christ more really than any image? As for images, what things can they portray but the form of his body—even if they express that? But the gospel represents the living image of his most holy mind [*sacrosanctae mentis illius*], and Christ himself speaking, healing, dying, rising again, and all his parts. So much so that even if he were present before your eyes, you would not see him so plainly and profitably.

End of the exhortation [*Paracleseos Finis*]

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<sup>85</sup> Or, "seeing that 'studies become habits.'" *Abeunt studia in Mores* is a famous Latin saying, Ovid, *Heroides* 15.83.

<sup>86</sup> Lit., "divine heart," *divini pectoris*.

<sup>87</sup> Lit., "the gospel letters," *euangelicae litterae*.

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# Erasmus and the Book That Changed the World Five Hundred Years Ago

DANIEL B. WALLACE

## Abstract

The first published Greek New Testament (NT), *Novum Instrumentum Omne*, appeared on March 1, 1516. It was a diglot—a Latin-Greek NT. The Reformation was born because Luther had Erasmus’s Greek NT in his hands. This article looks at the history behind that momentous publication, who Erasmus was, and how his most controversial work became the spark that was fanned into the flames of the Reformation. All Protestant translations of the NT for the past half millennium find their roots in the *Novum Instrumentum*. Ironically, producing a *Greek* NT may have been a “side issue” for Erasmus. Yet this Renaissance man wedded historical and philological scholarship of ancient texts to the study of the Bible and thus initiated the modern era of NT scholarship.

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## Introduction

**W**hat are the most momentous, world-changing events of the last millennium? We would be in good company if we thought that the late nineteenth to twentieth century had most of them—the Industrial Revolution, modern medicine, World War I, the rise of Communism, World War II, a myriad of technological advances and inventions—including the telephone, automobile, airplane, radio, Turing machine (now called

computer), and atomic bomb, manned space travel and the landing on the moon, the Internet—and many more. All of these are indeed world-changing events. And they have come at a dizzying pace.

We might also be forgiven if we were to draw a blank on the nine hundred years or so leading up to the modern era, thinking of them as largely static, with Europe slowly creeping out of the dark ages guided by the light of some flickering candles we call the Renaissance. But there were also five events in Europe that changed the world, especially the West, all happening within sixty-five years of each other—between 1453 and 1517. I will focus on the fourth of these, but I begin with the others.

**MAY 29, 1453:** After a seven-week siege by the Ottomans, the great city of Constantinople fell. Three days after that “black Tuesday” (as some Greeks still call it), the largest church in the world, Hagia Sophia, became the largest mosque in the world. Constantinople, formerly Byzantium, was the city that Constantine the Great had made the capital of the Roman empire in A.D. 330. For the next 1100 years, Greek-speaking scribes faithfully copied out both classical and biblical literature. When the city fell, many of the scribes and monks fled to Western Europe, bringing with them their manuscripts. At this time, ancient Greek was virtually unknown in the West, and it had been unknown for a millennium. Now the flood of manuscripts coming from Constantinople gave the Renaissance a shot in the arm, and it gave birth to the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

**1454:** The very next year was almost as momentous. This is the year that Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press.<sup>2</sup> Up until this invention, *all* books had to be made by hand, with scribes painstakingly writing them out letter by letter. Books had been written the same way for thousands of years.<sup>3</sup> With Gutenberg’s invention, now books became

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<sup>1</sup> Technically, the Renaissance began in the late fourteenth century in Florence, with the Greek phase starting when the chancellor of Florence, Coluccio Salutati, invited the Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysolaras in 1397 to teach ancient Greek in Florence. But the Greek phase received its greatest impetus from the sacking of Constantinople when the scribes fled with their manuscripts. Preserved Smith, *Erasmus: A Study of His Life, Ideals and Place in History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923; repr., New York: Dover, 1962), 2, argues cogently on the basis of societal shifts, new discoveries and inventions, and the rebirth of antiquity that “the Renaissance and the Reformation were ... really one.”

<sup>2</sup> The actual date of Gutenberg’s invention is disputed, but 1454 is often given as the correct year.

<sup>3</sup> The *shape* of books, however, was relatively new. That shape was the codex—a book with cut pages and bound on one side instead of written on a scroll. This was relatively new, since it had only been invented in the late first century A.D. Christians were the first to popularize it,

affordable. Combined with the deluge of Greek manuscripts into Western Europe, knowledge increased dramatically.<sup>4</sup>

**OCTOBER 12, 1492:** On this morning the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, under the sponsorship of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, spotted land—the Bahamas. At this moment, though never realized by Columbus, he had opened the doors of the New World to Europe. As a result, the horizons of knowledge and European imperialism expanded exponentially.

**OCTOBER 31, 1517:** This is the date on which Martin Luther presumably nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Schlosskirche—or Castle Church—in Wittenberg, Germany.<sup>5</sup> The Reformation was born—with it came the breakdown of the religious-political might of Rome, translation of the Bible from the original languages into modern languages, and the separation of Christendom into three branches.

**MARCH 1, 1516:** The fifth event (or fourth, chronologically) took place twenty months prior to Luther’s historic act of defiance and was arguably the *key* to Luther’s gambit. Yet, most people today have never heard of it. I am referring to the publication of Desiderius Erasmus’s *Novum Instrumentum Omne* on March 1, 1516—500 years ago. It has been famously said that Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched.<sup>6</sup> The egg he laid was his “whole new instrument”—a Greek-Latin diglot of the New Testament.

We will look at who Erasmus was, what this book was, and how it changed the world. Although he published five editions of the New Testament (NT), with quite a bit of controversy especially surrounding the third edition, our

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with the rest of the Western world catching on within five hundred years. See C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> There was, however, a price to pay for this new invention. When books were handwritten, they were designed in such a way as to make memorization easier. The layout, vivid colors, icons, symbols, and marginalia on the page were all utilized to aid the memory. (For a fascinating study on memory in the Middle Ages, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008]). Once books were printed, reading for *memory* was no longer such a high priority, since the texts became widely accessible. Books moved increasingly toward black and white printed *texts*, without accompanying aids for readers. The printing press changed Western civilization away from a memorizing culture as much as any other invention.

<sup>5</sup> By “presumably” we mean that Luther may not have actually posted the theses on the church door. Erwin Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted* (Boston: Beacon, 1968). Nevertheless, Luther disseminated the theses by some means, and the Reformation was born because of it.

<sup>6</sup> This was mentioned frequently, even during Erasmus’s day.

purpose is to focus on the first edition for its historical significance as the book that sparked the fire of the Reformation.

### **I. Erasmus: Monk, Scholar, Humanist, Reformer**

Desiderius Erasmus was born less than fifteen years after Gutenberg's invention, probably in 1467,<sup>7</sup> in Rotterdam, Holland. He was the second illegitimate son of a Catholic priest. Yet he received a decent education, especially in Latin. His parents died in the plague of 1483—when Erasmus was only sixteen years old. By age twenty, he chose to take up residence at a monastery in Steyn, apparently because the convent boasted a modest library of classical works, affording Erasmus opportunity for study. Five years later, he was ordained as a priest in the Augustinian order.<sup>8</sup> But the monastic life did not appeal to him, and he wanted desperately to enroll at a university, though he would not do so until he was almost twenty-nine years old.<sup>9</sup>

Erasmus came to the University of Paris in 1495, but left shortly thereafter because of friction between the medieval scholasticism of his professors and his own humanistic interests.<sup>10</sup> His stay in Paris was perhaps the most difficult time of his life; he was in deep poverty and living in the university housing, which was a frightful squalor.<sup>11</sup>

Erasmus left for England a few years later, and there his interest in theology was piqued by John Colet. At this time the Rotterdammer decided that he needed to acquire Greek if he were to be a serious student of the NT. To do so, he returned to Paris at the beginning of 1500. He was thirty-two. No doubt his late start at learning Greek raised some eyebrows. After all, the average lifespan of a European man at this time was not quite forty

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<sup>7</sup> Some date his birth year to 1466. More recent scholarship has advocated 1467, e.g., Richard J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe: The Making of a Humanist, 1467–1500* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), ix, 260–61.

<sup>8</sup> Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 1:84–120. And yet, “Here was a needy foreigner, who had, to be sure, the ordination of a priest, but who from the moment of his ordaining had never done a single clerical act.” Ephraim Emerton, *Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Putnam’s, 1899), 184.

<sup>9</sup> Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 1:140–42, 272.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:162–205. There is no record of his having earned even his baccalaureate, but some think he did so in Paris (e.g., Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:122). He would receive his doctorate in September 1506 at the University of Turin, but this was what we would call today an honorary doctorate. Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics II, 1523–1536* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1989), 150. Smith (*Erasmus*, 103) notes wryly, “There used to be an old joke in Germany that the train stopped half an hour in Erlangen for the passengers to take degrees, and evidently the standards of Turin were not much more exacting.”

<sup>11</sup> Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 1:163; George Faludy, *Erasmus* (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), 51–52; J. Kelly Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 13.



**DESIDERIUS ERASMUS**

ca. 1467-1536

years.<sup>12</sup> Pouring himself into his studies, Erasmus wrote to a friend, “It may be asked why I am ... learning Greek at my age. ... I am determined that it is better to learn late than to be without knowledge which it is of the utmost importance to possess.”<sup>13</sup> A few months into his studies he wrote again, “I have been applying my whole mind to the study of Greek; and as soon as I receive any money I shall first buy Greek authors, and afterwards some clothes.”<sup>14</sup> Within two years of initiating this program of intense research Erasmus pens, “I have advanced so far as to be able to write what I want in Greek tolerably well without preparation.”<sup>15</sup>

In the summer of 1504 a serendipitous event changed the course of Erasmus’s life. He came across a manuscript that was a compilation of philological notes on the Vulgate NT based especially on Greek manuscripts. Produced half a century earlier by the controversial Italian scholar Lorenzo Valla,<sup>16</sup> the *Adnotationes* (*Annotations*) were quickly edited by Erasmus and published the next year. Here, at last, Erasmus found a model for the kind of work he was designed to do.<sup>17</sup> So enthralled was he with the erudition of Valla’s *Adnotationes* that he exclaimed, “I am now eager ... to approach sacred literature full sail, full gallop; I have an extreme distaste for anything that distracts me from it, or even delays me. ... Hereafter I intend to address myself to the Scriptures and to spend all the rest of my life upon them.”<sup>18</sup>

His wanderlust and thirst for knowledge took him to Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Turin, Venice, Rome, Leuven (Louvain), Freiburg, and Basel.<sup>19</sup> This

<sup>12</sup> That is, counting from birth. If a man reached adulthood, he would be expected to live into his fifties.

<sup>13</sup> Epistle 149 (translation Smith, *Erasmus* 46); cf. also *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 89 vols., ed. R. A. B. Mynors et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–2016), hereafter cited as *CWE*, vol. 2 (1975), 25. In that same epistle (though numbered 143 in *The Epistles of Erasmus*, ed. Francis Morgan Nichols, 3 vols. [1901–1918]; vol. 1 [London: Longmans, 1901], 313, which is here quoted), he expresses his appreciation for Greek: “Latin erudition, however ample, is crippled and imperfect without Greek. We have in Latin at best some small streams and turbid pools, while they have the clearest springs and rivers flowing with gold.”

<sup>14</sup> *Epistles*, ed. Nichols, 1:236.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:353.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent treatment on Valla, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 32–69.

<sup>17</sup> The significance of Valla in shaping Erasmus’s thinking, methods, and scholarly focus can hardly be overstated. As Bentley notes (*Humanists and Holy Writ*, 32–33), “Valla was the first westerner since the patristic age to enjoy a thorough knowledge of Greek and to apply it extensively in his study of the New Testament.”

<sup>18</sup> Epistle 181, written to John Colet, ca. December, 1504 (*CWE*, 2:86).

<sup>19</sup> Erasmus’s travels are easily documented thanks to thousands of his letters that have been published. Thousands of works *about* Erasmus have also been published. Among the most accessible biographies today are Emerton, *Desiderius Erasmus*; Smith, *Erasmus*; Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation*, trans. F. Hopman (New York: Scribner’s, 1924; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001); Albert Hyma, *The Youth of Erasmus* (Ann Arbor: University of

Dutchman spent little time in Holland as an adult. He “was by nature a nomad. Never did he live as long as eight years consecutively in the same place.”<sup>20</sup>

In spite of not settling down, and constantly complaining about lack of funds and poor health, he came to be the greatest Latin scholar of the sixteenth century. Erasmus also became the greatest ancient-Greek scholar of his era, despite his late start.<sup>21</sup> His immense learning, coupled with an almost superhuman publishing record, made him the epitomic Renaissance man of letters.<sup>22</sup> In the words of one biographer, Erasmus was “the intellectual leader of Europe.”<sup>23</sup> He was courted by kings and popes, even taking up prestigious offices such as the newly established Lady Margaret Chair of Divinity at Cambridge University (1511–1514).<sup>24</sup> But these posts were always

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Michigan Press, 1930); Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Scribner's, 1969); Faludy, *Erasmus*; Albert Rabil Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of a Christian Humanist* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1972); Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 112–93; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, vols. 1 and 2; Cornelius Augustijn, *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence*, trans. J. C. Grayson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and A. G. Dickens and W. R. D. Jones, *Erasmus the Reformer* (London: Methuen, 1994).

In addition to biographies on Erasmus there are several series on his literary efforts. Besides his exquisite letters, all in Latin, he authored hundreds of books. Most notable among the modern publications of Erasmus's output are the three-volume set, *Epistles*, ed. Nichols; *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, 12 vols., ed. P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906–1958), hereafter cited as *EE*; *CWE*, 89 vols.; and *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi*, 11 vols., ed. J. H. Waszink et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1969–); hereafter cited, as is customarily done, as *LB* (for “Leiden: Brill”).

To gain an appreciation for the vast amount of literature on Erasmus, the works published in just a forty-year span can be found in the prodigious bibliography on Erasmus compiled by Jean-Claude Margolin: *Quatorze années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1936–1949* (Paris: Vrin, 1969); *Douze années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1950–1961* (Paris: Vrin, 1963); *Neuf années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1962–1970* (Paris: Vrin, 1977); *Bibliographie érasmienne IV cinq années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1971–1975* (Paris: Vrin, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Erasmus*, 48. Erasmus left Leuven on his birthday (October 27) in 1521 because it had become “too Catholic” for him. A few days later he arrived ... in Basle, where he would reside for the next eight years until it in turn became “too Protestant” (Faludy, *Erasmus*, 194).

<sup>21</sup> Yet, even though Erasmus would later surround himself (in Basel) with scholars who knew Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, because he was “frightened by the strangeness of the [Hebrew language], and considering the insufficiency of the human mind to master many subjects,” he soon gave it up” (Smith, *Erasmus*, 48, quoting Epistle 181, written ca. December 1504; cf. also *CWE*, 2:87). Still, Colet expressed surprise nearly a dozen years later that Erasmus was “now studying Hebrew” (*CWE*, 3:313 [Epistle 423, ca. June 21, 1516]).

<sup>22</sup> Erasmus did not shy away from letting others bask in his glory. At one point he told a friend, “I write what will live forever ... my books will be read in every country in the world ... men like me are scarcely found in many centuries” (*Epistles*, 1:300 [Epistle 139]). Remarkably, this letter was penned in 1501, just a few months after Erasmus had begun his Greek studies, and before he had published much of anything!

<sup>23</sup> Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:166.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:109–125. The chair was established in 1503 by Lady Margaret Beaufort, the grandmother of Henry VIII. It is distinctly possible that William Tyndale was one of Erasmus's students at this time (Smith, *Erasmus*, 66, 185).

short lived. This Augustinian canon was a citizen of the world who preferred independence to stability and writing to teaching.

Accolades were profuse, even unabashedly hyperbolic; he was called “the ornament of the world” and “the prince of humanists.” One said that “all Western Christendom resounds with his name.”<sup>25</sup> And after his NT appeared, one friend claimed, “You have found the way to immortality,”<sup>26</sup> and another, “The name of Erasmus shall never perish.”<sup>27</sup>

Erasmus’s NT would indeed become the crowning achievement of his life, appearing in five editions between 1516 and 1535 (the year before he died at age 70). Scores of official and unofficial reprints of these editions appeared during Erasmus’s lifetime. It was the natural conclusion for a man who had invested his years of painstaking study in Greek, Latin, and, to a lesser degree, theology, and biblical studies. But it was also his most controversial publication,<sup>28</sup> for it explicitly criticized the Vulgate as an adequate translation of the NT and put Erasmus on a trajectory toward the Protestant Reformation.

## II. Erasmus’s Most Notorious Publication: *Novum Instrumentum Omne*<sup>29</sup>

### 1. The First Published Greek New Testament

After his stint at Cambridge, Erasmus moved to Basel in August 1514. There he met the famous printer Johann Froben.<sup>30</sup> His initial publishing

<sup>25</sup> Huizinga, *Erasmus*, 96.

<sup>26</sup> *Epistles*, 2:242 (Epistle 377). There was good reason for such praise: “Probably excepting only Martin Luther, Erasmus was to become the most widely read and widely bought author of his generation” (Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*, 15).

<sup>27</sup> *CWE*, 3:312 (Epistle 423, by John Colet, written less than four months after Erasmus’s NT appeared).

<sup>28</sup> His second most controversial work was his *Julius Exclusus*, a book published anonymously after Pope Julius II had died. Julius’s military campaigns in Europe had caused Erasmus to become a pacifist see Margaret Mann Phillips, *The Adages of Erasmus: A Study with Translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 104–5. The book, meant apparently only for an inner circle of friends, and one that Erasmus never owned up to authoring, is a narrative of Julius coming to the Pearly Gates and finding himself rebuffed by Saint Peter, excluded from heaven due to the carnage of his reign as the vicar of Christ.

<sup>29</sup> The literature on Erasmus’s diglot New Testaments is extensive, with some curious omissions. The most comprehensive treatment, though restricted to the first two editions, remains Aug Bludau, *Die beiden ersten Erasmus-Ausgaben des Neuen Testaments und ihre Gegner* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1902), although it is now over a century old. Cf. also Bo Reicke, “Erasmus und die neutestamentliche Textgeschichte,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 22 (1966): 254–65; Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 83–97 and passim; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:175–93; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 112–93; Henk Jan de Jonge, “Novum Testamentum a nobis versum: The Essence of Erasmus’ Edition of the New Testament,” *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 35 (1984): 394–413; Henk Jan de Jonge, *Ex ipsis venis, ex ipsis fontibus: On the Importance and Necessity of the Critical Edition of Erasmus’ New Testament Works* (Voorhuizen: Florivallis, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Although intending to travel to Venice to have the Aldine Press publish his work on the

goal in Basel was to offer his own *Annotationes* to the NT text,<sup>31</sup> but the project expanded under the influence of Froben and company. Shortly after his arrival, the Dutch humanist decided to publish a Greek NT.<sup>32</sup> He then intended it to be a diglot with the Vulgate and the Greek text in parallel columns. Sometime afterward, he was persuaded by “certain learned friends—with advice that was unsuitable rather than well conceived,”<sup>33</sup> to replace the Vulgate with his own Latin translation.<sup>34</sup> Prolonged negotiations culminated in the work that began in earnest in the summer of 1515. Froben’s sweatshop employed knowledgeable assistants for the Dutchman, and it ran two presses for the production of the book. The volume was being revised even as it was going to the press. After months of intense labor (“I have got through six years work in eight months,” wrote Erasmus<sup>35</sup>), the 1027-page diglot with annotations was published on March 1, 1516.

Erasmus called his production *Novum Instrumentum Omne*—“a whole new instrument.” He preferred the title *Instrumentum* because it was a written document, while a *testamentum* was a covenant, and not necessarily written. Although novel in his own day, he cited Jerome and Augustine for this usage for the NT.<sup>36</sup> Only after 1633 would this basic Greek text be called the *Textus Receptus* (“received text”).<sup>37</sup>

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NT, the scholarly community in Basel was sufficiently to his liking that he stayed there through the winter. Aldus Pius Manutius died in February 1515, and Froben promised Erasmus that he would meet Aldus’s offer (Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 90; cf. also Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:181–82).

<sup>31</sup> “For when I first came to Basle, I did not given [*sic*] even a thought to the translating of the New Testament; I had just made a number of annotations in few words, and with these I had determined to be content” (*EE* 2758; translation is from Andrew J. Brown, “The Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation of the New Testament,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8.4 [1984]: 374).

<sup>32</sup> Erasmus’s letter to Johann Reuchlin, in August, 1514, indicates his intention to publish a Greek NT (*Epistles*, 2:157 [Epistle 300 in Allen’s edition]). See also Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:181.

<sup>33</sup> *EE* 1581; the translation is from Brown, “The Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation,” 373. Erasmus first mentions the plan to produce his own translation in September 1514 to his friend Jakob Wimpfeling (*EE* 305:222–24).

<sup>34</sup> *Pace* Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:184. Brown has demonstrated the likelihood that the translation in the 1516 edition, albeit conservative, was not meant to be just a revision of the Vulgate (Brown, “The Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation,” 351–80).

<sup>35</sup> Epistle 411 (*CWE*, 3:290). Although Erasmus complained perennially about his working conditions, he nevertheless persisted. “Erasmus was armed with phenomenal powers of concentration and the ability to work fourteen to sixteen hours a day with great speed” (Faludy, *Erasmus*, 158). Schoeck (*Erasmus of Europe*, 2:173) notes Erasmus’s overall objectives: “In all these months of being bone-weary in work on the editions, Erasmus evidently had not lost sight of the larger goals: all his labours were towards the end of knowing and loving God, and of leading others to that philosophy of Christ as well.”

<sup>36</sup> Epistle 1858 (*EE*, 7:140).

<sup>37</sup> Based on an exaggerated claim in an advertising “blurb” in the preface to the second

The *Novum Instrumentum* thus became the first *published* Greek NT. But it was not the first *printed* Greek NT. That honor belongs to the Complutensian Polyglot. This magisterial work, under the auspices of Cardinal Francis Ximenes de Cisneros, was conceived as early as 1502. Ximenes, who founded the University of Alcalá, Spain, gathered manuscripts and scholars for the Polyglot. The NT was completed on January 10, 1514. But it was not to be published for eight more years. The reasons for the delay are not altogether clear, but in general it seems that the editors wanted to publish the whole Polyglot at one time and the Old Testament would not be finished until 1517. Also, the editors sought the papal *imprimatur*, which they did not secure until March 22, 1520. Still, they inexplicably waited two more years before publication. Altogether, only 606 copies were made, 600 paper, 6 vellum.<sup>38</sup> Erasmus's text had already gone through three editions by the time the six-volume Polyglot appeared. Because his was a single volume, produced more cheaply, with a six-year head start, and with far more copies made (3,300 for the first two editions alone), Erasmus's NT eclipsed any influence that the Complutensian NT might have otherwise had.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. Erasmus's Latin Translation

Erasmus anticipated a reaction to his publication. After all, his Latin translation, even though very conservative in most of its renderings, could shake the foundations of the Catholic faith. His friend Martin Dorp of Louvain had implored the Dutch divine as early as 1514 to drop his plans for a philological critique of the Vulgate because "it is not reasonable that the

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edition of the Greek NT by the Elzevirs of Leiden. 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), 152. Erasmus's text had formed the basis of a long train of Greek New Testaments. Every such text that is based on Erasmus's has traditionally been called *Textus Receptus*.

<sup>38</sup> Jorge Luis Valdes, "The First Printed Apocalypse of St. John—The Complutensian Polyglot and Its Influence on Erasmus' Greek New Testament Text" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001), 61; cf. also Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., trans. William Eadie (London: Williams & Norgate, 1901), 2.

<sup>39</sup> There is no record of the Greek manuscripts used in the Complutensian Polyglot, which has caused much speculation and some reconstruction among scholars. Valdes, "The First Printed Apocalypse," notes that scholars such as Delitzsch, Scrivener, Gregory, Hoskier, Schmid, and Metzger all gave attention to this issue, but came up with uncertain results (64). After detailed collations in the Apocalypse, Valdes had to add his name to the list of puzzled scholars (*ibid.*, 104, 156). For a survey of the production and results of the Complutensian Polyglot, see Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 70–111. As for the Polyglot's influence, it "has been followed in the main by only a few later editions." Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed., ed. Edward Miller (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1894), 2:181; cf. also 2:188; and Frances Luttikhuisen, "The Ximenez Polyglot," *Unio cum Christo* 2.1 (April 2016): 83–98.

whole church, which has always used this edition [the Vulgate] and still both approves and uses it, should for all these centuries have been wrong.<sup>40</sup> But Erasmus felt the need to vigorously defend himself, as always;<sup>41</sup> in regard to his NT, he would become embroiled in this debate with several adversaries for the next two decades.<sup>42</sup>

Foreseeing such criticisms,<sup>43</sup> Erasmus shrewdly dedicated the publication to Pope Leo X, with the hope that this would insulate him from further reactions.<sup>44</sup> The ploy worked, although the response from the pontiff was delayed. Erasmus would proudly incorporate Leo's commendation into the preface of later editions.<sup>45</sup>

What initially caused most of the criticism was not Erasmus's Greek text but rather his Latin translation. Indeed, Erasmus's objective in producing a Greek-Latin diglot of the NT may have been to focus more on providing an updated Latin version than a critical text of the Greek. This seems evident in Erasmus's authorization of editions of his Latin translation alone, while his Greek text was always in tandem with the Latin.<sup>46</sup> It is an overstatement, however, to argue, as one scholar does, that "the primary purpose of Erasmus was to publish his annotations along with his Latin translation. The Greek

<sup>40</sup> Epistle 304 (*CWE*, 3:21).

<sup>41</sup> For his initial response to Dorp, see Epistle 337.

<sup>42</sup> See Rummel's two volumes, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics*; for a more succinct view, see Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:218–26. Although he was able to convince Dorp of the rightness of his actions in due time, other opponents did not embrace Erasmus's arguments. Among the most notable antagonists were Henry Standish, Edward Lee, Jacobus Latomus ("Latomus thought the teaching of Greek and Hebrew dangerous rather than useful" [Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:220]), "Louvain theologians *en bloc*" [ibid., 2:221] (including Jorge Ateca, Jean Briselot, and Nicolaus Baechem ["when the New Testament had appeared, he cried out that I was the Antichrist" (Epistle 1581, translation, ibid., 2:223)]), Jerome Aleander ("Aleander tried to win Erasmus over to the direct and outspoken support of the pope, but Erasmus refused, and he also declined all his invitations to dinner—fearing, as he later declared, that he would be poisoned" [ibid., 2:226]), and especially Diego López Zúñiga, or, in Latin, Stunica, one of chief the editors of the Complutensian Polyglot.

<sup>43</sup> He noted in his reminiscences thirteen years after the publication of the *Novum Instrumentum* that his new Latin translation would "arouse a great deal of ill will" (*Responsio ad Juuenem Gerontodidasalum* [LB 9:987A]; translation in Brown, "The Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation," 374).

<sup>44</sup> See also Epistle 384.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* (London: Bagster, 1854), 24.

<sup>46</sup> That is, of the editions that Erasmus authorized. Erasmus's assistant Nikolaus Gerbel urged him to publish a stand-alone Greek NT (Epistle 352 [EE, 2:140–42]); when Erasmus resisted, Gerbel published the unauthorized edition in 1521 at Hagenoe (see de Jonge, "Novum Testamentum a nobis versum," 401). The famous Venetian publishing house established by Aldus Manutius also produced *unauthorized* stand-alone Greek New Testaments that had been edited by Erasmus (Faludy, *Erasmus*, 165).

text was only there for the purpose of confirming the Latin translation.”<sup>47</sup>

The reality seems to be that Erasmus worked very hard on the production of his Greek NT, even though it was hurried.<sup>48</sup> And his Latin translation was apparently conceived shortly after his decision to produce a Greek text, both in 1514.<sup>49</sup>

While the Latin version in *Novum Instrumentum* was a somewhat haphazard and perhaps even mild revision of the Vulgate, still there were a few significant alterations. For example, in some key passages that spoke of repentance, such as Matthew 3:2, Erasmus rendered μετανοείτε (*metanoēite*) as *resipiscite* (“repent”) or *ad mentem redite* (“change the mind”), rather than *paenitentiam agite* (“do penance”). The force of Erasmus’s translation “worked so powerfully in Luther’s mind that it became the starting point of the Reformation and thus leavened the whole loaf of Christendom.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> William W. Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 44. Similarly, de Jonge, “Novum Testamentum a nobis versum,” 394–413; Toan Do, “A Plea for the *Novum Instrumentum*: Erasmus and His Struggle for a New Translation,” *Philosophy & Theology* 28.1 (2016): 143–63. De Jonge summarizes the situation: “It was not intended as a textual edition in its own right, but served to give the reader of the Latin version, which was the main point, the opportunity to find out whether the translation was supported by the Greek” (413). What neither de Jonge nor Do notes, however, is that the Latin text of Erasmus’s first edition apparently used the Vulgate as a base, though at times differing from it extensively. Beginning in his second edition of 1519, Erasmus provided a truly fresh translation. See also the critique by Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 114, n. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Bentley has treated this issue extensively (*Humanists and Holy Writ*, 112–93).

<sup>49</sup> Until Brown’s article, “The Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation,” was published in 1984, the consensus was that Erasmus worked on his Latin translation for about ten years (see Brown, *ibid.*, 351–52), but for some reason chose to use a much more conservative translation for his first edition, only bringing out the bolder translation in 1519. As Brown observes, “the first three editions of Erasmus, instead of representing a natural process of development and creative improvement, would be seen as a kind of progressive accommodation towards a pre-existing manuscript original. It was the sheer implausibility of such a view that first opened the eyes of the present writer” (*ibid.*, 369).

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Erasmus*, 168; see also Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:187, 192. Most likely, Erasmus was influenced by Valla’s *Adnotationes* in this regard: in his annotations on 2 Cor 7:10, Valla severely criticized the Vulgate’s translation of μετάνοια (*metanoia*) as *poenitentia* on philological grounds. “Valla therefore dealt a severe blow to the complicated Latin theology concerning the sacrament of penance” (Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 64).

It may be asked why Valla’s work on the NT text did not have the impact on the Reformation that Erasmus’s did. After all, as Bentley articulates, “his efforts to solve problems of New Testament text, translation, and explanation inaugurated the modern tradition of critical, philological scholarship on the New Testament” (34); “Valla found New Testament scholarship [of his day] dominated by commentators who knew no Greek, used an inferior translation as their base text, and recognized broad hermeneutic value in Aristotelian philosophy and scholastic theology. Valla rejected this approach to scriptural studies and effected a sort of paradigm shift in the realm of New Testament scholarship. He insisted that students of the scriptures learn Greek and base their work on the Greek text of the New Testament” (67–68); also, “Erasmus was so deeply influenced by the *Adnotationes* that he devoted much of his career to the task of developing, refining, and extending Valla’s methods” (69).

Nevertheless, the *Novum Instrumentum* was far from perfect. The typographical errors in the first edition, especially of the Greek text, were so numerous that F. H. A. Scrivener, the meticulous nineteenth-century textual critic who logged considerable time in the Rotterdammer's NT, complained that "Erasmus' first edition is in that respect the most faulty book I know."<sup>51</sup> Erasmus knew its shortcomings well. He famously declared that it was "precipitated [that is, 'thrown together'] rather than edited" (*praecipitatum est verius quam aeditum*).<sup>52</sup> It has been suggested that the reason for this rush was most likely pressure from Froben, who would have gotten wind of the Complutensian Polyglot and wanted to be the first to publish a Greek NT.

### 3. The Manuscript Basis

The number of Greek manuscripts that Erasmus used for the production of his *Novum Instrumentum* has been listed as anywhere between three and ten, all minuscules.<sup>53</sup> Several scholars claimed the number was ten, though not all the manuscripts are listed.<sup>54</sup> The most commonly cited number today is half a dozen, influenced especially by Metzger's *Text of the New Testament*.<sup>55</sup> Erasmus himself said that he used four Greek manuscripts for his first edition, but this apparently did not include codices with commentary on the biblical text.<sup>56</sup> It also did not include manuscripts he may have (partially) collated while in England which had at least some role in his editions. The number of these Greek manuscripts has typically been listed as

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The reasons for this lack of direct influence seem to be due to timing. Valla wrote in the 1450s, just when the printing press was invented. Indeed, the name of Valla would be all but forgotten if it were not for Erasmus's fortuitous discovery of the Valla manuscript in 1504 and his subsequent publication of *Adnotationes* in 1505.

<sup>51</sup> Scrivener, *Plain Introduction*, 2:185.

<sup>52</sup> Epistle 402, written in April 1516. A year later he reiterated this self-criticism: *Novum Testamentum quod pridem Basiliae praecipitatum* (Epistle 694). It is interesting that Erasmus was already calling his work *Novum Testamentum* within two months of its publication. In a 1518 printing of the first edition Erasmus changed the title to *Novum Testamentum*, most likely due to reactions to his original novel title; all subsequent printings and editions had the title *Novum Testamentum* as well.

<sup>53</sup> C. C. Tarelli, "Erasmus's Manuscripts of the Gospels," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943): 155–62, argues that Erasmus also used two majuscule manuscripts, Codices E (or 07 [eighth century]) and Δ (037 [ninth century]), but this is unlikely (Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 129–32).

<sup>54</sup> The suggestion that ten were used includes four that Erasmus allegedly collated in England and six that he utilized in Basel. Cf., e.g., Bludau, *Erasmus-Ausgaben*, 12–23; Smith, *Erasmus*, 163; Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*, 70, 74; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:183.

<sup>55</sup> Now in its fourth iteration, this has been the principal handbook for NT textual criticism in the English-speaking world since 1964. See Metzger-Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 148. Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 45, lists seven manuscripts.

<sup>56</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 125. Erasmus speaks of four codices used in the first edition and five in the second in the *Apologia* to later editions.

four,<sup>57</sup> but Henk de Jonge, a leading Erasmusian scholar, has recently shown that Erasmus most likely was speaking of Latin codices.<sup>58</sup> The number of Greek manuscripts that he had seen and utilized while in England is unknown.<sup>59</sup>

One way to cut through the Gordian knot of how many manuscripts Erasmus used is to place Erasmus's Greek codices in three categories: (I) those that formed the basis of his NT, (II) those that emended that basis and which Erasmus used with approbation, and (III) those he consulted, directly or indirectly, but only rarely agreed with. These three groups are listed in the table below.

<i>Cat-egory</i>	<i>Old Numbering</i>	<i>New Numbering</i> <sup>60</sup>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Present Location</i>
I	2 <sub>e</sub>	2	XI/ XII	Gospels	University of Basel
I	2 <sub>ap</sub>	2815	XII	Acts, Epistles	University of Basel
I	1 <sub>r</sub>	2814	XII	Revelation (lacking 22:16–21)	Augsburg University
II	7 <sub>p</sub>	2817	XI	Paul's Epistles	University of Basel
II	817	817	XV	Gospels	University of Basel
II	4 <sub>ap</sub>	2816	XV	Acts, Epistles	University of Basel
III	69	69	XV	whole NT	Leicestershire Record Office, Leicester, England
III	1 <sub>cap</sub>	1	XII	Gospels, Acts, Epistles	University of Basel

<sup>57</sup> *EE*, 2:164, 182; Allen's assumption that Greek manuscripts were in view has been repeated by many authors (e.g., Smith, *Erasmus*, 163; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:183).

<sup>58</sup> De Jonge, "Novum Testamentum a nobis verum," 403–4.

<sup>59</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 126. But codex 69 was almost certainly among them.

<sup>60</sup> Beginning with the second edition of the *Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Kurt Aland et al.; ANTF 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), each minuscule receives a unique Gregory-Aland number. The old system allowed for identical numbering (akin to the identical letters for many majuscules) for minuscules that had no overlap in content.

This comes to eight manuscripts for his first edition. Erasmus relied most heavily on three that he found after he came to Basel—codices 2, 2815, and 2814. The first two he borrowed from the Dominican monastery in Basel; these, along with other NT manuscripts, had been bequeathed by John of Ragusa after he presided over the Council of Basel (1431–39).<sup>61</sup> These became the basis for the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, and Erasmus *marked them up* as printer’s copy!<sup>62</sup> The best by far that he had access to, codex 1, Erasmus thought was particularly defective.<sup>63</sup> He also used as his only manuscript of the Apocalypse a transcription of codex 2814, another manuscript from the Dominicans that his friend Johann Reuchlin had borrowed. The Dutch scholar employed codices 2816 (Acts and Epistles), 2817 (Paul), and especially 817 (Gospels) for corrections to the base text.<sup>64</sup> He had little respect for codices 1 and 69, rarely correcting his text in light of them and only citing their readings occasionally in the *Annotationes*.<sup>65</sup> In sum, his publication essentially reflected the text of three late manuscripts, corrected by three others, and altered only sparingly by two other minuscules.

The manuscripts that he claimed in his letter to the pope to be “very old and very correct”<sup>66</sup> were just the opposite. “All these,” writes Scrivener, “were neither ancient nor particularly valuable.”<sup>67</sup> Codex 2 was especially sloppily written, requiring the editors to make several corrections in the service of publication. In any event, the *oldest* manuscript that Erasmus used was from the eleventh century, hardly “very old”; dating manuscripts paleographically was a science that would not be born for almost two more centuries.

#### 4. The *Annotationes*

In the first edition, the *Annotationes* comprised 294 pages. By the fifth edition (1535) they had expanded to 783.<sup>68</sup> As rich as these philological, textual,

<sup>61</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 126–27; Smith, *Erasmus*, 163.

<sup>62</sup> K. W. Clark, “Observations on the Erasmus Notes in Codex 2,” *Studia Evangelica*, TUGAL 73 (1959): 749–56.

<sup>63</sup> Bentley (*Humanists and Holy Writ*, 132) comments, “Erasmus did not think highly of MS. 1, did not closely examine it, and did not use it extensively in correcting MS. 2.” He cites only four places in which Erasmus followed codex 1 exclusively (Matt 27:35; Mark 11:8; Luke 2:43; 14:27; *ibid.*, 131). Scrivener had earlier claimed that Erasmus “could have followed none other than Cod. 1” in twenty-two places (Scrivener, *Plain Introduction*, 2:183, n. 2); although Bentley does not comment on this, Clark demonstrates that Scrivener’s numbers are exaggerated (Clark, “Observations,” 754–55).

<sup>64</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 129, 131–33.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 126, 137.

<sup>66</sup> *CWE*, 3:223–23 (Epistle 384); also, published in his preface to *Novum Instrumentum*.

<sup>67</sup> Scrivener, *Plain Introduction*, 183.

<sup>68</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 123.

and theological comments are, they have hardly been studied until fairly recently.<sup>69</sup> Among other things, they give us a glimpse into Erasmus's thinking about certain passages. For example, he argues against the reading εἰκῆ (eikē ["without cause"]) in Matthew 5:22 ("everyone who is angry with his brother *without cause* will be liable to judgment"), even though he printed it as his text. He also seriously questioned the authenticity of the blessing at the end of Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer ("for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" [Matt 6:13b]) because it was lacking in (virtually) all Latin witnesses. But again, he printed the text since it was found in his Greek manuscripts.<sup>70</sup>

In two other places Erasmus's *Annotationes* deserve special comment—Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11. The first text, known as the "longer ending of Mark," though found in almost all Greek manuscripts extant today, was questioned by Erasmus because Jerome had said that just about every Greek manuscript he had access to ended Mark's Gospel at 16:8.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Erasmus questioned the authenticity of the *pericope adulterae*—the story of the woman caught in adultery—because it was not found in the oldest Greek witnesses, nor commented on by the oldest church fathers. And even though the credentials for the *pericope adulterae* are significantly worse than those for the longer ending of Mark, Erasmus "liked the story! ... and he badly wanted to consider it genuine."<sup>72</sup>

Yet in some respects Erasmus demonstrated textual acuity well beyond that of his contemporaries. Not only did he suggest conjectures based, at times, on philological and exegetical grounds,<sup>73</sup> but he apparently was the first scholar "to develop the principle of the harder reading and to employ it regularly in his criticism of the Greek New Testament."<sup>74</sup> His rationale for much of this was not sound (e.g., he rejected the better codices because of the Vulgate's presumed influence on them), but he was a maverick in his own age. And on more than a few occasions his *Annotationes* revealed views on the Greek text that went counter to the NT text that he actually published.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>70</sup> Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 95, claims that Erasmus put the (Latin) text in smaller print, presumably to indicate his doubts over its authenticity. But this did not happen until the second edition of 1519.

<sup>71</sup> Jerome, *Epistola* 120, *PL* 22:980–1006.

<sup>72</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 147.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, *Erasmus*, 164. For a detailed study on Erasmus's conjectures, see Jan Krans, *Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament*, *NTTS* 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 154. Cf. Jerry H. Bentley, "Erasmus, Jean Le Clerc, and the Principle of the Harder Reading," *Renaissance Quarterly* 31 (1978): 309–21.

<sup>75</sup> Those who claim that the TR duplicates the autographic wording (some even going so far

### 5. *Curiosities in the Greek Text*

One passage in *Novum Instrumentum* that scandalized many clerics was 1 John 5:7, which, in the KJV and the Greek text on which it is based, is the only *explicit* affirmation of the Trinity in the NT (“For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” [NKJV]). These words were not found in the Greek manuscripts that Erasmus consulted, even though they existed in several late, corrupted copies of the Latin Vulgate. The Dutchman defended his position by arguing that he did not print the verse because he could not find it in any Greek manuscripts. By 1520 a manuscript was apparently “made to order” by an Oxford scribe who *translated* from the Latin to the Greek text here.<sup>76</sup> To save his reputation and legacy, Erasmus put this verse into his 1522 edition because this manuscript (codex 61 or Montfortianus) came to his attention, though he expressed his protests about the genuineness of the reading in a lengthy note in the *Annotationes* of that edition.<sup>77</sup>

Erasmus was a bit disingenuous about the whole matter, however, because he too back-translated from Latin to Greek on occasion, most notoriously in the last section of Revelation. He had access to only one manuscript of the Apocalypse. But it was lacking the last leaf of text (Rev 22:16–21), so he translated the Latin Vulgate back into Greek at this point.<sup>78</sup> As a result he created twenty textual variants<sup>79</sup> that were not in any Greek manuscripts (until a few were later produced that were *based* on Erasmus’s printed text!<sup>80</sup>). The Dutch scholar only partially owned up to the back translation: he said that he “added some words from the Latin” for these six verses, but he also claimed that all Greek manuscripts were defective here,

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as to claim that Erasmus was virtually inspired, even when he changed the Greek text to conform it to his Latin witnesses!) do not reckon with the Dutch scholar’s own *opinions* about the text that he produced. For a cataloging of statements by TR advocates, see Daniel B. Wallace, “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism,” *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992): 21–51. This is akin to KJV Only advocates who ignore the original preface to the King James Version and the eight thousand marginal notes in the earlier publications of the Authorized Version.

<sup>76</sup> Metzger-Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 146. Full discussion on 146–48.

<sup>77</sup> It is in the third edition that Tyndale translated for the first printed English translation of the NT. Luther based his German translation on Erasmus’s second edition.

<sup>78</sup> Faludy claims that Erasmus had the Greek text of v. 20 from Valla’s *Adnotationes* (Erasmus, 159), but no documentation is given.

<sup>79</sup> See Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” 47, n. 56, for a list of the variants.

<sup>80</sup> Darius Müller, “Manuscript Copies of the Textus Receptus as a Problem in the Textual Criticism of John’s Apocalypse” (paper read at the annual Society of Biblical Literature conference, November 2013), notes the following manuscripts as being copies of the TR for Rev 22:16–21: 296, 1775, 1776, 1777, 2049, 2066, 2072, 2619, 2669, and 2909.

none having Rev 22:16–21.<sup>81</sup> In all five of his diglots, Erasmus printed the same made-up Greek text for this passage.<sup>82</sup>

The most egregious of these is a reading that occurs in v. 19: “book” instead of “tree”: “If anyone removes any of the words of the book of this prophecy, God will remove his share from the *book* of life and from the holy city which are written in this book.” It is decidedly inauthentic, while “the tree” of life, found in the rest of the Greek manuscripts (except those based on Erasmus’s text), is clearly authentic. The confusion was most likely due to an intra-Latin switch: The form of the word for “tree” in Latin in this passage is *ligno*; the word for “book” is *libro* (the Textus Receptus, on which the KJV rests, reads “the book” [ἀπό βιβλου, *apo biblou*] of life instead of “the tree” [ἀπό τοῦ ξύλου, *apo tou xylou*] of life). The two-letter difference accounts for an accidental alteration in some Latin manuscripts.

The last few verses of the NT were not the only ones that Erasmus took Latin liberties with. He also changed the Greek text on the basis of the Vulgate in several other places, even adding a complete sentence to a verse (Acts 9:6a in the KJV) that to this day has not been found in any Greek manuscripts.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Erasmus also did what the Oxford scribe did—put words in the Greek text that had no support from any Greek manuscripts.

## Conclusion

“According to most conservative estimates more than three hundred thousand copies [of his NT editions] were in circulation” during Erasmus’s lifetime.<sup>84</sup> That is five hundred times the number of Complutensian Polyglot copies! Combining his abiding interests in classical and biblical literature, and

<sup>81</sup> See the *Annotationes* of the *Novum Instrumentum*, 675.

<sup>82</sup> Some Erasmusian scholars have mistakenly stated that the fourth edition was corrected to the wording of the Complutensian Polyglot (cf., e.g., Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 93; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 128, 134). Although Erasmus did change his Greek text of the Apocalypse in 110 places for the fourth edition to conform it to the Complutensian Polyglot (Valdes, “The First Printed Apocalypse,” 149), the last few verses were not among them.

<sup>83</sup> See Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” 46–47, for discussion of the most notable texts (Acts 9:6; Rev 17:4, 8). Further, because 2814 was a minuscule intermixed with a commentary by Andreas, it was often difficult to tell where the text stopped and the commentary began. Inevitably, a few extraneous readings found their way into Erasmus’s text. For Acts 8:37, Erasmus used the *marginal* reading of codex 4 because he believed the verse had been accidentally overlooked by sloppy scribes (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 316).

<sup>84</sup> Faludy, *Erasmus*, 166. Faludy (165) mentions that Erasmus’s diglot NT “was reprinted at least sixty-nine times between 1516 and 1536, not including four editions of the Latin text by itself, and two of the Greek texts printed by Aldus’s successor, Asolani.”

executing such devotion with a critical philological, historical, and literary method, Erasmus initiated the modern era of NT scholarship.<sup>85</sup>

Protestants quickly latched on to this new tool. “The *sola scriptura* of Martin Luther was inconceivable without Erasmus’ *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516 and subsequent editions.”<sup>86</sup> Erasmus’s Greek text stood behind Tyndale’s and Luther’s translations of the NT and essentially every Protestant translation until 1881. But it was soon banned at Cambridge and Oxford, universities that were still held captive to Catholicism. On April 8, 1546, the Council of Trent authorized the Vulgate as the Church’s only official Bible, condemning Erasmus’s work in the process.<sup>87</sup>

History was repeating itself: “The outcry with which Jerome had once been assailed was now renewed against Erasmus.”<sup>88</sup> And history repeats itself again today, as modern translations, based on far older and more accurate manuscripts, are condemned by those who claim that the King James Version is the final word on the Word. The very architect of the Greek text behind the KJV NT would reject such foolishness in the most vehement terms.

Ironically, since Erasmus’s *Novum Instrumentum/ Testamentum* always included the Latin (and in at least four editions authorized by him, without the Greek), he may have viewed his major accomplishment as that of a new *Latin* translation. But the history of the Reformation, with its battle cry of *ad fontes*,<sup>89</sup> has justifiably focused more on the Greek text; thus “the side issue [for Erasmus] became the main one and vice versa.”<sup>90</sup> It was this “side issue” that became the book that changed the world five hundred years ago.

Devoting much of his adult life to the study of the NT, especially to the establishment of the text, this Rotterdammer felt that “from this massive scholarly effort ... there would be a reforming of the individual and of Christendom.”<sup>91</sup> Although hindsight has shown that Erasmus’s publication was deeply flawed and based on inferior Greek manuscripts, it became the instrument that Luther used to find grace and the material catalyst for the Reformation; further, it burst forth the dawn of a new era of detailed, scientific biblical studies. Indeed, although it was tweaked from time to time, this

<sup>85</sup> Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 193; Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*, 82.

<sup>86</sup> Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:369.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, *Erasmus*, 159, n. 2, 174–75; Faludy, *Erasmus*, 162; Metzger-Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 146.

<sup>88</sup> Tregelles, *Printed Text*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> This Latin phrase, “back to the sources,” apparently was coined by Erasmus himself in *De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores* (Paris: Biermont, 1511) unnumbered page; reprinted in *LB*, 2:120.11.

<sup>90</sup> De Jonge, “Novum Testamentum a nobis versum,” 411.

<sup>91</sup> Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:175.

Greek text was essentially the only one published for the next three hundred years. To Erasmus we owe a great debt, and all of us who are students of the NT stand firmly on the shoulders of this giant. *Semper reformanda* (“always being reformed”)!<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Regrettably, the publication of *Basel 1516: Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament*, ed. Martin Wallraff, Silvana Seidel Menchi, and Kaspar von Greyerz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) appeared too late to be consulted for this article.

# **Re-Establishment of the Christian Church in Mongolia: The Mongolian Standard Version Translation by National Christians**

**BAYARJARGAL GARAMTSEREN**

## **Abstract**

This paper has two main parts: the history of Christianity in Mongolia and the history of Bible translation in the Mongolian language. The history of Christianity in Mongolia and among the Mongols, especially before and during the Mongol Empire, is largely understudied and unknown. I will attempt to show that four tribes, the Kerait, the Naiman, the Onguud, and the Uyghur, who were important parts of the Mongol Empire, had already become Christian, with their own church structures and tradition, by the thirteenth century. Giving the history of Christianity up until the present time, I briefly outline the seven-hundred-year history of Bible translation into the Mongolian language. At the end, I describe the Mongolian Standard Version project, an ongoing activity of Bible translation from the original languages by national Christians.

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**M**ongolia is sometimes called “the end of the world” and is still unknown and exotic for many. We were a closed country under Communist rule for seventy years until 1990 and had no open Christian witness in those years. But in these days God is building—or, properly speaking, re-establishing—his church and is doing a unique work in Mongolia. I will attempt to give a brief overview of the history of Christianity and Scripture translation in the land of Mongolia, particularly in times prior to and during the Mongol Empire, and at the end I will describe a new modern-language Bible translation project, the Mongolian Standard Version.

## ***1. History of Christianity in Mongolia***

### ***1. Christian Mongol Tribes in Central Asia***

The early history of Christianity in the land of Mongolia is, unfortunately, largely unknown by Mongolians today because of the suppression and alteration of our past history during the seventy years of Communism prior to 1990.<sup>1</sup> Inhabitants of modern-day Mongolia and Central Asia in the pre-Mongol Empire period (the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) were mainly Turkic-speaking tribes. Some of these tribes, sometimes as whole groups, came to the Christian faith between the sixth and eighth centuries through Christians of the Church of the East (known as Nestorians), who traveled via the Silk Road for both missionary and commercial purposes. Here I will limit the history to the Turkic tribes, the Kerait, Naiman, and Onguud, three of the six tribes that formed the Mongol Empire, and the Uyghur tribe, which later became a part of the empire.

The story is told of a king of the Keraites who turned to Christ with his subject people after experiencing a miraculous rescue in a heavy snowstorm.<sup>2</sup> In about 1009 A.D., ‘Abdishō, Metropolitan of Merw, wrote about the event to Patriarch John, saying that “about two hundred thousand Keraites had embraced Christianity” and

the king had set up a pavilion to take the place of an altar, in which was a cross and a Gospel, and named it after Mar Sergius, and he tethered a mare there, and he

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<sup>1</sup> Almost the only work covering the overall history of Christianity in Mongolia is by Hugh Kemp, *Steppe by Step: Mongolia’s Christians—From Ancient Roots to Vibrant Young Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Joannes Baptista Abbeloos and Thomas Josephus Lamy, eds., *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum Quod E Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera Ediderunt, Latinitate Donarunt Annotationibusque Theologicis, Historicis, Geographicis et Archaeologicis Illustraverunt* (Leuven: Peeters, 1887), 3:279–80.

takes her milk and lays it on the Gospel and the cross, and recites over it the prayers which he has learned, and makes the sign of the Cross over it, and he and his people after him take a draught from it.<sup>3</sup>

‘Abdishō then received an instruction to send a priest and a deacon to baptize and instruct the converts and teach them Christian habits, including abstinence from meat during Lent.<sup>4</sup> The Keraites lived in the Orkhon valley, near the capital of the Mongol Empire, Kharakhorum.

It must be mentioned that the legend of Prester John is connected with the Kerait tribe. Barhebraeus and others have identified the legendary figure with Ung-Khan, Toghrul in *the Secret History*,<sup>5</sup> because “‘John’ in Syriac ‘Yohannan’ may be a falsification of ‘Ung-Khan.’”<sup>6</sup>

Another populous Turkic-speaking tribe on the steppes of Mongolia was the Naiman, who occupied the modern-day Western provinces of Mongolia. The Mongolian word *naiman* means “eight,” and it is likely that they were Mongolized Turks. It is recorded in both Muslim and Chinese sources that the Naimans were largely Christian.<sup>7</sup> Li Tang proposes that the Naimans were Christianized through the Uyghur, as they had close contact in terms of language, culture, and trade. After Chinggis Khan conquered the Naiman, he and his sons took wives from them and appointed able Naimans, including many Christians, as officers and administrators.

In the center of the land once inhabited by the Naiman, in Ulaantolgoi, in Mongolia’s Khovd Province, one Chinese and two Syriac rock inscriptions are preserved as a strong testimony of the Naimans’ Christian faith. The Chinese inscription, although consisting of six largely illegible columns of text, reads “Prince of Gaotang” at the beginning of the text and gives the date as “the eighteenth day of the sixth month of the second year of the Dade era” (July 28, 1298).<sup>8</sup> The first Syriac inscription reads, “God, whose dwelling place is holy. 1609 of the Greeks,” reminiscent of Psalm 68:5. The

<sup>3</sup> Alphonse Mingana, “The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: A New Document,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 9 (1925): 310–11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>5</sup> The *Secret History*, written shortly after the death of Chinggis Khan, is a fundamental historic document for the history of Chinggis Khan, the Mongols, and the Mongol Empire. For the English translation, see Urgunge Onon, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols: The Life and Times of Chinggis Khan* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Mingana, “Early Spread,” 309–10.

<sup>7</sup> Li Tang, “Medieval Sources on the Naiman Christians and on Their Prince Küchlüg Khan,” in *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters*, 2nd ed., ed. Dietmar W. Winkler and Li Tang, *Orientalia - Patristica - Oecumenica* 1 (Berlin: LIT, 2014), 263.

<sup>8</sup> Takashi Osawa et al., “‘As the Mountains Surround Jerusalem’: Two Syriac Inscriptions at Ulaan Tolgoi (Doloon Nuur) in Western Mongolia,” *Journal of Syriac Studies* 18.1 (2015): 193.

Greek dating corresponds to July 28, 1298. The legible part of the second Syriac inscription reads “Jerusalem, the mountains surround her; [and] the Lord surrounds his people” from Psalm 125:2.<sup>9</sup> Both Syriac inscriptions have a cross beside the text. Such a nonfunerary Christian inscription is a rare find in Central Asia, and currently these are the only ones found within the borders of Mongolia.<sup>10</sup> The second Syriac inscription may or may not be contemporary with the first Syriac inscription,<sup>11</sup> but “the choice of the psalm text in this [second] inscription is particularly apt for the location, surrounded as it is by lofty and beautiful mountains.” Since “Prince of Gaotang” was the “title granted to the Christian Ongut Prince George,” who was captured later in the year 1298, it is suggested by the researchers that at least the first Syriac and the Chinese inscriptions were written when his military passed through this mountain pass in the summer of 1298.<sup>12</sup>

The Onguud were a Turkic-speaking tribe living in today’s Inner Mongolia region in China, with a strong Christian faith and a heritage traced back to Saint Sergius.<sup>13</sup> Tjalling Halbertsma conducted an extensive survey of locating, photographing, documenting, and studying about a hundred different Christian archaeological remains, mainly gravestones, steles, and artifacts, in Inner Mongolia.<sup>14</sup> Some of the gravestones have inscriptions in Syriac, Uyghur, and Chinese, and many artifacts have crosses with beautiful decorations and patterns. Olon-Sume, where there is a city wall and other remains, may have been the capital of the Onguud, with a congregation of the Church of the East and possibly a Catholic church started by John of Montecorvino, a Franciscan missionary, in the late thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> These archaeological finds from Inner Mongolia are extremely important proof of the presence of Christianity in the medieval period within the Mongol realm.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>10</sup> The same point is made in Takashi Osawa and Hidemi Takahashi, “Le Prince Georges des Önggüt dans les montagnes de l’Altaï de Mongolie: les inscriptions d’Ulaan Tolgoi de Doloon Nuur,” in *Le christianisme syriaque en Asie centrale et en Chine*, ed. P. G. Borbone and P. Marsone, *Études syriaques* 12 (Paris: Geuthner, 2015), 280.

<sup>11</sup> Osawa et al., “As the Mountains,” 197.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>13</sup> Atwood, however, argues that this strong Christian link and other aspects of their past was successively altered to create ethnic images favorable to the contemporary reigning kingdoms and kings, including the Mongol Empire. Christopher Atwood, “Historiography and Transformation of Ethnic Identity in the Mongol Empire: The Öng’üt Case,” *Asian Ethnicity* 15.4 (2014): 514–34.

<sup>14</sup> Tjalling H. F. Halbertsma, *Early Christian Remains of Inner Mongolia: Discovery, Reconstruction and Appropriation*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 156.

The Uyghur were a Turkic tribe who were conquered by Chinggis Khan and from whom the Mongols adopted the Uyghur-Mongol script. Archaeological discovery of Christian manuscripts at the ruin of a Christian monastery in Bulayiq in Xinjiang province of China reveals the spiritual and linguistic character of the Sogdian and Uyghur Christian community between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. The site provided “over 1100 Christian manuscript fragments,” demonstrating that Syriac was the liturgical language of the Church of the East.<sup>16</sup> The Syriac manuscripts contain mostly biblical texts, the Psalter, and prayer booklets, as well as the legend of Saint George and a dialogue between a Christian and a Jew. The Sogdian texts, written in Syriac script, consist of “Psalms, lectionaries, [and] hagiographical and ascetical texts,” while the Uyghur fragments, written in Syriac and Uyghur scripts, contain “the Legend of the Magi and a wedding blessing.”<sup>17</sup> These fragments show that Uyghur Christians followed the liturgical tradition of the Church of the East, but their prayers were also offered in their own language “as an acknowledgment of the need to make their faith intelligible to those around them.”<sup>18</sup>

## **2. Yaballaha III and Rabban Sauma**

The period of the Mongol Empire was a thriving time for Christianity because the Mongol kings were tolerant towards all religions, even exempting them of taxes in return for prayers. Furthermore, there was peace and free passage between the East and the West that never existed before.

At the end of the thirteenth century, Markos, a Christian Mongol of the Ongud tribe, became the Catholicus of the Church of the East, presiding over the whole see of the church in Asia. Markos was the fourth child of an archdeacon and was well “instructed in the Doctrines of the Church beyond all his brothers.”<sup>19</sup> He dedicated his life to monastery learning and discipline under the guidance of his spiritual master, Rabban Sauma (or Bar Sauma).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “500 fragments in Syriac, 550 in Sogdian (an Eastern Middle Iranian language) in Syriac script, 50 in Sogdian in Sogdian script and 50 in Old Uyghur (a dialect of Old Turkic) in Syriac or Uyghur script,” Mark Dickens, “Multilingual Christian Manuscripts from Turfan,” *Journal for the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 9 (2009): 23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Dickens, “Syro-Uigurica II: Syriac Passages in U 338 from Turfan,” *Journal of Syriac Studies* 16.2 (2013): 317.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Montgomery, trans., *The History of Yaballaha III Nestorian Patriarch and of His Vicar Bar Sauma Mongol Ambassador to the Frankish Courts at the End of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 31.

<sup>20</sup> It was common for Turkic Christians to give biblical names to their children. This is the case for both individuals in this story; Bar Sauma, meaning “son of fasting,” was a favored name in the Church of the East tradition after a famous leader from the fifth century.

He managed to persuade his teacher to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and they obtained the royal *paiza*<sup>21</sup> for their journey. On their journey they stopped at several Turkic towns, meeting Christians, sharing in fellowship, being prayed for and given gifts for their needs. In Baghdad they met with the Catholicus of the Church of the East. They continued their journey toward Jerusalem, but the road was closed because of war and unrest in the area.

In 1281 Markos was elected the new Catholicus of the Church of the East, with the title Yaballaha III. For a Turkic Mongol to oversee the whole of the Church of the East was an important and unusual event in the history of the Eastern and Mongol Christians. Yaballaha III, as the head of the Church of the East and sanctioned by then-reigning Mongol Ilkhanite King Abaga, served faithfully until the end of his life, a span that covered four different successive kings. He was sometimes mistreated, yet he defended Christians from persecution from later kings who embraced Islam.

Mongol Ilkhanate kings had a keen interest in extending the Mongol Empire westward and wanted to take Jerusalem from the hands of Muslims. In this effort they expressed their intention to cooperate with Western kings, and there was much correspondence between different Mongol kings and the West. On one of these missions, Rabban Sauma was sent as a royal messenger because of his language skills and suitability for the purpose. Starting his journey from Baghdad in 1287, he arrived in Rome and met a cardinal, who questioned his doctrinal positions, and spent a month visiting churches and seeing important Christian relics. Continuing his travel, he then met King Louis IX in Paris with gifts from King Aragon. In Bordeaux, he was received by the English king, Edward I, who received the Eucharist from him. On his return journey, he met the newly elected pope, conducting the Eucharist to show the Eastern way, and took letters and gifts back to Yaballaha III and the church.

### **3. The Linguistic Nature and Spiritual State of the Church**

One strong feature that emerges from archaeological finds and Christian manuscripts from Central Asia is the bilingual and even trilingual character of these Turkic Christians. Syriac, as the liturgical language of the Church of the East, played a central role in Scripture reading and worship. The manuscripts from Bulayiq, the rock inscriptions in Ulaantolgoi, and tombstones from Inner Mongolia and other parts of Central Asia all show the

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<sup>21</sup> *Paiza* is a royal tablet permitting the holder to obtain necessary help and supplies along the journey.

key place of the Syriac language in their worship. Yaballaha III was able to read and write Syriac, although he self-deprecatingly acknowledged his deficiency.<sup>22</sup> We can see his own handwriting in Syriac in his letter in Arabic to Pope Boniface VIII.<sup>23</sup> Concerning the Ulaantolgoi inscription, the researchers conclude that

someone with sufficient knowledge of Syriac to leave behind such inscriptions as we have—a cleric of the Church of the East, one would imagine, possible a prelate of that church in the company of a Christian prince—was present on at least one occasion towards the end of the thirteenth century at this site.<sup>24</sup>

The level of fluency in Syriac, however, was not equal in all parts of Central Asia. Pier Borbone writes that “Western Turco-Mongol Christians were more familiar with Syriac, whereas for the Eastern ones the Turkic mother tongue remained dominant even in the religious sphere, despite their adoption of the Syriac script and of the Syriac language in liturgy.”<sup>25</sup> Apart from Scripture readings, Christian teaching and instructions would have been in local Turkic languages like Sogdian and Uyghur—as evidenced in hagiographical and ascetical texts in Sogdian, and the wedding blessing and the legend of the Magi in Uyghur.

The influence of the Syriac script was so strong that Turkic languages—Sogdian and Uyghur and eventually Mongol—adopted them with some modifications. Among the manuscript finds, more manuscripts in languages other than Syriac use Syriac script than use the script of the source language. For example, of the Sogdian texts from Bulayiq, 550 fragments are written in Syriac script, while only 50 fragments are in Sogdian script; similarly, Middle Persian and New Persian fragments are written in Syriac script.

The Persian language also must have had a recognized place among the educated and the clergy, especially during the Mongol Empire period. Rabban Sauma wrote his diary in Persian.<sup>26</sup> The Franciscan missionary John of Montecorvino, who was stationed in Khanbaliq (modern-day Beijing), had pictures drawn from the Bible with writings in Latin, Turkic, and Persian.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> “For I am not even acquainted with your Syriac language, which is a matter of universal necessity.” Montgomery, *History of Yaballaha III*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> Laura Bottini, “Due lettere inedite del Patriarcha Mār Yahbhallāhā III (1281–1317),” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 66 (1992): 239–56.

<sup>24</sup> Osawa et al., “As the Mountains,” 198.

<sup>25</sup> Pier Giorgio Borbone, “Some Aspects of Turco-Mongol Christianity in the Light of Literary and Epigraphic Syriac Sources,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 19.2 (2005): 17.

<sup>26</sup> Montgomery, *History of Yaballaha III*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Dawson, ed., *Mission to Asia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in associa-

It is important to note that there was a specific Turkic word, *ärkägün* (or *erke'ün*, pl. *erke'üüd*), to designate a Christian.<sup>28</sup> This word occurs in Syriac, Uyghur, Chinese, Mongol, 'Phags-pa, Armenian, and Persian scripts or sources. The origin of the word is unknown and debated, but it clearly refers to a person of Christian faith. Another word for "Christian" "is *tars* or *t'rs'k* borrowed from Middle Persian *trs'*."<sup>29</sup> This widely recognized term with the same meaning in many languages and scripts strongly suggests that Christians were of a sizeable portion in the population and their faith and practice were recognized as unique and different from those of other faiths.

The church in the land of Mongolia and Central Asia had its own clergy and hierarchy according to the structure of the mother Syriac church. In manuscripts and records we come across names of different church offices: metropolitans (Mar George and Mar Nestorius), administrators (Syriac, *sā'orā*), verger or keeper (Syriac, *qanqāyā*), monk, and archdeacon. Borbone states that these terms indicate "the presence of organised Christian communities in specific towns or regions."<sup>30</sup> In response to the request of the king of the Keraites, they were given a metropolitan or bishop.<sup>31</sup>

From the historical records we can see that the church had its own teachers and instructors in the faith. The parents of Rabban Sauma "committed him to a suitable teacher, and they schooled him zealously under him in the Doctrines of the Church." Then, based on his education and training, "he was qualified for the order of Priesthood, and he was numbered among the Clergy, and he became Verger." Yaballaha III also in his young age "was instructed in the Doctrines of the Church beyond all his brothers" and became a student of Rabban Sauma.<sup>32</sup> This teacher-student relationship with its nature of spiritual instruction shows that spiritual teachers and clergy were well established and recognized by these Turkic Christian communities. Mark Dickens rightly states, "Christianity in Central Asia was not merely a thin veneer over the animistic and shamanistic religious core of the Turkic peoples. There was sufficient spiritual vibrancy and knowledge within the community to support teachers and interpreters of Scripture."<sup>33</sup> On the

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tion with the Medieval Academy of America, 1998), 227.

<sup>28</sup> See Christopher P. Atwood, "Christianity in the Mongol Empire," *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 107.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Zieme, "Notes on a Bilingual Prayer Booklet from Bulayik," in *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters*, 2nd ed., ed. Dietmar W. Winkler and Tang, Li, *Orientalia - Patristica - Oecumenica 1* (Zürich: LIT, 2014), 171.

<sup>30</sup> Borbone, "Some Aspects," 15.

<sup>31</sup> Mingana, "Early Spread," 306.

<sup>32</sup> Montgomery, *History of Yaballaha III*, 28, 30–31.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Dickens, "The Syriac Bible in Central Asia," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq: Collected*

basis of graffiti near Samarkand, Uzbekistan, written by a Turkic Christian exegete, as well as an exegetical writing, “Gannat bussāmē” (Garden of Delight), ascribed to a Turkic exegete, Borbone reasons that “even if very little has come down to us in written sources, there was some teaching activity and a related literary production within Turco-Mongol Christianity.”<sup>34</sup>

Sadly, the Church of the East and the Christian faith rapidly declined and even ceased to exist by the sixteenth century in the land of Mongolia. The factors that caused this decline are not clear. However, the fall of the Mongol Empire, which provided religious tolerance and an environment for religious growth, Lamaistic Buddhism becoming the state-supported religion of Mongolia, assimilation of Christian tribes with other tribes under the Mongol Empire, and the expansion of Islam in Central Asia appear to be strong factors.<sup>35</sup>

#### **4. The Christian Church in the Modern Era**

During the seventy years of the Communist regime that ended in 1990 there was not a single Christian church in the country, and only a few among those studying in Eastern European countries heard the gospel. When Mongolia finally opened up, missionaries and Christian workers were able to come and share the gospel message with Mongolians, who were spiritually hungry. Churches, small Bible study groups, and various kinds of Christian ministries flourished, and evangelism outreach teams went to provinces far and near and rural centers with the *Jesus* film, New Testaments, and some tracts. Missionaries and Christian NGOs worked with street children, poor families, and others who lacked the basic necessities of life in those economically troubled years.

Many of the people who became Christians during these early years were teenagers and young adults in their early twenties. Now, after twenty-five years, much of the leadership of Mongolian churches and Christian NGOs is in the hands of those Mongolian leaders as the declining body of missionaries provides more of a supporting role.<sup>36</sup> According to a census conducted

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*Papers from the Christianity of Iraq IV Seminar Days*, ed. Erica C. D. Hunter (Piscaway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), 112.

<sup>34</sup> Borbone, “Some Aspects,” 10–11.

<sup>35</sup> See also Li Tang, *East Syriac Christianity in Mongol-Yuan China*, *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana* 18 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 145–49.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the Christian church in Mongolia, see Hugh Kemp and Bayarjargal Garamtseren, “Mongolia,” in *Asian Handbook for Theological Education and Ecumenism*, ed. Hope Antone et al., *Regnum Studies in Global Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 565–73.

by the Mongolian Evangelical Alliance in 2015, there are over 30,000 Christians, 527 churches, and 91 Christian NGOs in Mongolia. Various Christian ministries include child care, foster homes, orphanages, hospices, literature translation, media, and ministries for alcoholics, prisoners, the homeless, students, and professionals. One distinctive characteristic of Mongolian Christians has been their enthusiasm for evangelism and mission. From the beginning in the early 1990s, Mongolians were encouraged to reach out and evangelize their own people as they were sent to many rural villages. They were also inspired to pray for, give to, and go to mission fields, especially among the ethnic Mongol people groups in Asia. Now there are Mongolian missionaries in China, Russia, and sensitive areas in Asia. Mongolian Christians are making good use of media for the gospel. There is a well-recognized and respected Christian radio station, Wind FM, with various programs focusing on family and relationship issues. It is the most listened-to radio station in Mongolia. A Christian TV group called AMONG airs Christian programs, news, and testimonies at certain times every week. Both of these media groups have received the National Religious Broadcasters Award (USA) for their excellence and effectiveness in presenting the gospel to the local culture: AMONG in 2015 and Wind FM in 2016. The Mongolian church is young, energetic, spontaneous, and mission minded, and it has much potential and talent. Yet there are areas where earnest attention and work are needed, such as discipleship, spiritual formation, leadership development, maturity, and theological education.

## **II. Bible Translation in Mongolian**

### **1. Past History**

Again, Bible translation in Mongolian is not a recent phenomenon, but spans many centuries. Since Syriac was the language of the Scriptures for Turkic-Mongol Christians, perhaps the necessity of translating the Bible into local languages was seen as less urgent and the needs were different from those of today. Dickens comments,

It is unclear whether or not the whole Syriac Bible was ever translated into Sogdian and Uyghur Turkic, although portions of the former and perhaps the latter were used for readings in church services. The exception is the Psalter, one of the most important parts of the Bible for those living a monastic lifestyle, as is evident from the extant Psalter fragments in Syriac, Middle Persian, Sogdian and New Persian.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dickens, "The Syriac Bible in Central Asia," 111.

Possibly what can be called the very first written translation of the Bible into the Mongolian language was by John of Montecorvino, who arrived in Khanbaliq in 1294 and with the permission of Tumor Khan built a Catholic church.<sup>38</sup> In his second letter, written in 1305, John writes, “I have an adequate knowledge of the Tartar language and script, which is the usual language of the Tartars, and now I have translated into that language and script the whole of the New Testament and the Psalter and have had it written in beautiful characters.”<sup>39</sup> This Tartar language is Mongolian, “the language of the ruling people of China at that time.”<sup>40</sup> The forty boys to whom John taught Latin and for whom he wrote Psalters, hymnals, and Breviaries would have assisted in and used this translation for their spiritual instruction. Unfortunately, no portion of this translation has survived.

Beginning in the 1760s, German Moravians made an attempt to reach the Kalmucks, an ethnic Mongol group living in Sarepta, Russia. They studied the language and culture of the Kalmucks and attempted some Bible translation, but the effort did not continue long. In the early 1800s the Moravians made another effort, this time working through Isaac J. Schmidt, who later became a famous Mongolist. Schmidt translated the Gospel of Matthew into Kalmuck in 1812 and the New Testament in 1827. Two Buryat Mongols, Nomtu and Badma, helped him translate the New Testament into the Mongolian dialect. Schmidt promoted the new term *Deed* for God instead of the traditional term *Burkhan* because he saw the latter term being equal to Buddha. Though much work went into the translation and many copies were printed, this translation was never widely used.

Four British missionaries sent from the London Missionary Society in 1818 and stationed in Selenginsk, Buryatia, started working on a new translation of the Bible. This team faced many challenges among themselves, family circumstances, health issues, communication difficulties, bureaucracy from the Russian Bible Society, and pressure from the Russian Tsar. However, they persevered until 1840, when the mission was forced to close. By then they had completed the translation of the Old Testament, and the individual books were printed in Selenginsk. After the mission post closed, the New Testament translation was printed in London in 1846, making it the first complete translation of the whole Bible. This translation became associated with the two main translators, William Swan and Edward Stallybrass,

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<sup>38</sup> For details of the history of Bible translation in Mongolian, see Bayarjargal Garamtseren, “A History of Bible Translation in Mongolian,” *The Bible Translator* 60.4 (2009): 215–23.

<sup>39</sup> Dawson, *Mission to Asia*, 227.

<sup>40</sup> Yiyi Chen, “A Brief Survey of the History of Chinese Translations of the Hebrew Bible,” *SBL Forum*, n.d., <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=460>.

and came to be known as the Literary Version. This year we are celebrating the 170th anniversary of this version.

The Literary Version and its individual books went through various revisions in the following years, mostly to bring the language into the Khalkha main dialect. In 1872 Joseph Edkins and Joseph Schereschewsky revised the Gospel of Matthew. Then D. Stenberg worked on the revision of the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, as well as Acts, but unfortunately he was murdered during the Boxer Rebellion. F. Larson and A. Almblad also revised the Gospels, Acts, and Genesis and published their work in Japan in 1913. In 1935 J. Erickson and G. Ollen started on a new translation of the Gospels and Acts from a Chinese text. The workers developed into a team consisting of S. Gunzel and three Mongols, Mattai, Genden, Erinchindorj, and were relocated to Hong Kong in 1949. They were able to complete a revised New Testament, which was printed in 1953 in simpler and up-to-date language.

In 1972 John Gibbens, from England, came to then-communist Mongolia as a student and started translating the Bible in secret. He received language assistance from a fellow Mongolian student, Altaa, who later became his wife. Gibbens had a team assisting him in different capacities, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the United Bible Societies provided consultancy and financial support until the New Testament was printed in 1990. This was the first translation in the Cyrillic script, which Mongolia had adopted in the 1940s. The translation came just when the country had opened up, and the new religious freedom could be enjoyed by Mongolians who were spiritually hungry for truth. The language of the translation was easy to understand, and many explanations and elaborations in it helped Mongolians grasp new Christian concepts and terms. The translation, however, drew much criticism for being too paraphrastic, for having arbitrary additions and omissions, as well as for using a new, nontraditional term for God. The complete Bible of this translation was published in 2015.

In response to the lack of confidence in the translation by the Gibbenses, in about 1993 missionaries came together to start a new translation, aiming to be more accurate and to use word-for-word correspondence. A team consisting of missionaries and Mongolians worked from an English text and published the New Testament in 1996, using the traditional terms for God and spiritual concepts. The complete Bible, known as the Holy Bible, was published in 2000, and it quickly became the most widely used translation among churches and Christians. The revised version of the translation was completed in 2013.

## ***2. Mongolian Standard Version***

### The Birth of a Vision

At a missions conference in November 2001 in Erdenet, Mongolia, Magnus Alphonse, a missionary from Sweden, challenged Mongolian Christians to do certain tasks that could only be undertaken by national believers. One such task was a Bible translation by Mongolian believers into their mother tongue. This challenge immediately struck my heart and changed the course of the rest of my life. Since I became a Christian in September 1992, I have had a keen interest and involvement in the translation of Christian literature and have interpreted for many conference speakers. This Bible translation challenge began to stir and tug at my heart more and more, and I came to the recognition that this was a calling from God, confirmed by discussions with my pastor and friends, and a real, recognized need. By March 2002 my wife Yanjinkham Enkhtaivan and I had made the decision to move in this new direction, and at the end of July I voluntarily resigned from my job in the finance department of World Vision Mongolia.

### Education and Training

The next necessary step was to receive proper training. My prayer was for the best possible training and equipping for the task to do the best possible translation. While applying and waiting for the right doors to open for schooling, I took on the leadership of the Bible dictionary translation project that was providentially assigned, after proper procedures, to an NGO from my church. This project was preparation for my future work, and after two years we saw the publication of the first Bible dictionary in Mongolian. Just as the project was nearing its end, I was awarded a full-tuition scholarship from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and other sources of funding to enable me to start the Master of Divinity program. In August 2004, my family, with two small children, left for schooling and training that would continue for another nine years. After I had completed the master of divinity and master of theology degrees at the seminary, God opened a wonderful opportunity for me to study in a PhD degree program at the University of Cambridge, in the UK. My research topic—text critical research between the Old Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and the Masoretic Hebrew text in one of the most complicated passages in the Old Testament—was ideal, but very challenging training for fulfilling the vision of translating from the original languages. During these years of studies God also provided for my family to study in a six-month-long special program for national Bible translators at the Home for Bible Translators under the auspices of the

Hebrew University in Jerusalem. By God's grace and provision, I completed and successfully defended my PhD thesis in December 2013. All the schooling and training I was blessed to receive was the best combination I could ask for and was definitely an answer to our prayers.

### Implementation of the Mongolian Standard Version Project

In November 2013, we commenced the Mongolian Standard Version (MSV), a project of the Mongolian Union Bible Society. By naming this translation the Mongolian Standard Version, we hope that it will be a standard and exemplary translation of the Scriptures for Mongolian speakers in Mongolia and elsewhere. Furthermore, we aim to implement and follow standard procedures, checks, and reviews for this version.

### About the Mongolian Language

The Mongolian language belongs to the Altaic family of languages and has three million speakers in the country of Mongolia. The Halh is the only official dialect for written Mongolian in Cyrillic script and is understood by speakers of all dialects in the country.

### Project Goals

For the MSV we have the following five goals:

1. To translate from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts
2. To be faithful to the source texts
3. To use natural and proper Mongolian grammar and expression
4. To be clear and understandable
5. To make the final product easily listened to

Current Bible versions in the Mongolian Cyrillic script (Mongolian Union Bible Society Holy Bible, 2000; Kitamura New Testament, 2005; Mongolian Bible Society Bible, 2015) are either translated from a secondary language or hard to be verified as coming from the original languages. For some versions, there were justifiable historical reasons to translate from a secondary language, such as urgent need and lack of necessary resources and personnel. Although such versions meet the need and may be acceptable for a time, they should not be considered standard for all time. When the necessary conditions and personnel are there, it is (and should be) the standard to translate Scripture from the original languages.

We are translating the Old Testament from the Masoretic text and the New Testament from the Greek New Testament produced by the United

Bible Societies. The Old Testament will be translated first because it gives the chronological and biblical foundation and builds the necessary vocabulary for the New Testament.

There are many weaknesses in translating from a secondary language. When one is translating from a translation, it becomes hard or impossible to recognize, understand, and properly translate the original phrase, word play, emphasis, simile, comparison, parallelism (especially in poetry), and many other linguistic features. Depending upon the characteristics of the secondary language and other cultural differences, we are quite often not able to see these linguistic features in the original through the translation in the secondary language.

Due to the limitations inherent in all translation, a translator is sometimes forced to choose between competing options. One who then translates from that second language has to live with the option taken by the first translator. But when a translator is able to see the original meaning in the original language, then he or she is able to express the intended meaning using his or her own judgment appropriate in that cultural setting and language. Sometimes it may be necessary or even better to take an option different from the one chosen for the secondary language translation. This is the reason we want Mongolian translators equipped with original language training to be able to see the original words, sentence structures, emphasis, and poetical and other features that are only visible in the original. When the translator sees these characteristics, he or she is encouraged to come up with a translation that will have similar feel, effect, structure, and character in natural Mongolian.

Furthermore, because Mongolian culture is nomadic, similar to ancient Hebrew (or Middle Eastern) culture, it brings an advantage and closeness to translate from the biblical Hebrew, which is three quarters of the Bible text. There are many similarities between the two cultures, making it easier for the translator to understand and translate the worldview and cultural values of ancient Israelites. Less is lost when a translation takes place between two similar cultures, that is, nomadic to nomadic, in comparison to going from nomadic to sedentary and then back to nomadic.

The requirement for a translation to be accurate applies to all translations. If a translation is made literally (i.e., word for word), especially from a secondary translation, there is great danger of producing a wrong or unintended meaning and effect. The right and intended meaning comes from a whole sentence within its context, not from “correctly” translated individual words. In other words, the emphasis for accuracy is not so much on properly translated individual words as it is on the meaning from the whole sentence.

Our third goal of using natural and proper Mongolian grammar and expression comes from the sad present reality. When a nation is suddenly open to a vast amount of information and knowledge from other languages that were not accessible before and needs to obtain information and knowledge from them, that nation is under pressure to translate and transmit all that information into the local language and culture, generally from English. Mongolia has gone and is still going through this experience. In many scientific fields, as well as in Bible and Christian literature translation, Mongolians have to translate many new and unfamiliar terms and concepts. When a nation is under such an inflow of translated information and knowledge, the local language is negatively affected, its naturalness lessened to some degree, word order and proper sentence structure impeded. It is not rare to see “foreignized” Mongolian in newspaper reports, advertisements, and media where the individual words are Mongolian but together they give a “foreign” and translationese feeling. This is exactly what we want to avoid in the MSV. We aim to use natural and proper Mongolian grammar and expression to give as closely as possible the meaning and effect in the original language. This will require us to use a balance of Mongolian phrases, collocations, and expressions, all the while thinking about how we would say this naturally in Mongolian.

Using natural and proper Mongolian grammar and vocabulary will help us to produce a clear and understandable translation. It becomes challenging to translate some extremely long Greek sentences, especially in the Pauline epistles, that are connected by participles one after another. Mongolian does not have a participle equal to those in Koine Greek. Another difference is that while Mongolian sentence structure is subject-object-verb, Koine Greek has a more or less flexible order, and biblical Hebrew is verb-subject-object. In these and other cases, it will be better to break long sentences into shorter sentences, repeating the verb instead of giving a long, convoluted sentence in Mongolian. Clarity and understandability is more important than keeping the same sentence structure and length as in the original language.

The fifth goal of the MSV is that it be easily listened to. There are many cases where the Scriptures will only be heard and not read, even in church settings. In fact, most cultures are oral, meaning that most of the communication and exchange of ideas takes place orally. Teachings and sermons are more often heard than read. More and more people are choosing audio books over text-printed books in this age of busyness, and more time is being spent in driving and commuting between home and work. Hearing the Bible read out loud allows the naturalness of the translation and how

well it is written to be assessed easily. Therefore, listening to the translation read out loud will be an important part of our checking process. To test and refine our translation, we will be producing an audio recording of individual books even before the final version and making the necessary changes.

### Translator Training

To produce a translation that meets the above goals we are concentrating our efforts on training and equipping our translators. Since we as a young church do not have people already trained and equipped with biblical languages for Bible translation, the only option for us has been to take nationals with some translation and foreign language-learning experience and teach them all the necessary skills on the job. Hiring of translators was preceded by voluntary biblical language training for three to six months, and only after passing exams and an interview were the candidates offered a contract with a request to make a long-term commitment. We have been providing training in biblical Hebrew, translation theory and practice, Mongolian language grammar, translation software, biblical geography, and cultural studies.

In particular, I want to mention our biblical language training. As I have experienced the benefit myself while studying in Israel, I have been putting emphasis on reading the text out loud. We also listen to an audio recording of the Hebrew Bible. Reading and listening to your own reading helps you memorize and retain vocabulary much better than just visual reading (or recognition) of the text. I encourage the translators to memorize words by their sounds as well as by their spelling.

### Project Stages and Organization

The project has two main stages: the Old Testament translation, 2016–2023, and the New Testament translation, 2024–2027. The sequence of books to be translated has been determined on the basis of the level of the translators' skill, book genre, and readers' needs. Thus we are translating in the following order: historical books, minor prophets, Pentateuch, wisdom, major prophets, Gospels, Pauline epistles, general epistles, and Revelation.

The project has a permanent advisory committee, with five to seven representatives from the Mongolian church, theological educators, language and translation experts, pastors, leaders, and representatives from Christian ministries to give external support and input for the translation.

For fundraising efforts, we encourage Christians to sponsor verses, \$35 US per verse. This has been a practical and motivational method for interested individuals and entities.

### Project Progress and Outcome

Thus far we have been able to implement the project as planned. This year we are working on the translation of the books of Joshua, Judges, Genesis, and Exodus. For a quick and cost-effective response, we will upload our translation drafts to the project website ([www.msv.bible](http://www.msv.bible)) as drafts are completed, and will conduct an online readers' survey.

Through this project we hope to making resources and tools available for Mongolian Christians to study biblical languages and the Bible. The material used in teaching translators biblical Hebrew is being developed into a textbook in Mongolian and is already used at a local Bible school as the course book. We plan to develop Hebrew–Mongolian and Greek–Mongolian dictionaries.

All glory to God!

# Inerrancy Is Not Enough: A Lesson in Epistemology from Clark Pinnock on Scripture

R. CARLTON WYNNE

## **Abstract**

In the 1960s, Canadian theologian Clark H. Pinnock declared that saving human knowledge of God could only be built upon the plain sense of the infallible and inerrant text of Holy Scripture. In the ensuing decades, however, Pinnock's confidence in an inerrant Bible severely waned. A close examination of Pinnock's early epistemological outlook reveals critical defects that sowed seeds of his later departure from a traditional confession of Scripture's total trustworthiness. Pinnock's theological migration reminds scholars and church leaders that only an epistemology that is rooted in the being, knowledge, and revelation of God in Scripture supplies the necessary context for a robust confession of Scripture's inerrancy and its relationship with the observable world.

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## Introduction

Canadian theologian Clark H. Pinnock opened his 1967 book, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, by claiming, “The central problem for twentieth century theology is its own epistemological basis.”<sup>1</sup> Pinnock went on to insist that a sure and saving knowledge of God can be derived only from the plain sense of the infallible and inerrant text of Holy Scripture. For him, any Christian endeavor—to the extent that it is truly Christian—must remain unswervingly faithful to Scripture as theology’s *principium cognoscendi* and “the necessary link epistemologically between sinful man and the inscrutable God.”<sup>2</sup>

In the decades following *A Defense*, however, Pinnock’s confidence in an inerrant Bible as the Christian’s ultimate epistemological norm severely waned. By at least 1977, he was convinced that evangelical defenders of an errorless Bible were evidencing a “fortress mentality” and had begun to “play on the fears of Bible readers” by telling them that the Bible was no longer trustworthy if it was mistaken on a single point.<sup>3</sup> For the “later” Pinnock, Scripture’s dependability must also be qualified by, and adjusted to, the limitations imposed upon the text by its human authorship and historical milieu.<sup>4</sup> Conflicts in ancient biblical manuscripts, the seemingly insuperable challenge of harmonizing purportedly disparate accounts, and the supposed illogical inference from inspiration to strict textual inerrancy, he believed, made “the argument [for an errorless Bible] based on epistemology ... very doubtful.”<sup>5</sup> Even so, Pinnock remained confident that the

<sup>1</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. See also Clark H. Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case: Studies in Christian Apologetics* (Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1968), 69.

<sup>3</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, “Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology,” in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, TX: Word, 1977), 65.

<sup>4</sup> Pinnock cites G. C. Berkouwer’s *Holy Scripture*, trans. and ed. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), as a work that does justice to “the actual nature of the Bible ... taking into account the cultural context, and the human qualities,” which for Pinnock account for Scripture’s “inconsistencies, duplicate passages, [and] seemingly pointless details.” Pinnock, “Three Views,” 62. For a romp through various models for understanding the humanity of Scripture, including Pinnock’s, and a conclusion with a constructive alternative, see Paul Wells, “The Doctrine of Scripture: Only a Human Problem,” in *Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 27–61.

<sup>5</sup> Pinnock, “Three Views,” 66. Pinnock has in mind here what Stephen Davis calls “the epistemological argument” for inerrancy, which Davis summarizes as follows: “Unless the Bible is inerrant, Christians have no sound epistemological foundation on which to base their beliefs. Thus, inerrancy is crucial for Christians.” Stephen Davis, *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 66. According to Barry Callen (*Clark H.*

edifice of theological knowledge could remain standing without a foundation in an inerrant Scripture and that Christian practice could even flourish in its absence.<sup>6</sup>

In the ensuing years, however, the edifice Pinnock perceived began to crumble as he followed his changed position on Scripture with additional radical theological views. He came, for example, to embrace a “wider-hope” theology in which redemption may extend to unevangelized people groups and the unconverted dead.<sup>7</sup> He grew sympathetic with a number of motifs in process theism, rejected substitutionary atonement, and applauded elements of charismatic Pentecostalism.<sup>8</sup> Today, Pinnock is perhaps best known as a prominent former spokesman for the movement within evangelicalism known as “open theism” (also “neoclassical theism” or “free-will theism”), in which a future that is unknown to God unfolds as he responds to man’s unconstrained and unanticipated decisions.<sup>9</sup>

What accounts for Pinnock’s dramatic change regarding the character and content of Scripture? Did he self-consciously uproot his epistemology from its biblical moorings and replace it with an entirely different system? Or was there something defective in his epistemology from the beginning that (a) can help to explain Pinnock’s departure from an evangelical, even apparently Reformed, confession of Scripture’s inerrancy, and (b) contributed to his later theological evolution? This article argues that the culprit was a defective early epistemology. An examination of the broader framework

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*Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal* [Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 2000], 56–57), the release of Davis’s book, which includes a chapter criticizing this argument, contributed to Pinnock’s re-evaluating and revising his traditional position on Scripture. If this is the case, it is noteworthy that Davis’s summary fails to address, at least in any pointed way, the Christian’s proper epistemological warrant for the belief itself that Scripture is inerrant. This article is intended to show how this lacuna played an important role in Pinnock’s departure from inerrancy.

<sup>6</sup> See Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 153–72.

<sup>8</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 147; Clark H. Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 22–23; Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 129–39.

<sup>9</sup> Pinnock defined open theism as “a relational and trinitarian doctrine with an emphasis on God as personal and interactive, both in his own immanent triune nature and in the economic relationships in which he engages and enjoys with creatures. It holds that God could control the world if he wished to but that he has chosen not to do so for the sake of loving relationships. Open theism does not believe that God is ontologically limited but that God voluntarily self-limits so that freely chosen loving relations might be possible.” Clark H. Pinnock, “Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics,” *Dialog* 44.3 (Fall 2005): 237.

behind Pinnock's initial trust in Scripture's total truthfulness reveals that his belief in inerrancy operated, at least in part, independently of Scripture's self-witness and authority. That is, Pinnock maintained defective epistemological assumptions—specifically including relying on an inductive-empirical form of reasoning that was insufficiently qualified by “the norming norm (*norma normans*)” of Scripture—that gradually exposed the instability of his early position on inerrancy and eventually infected much of the rest of his theology.<sup>10</sup>

The ensuing analysis does not presume to offer a comprehensive account of how Pinnock's faulty epistemology affected his entire theology. Nor does it deny that additional influences contributed to his theological evolution.<sup>11</sup> It simply aims to examine how Pinnock broke from an inerrancy position (a) by tracing that break back to a more basic epistemological commitment to would-be autonomous inductive and empirical reasoning and (b) by offering a critique of such reasoning from a Reformed theological perspective. This exercise will press home what the title of this article intends to convey, namely, that a bare confession of inerrancy, or one that surreptitiously depends upon some extrabiblical authority, is not enough to sustain a lasting Reformed Christian witness to the total truthfulness of Scripture. Instead, what is needed is a confession of biblical inerrancy and the Bible's relation to the observable world that is self-consciously rooted in an epistemological framework that is thoroughly shaped by the being and knowledge of the God revealed in his inerrant Word.

## I. *Pinnock's Epistemology at a Glance*

Pinnock never presented a sustained exposition of his epistemology, or theory of knowledge. His concerns throughout his career were more overtly theological.<sup>12</sup> When he did attempt to explain his epistemology, he often

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<sup>10</sup> In contrast to valid deductive arguments, in which premises logically entail a conclusion, in inductive reasoning premises provide only a degree of support for the conclusion. See James Hawthorne, “Inductive Logic,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/logic-inductive/>. The descriptor “inductive-empirical” attempts to capture how Pinnock viewed sense experience as supplying the premises that allegedly validate Scripture's claims by way of inductive probability.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller account of Pinnock's theological shift on the doctrine of Scripture, see Ray C. W. Roennfeldt, *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 16 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993). Pinnock offers a brief but even broader theological autobiography in his essay, “From Augustine to Arminius,” 15–30.

<sup>12</sup> The following statement from a book designed to commend the Christian faith to skeptics is typical: “This book will not be burdened with a lengthy discussion of epistemology, the

invoked philosophical terms rather loosely and without any explicit attempt to correlate them. But because one's method of knowing is integral to what is known, or what is claimed to be known, it is appropriate to examine Pinnock's writings on Scripture in order to grasp his epistemology and evaluate it.

### 1. *The Authority of Scripture and the Role of Reason*

Pinnock's early writings on Scripture present a person firmly committed to a supremely authoritative and wholly accurate Bible as the key source of true knowledge of God. For him in the late 1960s, the premier issue in need of a clear defense was the truth-claim implicit in the doctrine of inspiration, namely, that because the Bible is *God's Word* it remains utterly free from error.<sup>13</sup> The greatest threat to this Christian conception of inspiration, and thus to one's confidence in the truths disclosed in Scripture, Pinnock argued, was what he saw as a then vogue inclination by would-be autonomous man to impose an existential *a priori* onto the text of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> He noted, for example, how liberal critics of the Bible derive their conclusions from a "critical attitude adopted from the outset" rather than from a posture of total trust commanded by Scripture itself.<sup>15</sup> For Pinnock, the issue was a moral one, for, as he said, the reader who "pontificates" on alleged errors in the Bible "has usurped for himself the infallibility which he has denied to the Bible."<sup>16</sup> At first glance, Pinnock's case appears closed: either commit your epistemology to the authoritative Word of God written or allow an independent criterion to insert errors into a biblical text, which may then be wielded as a weapon to attack orthodox theology and undermine Christian fidelity to Scripture.

Yet even in the book once hailed as "the most vigorous scholarly statement of verbal plenary inspiration since Warfield,"<sup>17</sup> Pinnock himself endorsed a

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question of how we know what we know." Clark H. Pinnock, *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Pinnock, *A Defense*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. For a brief account of how rationalist biblical criticism inspired by the European Enlightenment is part of a broader anthropocentric worldview, see Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 24–29.

<sup>15</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 182–83.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 81. After making the same point in 1967, Pinnock added, "This is freedom in the flesh, a freedom sought by no Christian believer." Pinnock, *A Defense*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon R. Lewis, review of *Biblical Revelation*, in *Eternity* (January 1972), 50. Quoted in Daniel Strange, "Clark H. Pinnock: The Evolution of an Evangelical Maverick," *Evangelical Quarterly* 71.4 (1999): 313.

germ of independent, inductive thinking that ultimately contaminated his view of Scripture's inerrancy. In an attempt to "avoid philosophical solipsism and religious anarchy," he argued, even in this early stage, that one must not believe the Scripture's gospel "before the evidence for its truthfulness has been weighed."<sup>18</sup> While human reason is not a source of revealed truth, Pinnock explained, it is still competent to test the historical claims of biblical revelation.<sup>19</sup> Hence, defenders of inerrancy, he said, must be "revelation-empiricists."<sup>20</sup> They must recognize that "the validity of Christian theism rests on its *historical credentials*."<sup>21</sup> For Pinnock, this implied an open-to-investigation form of the gospel that called for a presumably neutral and open-minded analysis of the verifiable facts recorded in Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

Curiously, Pinnock added that Christians who investigate Scripture's truthfulness ought to begin by adopting the attitude of Christ and the apostles toward the Old Testament and thereby presume the reliability of the whole of Scripture.<sup>23</sup> On the surface, this methodological bias appears to set a high bar for evidence that might warrant concluding there was error

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<sup>18</sup> Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 44–45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. According to Pinnock, a "revelation-empiricist" is "one who studies revelation as an objective reality, and comes to conclusions about its shape and credibility, on the basis of the evidence available." *Ibid.* As early as 1968, Pinnock urged the Christian apologist to "challenge the non-Christian to suspend his prejudice against Christianity for the time it takes to examine fairly the evidence for the Christian faith, to take up a proven method for ascertaining truth, the empirical method, and apply it to the biblical records." Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case*, 86.

<sup>21</sup> Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 45; emphasis in the original.

<sup>22</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Apologetics and Theology of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971), 422; cf. Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case*, 43–45. Pinnock summarized his apologetic approach when he wrote, "I am committed to appealing to reason to try to persuade those yet unconvinced to make a decision for Jesus Christ." Pinnock, *Reason Enough*, 13. For him, such appeals assume "our cognitive and personal freedom" to examine the available "probabilities" and "clues" for the Christian faith. *Ibid.*, 18. In response, it is important to note that the question is not whether reason and evidence play a central role in the task of apologetics, but whether one's reasoning and evaluation of evidence, from the outset, is thoroughly conditioned by God's inscripturated revelation.

<sup>23</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 151; Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 75: "Inerrancy is the standpoint for a Christian to adopt in his examination of Scripture." This helps to explain Roennfeldt's observation that the early Pinnock "held to a view of the relationship between biblical authority and biblical reliability that involved movement in both directions." Roennfeldt, *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority*, 209. That is, the Bible's self-witness to its divine character and inerrancy ought to inform one's evaluation of the evidence for Scripture's truthfulness and (yet) sufficient historical evidence may ultimately falsify that self-witness. Unfortunately, Roennfeldt's opposition to a Reformed view of divine sovereignty (see, e.g., *ibid.*, 319) leads him to miss the profound epistemological flaw in Pinnock's position.

in the text; after all, Pinnock observed, “nothing less than the authority of Jesus is on the line.”<sup>24</sup> But the force of this initial instruction to Christians soon erodes in the face of questions prompted by Pinnock’s call in the first place to weigh the evidence for Scripture’s truthfulness. For example, who gets to decide where the bar is set for gauging whether there is error in Scripture, or when it is cleared by sufficiently persuasive evidence? How does one decide what counts as evidence in the first place? And by what criteria should it be evaluated?

Such questions will re-emerge later in this study, but they bear on yet another question that is relevant to Pinnock’s early demand for Christians to adopt Jesus’s view of Scripture (at least preliminarily): what grounds one’s confidence in the accuracy of those texts that speak of Christ’s submission to the Jewish canon? Pinnock answers this further question when he writes that his Christ-inspired presumption in favor of Scripture’s inerrancy is proportional to “that evidence, in weight and amount, which vindicates the trustworthiness of Christ.”<sup>25</sup> Crucially, however, for Pinnock, even this evidence is properly authenticated by a mechanism of independent factual verification and inductive reasoning.<sup>26</sup> As it turns out, “evidence of a most compelling variety” may also overturn a Christian’s trust in what the Bible reveals to be Christ’s own view of Scripture.<sup>27</sup> If this is so, then it appears that the early Pinnock’s methodological commitment to Scripture’s inerrancy was nominal at best, since it, too, depended on an independent evaluation of Scripture’s witness to Christ and to itself.

The early Pinnock insisted that the church’s trust in Scripture as the infallible revelation of God is a mark of consistent Christian discipleship.<sup>28</sup> Yet this conviction sat uneasily with his higher-priority desideratum to screen Scripture’s claims for their “truth value.”<sup>29</sup> As Pinnock would put it later in his career, although God is powerful enough to secure an errorless Bible, “we have to look and see if this is what he willed to do.”<sup>30</sup> He went on to warn that “should the facts prove to be inconsistent with the testimony of our Lord, it is well that we know it ... with the full realization of the consequences.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 152.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 151, quoting from B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 218.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Clark H. Pinnock, “In Response to Dr. Daniel Fuller,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16.1 (1973): 70.

<sup>27</sup> Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 155.

<sup>28</sup> Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 57.

<sup>31</sup> Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 152. Cf. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 136.

## 2. Pinnock's Inductive Reasoning and the Delimiting of Scriptural Authority

Pinnock's appeal to the "facts" of empirical observation and to the conclusions of inductive reasoning to validate Scripture indicates that he operated with an epistemological standard presumed to be more authoritative than the Word of God written itself. For him, the Christian and the non-Christian alike may verify the reliability of Scripture by reading its claims and then, like a confused Berean (cf. Acts 17:11), run to allegedly self-evident facts of experience to see if these things are so.<sup>32</sup> The danger of this approach should be clear. As soon as readers of Scripture encounter a particularly difficult inter-textual harmonization issue or entertain interpretations of historical evidences that they cannot, according to their limited knowledge and fallen reason (Rom 1:21; Eph 4:18; cf. 2 Cor 3:14), reconcile with Scripture, a rejection of inerrancy is all but inevitable. By the late 1980s, the floodgates had opened and Pinnock had come to believe that "strict" inerrancy was a "human construction" that spawned unnecessary problems for the text, imposed an interpretive grid on the Bible, and, in Pharisaical fashion, prevented laymen from "really hearing God's Word."<sup>33</sup> He came to concede that his one-time claim that "in our approach to biblical difficulties then we do not give equal weight to the phenomena [i.e., all that is in Scripture, except for its explicit self-witness] and to the doctrine of inspiration, as [Dewey] Beegle does" could not withstand the force of the Enlightenment methodology embedded in his epistemology.<sup>34</sup> Once he subjected the Bible's variegated Gospel accounts and Old Testament records to his allegedly autonomous and disinterested empirical eye, he concluded that "the case for total inerrancy just is not there."<sup>35</sup> Ironically, it appears that the early Pinnock's firm belief in the scientific verification of inerrancy is what eventually led him to see the doctrine as a false promise of rational certainty.<sup>36</sup>

As with his earlier methodology for validating biblical inerrancy, Pinnock's eventual denial of inerrancy exposes the deeper epistemological problems in attempting to verify Scripture, or anything else, through an allegedly

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<sup>32</sup> That Pinnock viewed empirically observable facts as "self-contained" and capable of being interpreted properly apart from Scripture can be seen in one of the rare occasions he formally addresses his epistemology, calling it a "common-sense" or "correspondence" model. On this view, he claimed, the Christian message "fits with the relevant facts of our experience and can be verified in an empirical way" by "thinking consistently and coherently about the data we encounter." Pinnock, *Reason Enough*, 16–17.

<sup>33</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "Parameters of Biblical Inerrancy," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1987), 99.

<sup>34</sup> Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy," 151.

<sup>35</sup> Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Pinnock, "Parameters of Biblical Inerrancy," 100.

independent inductive and empirical analysis. First, factual verification by sense experience raises the crucial question of whose experience is sufficient to serve as the norm by which empirical knowledge is evaluated. Whose or what axioms will determine what the “facts” actually say and what sort of relationships obtain between them? As David Hume understood, apart from establishing universal criteria for attaining knowledge by sense experience, conclusions derived from an inductive epistemology easily devolve into descriptions of personal internal experiences. That is to say, unless induction proceeds according to true antecedent metaphysical commitments, one’s reasoning will inevitably collapse into solipsism or skepticism.<sup>37</sup> The later Pinnock provides a vivid illustration of this danger in his self-assessment that he had moved toward the view that “the truth [of Christianity] is better represented by a cumulative argument which makes an appeal to *intuitive and ultimately to personal judgment*.”<sup>38</sup>

Second, as much as the early Pinnock may have wanted to avoid retreating into the cozy but hazy confines of subjectivity by appealing to an allegedly disinterested empirical method, the impossibility of bare induction led him to slip unspoken norming biases under the door. In the late 1970s, Greg Bahnsen challenged Pinnock’s inductivism by showing how his professed use of that method of knowing, far from maintaining the neutral and open-minded attitude Pinnock hoped would attract non-Christians to the gospel, “commits one to a great deal of unargued philosophical baggage.”<sup>39</sup> Bahnsen argued that the inductivist cannot, by inductive reasoning alone, meaningfully account for the reliability of sense perception, the constancy required to make observations, or a proper linguistic framework to communicate the resulting observations intelligibly, among other things.<sup>40</sup> To reason independently of the authority of Scripture one must make similar dubious assumptions for predication from inductive empiricism to mean anything coherent. Bahnsen concluded that the inevitability that philosophical precommitments are involved in any inductive endeavor “presents a solid challenge to the credibility of ... Pinnock’s espousal of exhaustive inductivism.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Recall that philosophical solipsism was precisely the error Pinnock was attempting to avoid in his call for readers to verify Scripture’s claims empirically. See Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 44; cf. footnote 18 above.

<sup>38</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, “Pinnock Postscript: How My Mind Has Changed,” in Callen, *Journey Toward Renewal*, 229; emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, “Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20.4 (1977): 299.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 296–300.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

To be fair, the early Pinnock admitted that his trust in Scripture's claims at least partially conditioned his inductive epistemology.<sup>42</sup> For example, he noted that both he and Daniel Fuller refused to entertain the notion of philosophical naturalism since, "if we did, we would not be talking as biblical supernaturalists."<sup>43</sup> Pinnock even claimed that nothing less than God's invitation to sinners to find him in the empirical world of factuality ought to propel one's independent investigation of the Bible's claims.<sup>44</sup> However, on Pinnock's terms, though Scripture petitions fallen sinners to weigh the factual evidence of Christianity for themselves, they must still derive their conclusions without appealing to any *a priori* biases gleaned from beyond the text itself.<sup>45</sup> But, as we have seen, such bare inductive reasoning is impossible, since some kind of metaphysical framework must provide the stability necessary for meaningful empirical observation; and any framework that is divorced from the norm of Scripture will oppose the claims of Scripture from the outset.

Pinnock's incoherent empirical approach to validating his belief in inerrancy eventually eroded his commitment to inerrancy. But what is particularly subtle about the evolution of Pinnock's views on Scripture is the way he deployed his early description of what biblical inerrancy means in order to service his later rejection of it. In the late 1960s, Pinnock claimed that Scripture's infallibility and inerrancy is "obviously restricted to the *intended assertions* of Scripture understood in an ordinary grammatical exegesis of the text."<sup>46</sup> In itself, the statement is innocuous, even helpful. A century earlier, and in similar fashion, B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge claimed that inerrancy demands that exegesis of biblical texts "must always seek the meaning *intended*, not any meaning that can be tortured out of a passage."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> A point Bahnsen acknowledges in *ibid.*, 300. See also footnote 23 above.

<sup>43</sup> Pinnock, "Response to Dr. Daniel Fuller," 70.

<sup>44</sup> Pinnock, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," 422.

<sup>45</sup> To be clear, Pinnock often struggled to articulate exactly how the Bible ought to influence our reasoning without violating the principle of neutrality he required to properly validate its claims. For example, he wrote that Christian scholarship should conduct an "open, inductive investigation of the biblical claims" (Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 151) yet also employ "a hermeneutics of consent" toward strange or alarming texts. Similarly, Christians must exclude from consideration those "theories that prevent the Bible from functioning as the truth-telling Scriptures of the church" (*ibid.*, 138) even though we may be surprised at "the kind of truth it chooses to deliver" (*ibid.*, 152). In these ways, we are "required to be liberal and conservative at the same time" (*ibid.*, 203).

<sup>46</sup> Pinnock, *A Defense*, 13 (emphasis added). See the nearly identical claim in Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 71: "The infallibility of Scripture is not, in one sense, absolute. Its field is restricted to the *intended* assertions of Scripture understood by an ordinary grammatical-historical exegesis of the text" (emphasis in the original).

<sup>47</sup> B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge, "Inspiration," *The Presbyterian Review* 2.6 (1881): 246

But while Warfield and Hodge's claim was designed to safeguard the categorical trustworthiness and accuracy of the entire (autographic) biblical text,<sup>48</sup> Pinnock's caveat that inerrancy should be restricted to the intended teaching of Scripture left room, in principle, for *unintended* errors by the Bible's human writers in the margins of their teaching.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, as Pinnock's epistemological commitment to an autonomous brand of "fact-checking" began to exert its pressure on his earlier trust in Scripture's total truthfulness, his earlier description of the nature of Scripture's inerrancy served instead to delimit for him the scope of the Scripture's reliability. By 1977, Pinnock still espoused a view of inerrancy "relative to the intention of the text," but, by that point, the phrase meant that "there are errors in the Bible, but they do not overthrow inerrancy because they do not belong to the intended, but only to the unintended teachings of the Bible."<sup>50</sup> What was once a potentially useful description of inerrancy now, for the later Pinnock, meant "one could fairly say that the Bible *contains* errors but *teaches* none."<sup>51</sup> A major reason for this new understanding of Scripture's truthfulness, Pinnock explained, was his determination to take the difficulties presented by the phenomena of the biblical text "very seriously," which for him meant

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(emphasis in the original); cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London: James Clark, 1960), 1:163. Only slightly different language is used in the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, commonly understood by evangelicals as a clear explanation and defense of the doctrine, when it asserts that Scripture is "of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches" (Statement 2) and is "true and reliable in all the matters it addresses" (Article XI), "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with Exposition," in G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 269, 272.

<sup>48</sup> The two authors sum up their statement by claiming that "no phenomenon can be validly urged against verbal inspiration which, found out of Scripture, would not be a valid argument against the truth of the writing." Warfield and Hodge, "Inspiration," 246.

<sup>49</sup> In his review of Pinnock's *Biblical Revelation*, Fuller interprets Pinnock's description as limiting inerrancy in a manner similar to his own view that only soteriologically oriented texts are inerrant. Writing his review in the form of a letter to Pinnock, he states, "In your handling of my view of inspiration (pp. 79f.), you imply that, unlike Warfield, I am 'limiting its [the Bible's] accuracy.' Do you not, however, do the same when you say, 'The infallibility of Scripture ... is restricted to intended assertions of Scripture.'" Daniel Fuller, "On Revelation and Biblical Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16 (1973): 67. While the early Pinnock strongly objected to Fuller's comparison, the later Pinnock essentially agreed with Fuller's position (cf. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 222–26). This later position is clarified further in Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 247–51. For an excellent examination of "limited inerrancy" positions as "argument[s] by slipperiness," see Vern S. Poythress, "Problems for Limited Inerrancy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18.2 (Spring 1975): 93–102.

<sup>50</sup> Pinnock, "Three Views," 63–64.

<sup>51</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "The Inerrancy Debate Among the Evangelicals," *Theology, News, and Notes*, *Fuller Seminary*, Special Issue (1976): 12 (emphasis in the original).

subjecting them to a more rigorously would-be autonomous inductive investigative procedure that, it is argued here, had plagued his view of inerrancy from the start.<sup>52</sup>

## II. *An Alternative and “Revelational” Epistemology*

Having surveyed the flawed empiricism governing Pinnock’s approach to Scripture, we do well to sketch an alternative epistemology that begins with the being and knowledge of God revealed in Scripture rather than the epistemological independence of man. It was mentioned earlier that one must settle the question of metaphysics outright in order to justifiably avoid the persisting skepticism of a subjectivist epistemology. But what type of metaphysic provides the necessary conditions to make investigation of so-called “facts” intelligible? Specifically, what theory of reality provides the requisite framework for justifiably affirming inerrancy and for making empirical and inductive efforts to confirm the claims of Scripture truly fruitful? Reformed theologian and apologist Cornelius Van Til offers a cogent answer when he states that “the existence of the God of Christian theism and the conception of his counsel as controlling all things in the universe is the only presupposition which can account for the uniformity of nature which the scientist needs.”<sup>53</sup> Van Til means that no “fact” exists that is independent of the comprehensive knowledge and plan of God. The discerning reader will note that these metaphysical claims both derive from and undergird the fact that Scripture is God’s inerrant self-revelation and must function as one’s supreme *principium cognoscendi* if one is to successfully relate the Christian faith to science and history.

Therefore, submitting to Scripture’s revelation of God and to the God who speaks in the very words Scripture, we may probe additional questions from within the circle of this “revelational” epistemology. How do we know, for example, that God’s plan for the world is coherent? First, we know that it is *coherent* because Scripture reveals that the God whom Christians confess is exhaustively self-known, the only independent, self-contained, necessary, and divine being (Exod 3:14-15; Isa 41:4, 44:6; John 5:26; Acts 17:25).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Pinnock, “Three Views,” 67.

<sup>53</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed., ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 125.

<sup>54</sup> Much more could be said on this point, but we simply note that each of these descriptions touches on what theologians have called God’s *aseity*, a term that comes from the Latin *a se*, meaning “from or of oneself.” It refers to the fact that God is not dependent upon anything but himself to exist. He is utterly self-sufficient and self-existent. Aseity captures the truth that God’s eternal being and knowledge are *coterminous*. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*,

What is more, it is the creative power of the integrated mind of this triune God that gives coherence to his creation and thereby makes possible any empirical investigation of the world (Ps 33:11; Isa 46:8–11). Second, we *know* this truth only because, given the absolute nature of God’s being and knowledge, whatever “fact” exists for us to know, including our knowledge of the “fact” of God’s omniscience, is known by way of his sovereign and flawless revelation (Isa 8:20; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Pet 1:20–21). Here we begin to approach a truly Christian epistemology: because God alone is the transcendent reality who creates, sustains, reveals, and has already correlated the discrete phenomena of creation and its history by his exhaustive decree (Isa 46:10; Eph 1:11; Acts 17:26), for man to know anything at all, he must replicate, on a creaturely scale, the coherent knowledge of God. He must acknowledge the revelational character of all that he knows, including the fact of his knowing. Moreover, because it is the triune God’s comprehensive plan and knowledge of history, predicated upon his own exhaustive self-knowledge, that permeates and governs all fruitful investigations of the world, every fact that man encounters in the world presses home to him his inescapable dependence on the absolute, personal God of Christianity (cf. Ps 145:16; Zech 12:1; 1 Tim 6:17; Jas 1:17). Only this epistemological framework enables man to evade the whirlpool of chance, since it alone recognizes (and submits to) God as absolute Creator of all creaturely laws, logic, and life. Similarly, only God speaking in the Scriptures affords this God-centered epistemological framework, which, in turn, undergirds a Christian’s trust in the Bible as God’s inerrant Word.<sup>55</sup>

Under this “revelational” scheme, where every created fact is inextricably revelational of the triune God, the most basic notion common to all men is not that they have a bare capacity for inductive reasoning, but that they possess as his image a true knowledge of God whenever and wherever they know anything at all, including their own intuitive and immediate self-awareness (Rom 1:21a).<sup>56</sup> However, since the fall in Eden, the entrance

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vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008), 150–53, 191–96.

<sup>55</sup> Relevant here is Bavinck’s astute observation that attempts to construct a doctrine of Scripture on the basis of some extrabiblical authority are exercises in unbelief: “For those who make their doctrine of Scripture dependent on historical research into its origination and structure have already begun to reject Scripture’s self-testimony and therefore no longer believe that Scripture.” Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, 424.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the famous opening line in Calvin’s *Institutes*, virtually unchanged from the first edition in 1536, that knowledge of God is given in the act of self-knowledge. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (London: SCM, 1960), 1.1.1.

of sin has ravaged human consciousness (Rom 1:21–23; Eph 4:18), leading man to suppress—but never eradicate, since he, as image, remains utterly dependent on God—the knowledge of God impressed upon and within him. Entrenched in intellectual rebellion against God, sinful man now hates all supernatural revelation (whether Scripture or in nature) that confronts his claims to independent reasoning and attempts, as much as he is able,<sup>57</sup> to interpret the world about him independently of God in his self-revealed Lordship. The redemptive correction of this otherwise futile enterprise comes to man only by the gospel of inscripturated revelation as it is applied to him by the power of the Spirit working by and with the Word of God in the heart (cf. WCF 1.5). As a result, and as Van Til perceptively noted, the inerrant Scripture “stands before us as that light in terms of which all the facts of the created universe must be interpreted,” rendering Scripture utterly necessary for epistemological, empirical, as well as ethical, purposes.<sup>58</sup> The foregoing aspects—(1) the free and exhaustively determined counsel of God for the world predicated upon his own self-knowledge and aseity, (2) the dependence of every fact upon God to be what it is, and (3) the necessity of a regenerate consciousness in submission to the Scriptures as the Christian’s ultimately authoritative interpretive lens for all of human experience—provide three baseline requirements for a truly Christian and Reformed epistemology. They also underscore the normative role Scripture ought to have played in Pinnock’s attempts to positively relate Scripture’s self-witness to the empirically observable world.

## Conclusion

Clark Pinnock’s ultimate rejection of Scriptural inerrancy is a telling example of how a flawed epistemology not only generates theological missteps but also harbors them. By failing from the outset to submit his God-given tools of inductive and empirical analysis to the authority of Scripture and the unique epistemological framework it reveals, he ended up abandoning his earlier—and, as it turns out, merely formal—commitment to the Bible’s total truthfulness. Pinnock’s journey sheds light on the danger of divorcing

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<sup>57</sup> This caveat is crucial and refers to the gracious activity of God to restrain nonbelievers from consistently living out their epistemological rebellion while on earth. For what remains a useful summary of the doctrine of common grace, see the three points formulated by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church meeting in Kalamazoo in 1924, reprinted in John Bolt, “Common Grace and the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo (1924): A Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 35 (April 2000): 7–8.

<sup>58</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 129.

one's epistemological method from one's professed theological convictions and touches on the relentless temptation of the human heart to reason independently of God. To put the same point another way, Pinnock serves as a stark example of the potential ruin that awaits those who do not relate their epistemology properly to the task of theology and, more specifically, do not submit their thinking about Scripture to the rule of Scripture itself.

If in his later years Pinnock was willing to retract a few of his attacks on inerrancy,<sup>59</sup> perhaps in his earlier years he would have acknowledged that a bare confession of inerrancy is not enough. Perhaps he would have known that a true and lasting commitment to the inerrant Scriptures is the Spirit's gift to the Christian who submits his intellect to the God of Scripture and, in light of his glory, discovers that his words are "trustworthy and true" (cf. Rev 21:5; 22:6).

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<sup>59</sup> Noted in a letter from Dr. David M. Howard Jr. to the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), dated October 24, 2003, reporting on the proceedings of the ETS Executive Committee's investigation of Pinnock's theology. This report was kindly mailed to me by Dr. James Borland, the Secretary-Treasurer of ETS at the time of the investigation.

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# The “Presentation” of the Infant Jesus in Luke 2:22–24

MICHAEL C. MULDER

## Abstract

The “presentation” of the infant Jesus in the temple is a well-known image. But what is happening in Luke 2:22–24? The article explains that in contemporary literature such a presentation is not known. It does not belong to the purification of the mother, nor is it part of the ceremonies of circumcision or of the redemption of the firstborn son. A semantic analysis of *paristanai*, used in Luke 2:22, gives new theological insight in the meaning of the passage. Luke does not confuse different ceremonies, but shows how Jesus is placed in the service of the Lord, at the same time fulfilling the words he is quoting from Exodus 13.

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## Introduction

**A** few weeks after Jesus is circumcised, his parents take him to the temple. Luke describes this event and quotes two Old Testament texts to explain what happens there. His first quotation refers to the custom of redemption of a firstborn son (Luke 2:23; Exod 13). The second relates to the sacrifice that Mary must bring for her purification after the birth of her child (Luke 2:24; Lev 12:8). At first sight, it seems that Luke conflates these two matters into one event.

For exegetes, this immediately raises questions. Is Luke really describing the ceremony of Jesus's redemption as firstborn child here? If so, why is there no mention of the five silver shekels that were required to be paid? And why would Jesus have to be brought to the temple? According to the Torah, there really was no need for that. In addition, does Jesus indeed assume a role here in Mary's purification? It seems as if Luke presumes that Jesus, too, was ceremonially unclean.

In almost all Greek manuscripts, we read that "the days of *their* purification" had come; Luke seems to indicate that this purification does not just concern Mary. However, nowhere does the Torah point to a requirement that the newborn child also needed such purification.

And finally: Why would it be necessary that Jesus, for one or both of these rituals, be presented before the Lord in the temple? Not a single Jewish source is known that refers to such a presentation of children in the temple.

Does the evangelist not combine or confuse practices from different ceremonies here, conflating them into one single event? Many exegetes point to the fact that on the one hand Luke displays a good general knowledge of Jewish life, as evidenced by his specific reference to Old Testament texts, while on the other hand he does not seem to be well informed about the details of the specific rituals that were associated with these practices. The conclusion is usually drawn that Luke, notwithstanding his historical research, did not possess sufficient knowledge of Jewish law and its implementation in the temple, and the assumption is that Luke himself was not a Jew, or that he—Jew or not—was not very familiar with the details of the temple service, having grown up far from Jerusalem in the diaspora.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I will examine the question whether this conclusion—that Luke lacked exact knowledge of the Law—is justified.<sup>2</sup> In particular, I will

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<sup>1</sup> As does, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (London: Chapman, 1978), 448–49. He describes Luke as having "a strange combination of a general knowledge of Judaism with an accurate knowledge of details—an indication that the author scarcely grew up in Judaism or in Palestine." In a more recent article, Matthew Thiessen provides an overview of various perspectives, in which it is clear that Brown's view still counts as the *communis opinio*: "According to the scholarly consensus, Luke's belief that both Mary and Joseph (and/or Jesus, a possibility that Brown does not mention) need to undergo purification conflicts with Levitical law, which requires only the purification of the new mother (Lev 12:1–8)" (Matthew Thiessen, "Luke 2:22, Leviticus 12 and Parturient Impurity," *Novum Testamentum* 54 [2012]: 17). Thiessen then quotes Joseph B. Tyson, who describes this consensus as follows: "Here Luke probably misunderstood passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as Jewish practices, since he conflated two different religious duties and failed to mention the practice of redeeming the first-born son" (Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006], 99).

<sup>2</sup> This article was first written in Dutch and dedicated to professor Dr. Teus Hofman in G. C. den Hertog, M. C. Mulder, and T. van Spanje, *Acta: Bundel ter gelegenheid van het afscheid*

focus on the combination of the rituals of Mary's purification and of the infant Jesus's redemption, examining these practices with reference to the Scripture texts Luke quotes. I will point out that one clear reference to the Old Testament seems to be consistently overlooked in scholarly literature, the one that may be found in the verb *paristanai* (παριστάναι, usually translated as "to present").

When the use of this word, in its own context, is properly weighed in the exegesis of the pericope, several of the questions that are raised will be answered, and the scene in the temple takes on a profound theological significance.

### I. *Circumcision*

Before we look at the infant Jesus's coming to the temple, it is appropriate to pay attention to the preceding verse, the one that refers to his circumcision (Luke 2:21). This verse and the passage that follows are closely connected, in regard to both form and content.<sup>3</sup> Luke highlights that both circumcision and purification—together with their attendant rituals—had to be carried out at specific times, as stipulated in the Law of Moses. Mary and Joseph adhere to these regulations; they wait until the set time has elapsed, and then carry out the relevant requirements of the Torah.

Leviticus 12:31 prescribes that an infant boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. As a rule, that was (and still is) an occasion for a small celebration.<sup>4</sup> This was also the moment when the infant child received his name. Until the boy had received the sign of his inclusion in the covenant, he remained nameless. The boy drew his identity from what his circumcision confirmed: that YHWH wanted to be his God. The name he was given was connected with that declaration. This is also what happens to Jesus. He receives the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb: Jesus, the LORD saves (Luke 1:31).

Jesus is treated as any other Jewish male child. He receives the sign of God's covenant, as prescribed in the Law. And it is not until this moment that he is given his name, a name that has greater significance for him than

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van Prof. dr. T. M. Hofman als hoogleraar aan de Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn (Heerenveen: Groen, 2015), 146–57. I most heartily thank Aart Plug, who was willing to translate it in order for it to reach a broader audience. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:21 and 22 begin identically: *Και ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι*, "and when the days were completed"; next to this formal congruence, there is also one of substance: both verses show that what happened to Jesus was in accordance with what the Law prescribes.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Luke 1:59.

for any other child. His name is the program of his life. Here the manner in which he is to fulfill this program becomes visible. He fulfills it by standing fully next to his people: not above, but under the Law.<sup>5</sup>

He has come to fulfill the promise God gave to Abraham and his offspring, so that all nations might be blessed in him. Both covenant and circumcision are signs of that promise. The One who is to bring this blessing takes up his place fully within the covenant; hence, he also receives the sign of this covenant. Jesus's circumcision and the giving of his name visibly demonstrate what his incarnation is really about. Following his birth, this takes Jesus one step further than merely his assumption of humanity: Jesus assumes the humanity of *one who stands under the Law*, in complete solidarity, and in complete subjection to the consequences of transgressions against the Law, transgressions from which those who live under the Law can never deliver themselves. In this way, the manner in which he is to fulfill the program of his life becomes visible: he is united with, next to, and in his people as one of them.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Purification

The beginning of verse 22 echoes the first words of the preceding verse. The repeated use of the verb *plērousthai* (πληροῦσθαι, to be completed) heightens the suspense. Besides pointing to Mary and Joseph's waiting for the right prescribed moment, the use of this verb also echoes something of the deeper significance of what is about to happen. At critical moments in his account, Luke uses the verb to complete or fulfill, to show that the gospel is bound up in God's firm purpose and promises. We already heard this word from the mouth of the angel, who rebuked the priest Zechariah for not believing his words, which would be fulfilled in their time.<sup>7</sup> We often come across this verb as a signal word throughout Luke's work.<sup>8</sup>

After the child's circumcision, Mary had to wait another thirty-three days before her purification. Leviticus 12:2–4 prescribes this period of waiting

<sup>5</sup> In this connection, frequent references are made to Gal 4:4. For example, Jakob van Bruggen writes, "It is as if Luke 2 elaborates Galatians 4:4: 'God sent his Son, born of a woman (Luke 2:1–20), born under law (Luke 2:21–39), to redeem those under law'" (*Lucas: Het evangelie als voorgeschiedenis*, CNT 3 [Kampen: Kok, 1993], 85).

<sup>6</sup> This is also highlighted in Christ's first public act, when he leaves Nazareth and is baptized by John (Mark 1:9). He is baptized together with "all the people" (Luke 3:21). Thus it was fitting for him to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:15).

<sup>7</sup> Luke 1:10.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Luke 4:21; 9:31; 24:44; Acts 1:18; 3:18; 13:27 and συμπληροῦν in Luke 9:51 and Acts 2:1.

after the birth of a male child. Contact with blood and with the secret source of life causes cultic impurity. Through the rituals of purification all of life is permeated with an awareness of distance from holy God, a distance that can only be bridged by way of a sacrifice—the way appointed and given by God himself. On the fortieth day a sacrifice is to be brought: a sheep as a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtle-dove as a sin offering, to make atonement (Lev 12:6–7). Whoever is unable to pay for a sheep, may bring a second pigeon instead (Lev 12:8); clearly, that was the case with Mary (Luke 2:24).

There is nothing at all in the regulations in Leviticus to indicate that the child, too, had to be purified. Still, Luke writes that “the time came for *their* purification according to the Law of Moses.”<sup>9</sup>

There are exegetes who relate this plural not to Mary and Jesus, but to Mary and Joseph. After all, it is they who together bring the child to Jerusalem (v. 22). Joseph too—so goes the argument—had a part in bringing the sacrifice and can be considered as participating in Mary’s uncleanness.<sup>10</sup>

It is questionable whether this is what Luke means, and if he does, then it is clear that he deviates from what is prescribed in Leviticus. Most exegetes therefore regard this as a contrived solution. The first editions of the *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* followed this line of thinking, first proposed by Heinrich A. W. Meyer, but in a subsequent edition Bernhard Weiss dismisses it as “a mere contrivance.”<sup>11</sup> In Weiss’s view, it is more realistic to admit that here we have to do with an error the Gentile Christian author made about the ritual of purification.<sup>12</sup> John Nolland,

<sup>9</sup> The great majority of manuscripts has *Και ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν*, i.e., with the plural *αὐτῶν*. Only the Codex Bezae has the masculine singular *αὐτοῦ*, while a very few non-Greek manuscripts have the feminine singular. It seems obvious that here we encounter a later assimilation of the text to Lev 12:4. The use of the female singular, e.g., in the κην (and the Dutch Statenvertaling): “when the days of her purification ... were accomplished,” is not based on the textual evidence. Thiessen (“Luke 2:22,” 18–19) discusses the range of variants.

<sup>10</sup> This is the way in which especially the first editions of *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* regarded the plural. Heinrich A. W. Meyer, in the third edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1855), described it as a “synecdochic expression.”

<sup>11</sup> From the seventh edition onward, doubt is expressed concerning Meyer’s view, and the ninth edition (Bernhard Weiss, *Die Evangelien Markus und Lukas*, 1908) says: “The hypothesis of a synecdoche, insofar as Joseph contributed to the presentation of the one who was bound with him ... or had to worry about fulfilling the legal duty ... is simply an excuse.”

<sup>12</sup> Weiss, *Markus und Lukas*, speaks of “a mistake of the Gentile-Christian author about the purification offering.” Over against that, Darrell L. Bock defends the reliability of the Lukan account, and attempts to show from the Mishnah that a husband could become ceremonially unclean by assisting with the birth, in which case Joseph also would have had to undergo purification after forty days (*Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 92). However, the references quoted from m. Niddah 1:3–5; 2:5; and 5:1 do not demonstrate that. From an entirely different perspective, Fred Strickert writes that Joseph was as much involved with the sacrifice as Mary was: “One can only conclude that Luke saw a role

however, is not prepared to call this a misunderstanding. He takes the view that here Luke “speaks loosely of the purification as a family matter.”<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, then, this statement is about Joseph and Mary, while on the other hand this solution leaves open the possibility that Luke certainly did understand that there was no need to bring a sacrifice for Joseph. It must be said, though, that this solution is still awkward and speculative.<sup>14</sup>

Many other exegetes, then, choose rather to link the plural to Mary and Jesus. A small number suggest that this is related to Greek ways of thinking, in which both mother and child were regarded as unclean.<sup>15</sup> However, the clear reference to the temple and to what is taking place there does not point to a Hellenistic background. Most exegetes presume that here Luke conflates various reasons for bringing a sacrifice.

Usually, three different ceremonies are thought to have been brought together: Mary’s purification, the infant Jesus’s redemption, and the presentation of the child in the temple. Hence, when Luke refers to “their purification,” he could mean that in these ceremonies in which the infant Jesus has a part, the child, too, in a certain sense undergoes purification. This purification might consist of the payment of a price for redemption, or in a ceremony that was part of his presentation in the temple.<sup>16</sup>

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for Joseph in the purification. The new reality, brought about by the presence of the child Jesus, required a totally new approach to the law” (Fred Strickert, “The Presentation of Jesus: The Gospel of Inclusion,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22 [1995]: 36). Basing his argument on the plural in Luke, Strickert defends an entirely new approach to the Law, in this case linked to a specific gender theology. However, he reads more into the text than is exegetically defensible.

<sup>13</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:50*, WBC 15a (Dallas: Word, 1989), 117.

<sup>14</sup> A quite different approach can be found in the Roman Catholic tradition, which sometimes gives a Mariological interpretation to the plural. In this view, “their purification” refers neither to Mary and Joseph, nor to Mary and the Child, but only to Mary, in whom the whole church is represented; that is why purification for Mary was necessary, according to the Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis in *Maria in Sacra Scriptura: Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani in Republica Dominicana anno 1965 celebrati* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1967), 294–95: “Luke’s text is first of all testifying that Jesus is the Messiah. But indissolubly with this scope he combines the proclamation of Mary as offering and suffering with him, in the name of Mankind (as their head, representing the church and all men). Thus Mary, the mother of our Savior, is acting here as Mother of Mankind and as Mother of the Church.”

<sup>15</sup> Michael Wolter: “Possibly the Greek conception is in the background, according to which mother and child become unclean through the birth” (*Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 135). Nolland, too, mentions the possibility that Luke’s language is “an accommodation to a Hellenistic manner of speaking” (*Luke 1–9:50*, 117).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, I. Howard Marshall: “It is most likely that Luke has run together the cleansing of the mother and the offering of the child into one act” (*Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 116), and François Bovon: “The expression [‘their purification’] is only to connect [Mary’s] ‘purification’ and [Jesus’s] ‘presentation’” (*A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, trans. Christine M. Thomas, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress,

There is, however, a problem: the prescriptions for redemption do not include the bringing of a purification sacrifice. Exegetes who become more specific on this point therefore prefer to point to the presentation of the child in the temple.<sup>17</sup> In order to determine whether this "presentation" in the temple may in a sense be regarded as a purification, we first need to have a clearer view of what exactly is meant by it.

### III. *Presentation in the Temple?*

Luke links Mary and Joseph's journey to Jerusalem to present the infant Jesus to the Lord with a free rendering of some verses from Exodus 13. There we read that all males<sup>18</sup> that open the womb<sup>19</sup> belong to the Lord<sup>20</sup> and are therefore to be set apart to him.<sup>21</sup> For an animal, this setting apart usually means that it is to be killed, or that another animal is to be sacrificed in its place.<sup>22</sup> Firstborn children, however, had to be "redeemed."<sup>23</sup> We read in Numbers 18 what exactly this redemption of a human firstborn consisted of. Moreover, in this chapter a distinction is made between clean and unclean animals. All firstborn males are to be set apart to the Lord. This means that, in the case of a clean animal, it was to be sacrificed to him. Unclean animals

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2002], 99). Van Bruggen follows a similar line in interpreting the reference to Lev 12:6: "Mother and child are closely connected, the child gets involved in the uncleanness of his mother" (*Lucas*, 88–89). While Van Bruggen correctly points out the special involvement of Jesus in Mary's impurity, he does not offer a satisfactory explanation why Jesus should therefore have been taken to the temple "according to the Law." Bock raises the possibility that "Luke is alluding in verse 22 to all the sacrifices involved in the three ceremonies and that those offerings, some hers and others theirs, are combined" (*Luke*, 92). Similarly, James T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 75: Luke "fuses two rituals."

<sup>17</sup> "Under καθαρισμός αὐτῶν [their purification] the narrator apparently understands in imprecise and broad terms the entire path to the temple. Above all the 'presentation' of the first born, which is given as the main reason for the trip to Jerusalem (v. 22b)" (Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HThKNT 3.1 [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1984], 121). Hans Klein writes in a comparable manner about Joseph and Mary's journey to Jerusalem: "They connect the purification of the mother at the birth of the first child (Lev 12) ... with a presentation of Jesus" (*Das Lukasevangelium*, KEK [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006], 145).

<sup>18</sup> πᾶν ἄρσεν in Luke 2:23, cf. Exodus 13:12, 15, in LXX: πᾶν ... τὰ ἀρσενικά.

<sup>19</sup> διανοίγον μήτραν in Luke 2:23, cf. Exod 13:2: πᾶν πρωτότοκον πρωτογενές διανοίγον πάσαν μήτραν (cf. Exod 13:12 and 15).

<sup>20</sup> τῷ κυρίῳ κληθήσεται in Luke 2:23, cf. in Exod 13:2: ἐμοί ἐστιν.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. ἀγιάσον μοι in Exodus 13:2 and ἀγιάσεις τῷ κυρίῳ in Exod 13:12, interpreted in Exod 12:15 as λυτρώσομαι.

<sup>22</sup> The firstborn of all livestock (in principle, of clean animals) shall be the LORD's (Exod 13:12), while every donkey's foal shall be killed or redeemed by a clean animal (Exod 13:13).

<sup>23</sup> Exod 13:15. How that is to be done is not recorded. Exod 34:19–20 repeats this prescription word for word, with the addition that one could not appear before the face of God empty handed.

were to be redeemed by paying a certain sum of money. Firstborn male children also, rather than being sacrificed, were to be redeemed by paying five shekels “according to the shekel of the sanctuary.”<sup>24</sup>

Exegetes attempt to find a link between this redemption and the presentation in the temple of the child. Some suggest a specific ceremony, known to everyone at the time, in which the child was dedicated to the Lord.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes this is thought to be combined with a ceremonial redemption. Raymond Brown even identifies the presentation in the temple and this redemption as one and the same thing.<sup>26</sup> In this view, Luke here describes a presentation in the temple, as was customary for the dedication of all firstborn.<sup>27</sup> Whichever way this combination is interpreted, such a presentation or offering is often regarded as a separate cultic ritual, even though views may differ as to whether Luke was correct in linking this act to the sacrifice of purification.

It is especially in religious art that this motif has found broad acceptance. Since medieval times, the presentation in the temple has been a favorite theme, sometimes characterized as “the presentation of the firstborn in the temple.”<sup>28</sup> Many exegetes will have a mental picture of this occasion, often inspired by the visual representation of a well-known artist. Such a mental picture unavoidably evokes the idea of a separate, concretely visualized ceremony that took place in the temple.

<sup>24</sup> Num 18:16; up to the present day, that is a substantial amount.

<sup>25</sup> Van Bruggen: “The presentation of the child to the Lord would have been consisting in its dedication to the priest” (*Lucas*, 88). Seakle Greijdanus: “The same ceremony has been applied to many Israelite boys” (*Het evangelie naar Lucas*, KV [Kampen: Kok, 1941], 71). See also Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 118, who identifies next to the sacrifice a separate act of presentation “to consecrate Him to the service of God.”

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 447: “There was the consecration or presentation of the child to the Lord.” A little further on, he uses the words “presentation” and “redemption” to denote one and the same ceremony: clearly, he regards the redemption ritual and the presentation in the temple as the same thing.

<sup>27</sup> “This consecration [of the firstborn by means of their redemption] was called ‘presentation’ and meant that the child was dedicated to the Lord and handed over for the service of the temple” (Fritz Rienecker, *Das Evangelium des Lukas*, WS [Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1959], 65). Jos Keulers, *De evangeliën volgens Marcus en Lucas*, BNT 2 (Roermond: Romen & Zonen, 1951), explains that the firstborn were presented in the temple one month after birth, as a sign of their dedication. However, he notes that there was no requirement that they be brought to the temple for this.

<sup>28</sup> Heidi J. Hornik and Mikael C. Parsons, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s Presentation in the Temple: A ‘Visual Exegesis’ of Luke 2:22–38,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 28 (2001): 31–46; their connection of the history of the exegesis of this passage with its portrayal in Christian art is interesting. From the fifth century onward, the Western church celebrated the feast of Mary’s purification. Later, this met with theological objections, since a pure virgin ought not to have needed any purification. These objections were refuted in the twelfth century, by Thomas Aquinas among others, who indicated that this was an example of the virgin’s humility, as well as of Christ’s assent to the law.

However, the question may be asked whether such a practice actually existed at that time, a specific act that could be described as a "presentation to the Lord": a dedication before the priest connected either to the purification ritual for the mother, or to the redemption ritual for the child. The answer to such a question is quite clear: as far as we know, it was not the case. "Extraneous sources know of no such practice."<sup>29</sup> Schürmann sets out the facts clearly in his commentary, at the end of a paragraph entitled "Jesus's presentation in the temple," where he writes: "That a first born male child would be 'presented' before the Lord was not prescribed, and is not attested in any source."<sup>30</sup> A practice that could be described as a presentation in the temple was completely unknown within the Jewish world of that time.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, only two known motifs to which Luke can point remain: Mary's purification in the temple and the redemption of the firstborn. The remarkable thing is that these two events are connected: on the one hand the child had no role in the purification, whereas on the other the ritual of redemption, to which the quotation from Exodus 13 indirectly refers, did not have to take place in the temple.

#### IV. *Redemption*

Herman Strack and Paul Billerbeck's exhaustive *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* indicates that while the redemption of first-born usually did not take place in the temple, it was possible. The only

<sup>29</sup> Jacob Mann, "Rabbinic Studies in the Synoptic Gospels," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924): 329: "Apparently, Luke refers here to a general custom in the time of the second Temple to present there the first-born sons. For Luke does not suggest that the case of Jesus was exceptional. Extraneous sources, however, know of no such practice."

<sup>30</sup> Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 1:121–22. The only exegete who believes he can point to such a practice is Nolland, who refers to Neh 10:35–36 (*Luke 1–9:50*, 117). There, the people of Israel commit themselves in a profession of renewed obedience, closely linked to the reconstruction of the new temple, to bring their firstborn sons to "the house of our God." Within the situation of the newly rebuilt Jerusalem it is quite understandable that the people stated their intention to bring the price of redemption, which was to be paid to a priest, to the temple. However, there is no mention here of an attendant "presentation ceremony" either.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, together with others, proposes another motif that may have played a role here: "the real model for the presentation motif is the story of Samuel" (*The Birth of the Messiah*, 450). It is indeed true that Luke 1 and 2 contain a number of allusions to the story of Hannah and Samuel. However, Luke's choice of words in describing the visit to the temple bears no resemblance to 1 Samuel 1:28: *καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν τῷ κυρίῳ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἅς ἐζη αὐτὸς χρῆσιν τῷ κυρίῳ*. This text deals with "giving him to the Lord," "in the service of the Lord," and the specific terminology that Luke uses is not present here. It would be an overstatement if, as Brown does, Luke's lack of clarity comes about because of the conflict between the "redemption" motif and that of giving him to the service of the Lord, as was the case with Samuel. Nolland rightly notes that the "allusion remains secondary" (*Luke 1–9:50*, 117).

prooftext to show this, however, is Luke 2:22–23.<sup>32</sup> It seems, then, that we are dealing here with a quite unique situation.

To gain a good sense of this uniqueness, we ought first to clearly understand the manner in which a firstborn son was to be redeemed. This ceremony still exists in Jewish practice.<sup>33</sup> One month after the birth of the child a priest pays a visit to the family.<sup>34</sup> He points to Exodus 13, which describes the background to the law of the firstborn, then he asks the father whether he wants to give his son to the priest or to redeem his baby for the required amount. The background of Exodus 13 is very meaningful. The people of Israel are no better than the Egyptians, who resisted God's command to let his people go. This, in essence, explains the practice of redeeming the firstborn: God could with equal right have destroyed all of Israel's firstborn, when his angel went through the land on the night of the Passover. His people need constantly to be reminded that God himself, out of pure grace, has provided an alternative. On the night of that first Passover, it was a slaughtered lamb, the blood of which had to be smeared onto the doorposts. The sacrificial animal was brought to God in place of the life of the firstborn son, who as firstborn represented, in a sense, all of their offspring. Since that first Passover night in Egypt, the reality has remained the same. Even after God accepted this sacrifice, the firstborn remained set apart as holy to the Lord. That is what Exodus 13 emphasizes, following on from the account of the exodus in the preceding chapter.

This is what is brought into remembrance with the ceremony of redemption. That such redemption is possible still relates to the alternative that God himself has provided. Numbers 3:11–13 explains that it is the ministry of the Levites that makes it possible for the firstborn to be redeemed. God has taken them into service in the place of Israel's firstborn, those who were rightfully his. It is only because the tribe of Levi has been set apart to stand in the service of the Lord that the redemption of the firstborn from the other tribes is possible. Because the Levites have been given to God every firstborn son in Israel, the beginning of every family's future, can stay alive.

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<sup>32</sup> "The ransom money could be paid in the whole country to any priest. That it could happen in the temple as well together with the bringing of the child and occasionally of the purification offering of the mother appears from Luke 2:22–23" (Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* [Munich: Beck, 1983], 2:120).

<sup>33</sup> For the manner in which this ceremony has developed within present-day Jewish life, see for example Dan Cohn-Sherbock, *Judaism: History, Belief and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 534.

<sup>34</sup> This period of one month is mentioned in Num 18:16.

This is the context of the words to which Luke refers: all firstborn males shall be set apart as holy to the Lord.

### V. *Brought to Stand before the Lord*

Exegetes might find it remarkable that Luke does not mention the act of redemption itself and that he only quotes words that form the backdrop for this event. However, this begins to make sense when we examine the context of the words Luke uses to indicate the "presentation of the child to the Lord": *paristanai tō Kuriō* (παριστάναι τῷ Κυρίῳ, literally "to be brought to stand before the Lord"). Is Jesus really being redeemed here, or is something else going on? As has already been pointed out, the problem is that *paristanai* does not occur in relation to any specific ritual act that took place in the temple, nor is it connected anywhere at all to the ritual of redemption.

On the other hand, it turns out that this verb is frequently used in connection with the Levitical service. In Deuteronomy 10:8 we read that the tribe of Levi was set apart to "stand before the Lord" (*paristanai enanti Kuriou*). This verse explains that to "stand before the Lord" means: to stand before him to serve him. In Deuteronomy 18:5 and 7 we read that the sons of Levi are said to stand before the Lord, using the same standard expression *paristanai tō Kuriō* and *enanti Kuriou*, respectively. In various other places, it becomes apparent that the verb is a technical term for the priestly ministry.<sup>35</sup> In addition, it occurs with a related meaning in connection with the service of other office-bearers. Especially in the case of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, we regularly encounter *paristanai* in the standard expression "to stand before his face" when they indicate that they are acting in the service of the Lord.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Deut 17:12: the priest stands before the LORD, which means that he is in God's service, τοῦ ἱερέως τοῦ παρεστηκότος (derived from παριστάναι) λειτουργεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ). Judg 20:28: the priest Phinehas stands (παρεστηκώς) before the ark of the covenant. Jer 35:19 (LXX 42:19): the promise to the Rechabites that there will always be a son of Rachab to stand before the face of God (παρεστηκώς κατὰ πρόσωπόν μου). Zech 4:14: the two anointed who stand before the Lord (παρεστήσιν τῷ κυρίῳ). Cf. apocryphal Judith 4:14: temple servants who all stand before the Lord (οἱ παρεστηκότες ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἱερεῖς) and Judith 11:13: the priests who stand in Jerusalem before the face of the Lord (τοῖς παρεστηκόσιν ... ἀπέναντι τοῦ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ). Hence Paul uses this term in his application of priestly service to the life of believers (Rom 12:1), where he describes priestly service as standing before God: παριστάναι τῷ θεῷ, compare παριστάναι in Rom 6:13, 16, 19, and presumably with the same meaning in Col 1:22, 28 and 2 Tim 2:15.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Kgs 17:1: ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ, ᾧ παρέστην ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, ditto in 1 Kgs 18:15, 2 Kgs 3:14 and 5:16.

Luke uses this verb once earlier in his Gospel, before he uses it to indicate Jesus's first appearance in the temple. It comes from the mouth of the angel Gabriel, just as it did from Elijah and Elisha, to indicate his direct service before God: "I stand in the presence of God."<sup>37</sup>

The expression usually translated as "to be presented to the Lord" literally says, "to be brought to stand before the Lord," which thus means to stand in his service. It can be used this way in numerous contexts, but especially to describe the Levitical and priestly service in the temple.

When this background of *paristanai* is taken into account, we discover in Luke 2:22 something that is quite different from a customary ritual. It was normal only for the Levites to be "brought to stand before the Lord" in the place of the firstborn of the people. It is because the Levites stand before the Lord to serve him, that the rest of the people of Israel are kept alive through the redemption of their firstborn.

And now comes Jesus. He is no Levite. And still, says Luke, his parents take him to the temple to "bring him to stand before the Lord." In this way he confirms the truth of the most original meaning of the words of Exodus 13: he will be set apart for the Lord. He does not need to be redeemed for that. He does not need the tribe of Levi for that, either. It is just the other way around.

Luke makes a unique connection between Jesus's *paristanai*, his being placed in the service of the Lord, and the fulfillment of the words of Exodus 13.<sup>38</sup> He traces Jesus's ministry not through Levitical descent, but directly back to Exodus 13:2. Since Jesus from infancy has been placed in the Lord's service, the words of Exodus 13 become fully true in him. And because he is fully consecrated to the Lord, he is able to fulfill this *paristanai* as God originally intended it. In his ministry he has not only come, as the Levites

<sup>37</sup> Luke 1:19: ὁ παρεστηκώς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. Compare the use of *paristanai* for the service of God in heaven in Dan 7:10; Zech 4:10; 6:5; 4 Maccabees 17:18 and for the service of the angels in Matt 26:53.

<sup>38</sup> There are more exegetes who have emphasized that Jesus here is consecrated to God in a unique manner, and in this way has been placed in the service of God. However, the connection with the fulfillment of the Levitical ministry through the words *paristanai τῷ θεῷ* is, regretably, then not made. Van Bruggen correctly links the setting apart of the firstborn with being "placed before the Lord" in a special service to God (*Lucas*, 87). However, he intentionally leaves open the question whether Jesus needed to undergo redemption or not. Van Bruggen suggests that if Jesus had descended from the tribe of Levi, as Luke seems to indicate, there would have been no need for such redemption. At the same time, he points out that this has no bearing on what Luke is saying, since the evangelist's point was the specific act of consecration, by a priest, of the child. If, as I have concluded above, Luke is indicating that Jesus has fulfilled the Levitical ministry through his own *paristanai τῷ θεῷ*, then the reason why he did not need to be redeemed is quite different. In fact, then, he is consecrated as a Levite in the absence of a Levitical genealogy; a Levite after the order of Exodus 13.

did, to stand in the place of all the firstborn, who otherwise would have had to die. He takes this substitutionary work of the Levites a step further. He also comes to stand in the place of the Levites themselves.<sup>39</sup> That is why he was not redeemed, because in him the deepest meaning of the words of Exodus 13 becomes true. In him they take on a substitutionary character, just as the Levites had a place as substitutes for all the firstborn. In this manner he is set apart to stand before the Lord in the place of the whole people.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

In this short passage dealing with Jesus's infancy we encounter two aspects of his work that had evidently already begun when he was an infant. He comes to stand next to his people, under the Law. This becomes clear in his circumcision and also in the manner in which he is connected, in the same breath, with the impurity of his mother. For him, too, the door to the temple can only be opened after a sacrifice of cleansing is brought. But for him this uncleanness is not something that is beyond his power to remove. This becomes evident from the second thing that Luke writes about him. He is set before his people to stand before the face of God for them, to fulfill in their place their service to God. This second scene is not some sweet "presentation" in the temple: it is Luke's portrayal of the confirmation of

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<sup>39</sup> Théodore Köhler highlights this substitutionary aspect of the role of the Levites: "In particular, he purifies the sons of Levi who took the place of the firstborn, thus he purifies, redeems his entire people" ("Pour le présenter au temple," in Ferdinando Bergamelli, Mario Cimosà, *Virgo fidelis: Miscellanea di Studi Mariani in onore di Don Domenico Bertetto* [Roma: C.L.V.-Edizioni liturgiche, 1988], 519). Köhler, however, links this role not to the verb *παριστάναι* but to the significance of the feast of Jesus's presentation the temple (in the Eastern church, the feast of *Hypapante*), which he regards, among other things, as a fulfillment of Mal 3:1.

<sup>40</sup> Luke's comment in 2:27 that Jesus's parents brought him to the temple to "do for him according to the custom of the law" appears to be at odds with this interpretation, which highlights the unique character of what took place in the temple. Is Luke here alluding to a specific practice, a "presentation" in the temple that was done with other firstborn boys as well? The word that is translated here as "custom," *τὸ εἰθισμένον*, does not appear anywhere else in the NT. Here, Luke does not write *κατὰ τὸ ἔθος*, as he does, for example in Luke 1:19. The verb *ἐθίζειν*—from which *τὸ εἰθισμένον* is derived—occurs several times in the LXX, as does the noun *τὸ ἐθισμός*. This is often used as a translation of the Hebrew *חֻשְׁבֵּן*. In addition to the meaning of "custom," this word may also convey aspects of "ordinance" or "jurisprudence." In 2 Maccabees 4:11 *ἐθισμούς* even indicates completely new ordinances. It seems likely that the prevailing translation of Luke 2:27 is colored by the belief that it referred to a commonly understood practice. We could with equal justification translate the sentence *καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσαγαγεῖν τοὺς γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου περὶ αὐτοῦ* in a manner which emphasizes its unique character: "when the parents brought the child Jesus, to do for him according to what had been laid down (or decreed) concerning him in the Law."

his priestly service so soon after his birth. In Jerusalem, in the temple, he is confirmed in his office as substitute. It is because of his being set apart to stand before God that there is a future for Israel and for the nations.

# From Ignominy to Glory:<sup>1</sup> Jesus's Death and Resurrection in Calvin's *Harmony of the Gospels*

W. GORDON CAMPBELL

## Abstract

In the final fifty pages of Calvin's *Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels* the Reformer expounds, in eleven sets of parallels, the Synoptic accounts of Jesus's death and resurrection (Matt 27:45–28:20, Mark 15:33–16:20, and Luke 23:45–24:53). This article seeks to commend the usefulness of Calvin's exposition for contemporary readers by means of a digest in which significant elements for each section are drawn out, their chief exegetical and theological emphases highlighted, and the main qualities of Calvin's work identified. The conclusion considers both the merits and limits of Calvin's harmonization, offering suggestions on how scholars and believers might complement Calvin when reading or studying the Synoptic Gospels today.

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<sup>1</sup> My title draws on Calvin's own words: he calls Jesus's burial (Matt 27:57–61 & par.) "a transitional passage from the ignominy of the cross to the glory of the resurrection." John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke*, trans. A. W. Morrison and T. H. L. Parker (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1972), 3:215–16; hereafter simply *Harmony*.

## Introduction

In the summer of 1555 John Calvin published a lengthy and energetic *Harmony* of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in Latin and French simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> In its introduction Calvin expresses his debt to Martin Bucer, the Strasbourg Reformer whom he assisted for three formative years and whose 1527–28 commentary on the Gospels Calvin is self-consciously emulating: “I freely confess ... that the method derives from imitation of others. I have particularly copied Bucer, that man of holy memory, outstanding doctor in the Church of God, whom I judge to have pursued a line of work in this field which is beyond reproach ... [and whose] industry and research have given me considerable assistance.”<sup>3</sup>

Attempts at bringing the Gospels’ individual portrayals of Jesus together into one more or less continuous account largely ceased in the post-Enlightenment period, with harmonization giving way to differentiation. Today we are accustomed to discerning and prizing the distinctive notes and cadences in each evangelist’s unique melody for representing Jesus’s words and deeds; we appreciate their counterpoint and enjoy their polyphony. The unison singing characteristic of Calvin’s *Harmony* is correspondingly unfamiliar, perhaps even unexpected: for while substantial agreement typifies the heart of the Synoptic testimony,<sup>4</sup> the unique perspectives of Matthew, Mark, and Luke also join with those of John to enhance and enrich a blended diversity in the fourfold Gospel expounded, celebrated, and applied in Reformed churches today.

By means of the following digest of the closing fifty pages of the *Harmony*, I hope to capture the essence of Calvin’s approach and illustrate its enduring value for contemporary readers of the Gospels.<sup>5</sup> In my conclusion I will then reflect briefly on how to compensate for its limitations. I have reflected on Calvin’s *Harmony* and its portrayal of Jesus before, surveying the Reformer’s treatment of five prominent phases in the Synoptic story of Jesus: the

<sup>2</sup> *Harmonia ex tribus Euangelistis composita, Matthaeo, Marco & Luca*; and *Sur la Concordance ou Harmonie composée de trois évangélistes, àçavoir S. Matthieu, S. Marc et S. Luc*. Morrison and Parker’s translation is from the Latin, whose final edition appeared in 1563. For the French I have consulted the 1561 French edition by Conrad Badius, Geneva (republished; Paris: Librairie de Ch. Meyrueis et Compagnie, 1854–55), available online at <http://www.unige.ch/theologie/cite/calvin/CommentairesNT.html>; Badius, in 1562, also published sixty-five sermons preached subsequently by Calvin on his *Harmony*.

<sup>3</sup> *Harmony*, xiv. He acknowledges, nonetheless, that his exegesis may disagree with Bucer’s!

<sup>4</sup> As is well known, impressive agreement in both the wording and the ordering of material characterizes both the triple tradition (or Synoptic core) and the additional material common to both Matthew and Luke.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin explicitly invites readers to judge its worth. *Harmony*, xiv.

infancy narratives, the early ministry, the Sermon on the Mount or Plain, the later ministry, and Jesus's passion (up to and including the crucifixion).<sup>6</sup> I found that the red thread running through Calvin's composite portrayal of the evangelists' one Jesus is his resolute prioritizing of *the work of Christ for us and in us*: from the Gospels springs the gospel, with its pressing existential claims upon the reader, so that Christ the Mediator and Redeemer is also ours to be loved, imitated, and obeyed.<sup>7</sup>

Calvin expounds the death and resurrection of Jesus in eleven sets of parallels, accompanying the printed texts with a continuous commentary. In my digest below the applicable portions of the Gospels are in brackets, while a subtitle alerts readers to the main events involved in each section.<sup>8</sup> Covering Matthew 27:45–28:20,<sup>9</sup> Mark 15:33–16:20, and Luke 23:45–24:53, their subject matter moves from the death of Jesus to the women's flight from the empty tomb (in Mark), through the resurrection appearances narrated by Matthew or Luke (read in tandem with the longer ending of Mark 16:9–20), to the conclusions of these two Gospels.

## Digest

### 1. *Jesus's Death* (Matt 27:45–56; Mark 15:33–41; and Luke 23:44–49)

Calvin begins with the phenomena highlighted only by Matthew (Matt 27:45) as occurring *from the sixth hour*<sup>10</sup> to the ninth, seeing in them “superb

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Campbell, “Jesus of Geneva: Has Calvin's Redeemer Got Contemporary Relevance?,” in *John Calvin: Reflections on a Reformer*, ed. T. D. Alexander and L. S. Kirkpatrick (Belfast: Union Theological College, 2009), 77–87, and subsequently also, translated into Calvin's native French, “Jésus de Genève’: Pour le Rédempteur de Calvin, quelle pertinence aujourd’hui?,” *La Revue réformée* 61.4 (2010): 83–96. I revisited the topic in Gordon Campbell, “Jesus of Geneva. Encountering Christ with Calvin in the Gospels,” in *Living in Union with Christ in Today's World: The Witness of John Calvin and Ignatius Loyola*, ed. Brendan McConvery (Dublin: Veritas, 2011), 57–74.

<sup>7</sup> For more detailed assessment see the two publications in English (previous note), especially pages 86–87 (2009) and 70–73 (2011).

<sup>8</sup> Successive sixteenth-century editions of Calvin's *Harmony* printed parallel passages side by side, allowing readers to make their own observations: for the relevant English parallels (including John's Gospel), using the New International Version, readers might consult Orville E. Daniel, *A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), paragraphs 169–87; or for a contemporary online synopsis of the passages in question, in Greek and English, see, for example <http://www.textexcavation.com/synopticitemizedinventory.html#resurrection>.

<sup>9</sup> The entire *Harmony* follows Matthew's sequence. Calvin comments on Mark or Luke only when he regards their material as deviating sufficiently from Matthew's to require separate treatment.

<sup>10</sup> As all citation of the Gospel text is italicized by Morrison and Parker, I have followed the same practice when reproducing it here.

testimony” to Christ’s majesty over against “the disgrace of shame and contempt” characterizing the scandal of the cross.<sup>11</sup> The eclipsed sun powerfully tells hardened and blinded scribes and others that by crucifying Christ they have “shut out the light”; there is a lesson for readers: “the sacrifice by which we were redeemed was of no less importance than if the sun fell out of heaven.”<sup>12</sup> Christ’s cry (Matt 27:46) gives voice to his dread as he contemplates carrying “our guilt in soul as in body” and standing “trial at God’s tribunal” for us.<sup>13</sup> Calvin depicts Christ, harrowed by his Father’s absence, as fighting in faith and the power of the Spirit for a “confidence in the close assistance of God”; when, with his second cry (Matt 27:50), he can at last commit his spirit into his Father’s hands (Luke 23:46), we see how Christ trusts still in God as “the faithful Guardian of his soul,” adapting Psalm 31:9 for the horror of the “many deaths” that he must now die and for “the emergency of the moment.”<sup>14</sup> Calvin sees only *Christ for others* here, keeping “all the souls of his faithful in one bundle,”<sup>15</sup> along with his own, and entrusting himself and them to his Father: readers take note, Calvin says, and emulate his confidence. In the opened tombs (Matt 27:52–53) Calvin sees God’s demonstration that his Son “had entered death’s prison ... to lead all free who were there held captive”;<sup>16</sup> *their* resurrection relies on Christ’s own, as firstborn and firstfruits (cf. 1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:18), as they sample the resurrection life that the whole church will one day enjoy. What became of these individuals afterwards? Calvin recognizes the exegetical challenge: with no “easy or ready solution”<sup>17</sup> at hand, he assumes that these risen ones retained their resurrection life.

Calvin now synchronizes all three accounts. Whereas Mark has the soldier say “let be” (Mark 15:36), Matthew has others utter this (Matthew 27:49); these tally, for whoever started the mockery, everyone took it up “passing the jingle along the line.”<sup>18</sup> When Luke combines torn veil and eclipse as being prior to Jesus’s death, inverting their order, for Calvin this illustrates the evangelists’ regular unconcern for any exact sequence in time; thus Matthew’s earthquake and split rocks are simultaneous events.<sup>19</sup> In Mark 15:39 Calvin comments on a variant, likely influenced by Matthew

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<sup>11</sup> *Harmony*, 206.

<sup>12</sup> *Harmony*, 206–7.

<sup>13</sup> *Harmony*, 208.

<sup>14</sup> *Harmony*, 210.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Harmony*, 211.

<sup>17</sup> *Harmony*, 212.

<sup>18</sup> *Harmony*, 209.

<sup>19</sup> *Harmony*, 211.

27:50: the centurion—seeing not just how Christ died but also, *cried out*—was impressed by his “persistent endurance in calling on God’s name,” as well as by the accompanying “miracles in heaven.”<sup>20</sup> Luke’s version of the centurion’s response (*surely this was a righteous man*, Luke 23:47) has, for Calvin, “the same force”<sup>21</sup> as what Matthew or Mark say: in all three, the centurion’s prominent recognition of Christ as Son of God contrasts starkly with the crass stupidity of the Jewish authorities, as God makes sure that testimonies to his Son do not go unnoticed. Interestingly, for Calvin the centurion is merely a “momentary herald of the Deity of Christ,” whose words are “a sudden and passing impulse,”<sup>22</sup> while the crowds’ beating their breasts and going away (in Luke 24:48) represent “a public expiation ... for the unjust and wicked killing” that may or may not have produced “a better repentance”<sup>23</sup> subsequently.

For his concluding commentary on Jesus’s death, Calvin focuses on the women (Matt 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; and Luke 23:49). *As many women were there* (Matt 27:55), the texts simply warrant this; however, with gender equality still far distant, Calvin’s emphasis is nevertheless remarkable for 1555. The women are those “whom the Lord retained as witnesses”<sup>24</sup> in the absence of the male disciples. John perhaps stayed at the cross;<sup>25</sup> but where were the others? By deeming the women “worthy to be put before the men” some “serious criticism of the Apostles” by the evangelists is implied, linked to their absence: “It was a great disgrace,” he writes, “to withdraw from that scene, on which depended the salvation of the world.” By contrast, Calvin is impressed with the women: by their staying at the cross “their singular devotion to their master shone out the more clearly ... [and] they must have had a rare enthusiasm and fire in them.” He can still say condescendingly that “though we might not think there is so much authority in women, ... our faith ... rests on God, the true Author of their testimony!”<sup>26</sup> Even so, the female disciples remain crucial: sparing neither effort nor means to stick by Christ, they hang on his words to the bitter end and should be saluted as those on whom God prevailed “to be the witnesses of that story—without which faith we could not be saved.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Harmony*, 213.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Harmony*, 214.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* for all citations in this paragraph.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin admits, however, that the Synoptics are silent on this.

<sup>26</sup> *Harmony*, 214.

<sup>27</sup> *Harmony*, 215.

## 2. *Jesus's Burial* (Matt 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–44; and Luke 23:50–56)

For Calvin, here is testimony that Jesus “died a real death, on our account.” The nub is how “the curse which [God’s Son] had for a while undergone began to be lifted.”<sup>28</sup> Calvin sees providence at work in the intervention of Joseph, a noble and respected Jew who sought “to cover the shame of the cross with honourable burial” and took “very great risk” in so declaring his faith, thanks to “the hidden prompting of the Spirit”;<sup>29</sup> “God’s Son,” Calvin concludes, “was buried under divine persuasion by the hand of Joseph,”<sup>30</sup> who was “equal to the responsibility.”<sup>31</sup> A lesson may be taken from Joseph: “God shapes our hearts to new passions,” for just as Joseph boldly did his crucified Lord proper honor, so in light of his resurrection we ought to show “the same flourishing zeal for his glory.”<sup>32</sup> Both Mark 15:43 and Luke 23:51 spell out how Joseph *was looking for the Kingdom of God*—for Calvin “the highest commendation” he could be given, showing how he hoped in God’s promised redemption: the Reformer wonders how many in his own “unhappy generation ... in fact aspire to this hope, even in a moderate degree”;<sup>33</sup> to those who would profit from the grace of God, Calvin then offers Titus 2:11–13 as an incentive.

Noting how *Joseph took the body* (Matt 27:59), Calvin observes how the Synoptics (unlike John) say nothing about the unguents, merely narrating a decent burial in a linen shroud. Nevertheless, over and above Joseph’s actions Calvin detects God’s secret purpose in the “new and still unsullied tomb” given his Son: thus God “in his very tomb set out the newness of life.”<sup>34</sup> According to Matthew 27:61, *Mary Magdalene was there*: in both Matthew and Mark the women merely watch, while Luke’s addition of their intention to prepare spices and liniments speaks of “a better odour, which the Lord breathed into his dying,”<sup>35</sup> which will draw the women back to the tomb and to higher faith.

## 3. *The Next Day* (Matt 27:62–66)

This short narrative accounts for the placing of a guard at the tomb. For Calvin, Matthew’s main aim is to present “the incredible providence of

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<sup>28</sup> *Harmony*, 216.

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

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

<sup>31</sup> *Harmony*, 217.

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

<sup>33</sup> *Harmony*, 218.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

God, in proving the resurrection of his Son.”<sup>36</sup> Seeking to “suppress faith in a resurrection,” the authorities ironically facilitate it by placing witnesses by the tomb; it is as if God had hired them, using their efforts “to publish the glory of Christ, for when they found the sepulchre empty, they were left no chance of lying in denial of it”:<sup>37</sup> by keeping the tomb sealed, the soldiers also gave unintended testimony to resurrection when the body was not forthcoming. Pilate’s assent to the placing of the guard (v. 25), meanwhile, will only reinforce the limits set on the religious authorities’ attempts to twist the evidence. Calvin dwells on the words of the chief priests and Pharisees (Matt 27:63): “They actually name him a *deceiver* whose divine power and glory had so recently been displayed, with so many miracles.”<sup>38</sup> This is satanically inspired blasphemy, “(as it were) spitting in the face of God”; from it we should learn, on the contrary, “reverent, sincere attention”<sup>39</sup> and, rather than let their blasphemy trouble us, notice “the end to which God turns it,” namely, “to vindicate his Son.”<sup>40</sup>

#### **4. *Jesus’s Resurrection (Matt 28:1–7; Mark 16:1–7; and Luke 24:1–8)***

Calvin right away underlines the theological importance of Matthew’s account and its parallels, as “the closing passage of our redemption [and] our reconciliation with God ... [where] our righteousness came to be won and our access to heaven laid open.”<sup>41</sup> Turning once more to the women, he pinpoints the fundamental importance of their role. Even though the women belong to what Paul calls foolish and weak in the world (1 Cor 1:27)—we can almost see Calvin’s male readers smile—the lesson for all to learn is to “lay aside all pride, and submit to the testimony of the women,”<sup>42</sup> as the apostles did: Christ “gave them the message of the Gospel for the Apostles, making them their teachers ... honouring them with exceptional distinction, taking the apostolic office from the men for the moment and committing it to them.”<sup>43</sup> Here Calvin detects what he calls “Christ’s wonderful goodness,” which “shines out in presenting himself alive to the women with grace and courtesy, when they wrongly sought him among the dead.”<sup>44</sup> The women’s reward for coming to the tomb permits a further lesson to be

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<sup>36</sup> *Harmony*, 219.

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

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Harmony*, 219–20.

<sup>40</sup> *Harmony*, 220.

<sup>41</sup> *Harmony*, 221.

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

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Harmony*, 222.

drawn: even today, no-one will come to Christ by faith in vain. At this point, synoptic comparison also throws up a question: how many women were there? Comparing Matthew 28:1 (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary), Mark 16:1 (Salome), and Luke 24:5 (mentioning only *the women*) Calvin concludes that the evangelists are referencing a greater number by instancing a few.<sup>45</sup>

The women elicit further exegetical remarks. In Mark 16:3, which expresses the women's doubt, Calvin detects a sign of their "complete perplexity" and "holy excitement"<sup>46</sup> at the removed stone, as recounted by all three evangelists.<sup>47</sup> The *great earthquake* of Matthew 28:2, appropriately accompanying the hugely significant victory of Christ over death "on which all our salvation depends," is a portent alerting the women "to a new and unexpected work of God."<sup>48</sup> In the onlookers' quaking (Matt 28:4–5), Calvin highlights "two kinds of terror which Matthew contrasts":<sup>49</sup> the women's, soon to be calmed, is set over against the soldiers' "fright ... as great as the women's [which] they received no healing to relieve ... [since] only to the women did the angel say, *fear not*."<sup>50</sup> Calvin also spots the additional rebuke to the women in Luke 24:5 about seeking *the living among the dead*: the angel, he says, is further tweaking the women's ear! And when the angel says *go quickly, and tell his disciples* (Matt 28:7), this confers on the women God's "extraordinary honour" of witnessing to the apostles that Christ is risen—while Peter still hid for fear and for shame—and represents "the reward for their patience"<sup>51</sup> in attending the sepulcher. Their message was

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<sup>45</sup> Well aware that John's Gospel is also parallel at this point, Calvin considers apparent discrepancies. While Matthew and Mark have one angel, John and Luke have two: for Calvin this is synecdoche (the part representing the whole), with Matthew and Mark content to focus on the one angel who spoke. When Matthew mentions that *an angel sat upon the stone*, this might be either a case of *hysteron-proteron* (making something later come earlier) or an evangelist's typical unconcern for the order of events. The angel's appearance is an outward sign of God's glory, adapted to our human weakness: visible, it should direct our minds to God who is invisible—as "a taste of his spiritual essence, that we should seek him in Spirit" (*Harmony*, 224). Finally, in the Synoptics' failure to recount the race to the tomb between Peter and the other disciple (as found in John 20:1–12), Calvin also sees "nothing unusual for them." *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Harmony*, 223.

<sup>47</sup> Concerning when things took place, Mark's end of the Sabbath and dawning of the first day of the week (Mark 16:1) are one and the same: all three evangelists agree. In regard to the spices, "Luke's narrative differs considerably from Mark's" (*Harmony*, 222–23) by clearly distinguishing the preparation from the Sabbath rest prior to the setting out; nevertheless, for Calvin the same sequence of events is implied.

<sup>48</sup> *Harmony*, 223.

<sup>49</sup> *Harmony*, 224.

<sup>50</sup> *Harmony*, 225.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

nonetheless for Peter, whose “shameful lapse had need of special comfort ... however disgracefully and wickedly he had fallen.”<sup>52</sup>

### 5. *The Women's Return* (Matt 28:8-10; Mark 16:8-11; and Luke 24:9-12)

The Synoptics are silent, unlike John, about Mary Magdalene's first return to the city, announcing the disappearance of the body, relating only the women's “second return”<sup>53</sup> as they rush to obey the angel's commission. Christ meeting them so they could see him for themselves is “a singular mark of kindness”<sup>54</sup> designed to remove the lingering doubt in their *fear and great joy* (Matt 28:8), help them fully digest the angel's words, and achieve the peace of mind that the Spirit brings: only by such a meeting could their trembling fear and flight (Mark 16:8) be overcome; with this interpretation Calvin anticipates his commentary on the longer ending (vv. 9–20), viewed as canonical in his day.<sup>55</sup>

How is Christ's *don't hold on to me* (John 20:17), spoken to Mary, to be reconciled with the detail that the women *took hold of his feet* (Matt 28:9)? By Christ first allowing Mary to take assurance from touching him, then encouraging her to let go: in the fact that the women *worshiped him* Calvin also sees “a proof that their recognition was certain,”<sup>56</sup> while his command not to be afraid (Matt 28:10) bids the women—and us—“take courage, and dare to boast” in his resurrection.<sup>57</sup> By putting Peter's discovery at the tomb first, Luke 24:12 clearly reverses the narrative order, Calvin says, as confirmed by John's account; this alteration allows Luke “to underline the Apostles' hardness in scorning the women's words.”<sup>58</sup>

### 6. *The Guards' Report* (Matt 28:11-15)

Central to Calvin's focus here is the “reward paid out for perjury”<sup>59</sup> to some or all of the soldiers by the priests who, in order to buy a lie, “were forced to bribe [them] with a large sum” and thus get further mired in their sin and guilt; as a result, *this saying was spread abroad* (Matt 28:15). Calvin

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *Harmony*, 226.

<sup>54</sup> *Harmony*, 227.

<sup>55</sup> By regarding Mark 16:9–20 as Scripture, Calvin correspondingly fails to address various issues of interest to us: problems with the longer ending, the merits of any rival ending, the issue of a lost ending or a rationale for v. 8 being the original or intended Markan ending.

<sup>56</sup> *Harmony*, 227.

<sup>57</sup> *Harmony*, 228.

<sup>58</sup> *Harmony*, 229.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

sums up what God allows to happen here as “the final culmination of [his] vengeance in blinding the Jews” for willfully despising “their own Redeemer”: God might have prevented such a rumor from extinguishing “his Son’s glory”; instead we see him “loosing the reins on the wicked, that they may come out all the worse.”<sup>60</sup>

### **7. Jesus’s Appearance on the Emmaus Road (Mark 16:12 and Luke 24:13–30)**

Apart from a very brief reference in Mark 16:12, this story is unique to Luke. In partial explanation of differences between the evangelists, here as elsewhere Calvin detects the providential and guiding hand of a divine Author in their work: “the Spirit of God shared out the parts appropriately to each evangelist, so that what did not strike one or another may be learned from the rest.”<sup>61</sup> At the same time, this incident has a special point: the Lord’s reproof of his apostles’ slowness to believe. Insofar as *they communed with each other* (v. 14), Calvin pictures the two companions wrestling over “the scandal of the cross”; their desire to overcome it “showed Christ a means of approach,”<sup>62</sup> opening a door to him for the correction of their error. *Their eyes were holden* (v. 16) not because Christ’s bodily form had become unrecognizable but because the travelers’ own eyes were “checked”—as a reminder to us that “God keeps the use of [our faculties] in his hand”<sup>63</sup> and that, in our “wretched state of corruption,”<sup>64</sup> we only see anything clearly by “the wisdom of the Spirit.”<sup>65</sup> What Christ did for the two companions he must still do secretly for us today (v. 17): “he freely comes up to us and teaches us.”<sup>66</sup>

In light of Cleopas’s expressed hope (v. 21), Calvin detects a “godly man, caught between faith and fear,”<sup>67</sup> who knows the testimony that the tomb is empty and Christ risen but still struggles to overcome his fear. Calvin underscores the reprimand (v. 25), which shows how Christ might as well have spoken previously to “trees and stones,” so dull were his disciples at recalling his prediction of resurrection or grasping how the words of the prophets supported this. By contrast the walk (v. 26) brings them Jesus’s “generous explanation”<sup>68</sup> of how Messiah must suffer and die to expiate the world’s

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<sup>60</sup> *Harmony*, 230.

<sup>61</sup> *Harmony*, 231.

<sup>62</sup> *Harmony*, 232.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Harmony*, 233.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Harmony*, 234.

<sup>68</sup> *Harmony*, 235.

sin, removing the curse and clearing “the pollution of others by guilt imputed to himself”: Christ’s death is “the chief part of the redemption.”<sup>69</sup> This explanation, *beginning from Moses* (v. 27), “borrows from the Law and the Prophets the proof of his teaching,” because these preliminaries are needed for understanding the Gospel. Since Luke gives no detail of relevant Scriptures, Calvin supplies none but concentrates on defending the general fact that “Christ is rightly inferred from the Law, if we think how the covenant which God struck with the Fathers depended on a Mediator.”<sup>70</sup>

In his exposition of v. 28 Calvin deals with an old allegation: in making as if to go farther, does Christ engage in a pretense? If so, it is no greater than posing as a traveler in the first place; rather, suspense is maintained “till the time for his revelation was ripe,”<sup>71</sup> when *he took the bread* (v. 30), doing that which his disciples recognize would “remind and arouse their thoughts.”<sup>72</sup>

### 8. *Jesus’s Appearance in Jerusalem* (Mark 16:13–14 and Luke 24:31–40)

Previously God had obscured these disciples’ sight; now, “as far as was necessary for their witness to the resurrection, [Christ] let them see him” (Luke 24:31).<sup>73</sup> Their haste to share this news with the apostles in Jerusalem, for Calvin, “adds to the narrative.”<sup>74</sup> Mark 16:13 says that the eleven did not believe the two, whereas Luke 24:34 narrates a contrasting “reward of mutual confirmation.”<sup>75</sup> Calvin can explain the inconsistency: “the general statement includes a synecdoche,” for not all believe them and some still doubt—with “Thomas more stubborn than them all.”<sup>76</sup> Further differences between John’s and Luke’s accounts of Jesus’s next appearance, and Mark’s much briefer one, resist harmonization; but Calvin finds “no contradiction,”<sup>77</sup> unless one were to quibble over whether Jesus appeared after nightfall or late at night. As to whether the eleven were there (as Mark and Luke say), or Thomas was absent (as John declares), Calvin also sees no problem: eleven is “the number of the apostles”—even if one should be

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Harmony*, 236.

<sup>71</sup> *Harmony*, 237. Calvin considers it unnecessary to resort to Augustine’s more sophisticated reasoning here, involving tropes and figures of speech.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* Here, too, Calvin takes Luke’s words more simply and literally than Augustine or others as real bread for eating—rather than a symbolic offering, as though the companions now saw Christ in what Calvin calls a “spiritual mirror.”

<sup>73</sup> *Harmony*, 238.

<sup>74</sup> *Harmony*, 239.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Harmony*, 240.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

missing—while John may still preserve details that the others omit or Luke alone may refer to the disciples’ dread (v. 37). Terrified and troubled (v. 38) as they are, seeing they do not see: so Jesus says *see my hands* (v. 39), proving thereby for Calvin that Christ has a real body that may be touched.<sup>78</sup> Christ’s stigmata, testifying to his resurrection for us, are for Calvin temporary “left-overs of the cross” that Christ bore for a time “for the sake of his people.”<sup>79</sup>

### 9. *Jesus’s Final Words in Luke (Luke 24:41–49)*

Calvin begins with the apostles’ ongoing disbelief (v. 41), just as he will later highlight their failure to recollect both Jesus’s teaching and the supporting testimony of the Old Testament (v. 44). Interestingly, Calvin acknowledges (before dismissing) the kind of “curious questions” we might be tempted to formulate from the text’s silence: whether Christ digested the food, or what sort of nourishment his body got from it, “and what became of the excrement!”<sup>80</sup> For Calvin, the one who made all things could “reduce a morsel of food to nothing when it was his will”;<sup>81</sup> what we should ponder here, instead, is Christ’s extraordinary condescension in taking food “to persuade the disciples of his resurrection.”<sup>82</sup>

More decisive is the fact that Christ *opened their mind* (v. 45). The Reformer reads this as Christ beginning “to teach them inwardly, by his Spirit,” his outward teaching ministry having so far “made no headway”<sup>83</sup> with them. Calvin’s reader and the Reformed church may learn twin lessons: first, that the Spirit’s inner guidance must accompany Scripture for it to have any effect—for “the disciples did not have their minds opened to see God’s mysteries without assistance”; and second, that then as now the Spirit interprets only Scripture, not vain “revelations.”<sup>84</sup> Christ here was not merely “minister of the outward voice ... but reached into minds by his hidden power ... a sure proof of his Godhead.”<sup>85</sup> With the Spirit now at work in the apostles by Christ’s gift, he “gives a truly fruitful discourse on Scripture,”<sup>86</sup> in which *thus it is written* (v. 46) enshrines the principle of certain fulfillment,

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<sup>78</sup> This fact, he says, rules out any “transubstantiation of the bread into body, the local presence of the body” at the Supper. *Harmony*, 242.

<sup>79</sup> To suppose that in his resurrection glory he *remained* marked by the scars would, for Calvin, be “foolish, old women’s nonsense.”

<sup>80</sup> *Harmony*, 244.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Harmony*, 243.

<sup>83</sup> *Harmony*, 245.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Harmony*, 246.

with everything directed towards the key point that “Christ is the end and soul of the law.”<sup>87</sup> In essence, for Calvin Christ here teaches us to seek “the cause and ground of our salvation” in his death and resurrection—and only there—as the unique source “of our reconciliation with God and regeneration into new and spiritual life.”<sup>88</sup>

In announcing the preaching of repentance for forgiveness of sins to all nations (v. 47), Calvin sees Christ revealing “what he had concealed before, that the grace of redemption, brought by himself, is clearly for all nations, without distinction.”<sup>89</sup> Only following his resurrection is Messiah revealed as the Redeemer of all peoples: things begin in Jerusalem, for the Jews remain “in first rank” as having “the right of primogeniture”<sup>90</sup> (Jer 31:9), thus showing God’s covenant to be fruitful. Although the apostles *are witnesses* (v. 48), no “warrant to publish the Gospel” is given them as yet but merely a preparatory explanation about “new grace” to compensate for “their recent failure,” which incentivizes them for the forthcoming “mission of publishing eternal salvation to the whole world.”<sup>91</sup> As though anticipating the apostles’ sense of inadequacy for this task, Christ reminds them of the Father’s promise of the Spirit (v. 49): “putting himself in the place of the Father, [he] undertakes to perform it, thereby claiming again for himself divine authority.”<sup>92</sup> Calvin sees the command to stay in the city as “a useful test of their obedience”: although they now have the Spirit, and understand the Scriptures, before beginning to speak they must await Christ’s “good pleasure”<sup>93</sup> and a new endowment of power; the lesson for Calvin’s reader is that “we are taught by their example, not to attempt anything but at God’s call.”<sup>94</sup>

### 10. *Jesus’s Farewell* (Matt 28:16–20 and Mark 16:15–18)

Matthew 28:16 tells only “how the eleven disciples were appointed to their office,”<sup>95</sup> concentrating on “what affected us most,”<sup>96</sup> namely, the entitlement of Christ in his universal authority (v. 18) to commission the apostles. Concerning the evangelists generally, with their differing accounts, Calvin can therefore repeat how “the Holy Spirit who directed their pen was content

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> *Harmony*, 247.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> *Harmony*, 248.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> *Harmony*, 249.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

to bring in the whole by their joint testimony.”<sup>97</sup> Following Matthew’s emphasis, Calvin concentrates on Christ’s “supreme and truly divine power of command”—a post-resurrection authority sufficient for promising eternal life for “the whole human race”<sup>98</sup>—and on the apostles’ need to know that their Lord was fully in charge and thus well positioned for directing, and endowing them for, their difficult task. Accordingly, “the power [Christ] now took, when appointed Judge of the world,”<sup>99</sup> had him ascend to his Father “wearing the insignia of supreme king”: the apostles now knew that “their Champion sat in heaven, and that supreme power was given to him ... [to] rule over heaven and earth”;<sup>100</sup> this would be “more than enough ... aid for them, to overcome every obstacle.”<sup>101</sup>

Throughout his discussion of Matthew 28:19–20 (and Mark 16:16 in parallel) Calvin has in mind the apostolic task of faithfully transmitting what Christ commanded as “Master of his Church.”<sup>102</sup> From the injunction to teach (Matthew) or to preach the gospel (Mark) or observe all that the Lord commands (Matthew), Calvin deduces the apostolate to be “a responsible office” and essentially a “responsibility to teach.”<sup>103</sup> Here some of Calvin’s exegesis becomes polemical: such a task ought not to be usurped by “fake men” who “live at ease as kings”;<sup>104</sup> he is thinking of the papacy he knew and in particular of what he perceives to be the papal court’s intolerable temerity in masquerading as “heralds of the Gospel”<sup>105</sup> while failing to preach it. Remarkably, Calvin can nonetheless countenance a contrasting scenario: “We would readily suffer [the pope] to be the successor of Peter or of Paul if only he did not lord it over souls as a tyrant. ... The teachers set over the Church ... must themselves depend solely on the mouth of one Teacher, so as to win disciples for Him and not for themselves.”<sup>106</sup>

In the command to *make disciples of all nations* Calvin remarks how Christ “removes the distinction and equates Gentiles with Jews,” bidding his apostles “scatter the teaching of salvation throughout all the regions of the earth”<sup>107</sup> and so fulfill the prophecy of light to the Gentiles in Isaiah 49:6;

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Harmony*, 250.

<sup>100</sup> *Harmony*, 249.

<sup>101</sup> *Harmony*, 250.

<sup>102</sup> *Harmony*, 255.

<sup>103</sup> *Harmony*, 250.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. Calvin also concludes that “all sacrificers are degenerate, and lying, who are not engaged in the task of teaching.” *Harmony*, 251.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> *Harmony*, 255.

<sup>107</sup> *Harmony*, 251.

by *every creature* “Mark means the same.” How vital was this command is apparent to us, says Calvin, from the apostles’ later scruples: Gentiles might “pollute their doctrine” (Acts 10:28).

Doubtless encouraged by Mark 16:16’s evocation of both faith and salvation along with baptism, Calvin discusses the latter<sup>108</sup> with several distinct opponents in mind. First, “foolish men [who] devise various sacraments by their will,” without any “basis in the word”—still thinking of Rome, its “superstition” and “magical exorcisms.”<sup>109</sup> Second, “hypocrites”<sup>110</sup> who see only the outward sign but miss the need for accompanying faith or the teaching of the gospel. And third, and at most length, the Anabaptist view that baptism is only rightly administered where “faith has preceded it.”<sup>111</sup> Whatever the bearing of these controversies upon Calvin’s situation, he does not let them guide his exegesis: the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles is the context for this evocation of baptism, and Calvin expounds baptism *into the name of the Father* (Matt 28:19) in light of that. Christ seals with baptism “a mission of eternal salvation to be carried to all Gentiles,” for whom “the faith of the Word”<sup>112</sup> must indeed come first as the means whereby they are gathered into God’s people. For Jew or Gentile alike confidence comes “from Christ, their head, [because] the Father showed himself in the Son, his living and express image [and the Son] by the brilliant light of his Spirit, shone out upon the world.”<sup>113</sup>

In relation to the phrase *these signs shall follow them that believe* (Mark 16:17), Calvin directs his attention to miracles. During his ministry Jesus confirmed by miracles “the faith of his Gospel”;<sup>114</sup> now the risen Christ “extends the same power for the future”<sup>115</sup> when, despite his absence, miracles may confirm his resurrection or ratify the gospel as his followers do the same or greater things in his name (John 14:12). For Calvin miracles were intended to “give enough assurance for the gospel teaching at its outset, [but] their use ceased not long after, or at least, instances of them were ...

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<sup>108</sup> *Harmony*, 251–54.

<sup>109</sup> *Harmony*, 252.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* Calvin argues, essentially, that whereas “the faith of the Word” must indeed come first, as the means whereby *Gentiles* are gathered into God’s people, once gathered in—like Israel—they become *sons*, and the Father extends to “their sons and grandsons in the same way” the same covenant promise given to Abraham (Gen 17:7); he concludes, “I deny that baptism is unwisely conferred on infants; the Lord calls them to it, as he promises that he will be their God.” *Harmony*, 253.

<sup>112</sup> *Harmony*, 252.

<sup>113</sup> *Harmony*, 253.

<sup>114</sup> *Harmony*, 254.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

rare.”<sup>116</sup> While for Calvin miracles apparently do not still happen in 1555, he nonetheless rejects as a slander the charge that “our doctrine is without miracles.”<sup>117</sup> His main concern is spurious miracles—“empty fabrications,” “delusions,” and “impostures” that fool people: hadn’t Christ foretold (Matt 24:24) that “the kingdom of Antichrist would be full of lying signs?” Seeking for miracles, Calvin says, is a distraction from faith and the “proper proofs” on which faith relies; this emphasis may explain why the Reformer declines to say anything at all about picking up snakes or drinking deadly poison (Mark 16:18)!

### 11. *Jesus’s Ascension (Mark 16:19–20 and Luke 24:50–53)*

Where Matthew concentrates on Christ’s reign over the whole world, Mark mentions the ascension but, unlike Luke, not “the place and manner of it.”<sup>118</sup> *By led out until they were over against Bethany* Mark also has Jesus ascend from the Mount of Olives, the very place where he had set out for the cross. Only a few witnessed either Christ’s resurrection or ascension: this was so that both events would be “known more by the preaching of the Gospel than by the eyes.”<sup>119</sup> Luke’s *lifted up his hands and blessed* (Luke 24:50) attracts Calvin’s attention, for it makes the priests’ blessing by lifted hands (as practiced in ancient Israel) now properly Christ’s. Under the law priests had given blessing “in [God’s] name, as mediators,”<sup>120</sup> like Melchizedek to Abraham or the utterance *we bless you from the house of the Lord* (Ps 118:26). Thus Christ is “the true Melchizedek and eternal priest,”<sup>121</sup> in whom we “are blessed by God the Father” (Eph 1:3).<sup>122</sup> Seeing Christ bless the apostles publicly and solemnly in this way, Calvin concludes, is for all of us an invitation to go to him directly “for a share in the grace of God.”<sup>123</sup> Luke 24:52 notes how the apostles worship the ascending Christ—not merely, says Calvin, “as Teacher or as Prophet, not even as Messiah ... but as the King of glory, and revealed as Judge of the world.”<sup>124</sup> The apostles’ joy in continuing Temple worship (Luke 24:52–53) “is contrasted with their fear which previously kept them shut in, hidden, at home.” Luke’s brevity here is attributed by Calvin to the evangelist’s intention to develop his story

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> *Harmony*, 255.

<sup>118</sup> *Harmony*, 256.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> *Harmony*, 257.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. for all citations in this paragraph.

further in Acts. The remaining detail about the ascension is Mark's: since Christ *sat down at the right hand of God* (Mark 16:19), "it is as if He were called God's Deputy, to act in his Person"; as the right hand is not about place, but power, Christ stands "guard over the world for the salvation of the godly."

Calvin's final paragraph in the *Harmony* focuses on the words *and they went forth and preached* (Mark 16:20). He interprets them as betokening a transformation in the disciples describable only as "really divine work,"<sup>125</sup> seen in Mark's addition *the Lord working with them*. Like the apostles, "ministers of the Word ... have no power but what he supplies,"<sup>126</sup> says Calvin: their work would be in vain but for "the secret effect of the Spirit." In Mark's additional detail *confirming the Word* Calvin sees the Lord's intervention "to prevent the preaching of the Gospel being vain" as well as an instruction on how to regard miracles properly: "they must serve the Gospel." This closing emphasis reflects Calvin's opening dedication, commending to the Frankfurt authorities his "study which interprets the riches of the Gospel."<sup>127</sup>

## Conclusion

Perhaps the reader may agree that these eleven expositions—or my summary of them, at least—do indeed explicate a single movement *from ignominy to glory*: from shame to honor, from humiliation to exaltation, and from Christ's scandalous rejection to his glorious vindication. Throughout, the digest has reflected Calvin's persistent accentuation of the dimension *Christ for us and in us*: he constantly reminds his reader of the particular reasons why Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension provide grounds for assurance—though not without due acknowledgement of the believer's frailty or susceptibility, like Cleopas (Luke 24:21), to be "caught between faith and fear."<sup>128</sup> There is no exegesis without application, and Calvin constantly invites us to respond with faith, hope, and love to the Christ whom he shows us.

It has also emerged how Calvin's gospel-within-the-Gospels rests firmly on a consensus: the common witness of the three evangelists, as painstakingly established in the *Harmony*. The strength of this threefold cord is especially apparent whenever Calvin defends the evangelists' unanimity

<sup>125</sup> *Harmony*, 258.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* for all citations in this paragraph but the final one.

<sup>127</sup> *Harmony*, Dedicatory Epistle, ix.

<sup>128</sup> *Harmony*, 234.

against allegations of contradiction. However, in systematically favoring that which Matthew, Mark, or Luke say *with one accord*, Calvin is listening for the divine Author's orchestration. Why, then, is he correspondingly less attentive to each evangelist's *particular* insights—even though he faithfully expounds this differentiated material, taking it to possess the same divine inspiration as the shared content? Calvin, it seems, does not hear in these unique perspectives anything fundamentally determinative of the gospel *according to* Matthew, Mark, or Luke specifically.

In and for his own day, Calvin labored to demonstrate the unity of these three interconnected Gospels, and the quality of his work has emerged in the digest above. For today's context, the challenge may lie in keeping this unity in balance with the Gospels' diversity: at stake is the recognition that the one Jesus has engendered three distinct, if linked, Gospel portrayals.<sup>129</sup> There is a multifaceted, three-dimensional complexity to Jesus that no one Gospel captures but all three presuppose, and part of this resides in the singular beauty and grandeur of each evangelist's irreducible and irreplaceable witness to Jesus.

In today's academy, and whatever the solution to the Synoptic problem, Christian scholars may gainfully draw inspiration from Calvin's committed exegesis by offering carefully delineated accounts of Mark's Jesus, or Matthew's, or Luke's, as wholly preferable and historically more believable alternatives to the colorless cardboard cut-outs that have often resulted from the harmonizing undertaken by much historical Jesus research.

In the church, patient hearing of each Gospel's distinctive testimony, told separately and in a sustained way, should serve to oust any confused amalgam or consumer-friendly, customized Jesus from the imagination, mind, and heart of ministers and believers, inspiring and shaping worship, discipleship, evangelism, and mission with each evangelist's authentic portrayal: as the Spirit, working with the Word, mediates the Christ of the Gospels' manifold and variegated witness, to the Father's glory, wouldn't Calvin approve?

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<sup>129</sup> Not forgetting John's Gospel (not our concern here) or, indeed, other New Testament witnesses to Jesus.

# The Holy Spirit in the Gospels

PETER A. LILLBACK

## Abstract

The Synoptics emphasize the eschatological significance of the Holy Spirit in relation to the earthly Messiah, who speaks God's word. Johannine theology highlights the sending of the Spirit from a post-Pentecost perspective. As *paraklētos*, the coming Spirit is promised to bring to mind the teachings of the Lord. The word *paraklētos* expresses facets of this "helper," or "comforter," that are analogous to Christ's. The *paraklētos* also comes alongside believers, enabling them to embrace the gospel, to fulfill the multifaceted ministries of the gospel, and to convict the unbelieving world. The abiding significance for the church is not identified in charismatic manifestations but in the believer's relationship with and witness to Christ.

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**A**vast chasm divides the historic Reformed and Evangelical views of the person and work of the Holy Spirit and the perspectives on the Spirit in Protestant liberalism. Demythologization of the biblical teaching on the Spirit is the paradigm of liberalism. David Holwerda writes,

According to Bultmann (and in this he does not differ from the liberal theologians), the N.T. describes the world and the events of salvation mythologically. ... This mythological view of the world has become obsolete for modern man. The major cause for this obsolescence is modern science. ... A second challenge to N.T. mythology is modern man's understanding of himself. Whether he is a naturalist or an idealist,

modern man views himself as an independent responsible being. He is not open to the manipulation of supernatural powers, and, consequently, the N.T. view of the Spirit and the sacraments with their mysterious powers is utterly incomprehensible to him.<sup>1</sup>

Bultmann's solution to modern man's inability to embrace the New Testament's archaic mythological theology of the Holy Spirit was to interpret it in terms of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy:

For Heidegger, anxiety is the chief characteristic of man's being. Man is continually confronted with the decision between past and future, whether he is going to lose himself in the world of things (*das Vorhanden*) and thereby lose his individuality to the masses (*das Man*), or whether he is going to achieve his authentic existence by surrendering all security and committing himself unreservedly to the future. Bultmann cast the N.T. teaching concerning human existence into the form provided by this analysis of authentic and inauthentic existence.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to liberalism's rejection and reinterpretation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, biblically based theologies maintain the foundational reality of the Holy Spirit for human existence and the salvation of the believer.<sup>3</sup>

The study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit by historic Christians often focuses on Acts, with its emphasis on the extraordinary work of the Spirit. However, N. B. Stonehouse in "Repentance, Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit" reminds us of the Trinitarian character of Acts and that "Acts ... is not narrowly pneumatological," since it honors the Spirit's Trinitarian relationships by the phrase "the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4; Luke 24:49) and that it is "the exalted Christ who pours out the Spirit" (Acts 2:33). "Nevertheless," Stonehouse admits, "it is the baptism and endowment (*sic*, endowment) of the Spirit that is pervasively and most conspicuously in the foreground."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David E. Holwerda, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in the Gospel of John: A Critique of Rudolf Bultmann's Present Eschatology* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 86–87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979); J. I. Packer, "Holy Spirit," *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 316–19.

<sup>4</sup> N. B. Stonehouse, "Repentance, Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit," *Westminster Theological Journal* 13.1. (1950): 1–2. See also M. Max B. Turner, "Holy Spirit," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity

Moreover, among biblical interpreters of Acts, there is substantial disagreement regarding the Holy Spirit's work. This is seen, for example, in the conflicting interpretations of "the gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2:38: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Differing theological conclusions have been drawn from this text. Does this phrase refer to the Spirit's saving work in the heart of the sinner, or does it concern the more external nonsalvific manifestations of the Holy Spirit? Interpretations of this passage illustrate how Acts has spawned diverse theological views on the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

The focus of this study, however, is not the locus classicus of Acts, but the Gospels' presentation of Jesus's teaching on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We begin by addressing the seeming "nonpneumatic" or "noncharismatic" character of the life of Christ and the relatively limited teaching by our Lord on the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the Synoptic Gospels. Given the theology of the Spirit that dominates in Acts, why is there so little teaching by Jesus on the Holy Spirit?

### ***I. The Synoptics' Nonecstatic Messiah and the Eschatological Holy Spirit***

The difference in emphasis between the Gospels and Acts regarding the Spirit, according to Eduard Schweitzer, is the difference between the early Christian community's experience of the Spirit and the church's developing doctrine of the Spirit. He writes, "Long before the Spirit was a theme of doctrine, He was a fact in the experience of the community. This is the basis

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Press, 1992), 341–51; "Jesus and the Spirit in Lucan Perspective," *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 3–42; *Power from on High: The Spirit of Prophecy in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Stonehouse, "Holy Spirit," 2, writes, "On the supposition that Peter is speaking particularly concerning salvation in this passage and its immediate context, and that 'the gift of the Holy Spirit' also must have in view the Spirit's saving action, the passage might appear to suggest a number of interesting possibilities. According to Smeaton, the reference 'is plainly to the sanctifying gifts of the Spirit and to His gracious inhabitation', a view that would be quite compatible with the classic Reformed conception of salvation by grace alone. If, however, the gift of the Spirit were understood as signifying regeneration in the narrow sense, the passage would appear to have a Pelagian flavor. Or, if the reference to the reception of the Spirit were construed precisely and pointedly with the requirement of baptism, baptism could be understood as effecting regeneration or salvation in general, and the passage would seem to support certain high-churchly views of the sacrament." See also, Turner, "Holy Spirit," 341–51; "Jesus and the Spirit in Lucan Perspective," 3–42; *Power from on High*, 267–303; Sylvain Romerowski, *L'oeuvre du Saint-Esprit, ancienne et nouvelle* (Mulhouse: Centre de Culture Chrétienne, 1989), 109ff.

of the marked variety and unity of the NT statements.”<sup>6</sup> He adds, “This review shows that there are surprisingly few statements about the Spirit in Mt. and Mk. ... Experiences of the Spirit in the community were not imported back into the depiction of the life of Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

If Schweitzer points to the distinction between experience and doctrine to explain the differences between the Gospels and Acts regarding their presentation of the Holy Spirit, James Dunn explains that Jesus’s teaching on the Spirit must be understood in light of Jesus’s historical moment of following the ministry of John the Baptist. John was a “prophet of judgment” while Jesus was a “minister of eschatological blessing.”<sup>8</sup>

Schweitzer notes that the Gospels do not portray Jesus as a “pneumatic,” as one might have expected in light of the subsequent Pentecostal experiences in the theology of Acts. He explains,

The temptation to portray Jesus as a pneumatic must have been considerable. Even if Jesus did not manifest many of the traits of ecstatic piety, .... It seems highly unlikely that Jesus was first portrayed as a pneumatic and that these traits were later suppressed in the interests of a developed Christology. ...

It is no doubt a historical fact that Jesus Himself seldom referred to the Spirit. This may be because He regarded Himself only as the Messiah *designatus*, or because the understanding of His disciples was open to such teaching only after the conclusion of His work, or because He did not expect an outpouring of the Spirit. This means, however, that there is truth in John’s view that full knowledge of Jesus is to be found, not in His words, but in the proclamation of the community after Easter. ... The one essential point is that in Him God Himself encountered His people. All the spirit-statements concerning Jesus simply underline His uniqueness, His eschatological position, the fact that in Him God Himself is really present as He is not present anywhere else.<sup>9</sup>

Dunn concurs, asserting that Jesus is not presented as the “pneumatic exemplar or the first (Christian) charismatic.”<sup>10</sup> This is likewise consistent with the Gospel of Luke, even though the second volume of Luke-Acts is so intensively Spirit-centric. “To be sure, Luke does portray Jesus’ ministry in more distinctively charismatic terms, particularly in Lk. 4:1, 14 and 10:21, but Jesus is hardly presented as an ecstatic even by Luke.”<sup>11</sup> The difference

<sup>6</sup> Eduard Schweitzer, “*Pneuma*,” *TDNT* 6:396.

<sup>7</sup> Schweitzer, *TDNT*, 6:402–3.

<sup>8</sup> James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit, Holy Spirit,” *NIDNTT* 3:695.

<sup>9</sup> Schweitzer, *TDNT*, 6:403–4.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, *NIDNTT* 3:698. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 84–88.

<sup>11</sup> Dunn, *NIDNTT* 3:698.

in presentation of the Holy Spirit in Jesus's ministry in Luke versus that of the Acts manifests Luke's understanding of the continuity and discontinuity of the old and new covenants:

We should, however, not ignore a certain schematization which Luke has contrived in his two volumes (Luke-Acts) whereby Jesus, precisely in his relation with the Spirit, provides a bridge between the old age of Israel and the new age now recognized as the age of the church.<sup>12</sup>

As the harbinger of eschatological blessing—unlike John, the prophet of judgment (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22 with Isa 29:18–20; 35:3–5; 61:1f.)—Jesus was ushering in the new age of the kingdom of God (Matt 12:24–29; Luke 11:15–23), as shown by his authority over the demonic hosts, authority that came from the Spirit of God. As the divinely inspired prophet possessing the Spirit of prophecy (Mark 6:4; Matt 13:57), Jesus fulfilled the role of the promised eschatological prophet (Deut 18:15, 18–19 and Isa 61:1 with Matt 5:3–6; 11:5; Luke 4:18; 6:20; 7:22). Thus the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus's ministry was essential for his mission; nevertheless, his exposition of the theology of the Holy Spirit was relatively circumscribed.

## **II. *Why Was Jesus's Teaching on the Holy Spirit Limited in the Synoptics?***

Luke most emphasizes the Spirit, yet even with this, the role of the Spirit in the Synoptics is not extensive. Each Gospel records John the Baptist's teaching that the Messiah would be baptized by the Spirit (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16) and links the Spirit to Jesus's baptism (Matt 3:15; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22). Each also notes the Spirit's role in Jesus's temptation (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1) and presents the Lord's teaching concerning the blasphemy against the Spirit (Matt 12:31; Luke 12:10–12; Mark 3:28–29). Clearly, the breadth of teaching on the Spirit found in John and Paul is absent in the Synoptic Gospels.

There seem to be three primary reasons for this absence: the Galilean context of the Synoptics, the Messianic secret, and the eschatological character of the Messianic Kingdom. Henry Swete explains the paucity of Jesus's references in the Synoptics to the Spirit: "The Synoptic recollections of our Lord's teaching upon the Holy Spirit are few, but perhaps as many as the

<sup>12</sup> Dunn, *NIDNTT* 3:698, writes, "Thus the conception and birth of Jesus by the power of the Spirit takes place in the context of a sporadic reappearance of the Spirit of prophecy (Lk. 1:15, 41, 67; 2:25–7)—a last flare-up of the spiritual power and vitality of the divine revelation of the OT era before Jesus alone fills the centre of the stage."

scope of the first three Gospels might lead us to expect. It is even possible that they are fairly representative of His Galilean teaching on this subject, for the early Ministry was not the occasion or Galilee the place for a full revelation of the work of the Spirit in the new order which was to follow His Passion and Resurrection.”<sup>13</sup>

C. K. Barrett interprets the limited Synoptic treatment of the Spirit by reference to the Messianic secret: “Jesus was the Messiah; as such he was the bearer of the Spirit. But he kept his Messiahship secret, and knew himself to be a Messiah destined for suffering and death; hence it might be expected that the Spirit which rested upon him would not be openly and entirely manifest. . . . Jesus himself hardly ever spoke of the Spirit; he could not have done so (in the only way in which he could truthfully have related the Spirit to himself) without declaring the Messiahship which it was his purpose to keep secret.”<sup>14</sup>

Barrett further argues that Jesus’s non–full disclosure of the Holy Spirit in the Synoptic accounts was consistent with his eschatological perspective regarding his newly announced kingdom:

Thus the eschatological thought of Jesus, so far as this may be known, accounts for his silence with regard to the Spirit. He could not in the time of his ministry speak of his own plenary inspiration, nor unmistakably reveal it, because that would have meant the betrayal of the Messianic secret. He did not bestow the Spirit upon his followers, because that gift was a mark of the fully realized Kingdom of God, and did not lie within the province of the germinal Kingdom which corresponded to his veiled Messiahship.<sup>15</sup>

If the non-ecstatic Messiah’s teaching on the Spirit is limited in the Synoptic Gospels, are there notable nuances in each relative to the Holy Spirit?

### **III. *The Synoptic Gospels’ Distinctive Emphases Regarding the Holy Spirit***

There is unity and diversity with respect to the Holy Spirit in the Four Gospels. Matthias Wenk explains the general unity of the Gospels regarding the Spirit:

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<sup>13</sup> Henry B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 114. See also Max-Alain Chevallier, *Souffle de Dieu: Le Saint Esprit dans le Nouveau Testament*, Point théologique 28 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1978), 91ff.

<sup>14</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1947), 120.

<sup>15</sup> Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, 160.

Although each of the Gospels reflects its own particular outlook on the Spirit, their pneumatologies are in one way or another a corollary of the OT understanding of the Spirit as the creative and restoring power of God. This restoration, accomplished by the Spirit-endowed Jesus, will bring about a renewed and cleansed community (Spirit-and-fire baptism in the Synoptics; the cleansing as anticipated in Ezek 36–37 in John). ... In all four Gospels the Spirit is further related in some way to God's creative and powerful word, which is able to transform realities (prophetic speech in the Synoptic Gospels, the life-giving cleansing word in John).<sup>16</sup>

As to their distinctive perspectives, Craig Keener, for example, identifies differing emphases in each Gospel's presentation of the Spirit. He notes that Mark and Matthew, in similar ways, present Jesus as the "Spirit-Bringer."<sup>17</sup> Luke-Acts, however, accents the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of prophecy or inspired speech."<sup>18</sup> And John's concern is to present the Spirit as the "Spirit of purification," as he "juxtaposes the Spirit and water, the latter often symbolizing traditional rituals, in a manner meant to contrast his community's possession of the Spirit with his opponents' reliance upon, in his view, ritual forms."<sup>19</sup>

### 1. Mark

It is generally accepted that Mark is the gospel preaching of the apostle Peter. Its purpose is simply to provide the kerygma, the simple outline of the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus that shaped the *euaggelion* of the early church. In that it focuses on the life of Jesus and the bare essentials of his teaching, it is consistent that this Gospel has but a modicum of information on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Thus Mark has the fewest references to the Spirit, although he generally follows Matthew in regard to the Spirit's presence at Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:10; Matt 3:16) and at his temptation (Mark 1:12; Matt 4:1), as well as Jesus's teaching about the blasphemy of the Spirit (Mark 3:29; Matt 12:31). Moreover, Mark only mentions baptism with the "Spirit" whereas Matthew refers to both "the Spirit and fire" in the Messiah's baptism (Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11).

### 2. Matthew

Though Matthew has more to say about the Holy Spirit than Mark, due to his infrequent references to the Spirit, it is possible to overlook the literary

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<sup>16</sup> Matthias Wenk, "Holy Spirit," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 393.

<sup>17</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 49ff., 91ff.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135ff.

emphases Matthew places upon the Holy Spirit. Matthew's introductory words, according to Blaine Charrette, give the entire Gospel a "pneumatological perspective."<sup>20</sup> He notes that Matthew begins with the phrase "book of the *genēsis* of Jesus Christ" (Matt 1:1), and in Matthew 1:18, he parallels this with, "this is how the *genēsis* of Jesus Christ was: ... his mother Mary ... was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit." He reasons that the connection of *genēsis* with the Spirit suggests that through Jesus, God's new creation has begun, since as in the creation account of Genesis, this work is achieved through the Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Thus the Spirit at the beginning of redemptive history is now at the beginning of the gospel age and at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. The Spirit in Matthew's presentation is also the eschatological Spirit who restores the fallen creation. Charrette further suggests that the Messianic title "Emmanuel"—"God with Us"—in the opening chapter of Matthew (Matt 1:23; Isa. 7:14) may offer a conscious allusion to the Spirit. If so, this implies that "the Holy Spirit remains with Jesus as the presence of God to carry out the salvation of his people."<sup>22</sup>

Matthew also employs the literary form of *inclusio*—the use of parentheses or bookends that he places at the beginning and the end of his narrative. Thus Matthew implies that the entire earthly ministry of the Messiah was conducted in relationship with the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:18 begins with the miraculous conception of Jesus by the *Holy Spirit*, while Matthew 28:19 concludes with the Great Commission of the risen Lord to make disciples of all nations by baptism "in the name of the Father and the Son and the *Holy Spirit*." Within these Holy Spirit "bookends" Matthew identifies Jesus as God's servant anointed by the Spirit, called to proclaim justice to all nations (Matt 12:18 with Isa 42:1–4). Moreover, his disciples also serve in relationship to the Holy Spirit as they are enabled to do their ministry, since the Spirit will come to their aid in persecution (Matt 10:20) as they proclaim the Spirit inspired Scriptures of the Lord (Matt 22:43). Matthew's pneumatology is powerfully asserted via literary structure even though it is minimally expressed in overt teaching.

Another aspect of the Holy Spirit *inclusio* in Matthew is seen in his use of the Messianic title "Emmanuel," translated from the Hebrew as "God with Us." If this is, as noted above, a conscious allusion to the Spirit by Matthew, then there is a parallel with the climax of the book. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 extends the Messianic name of Emmanuel by making it

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<sup>20</sup> Blaine Charrette, *Restoring Presence: The Spirit in Matthew's Gospel*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

a promise to Jesus's disciples as they fulfill their mandate for worldwide evangelism. There the Lord promises, "And behold, *I am with you always*, to the end of the age." In Matthew's presentation of the Gospel, Emmanuel, "God with Us," promises, "I am with you always." Thus "Emmanuel," the one who possesses the Spirit and commands his disciples to be baptized in the name of the "Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19), promises ever to be with his people. Through such literary features Matthew shows that his theology is not seeking to diminish the theological importance of the Holy Spirit.

### 3. Luke

A fuller sense of the work of the Spirit is evident in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>23</sup> Luke begins with the accounts of individuals filled with the Spirit and prophesying (Luke 1:41, 67; 2:28, 38). But is the Spirit's primary role in Luke to enable inspired speech, or is it rather to show that the prophesied Messianic Age has been inaugurated? Does the Spirit's work of inspiration, as suggested by Keener, best summarize Lukan pneumatology?

Mark (12:36) and Matthew (22:43) record that David's declaration about the Lord in Psalm 110:1 was due to the Spirit's inspiration. But surprisingly, in Luke the reference to the Spirit is missing (Luke 20:42). Luke's omission at this point may reflect the way in which Luke-Acts implicitly sees the Spirit at work in the Messiah awaiting the fulfillment of his ministry through the giving of the Spirit. For example, the Messiah's promise, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict" in Luke 21:15, appears to be fulfilled by the Spirit in Acts 6:10: "But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." At any rate, Wenk cautions against reducing Luke's theology of the Spirit to inspired speech:

In the infancy narratives the Spirit is, however, also related to the Baptist's life and ministry (Lk 1:15) and to Jesus' birth (Lk 1:35). In Luke 1:13–17 the Spirit's work in and through the Baptist is further correlated with the preparation of God's people by reconciling what is ostracized, and in Luke 1:35 the Spirit clearly is the *Spiritus Creator*. It further seems best to understand Luke's redactional work in this verse as implying that the role of the Spirit in Jesus' conception also accounts for his status as being holy (contrary to Matthew). Hence, to limit the Spirit in the writings of Luke to inspired speech and proclamation may not represent the whole picture of Luke's colorful and multifaceted pneumatology.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Matthias Wenk, *Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Wenk, "Holy Spirit," 389.

But do the “Spirit and fire” of Luke 3:16 refer to the miracle of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4)? Perhaps baptism with Spirit and fire provides the model for the believers’ conversion and cleansing from sin by the Spirit. And baptism with the Spirit and fire may connect the believer with Jesus’s own baptism in Luke 3:22. So is this Spirit-and-fire baptism referring to empowerment for one’s ministry for God, even as Jesus’s baptism inaugurated his public ministry? This view can appeal to the fact that Jesus’s temptation follows his baptism (Luke 4:1–13). Clearly, the Spirit is present as Jesus is led into temptation and overcomes Satan, which consequently establishes him as the Anointed One of God (Mark 1:12; Matt 4:1; Luke 4:1).<sup>25</sup>

However, Luke underscores that the Spirit’s work is also a fulfillment of prophecy. Thus Luke records John the Baptist’s spiritually empowered ministry (Luke 3:1–20) as the realization of the angelic message of Luke 1:13–17. As John the Baptist declares the imminent arrival of the Messiah (Luke 3:16), he speaks of the anointed one’s baptism with the Spirit and fire. This prophesied fiery Spirit baptism seems to refer to the end-time purification and global gospel mission of God’s people (Luke 24:46–47). In Jesus’s sermon at Nazareth in Luke 4:16–30, he declares that he is the one who fulfills the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 51:1–2. This parallels the claim made in Acts 2:17ff. that the Spirit’s prophesied work is fulfilled in the miracle of Pentecost; this parallel supports the eschatological understanding of baptism by fire and Spirit. The Lord’s Prayer as presented in Luke 11:1–13 also highlights Luke’s eschatological concern.<sup>26</sup>

So while the Synoptic Gospels do present the reality of the Holy Spirit, whether in as the fulfillment of the eschatological promise or as the enabler of inspired speech and Gospel ministry, it is in the Fourth Gospel that Jesus’s fullest and deepest teaching on the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit is to be found.

#### **IV. *The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Theology***

George Montague develops the theme of the Holy Spirit starting from the Old Testament and the intertestamental “valley” that ascends to the “rich pneumatology of John.” He asserts that the Gospel of John offers “the summit

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<sup>25</sup> See Wenk, “Holy Spirit,” 389; Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology: With Special Reference to Luke-Acts*, JSNTSS 54 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (New York: T&T Clark, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Wenk, “Holy Spirit,” 390.

of New Testament pneumatology.”<sup>27</sup> Swete summarizes John’s presentation of the Spirit: “The subject of the teaching on the Spirit in John iii.–vii. is the Giver of Life; the subject of the later teaching in John xiv.–xx. is the Paraclete. The first concerns the individual, the second the Body of Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

### 1. *John’s Main Themes of the Spirit*

Three major themes are found in John regarding the Holy Spirit. The first is Jesus’s endowment by the Holy Spirit, the second is the life-giving Spirit, and the third is the Spirit as the promised paraclete. The first then is that *Jesus was endowed with the Spirit* in his baptism (John 1:32–34). Accordingly, at the conclusion of John’s Gospel, Jesus is the giver of the Spirit to his disciples (John 20:22–23), which John explained, however, could only occur after Jesus’s glorification (John 7:39).

John’s second theme, *the life-giving Spirit*,<sup>29</sup> emphasizes that eternal life is the work of Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit (John 1:4; 3:15; 11:25 with John 3:5–7, 34; 6:63–68). This is especially seen in John 7:37–39, where living water flows from within the believer by the Spirit and in the necessity and realization of the new birth by the Spirit (John 3:3–8). At the climax of the Fourth Gospel (John 20:19–23), Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, “Receive [the] Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). This identifies with the biblical-theological theme of the life-giving breath of God in creation and resurrection (Gen 2:7 and Ezek 37:5, 14).

John’s third theme regarding the Spirit is in the Upper Room Discourse, where the Lord promises his disciples “another paraclete [*paraklētos*]” (John 14:16).<sup>30</sup> In the Upper Room Discourse of John 13–17, there are five references to the Holy Spirit by Christ (John 14:16–17, 26–28; 15:26; 16:7–8, 13). The first four speak of the *paraklētos*, translated in the ESV as “Helper.”

<sup>27</sup> George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (1976; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 333.

<sup>28</sup> Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, 148.

<sup>29</sup> “The Spirit is also of considerable importance in John’s theology. His understanding of the Spirit overlaps with that of earlier NT writers at several points. In particular, the new life of the Spirit is presented under the very vigorous metaphors of (re)birth from above (Jn. 3:5–8; 1 Jn. 3:9), of new creation (Jn. 20:22, the verb deliberately echoing Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 37:9; Wis. 15:11), of life-giving water and bread (Jn. 4:14; 6:63; 7:38f.) and of anointing (1 Jn. 2:20, 27),” Dunn, *NIDNTT* 3:703–5.

<sup>30</sup> Wenk, “Holy Spirit,” 39, writes, “This ‘current absence of the Spirit’ also reflects John’s major difference from the Qumran texts of the two spirits: ‘In the Teaching on the Two Spirits, although the spirit of truth within is tempered by the spirit of deceit with which it battles, it is nonetheless present within as the source of a life of virtue. In the Fourth Gospel ... there is no corresponding group of people who bask in the light. There is no group—not yet, anyway—with the spirit of truth in it’ (Levison, 390). But there will be such a group, and the paraclete will recall for them the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”

## A. John's Understanding of the *Paraklētos*: The Meaning and Etymology of *Paraklētos*

*Paraklētos* has been translated by a broad range of words. Translations of the word from biblical and extrabiblical literature have included: helper, counselor, comforter, advocate (1 John 2:1), mediator, interpreter, teacher, leader, and vindicator. The word itself literally means, "called alongside."<sup>31</sup> This may explain its range of meaning: each of these is called to one's side to help in various ways.<sup>32</sup>

Montague argues that the *paraklētos* is a prosecutor.<sup>33</sup> Brown suggests that *paraklētos* reflects the concept of a broker in the Mediterranean culture, one who guarantees to the disciples access to Jesus.<sup>34</sup> Dunn sees the *paraklētos* as a witness, revealer, and interpreter.<sup>35</sup> Since the Holy Spirit is identified both as the "Spirit of truth" and as the *paraklētos* (Spirit of truth: 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; *paraklētos*: 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), it is relevant that Schweitzer sees a source for the "Spirit of truth" in Jewish angelology.<sup>36</sup> Dunn wonders if John coined the term to summarize the many nuances associated with the *pneuma*.<sup>37</sup>

## B. The Personhood of the *Paraklētos*

The *paraklētos* is a person, not just a force, a power, an influence. This is seen first in the way that the Spirit is identified and then also in the Spirit's personal work. So first, even though *pneuma*, meaning "wind" or "spirit" is neuter, Jesus refers to the Spirit by masculine pronouns, that is, as "he" and

<sup>31</sup> Turner, "Holy Spirit," 349–51. "In Greek the word is formally a passive verbal adjective, 'one called alongside' (especially to offer assistance in a court), and so an 'advocate' (though not with the professional legal sense of the Latin *advocatus*), ... (2) 'Exhorter' ... (3) 'Helper' ...."

<sup>32</sup> See George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 322–33.

<sup>33</sup> Montague, *The Holy Spirit*, 368.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond E. Brown, "The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 13.2 (Jan 1967): 113–32; T. G. Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-Scientific Perspective*, JSNTSS 253 (New York: T&T Clark, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> "... this embraces both recalling of the teaching originally given (14:26; 15:26; 16:14; cf. 1 Jn. 5:6–8) and leading into new truth (Jn. 16:12 f.; cf. Isa. 42:9; 44:7; 1 Jn. 2:27). This implies that new revelation and original teaching are to be held in constant tension for John, so that the Spirit's role is never simply that of repeating the original teaching as first given, nor that of revealing new truth wholly unrelated to the old, but that of reinterpreting the old to give it contemporary significance and that of revealing the new in a way consistent with the old." Dunn, *NIDNTT* 3:703–5.

<sup>36</sup> See Schweitzer, *TDNT* 6:442–44.

<sup>37</sup> "Where John derives the title 'Paraclete' (*parakletos*) from is not clear. It is quite possible that he coined the title himself to express in a single word the various functions he attributed to the Spirit. The nearest parallels to the forensic and intercessory functions are to be found in late Jewish angelology (cf. particularly Job 16:19; 19:25; 33:23, 26; 1QS 3:20; CD 5:18; 1QM 13:10) and in early Christian understanding of the Spirit (Mk. 13:11; Acts 5:32)." Dunn, *NIDNTT* 3:703–5.

“him.” There are clearly “personal features of the Spirit Paraclete.”<sup>38</sup> John identifies the Holy Spirit with the masculine noun *paraklētos*. There are also grammatical clues where personal pronouns are joined with the neuter *pneuma*. The masculine personal pronoun *ekeinos* is used in 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 14, and *autos* in 16:7. Gary Burge argues that this use “shows that for John, ‘*pneuma tes aletheias*’ [spirit of the truth] meant more than a mere tendency or influence.”<sup>39</sup>

As to the personal work of the *paraklētos*, Hans Windisch identifies “two conceptions of the Paraclete [that] run through the entire New Testament: ‘the friend at court’—the heavenly intercessor (cf. 1 John 2:1; Rom 8:31ff.); and ‘the friend from court’—the witness sent by God to earth (thus, Mark 13:9ff.; John 14:15f.; etc.).”<sup>40</sup> Obviously, a friend by definition is personal in nature.

### C. Jesus as the First *Paraklētos* and the Holy Spirit as Another or Second *Paraklētos*

Even after sending the Spirit at Pentecost, the risen Lord is called an Advocate (*paraklētos*, 1 John 2:1). Thus the Spirit is called *allos paraklētos* (John 14:16), another *paraklētos*.<sup>41</sup> The difference between *allos* and *heteros* is important. The Spirit is another helper of the same kind (*allos*) as Jesus, not another helper of a different kind (*heteros*; compare Matt 5:39). Christ is the first helper, the Holy Spirit is the same kind of helper—though different, still the same.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 142.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Hans Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel*, trans. James W. Cox (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 1.

<sup>41</sup> “The unity of Christ and Spirit in personality and mission is neatly expressed by identifying the Spirit as the ‘other Paraclete’ (Jn. 14:16), where Jesus is by implication the first Paraclete (cf. 1 Jn. 2:1), so that the Paraclete continues the presence and work of the Son once the Son has departed (Jn. 14:16–28; Advocate); or, alternatively expressed, so that the Spirit becomes the seed of sonship, the Spirit of the Son (1 Jn. 3:9, 24; 4:13),” Dunn, *NIDNTT* 3:703–5.

<sup>42</sup> “This point is made both in Jesus’ promise of ‘another Paraclete of the same kind’ (*allos*), and in the deliberate parallelism between Jesus and what is promised of the Spirit [e.g.]: (1) both ‘come forth’/are ‘sent’ from the Father into the world\* (3:16–17; 5:43; 16:27–28; 18:37 par. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7–8, 13); (3) if Jesus is the great teacher\* (cf. 13:13–14), the Paraclete will ‘teach you ... all things’ (14:26); and (4) just as the Messiah bears witness to God and reveals all things (4:25–26; cf. 1:18; 3:34–36; etc.)—supremely himself and the Father—so too the Paraclete will witness to and reveal especially the glorified Son (15:26–27; 16:13–14). And as Jesus set out to convince and convict the world, which nevertheless did not ‘receive’ him (1:12 etc.), so too the Paraclete’s task is to convince and convict the world (Jn 16:8–12), but the world does not receive him either (14:17; 14:18–26). ... Jesus has acted as the Paraclete so far; the Spirit is to take over that role.” Turner, “Holy Spirit,” 349–51.

To understand the Spirit as *paraklētos*, we must see that Jesus is the archetype, the first *paraklētos*. Just as the first *paraklētos* was with the disciples, teaching them and sending them, so the second *paraklētos* will be with the disciples to teach them and to continue to teach them Jesus's words.

By the Holy Spirit, the second *paraklētos*, the risen Jesus, the first *paraklētos*, is present with his people (John 14:8; 16:21). It is in the context of the *paraklētos* (14:14–17, 25–26) that Jesus promised he would not abandon his disciples, but would be with them even though the world would not see him. This suggests that it is the *paraklētos* who unites the Father and Son with believers (14:16–26). Moreover, the *paraklētos* is the teacher and revealer of Christ's words to the disciples (14:26; 16:12–14). The disciples could not grasp the meaning of Jesus's teaching and accomplishments until his glorification (16:12, 25). The role of the *paraklētos* is to cause Jesus's words to be remembered (14:26) and to declare "things to come" (16:13).

John describes a triple sending: a sending of the Son by the Father, the sending of the Spirit by the Son and the Father, and the sending of the disciples by the Son with the aid of the Spirit. As the sent one, Jesus was the advocate of the Father's will. Even as Jesus was "sent," so also the disciples are "sent" (John 20:21; cf. 17:17–18). The Spirit, as another *paraklētos* sent by the ascended Son, advances Jesus's mission by aiding his disciples (15:26–27; 16:7–11). The Spirit's conviction of the world is through the teaching of the truth by the disciples (16:12–15). Thus, the *paraklētos*, commissioned by the ascended Christ, places the world on trial with regard to sin, Jesus's righteousness, and the world's certain judgment apart from the Savior (16:8–11).<sup>43</sup>

#### D. The *Paraklētos* and Pentecost

John wrote his gospel at least thirty years after Pentecost, and thus his perspective of Jesus's teaching on the Holy Spirit was shaped by the miracle of Pentecost. What then should we make of John's account of the breathing out of the Spirit on the disciples after Jesus's resurrection but before Pentecost (John 20:21–22)? As noted above, John presents Jesus's teaching on the Holy Spirit's ministry to believers without reference to the gift of tongues. The Holy Spirit had dwelt *with* the disciples, but soon he would be *in* them (John 7:38–39; 14:17; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:1ff.). The work of the *paraklētos* in John is not glossolalia, but life in Christ by the new birth or palingenesis and sanctification. Windisch puts it this way:

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Turner, "Holy Spirit," 349–51.

Out of the manifold parallel and competing traditions of the four evangelists on “Jesus and the Spirit,” two fundamental views requiring dogmatic development and evaluation stand out in bold relief: (1) the Spirit is a gift of the ascended Jesus, a gift that lays the foundation of the church, or the Spirit is a gift of God to the disciples who are left bereft of their Lord; and (2) the historical Jesus was already a bearer of the Spirit and one who baptized with Spirit. It is not so easy to bring both ideas into an inner unity, but both contain truth for the believer.<sup>44</sup>

#### E. The Holy Spirit’s Relationships as the *Paraklētos*

The Spirit has distinct relationships as the one who is sent and the one who comes alongside. The Spirit’s role as the *paraklētos* is clearly Trinitarian in character.<sup>45</sup> This is seen in the Holy Spirit’s relationship to the *Father*:

- Jesus asks the Father to give “another Helper” (14:16).
- The Spirit proceeds from the Father (15:26).
- He is sent by the Father in Christ’s name (14:25).
- Christ’s ascension was necessary for the Spirit’s coming (16:7).
- The Spirit does not speak on his own authority (16:13).
- The Spirit speaks what he hears from the Father and Son (16:13–15).

The Holy Spirit’s relationship to the *Son* also reflects the Trinitarian nature of his person and work:

- Jesus sends the Spirit (16:7).
- What he hears from Christ, he speaks (16:13–15).
- The Spirit is sent by Christ, from the Father (15:26).
- He comes to glorify Christ (16:14).<sup>46</sup>
- He bears witness of Christ (15:26).
- He speaks what he hears from the Son (16:13–15).

<sup>44</sup> Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel*, 38.

<sup>45</sup> “A minor debate continues as to when John thought the Spirit was first given as the ‘Paraclete’ (whether at 20:22 or beyond the period of the Gospel, when first the Spirit replaces Jesus). More theologically significant are the christological and Trinitarian conclusions to be drawn: (1) Jesus’s lordship over the Spirit expressed in his sending and commissioning of the ‘Paraclete’ (15:26; 16:7) attest a fully divine Christology; (2) the portrait of the Spirit as a replacement figure, and one which goes well beyond the frequent but incidental personifications of the spirit in Judaism, takes the pneumatology in the direction of trinitarianism.” Turner, “Holy Spirit,” 349–51.

<sup>46</sup> An apt illustration attributed to J. I. Packer is of a spotlight illuminating a cathedral. No one gazes at a spotlight in its brilliance, but rather looks at what it highlights in the night. Such is the work of the Spirit. He does not call attention to himself, but brings all of his power and glory to bear upon Christ so that all might know and worship him. The Holy Spirit, like the church, is to be christocentric.

The Holy Spirit's relationship to the *apostles* is vital since he is “another” *paraklētos* like Jesus. By sending the Spirit, Christ fulfills his promise to the apostles.

- The disciples know him as he had dwelt with them, but he would soon be in them (14:17; John 7:38–39; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:1ff.).
- He causes Christ to return to the apostles quickly (14:18–19) to be with them forever (14:15).
- He sanctifies them, as he is the *Holy Spirit* (14:25).
- Since he brings the presence of Christ, they are not orphans (14:17–18; 2 Cor 3:17).
- As Spirit of truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), he guides them into all truth (16:13).<sup>47</sup>
- He teaches them all things, thus fulfilling the new covenant (14:26; Jer 31:31–34; John 6:45).
- He brings to their remembrance all of Christ's teachings (14:26; Word and Spirit are inseparable, John 4:25–26; 6:63).
- He declares things that are to come (16:13; cf. Rev 1:18; 2–3).
- He enables them to be witnesses for Christ (15:27; Acts 1:8).

In the context of the Spirit bringing the presence of Christ, Christ promises an untroubled peaceful heart unlike what the world offers (14:26–27), as well as a joy that no one can take away (15:11; 16:20–24; Gal 5:22–23). These words support the translation of *paraklētos* as the “Comforter.” Christ, through the Spirit, is the ongoing fulfillment of the messianic “Wonderful Counselor” and “Prince of Peace” of Isaiah 9:6.

The Holy Spirit's relationship to the *world* is directly connected with the gospel witness of the disciples:

- The world cannot receive the Spirit, as he distinguishes believers from the world (14:15–17).

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<sup>47</sup> “When the Paraclete is called the πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας [*pneuma tēs alētheias*] in 14:17; 15:26; 16:13, He is presented as the representative of the world of reality in contrast to mere appearance. In Him God's world is present as it was present in Jesus and will continue to be present in His Word, 17:13–17. ... Hence it is only the πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας [*pneuma tes alētheias*], who genuinely discloses Jesus to the disciples (14:26; 16:13), who glorifies Him (16:14). Though His words are not different from those of the historical Jesus (6:63, 14:26; 16:14), it is only in them that the latter take on real force (16:8–11). Hence it is only here that we find the idea of an advocate or supporter—an idea which plainly goes beyond that of the revealer. But these words of the Spirit are no different from those spoken in the authoritative proclamation of His community, 20:22f.; 15:26f.” Schweitzer, *TDNT* 6:442–43.

- The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth, nor see him (14:17, 22).
- He convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8–11).

What then is the Holy Spirit's relationship to *believers* in general? Are the aspects of the Holy Spirit's relationships with Christ's first disciples appropriately applied to all Christians? This would seem to be the case, as the Spirit's work is declared to be "forever" (14:15). Further, there is an inherent parallelism between the Spirit's ongoing conviction of the unbelieving world (16:8–11) and the ongoing witness of the church (Matt 28:18–20) and the world through the Spirit (15:26–27). As there is no mention of tongues in Jesus's teaching about the *paraklētos*, does this further suggest that glossolalia was not an essential or permanent aspect of the Spirit's ministry in the future church? This seems to be the case. In his post-Pentecostal perspective, John emphasizes the Holy Spirit's focus on Christ, the proclamation of the gospel to the world, and the enablement of disciples to know and teach Christ's word, rather than the continuing participation of believers in the ecstatic experiences of the early church.

### ***V. Implications of the Gospels' Teaching on the Holy Spirit's Regenerating Work for Global Evangelization***

As we conclude our survey of the Four Gospels with respect to the teaching of Jesus on the Holy Spirit, it is important to see the significance of this for the work of evangelism and missions. It must be underscored that the Scriptures teach that the salvation of sinners occurs by divine "appointment" (Acts 13:48) because the presence of the Holy Spirit is the *sine qua non* of the new birth (John 3:3–15). The Holy Spirit, working through the believer's witness (John 15:26–27; Acts 1:8), reaches the elect of God to bring them into eternal life in Christ. In his *Institutes* Calvin writes, "Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit."<sup>48</sup>

God's sovereign work of salvation applied by the Holy Spirit as seen in John is also taught by Peter (1 Pet 1:23). John asserts human inability and the necessity of divine sovereign initiative, as the "Spirit of truth" is one "whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him" (14:17). Jesus insisted that even his disciples were spiritually impotent without him: "For apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). In

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<sup>48</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.8.13.

contrast with the world, Jesus declares that his own “know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (14:17). The church’s mission can only proceed by the work of God’s sovereign Holy Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:17; 4:31; 13:2; Rom 8:9, 26; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 5:25; Eph 5:18; 1 John. 3:24). Accordingly, the new covenant in Christ and his giving of the Holy Spirit to the church have critical significance for missions (Acts 1:8; 2; 2 Cor 3:4–6; 7:16–18; Gal 3:15; Eph 2:12; Heb 8:6–13; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20).

This aspect of the Spirit’s ministry has been termed the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. James Boice writes,

The idea of the witness of the Spirit in the Fourth Gospel has been central to that doctrine which reformed theologians have called the internal witness of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*). By this phrase is meant the supernatural and saving activity of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the one who hears the Gospel so that the reality of what is taught is conveyed to the mind, producing the conviction that this is truth and leading the soul to receive it to its consequent salvation.<sup>49</sup>

For the truth of God to be received, the Holy Spirit is necessary, for he alone is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Spirit is the revealer of God to the unbeliever, since he is “sent by the Father” in Christ’s “name” (John 14:26) to be the evangelist’s and missionary’s “Helper” (*paraklētos*, John 14:16, 26), by witnessing to Christ (John 15:26). The missionary and the evangelist are enabled by the Holy Spirit in their ministries as the Holy Spirit reminds them of Christ’s teaching (John 14:26) and guides them into truth (John 16:13–14). Thus the nations are reached as the Spirit-inspired word (John 6:63; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19–21) is taught with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–8; 1 Thess. 1:5; Jude 15).

Not only does the Spirit have an inner witness to the elect, but the Spirit witnesses to the world. John 16:8–11 speaks of the elenctic work of the Holy Spirit to the world. George Ladd notes, “If the primary function of the Spirit to believers is that of teacher and interpreter, he is to the world an accuser.”<sup>50</sup> J. H. Bavinck explains:

The Holy Spirit will convince the world of sin. The Holy Spirit is actually the only conceivable subject of this verb, for the conviction of sin exceeds all human ability. Only the Holy Spirit can do this, even though he can and will use us as instruments in his hand. Taken in this sense, elenctics is the science which is concerned with the conviction of sin. In a special sense then it is the science which unmasks to

<sup>49</sup> James M. Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 143.

<sup>50</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 333.

heathendom all false religions as sin against God, and it calls heathendom to a knowledge of the only true God.<sup>51</sup>

This conviction leads either to conversion or condemnation (John 3:16–21, 36). The Spirit of the new covenant blesses the church and gives power to missions. He creates the community of faith that is visibly present to the unbelieving world.<sup>52</sup> The Holy Spirit is the power that builds the church, even though there are challenging questions raised by the diverse experiences of the Spirit's work in differing church traditions.<sup>53</sup>

Consistent with Jesus's teaching of the person and work of the Holy Spirit discovered in the Gospels, the eschatological age of the Spirit has arrived (Acts 2). The risen and ascended Christ has sent the *paraklētos* to come alongside each believer to provide the help they need to fulfill the gospel mandate. In the Gospels, however, this enablement is for ministry of the word of God, rather than for ecstatic experiences and utterances. Although the church's task during this epoch of redemption occurs in a hostile world, worldwide preaching of the gospel is possible. This is only possible because of the inspired word and imparted power of the life-giving Spirit. In the power of the Spirit sent by the Father and the Son, the church advances the Lord's kingdom until his return. Believers join with the Holy Spirit in glorifying the Son as the ascended and coming KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS (John 16:14; Rev 19:16; 22:17).

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<sup>51</sup> Johan H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David H. Freeman (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 222.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John*.

<sup>53</sup> See Ju Hur, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts*, JSNTSS 211 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 286–89.



# J. Gresham Machen's *The Virgin Birth of Christ:* Then and Now

BERNARD AUBERT

## Abstract

This article considers the context of J. Gresham Machen's *The Virgin Birth of Christ* and how it developed as the result of years of labor; it outlines the argument of the book and documents its reception. For Machen, positive evidence for the virgin birth and the failure of alternate explanations point to the supernatural fact of the virgin birth. His scholarship and interactions with a broad array of scholars set him apart from fundamentalists. Machen's *Virgin Birth* remains an essential treatment of the topic and an important work in apologetics and New Testament studies.

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## Introduction

**N**ew Testament scholar William Baird writes of J. Gresham Machen's *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, "How Machen accomplished the immense amount of research displayed in this work while he was center of the storm that raged in church and seminary is testimony to his enduring fortitude."<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> William Baird, *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 2:356. On Machen's New Testament scholarship, see also Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 180–202.

article attempts to explain Machen's accomplishment by exploring the origin of his work and uncovering how it relates to the challenges he was going through.<sup>2</sup> Exploring his New Testament scholarship through *Virgin Birth* will allow us to situate him more precisely within the ecclesiastical and academic scene of his day.<sup>3</sup> A paradox will emerge: his thorough and up-to-date research makes his work both outdated and relevant for today.

## I. *Virgin Birth Discussions in Historical Context*

### 1. *The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy*

The fundamentalist-modernist controversy is not mentioned in Machen's *Virgin Birth*, but the book was relevant to it and he engaged with it.<sup>4</sup> Two popular contributions would have served in the debate and offer summaries of his views. The first is a popular presentation in two parts.<sup>5</sup> In the second, he introduces the virgin birth as "a universal belief of the historic Christian Church."<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, conservative Protestants defined the five essential doctrines or fundamentals of the faith: "the inerrancy of Scripture and the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and miracle-working power of Christ." The General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church adopted these as "essential and necessary" in 1910 and 1916.<sup>7</sup> In response, after the 1923 General Assembly, modernists drafted the

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<sup>2</sup> We will use the revised edition of the book. J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> His relationship to fundamentalism and his identity have long been a subject of discussion. See J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God: *Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 34–36. D. G. Hart concludes that he was both an orthodox Presbyterian and allied to elements of modern culture. See D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 160–70. For arguments that his scholarship and educational philosophy are distinct from fundamentalism, see Annette G. Aubert, "J. Gresham Machen and the Theology of Crisis," *Westminster Theological Journal [WTJ]* 64 (2002): 337–38 and Dariusz M. Bryćko, "Steering a Course between Fundamentalism and Transformationalism: J. Gresham Machen's View of Christian Scholarship," in Thomas M. Crisp, Stever L. Porter, and Gregg A. Ten Elshof, eds., *Christian Scholarship in the Twenty-First Century: Prospects and Perils* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 83–84.

<sup>4</sup> Hart states, "He wrote with exceptional detachment for one who would become the principle scholarly spokesman for fundamentalism." Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 41.

<sup>5</sup> J. Gresham Machen, "The Virgin Birth," *The Bible To-day* 19 (December 1924): 75–79; 19 (January 1925): 111–15. Cf. "Machen – The Virgin Birth," PCA Historical Center, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/auburn/machen-1924-virginbirth.html>.

<sup>6</sup> J. Gresham Machen, "The Virgin Birth of Our Lord," *Revelation* 1.12 (1931): 399–400, 426–28.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and*

Auburn Affirmation (1924).<sup>8</sup> Its fourth point distinguishes between the “facts and doctrines of our religion” and “particular theories,” thus implying that one could hold to the incarnation without the virgin birth. In a public letter, Machen defended the virgin birth as essential and as a test for ordination: “The Affirmation declares the virgin birth to be a theory; Holy Scripture declares it to be a fact.”<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, he had not merely an academic concern, but a vision of scholarship in service to the church.

## 2. *The History of Religion School*

Both Machen's *Virgin Birth* and his *The Origin of Paul's Religion* interact with and critique the history of religion school, which he encountered during his studies in Germany and which, in reaction to “literary criticism,” proposed a new comparative approach (including ancient myths).<sup>10</sup> Adolf Harnack was one of its “spiritual forebears.”<sup>11</sup> It tore “down the barriers of the canon” and pioneered the study of “the pseudepigrapha and apocrypha.”<sup>12</sup> It dealt with essential “issues around baptism and the Lord's Supper, the virgin birth, the resurrection, mysticism, and Christology.”<sup>13</sup> For example, Hermann Usener considered the biblical infancy narratives “to be legend,” originating “on Greek soil.”<sup>14</sup> Its teaching was not without resistance, and “scholars in the history of religion [were] prevented from occupying chairs of theology in Prussia.”<sup>15</sup> David Strauss, though earlier than this school, pioneered historical study of the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> His epochal 1835–36 *Das Leben Jesu* (The Life of Jesus) challenged both rationalist and orthodox

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*Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 25. For the five points at the 1910 Assembly, see “Historic Documents of American Presbyterianism: The Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910 [Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.],” PCA Historical Center, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/deliverance.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. “The Auburn Affirmation,” PCA Historical Center, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/auburntext.html>. See Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 78–79.

<sup>9</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “The Virgin Birth, the Auburn Affirmation, and the Presbyterian Advance,” *The Presbyterian* 98 (February 9, 1928): 12. See also J. Gresham Machen, “Why We Believe in the Virgin Birth,” *Sunday School Times* 75 (1933): 775–76.

<sup>10</sup> See Hugo Gressmann, “The History of Religion School,” in Albert Eichhorn, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament*, trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer, HBS 1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 40.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Werner G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. MacLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 246. Cf. Machen's *Virgin Birth*, 324–26, 329.

<sup>15</sup> Gressmann, “The History of Religion School,” 36.

<sup>16</sup> Kümmel, *The New Testament*, 172.

perspectives and offered a “mythical” alternative, analyzing miracles, including the virgin birth, as myth.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. *The Apostles’ Creed*

Discussion about the Apostles’ Creed and evidence from the second century serves as the entryway gate to Machen’s volume.<sup>18</sup> He is familiar with the wealth of current studies on the creed, including the two volumes by Ferdinand Kattenbusch. He also makes use of Theodore Zahn and English-speaking scholarship. This evidences that the Apostles’ Creed (and the virgin birth) received intense scrutiny at the turn of the century.<sup>19</sup>

## II. *Influences on Machen*

### 1. *Classical Education*

Machen received a classical education. His father collected early “editions of the Greek and Latin classics.”<sup>20</sup> At Johns Hopkins University he studied with the famous classical scholar Basil Gildersleeve;<sup>21</sup> there he learned philology and encountered the German-based seminar system.<sup>22</sup> The classical approach emphasized the authorial intent of texts in contrast to the new historical methods used by historians of antiquity and students of Christian origins.<sup>23</sup>

### 2. *Old Princeton*

Machen asserts that his training in New Testament at Princeton compared favorably to the classes he took in Germany.<sup>24</sup> The dedication of *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* reads, “To William Park Armstrong, my guide in the study of the New Testament and in all good things.” Armstrong was his teacher and then colleague in the New Testament department at Princeton Seminary, and Armstrong’s interest in the historical study of the Gospels surely

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 120–21. Cf. David F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 130–33 (orthodox view), 137–40 (natural explanation), and 140–43 (mythical view).

<sup>18</sup> Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 3–8.

<sup>19</sup> Machen, however, does not want to “make the Apostles’ Creed ... the be all and the end-all of ... Christian profession” (ibid., 391).

<sup>20</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity in Conflict,” in *Contemporary American Theology*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Round Table, 1932), 1:247.

<sup>21</sup> Machen, “Christianity in Conflict,” 250–51.

<sup>22</sup> Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 15–16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>24</sup> Machen, “Christianity in Conflict,” 258.

influenced him.<sup>25</sup> In *Virgin Birth*, he made use of two writings by Armstrong, one on the text of Matthew 1:16 and the other on chronology in relation to the census of Quirinius.<sup>26</sup> The emphases of George Purves—Presbyterian pastor-scholar and New Testament professor at Princeton shortly before Machen's time—on history, early Christianity in the second century, and apologetics anticipate Machen's own concerns.<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Warfield, another of Machen's mentors, was a New Testament scholar in his own right. However, Warfield's more proximate impact on Machen was in the realm of systematic theology and apologetics. In his conclusion he explicitly refers to two articles by Warfield to reinforce the importance of the doctrine of the virgin birth and to support the distinction between classic Christianity and modern antisupernatural Christianity or "Christless Christianity."<sup>28</sup>

Machen in *Virgin Birth* also interacted with the works of his colleagues in biblical theology and Old Testament. His conception of the Jewishness of the infancy narratives has affinities with Geerhardus Vos's understanding of the redemptive epoch prior to the Christian era.<sup>29</sup> When dealing with the Jewish background, he refers to Joseph Alexander's *Commentary* on Isaiah 7:14 for details about the fulfillment of the prophecy and to Robert Wilson for philological support on the meaning of 'alma as "virgin."<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Education in Germany

The impact of Machen's studies in Germany on his scholarship and on *Virgin Birth* should not be overlooked.<sup>31</sup> In 1905, Machen spent one year in

<sup>25</sup> His views on background, historical evidences, and supernatural Christianity are akin to those of Machen. See William P. Armstrong, "Gospel History and Criticism," *The Princeton Theological Review* [PTR] 12 (1914): 427–53 and "The Place of the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1912), 307–92. Hart argues that despite theological differences, Princeton seminary shared its methodological approach with other schools. See Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 182, n. 45, and Ernest DeWitt Burton, "The Place of the New Testament in a Theological Curriculum," *American Journal of Theology* 16.2 (1912): 181–95.

<sup>26</sup> See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 179, n. 25, and 239, n. 2.

<sup>27</sup> See Benjamin B. Warfield, "Introductory Note," in George T. Purves, *Faith and Life: Sermons* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902), ix–xxx.

<sup>28</sup> See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 382, n. 1, and 384, n. 3. On Warfield, see Annette G. Aubert, "Nineteenth-Century Princeton Theology in European Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Carl R. Trueman (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 305–29.

<sup>30</sup> Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 292, n. 15, and 289, n. 8.

<sup>31</sup> See William D. Dennison, "Comparing J. Gresham Machen and Rudolf Bultmann: Reflections upon the Marburg Experience, 1905–06," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology/Zeitschrift für neuere Theologie-geschichte* 16 (2009): 217–75, and Machen, "Christianity in Conflict," 255–64.

Germany. He writes that “in Germany I obtained practically no contact with conservative scholarship, but listened almost exclusively to those who represent the dominant naturalistic point of view.”<sup>32</sup>

At Marburg, he attended classes by Johannes Weiss, whom he came to appreciate more than at first and whose commentaries he used.<sup>33</sup> There he also heard Walter Bauer.<sup>34</sup> In *Virgin Birth*, Machen uses Bauer’s *Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen* (The Life of Jesus in the Age of the New Testament Apocrypha, 1909). Although Bauer’s controversial *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* only appeared in 1934, Machen’s work can be seen as a partial challenge to the thesis that orthodoxy and heresy were equally present in early Christianity.<sup>35</sup> According to William Dennison, he attended classes with Rudolf Bultmann at Marburg.<sup>36</sup> Both dealt with the Synoptics, but Bultmann kept the approach of the history of religion school alive while Machen defended the historicity of the Gospels.

At Göttingen, Machen heard the church historian Kattenbusch, who later reviewed *Virgin Birth*. Machen also attended lectures by Wilhelm Bousset. Later Machen wrote, “My admiration for Bousset’s learning and brilliancy were later increased by his book, *Kyrios Christos*, which appeared in 1913.”<sup>37</sup>

The scholars Machen met in Germany were crucial for his work, and he kept up to date with their research. He had thus a first-hand knowledge of biblical and historical scholarship in Germany, which perhaps accounts for the broader appeal of his works.

### III. *The Birth and Growth of Machen’s Magnus Opus*

#### 1. *Machen’s Reviews on the Virgin Birth*

Early on, Machen started to write reviews on the virgin birth that shed light on his approach.<sup>38</sup> He reviewed two classic works, one by James Orr

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. a team of the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (1971; repr., Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Dennison, “Machen and Bultmann,” 234–35.

<sup>37</sup> Machen, “Christianity in Conflict,” 260. Bousset argues that the witnesses to the virgin birth are late and limited to Matthew and Luke, and it is of pagan origin. Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 342–47, esp. 342–43. In *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), Machen will both refute Bousset and find help in his creative views.

<sup>38</sup> Before him, Armstrong had written one review on Allan Hoben’s book on the virgin birth *PTR* 2.2 (1904): 347–49. Terry Chrisope, in part through an analysis of Machen’s book

(1907)<sup>39</sup> and the other by G. H. Box (1916).<sup>40</sup> Though Orr's views are akin to his, he finds Orr's work too popular (p. 508).<sup>41</sup> He appreciates Orr's parallel between Romans 1:3–4 and Luke 1:35 and the doctrinal part on the importance of the virgin birth (pp. 506–7). Box shows the Jewish character of Luke's infancy narrative and challenges theories about the influence of Greek myths, but the infancy narratives are for him "throughout a poetic and idealizing expansion of actual fact" (p. 152), and he omits Bauer's work on the New Testament apocrypha (p. 153).

Two Catholic authors, Leonard Prestige<sup>42</sup> and A. Durand,<sup>43</sup> defend the historicity and supernatural nature of the Gospels. Prestige does not adequately deal with "modern negative criticism" (p. 679) and follows a faulty reading in Justin Martyr, but Durand got Justin right. Machen disagrees, however, with the latter's defense of the "perpetual virginity of Mary."

The next two works are not up to Machen's standards. Louis Sweet (1906) through research became more convinced of the "historicity of the narratives,"<sup>44</sup> yet he overlooks "the interpolation theory" and confines himself to English and American sources. D. A. Hayes (1919) raises the question of the personalities of biblical authors, but his approach is undisciplined.<sup>45</sup> His treatment leaves unresolved the relation between Matthew's genealogy and the virgin birth.

Machen's reviews of other authors uncover less-than-adequate views on historicity or doctrine. In a 1925 work Orville Crain<sup>46</sup> "defends the historicity of the virgin birth, but is inclined to deny its doctrinal importance." Further, as Machen noted, he is not very familiar "with the modern critical debate" (pp. 134–35). Machen's review of James Mackinnon's 1931 study begins with an extensive survey of studies on the historical Jesus.<sup>47</sup> Mackinnon's

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reviews, documents how his views matured up to 1915. See Terry A. Christo, *Toward a Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881–1915* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000), esp. 99–114.

<sup>39</sup> *PT* 6.3 (1908): 505–8. Orr also contributed to *Fundamentals* on the topic; James Orr, "The Virgin Birth of Christ," *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 7–20.

<sup>40</sup> *PT* 17.1 (1919): 152–53. Box also wrote G. H. Box, "Virgin Birth," *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 2:804–9.

<sup>41</sup> Both use positive evidence and counteract alternative views.

<sup>42</sup> *PT* 17 (1919): 678–79

<sup>43</sup> *PT* 9.4 (1911): 672–73.

<sup>44</sup> *PT* 5.2 (1907): 315–16.

<sup>45</sup> *PT* 17 (1919): 675–77. The book prompts Machen to assert that "the doctrine of plenary inspiration does not involve suppression of the personal characteristics of the Biblical writers" (p. 676).

<sup>46</sup> *PT* 24.1 (1926): 134–36.

<sup>47</sup> *Evangelical Quarterly* 3 (1931): 312–21.

classical liberal view discounts the supernatural, but wants to keep historical elements. Machen, however, counters that “if the supernatural [is] removed they too must go” (p. 314).

These reviews show Machen’s grasp of the literature and concern about scholarly informed contributions, doctrinally sound treatments, and defenses of the historicity of the Gospels. These concerns shaped his works on the virgin birth that culminated in the publication of *Virgin Birth*.

## 2. Roots of the Work

Machen’s *Virgin Birth* was almost thirty years in the making and has antecedents in earlier writings published at key times in his professional career.<sup>48</sup> He wrote on the virgin birth, the assigned topic, for a fellowship competition in his last year at Princeton Seminary.<sup>49</sup> The essay he submitted was then published in the seminary’s periodical.<sup>50</sup> The twofold article includes many German sources and contains the seed of his later contributions: in particular the presentation of positive evidence and the refutation of alternate theories. Machen argues that either “the narrative may be regarded as really based upon facts ... [or it] may be regarded as false; in which case the genesis of the false ideas must be explained.”<sup>51</sup> Thanks to this contribution to biblical studies and apologetics, he received job offers both at Biblical Seminary in New York and at Princeton Seminary.<sup>52</sup> In addition, scholars such as Orr and Herman Bavinck used these early articles.<sup>53</sup>

In 1912, Machen published three key articles.<sup>54</sup> The first two, reprinted as a booklet, were reviewed by Harnack.<sup>55</sup> This recognition encouraged

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<sup>48</sup> Besides published material considered here, the Machen Archives (MA) of the Montgomery Library of Westminster Theological Seminary contain abundant notes taken by Machen in preparation for his book.

<sup>49</sup> Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*, 2nd ed. (1955; repr., Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977), 84–85.

<sup>50</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “The New Testament Account of the Birth of Jesus,” *PTR* 3.4 (1905): 641–70 and *PTR* 4.1 (1906): 37–81.

<sup>51</sup> Machen, “Account of the Birth of Jesus,” 641.

<sup>52</sup> Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 118.

<sup>53</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006), 3:287, n. 148.

<sup>54</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “The Hymns of the First Chapter of Luke,” *PTR* 10.1 (1912): 1–38; “The Origin of the First Two Chapters of Luke,” *PTR* 10.2 (1912): 212–77; and “The Virgin Birth in the Second Century,” *PTR* 10.4 (1912): 529–80. Cf. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 178–80.

<sup>55</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 1 (1913): 7–8. While having some reservations, Harnack stated that Machen’s studies “deserve all our attention.” They debated about sources and the Semitic character of Luke. See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 76. René Laurentin affirms against Harnack that Machen’s position “imposes itself as the only explanation for the

Machen, and shortly after he finally took the steps to be ordained and was installed as Assistant Professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary in May 1915.<sup>56</sup> The third article, on the second century, became the first chapter of Machen's book, thus seeming to move the evidence of church history ahead of the biblical data.<sup>57</sup> The other two exegetical articles were more thoroughly changed and became chapters 4 and 5. These three articles served as building blocks of the book.

The Thomas Smyth Lectures delivered by Machen in the spring of 1927 at Columbia Theological Seminary, "The Integrity of the Lucan Narrative,"<sup>58</sup> would become the heart of the book.<sup>59</sup> The content of the lectures was published in the *Princeton Review*,<sup>60</sup> and chapter 6 reproduces this article with a few additional footnotes.<sup>61</sup> The lectures perhaps explain this chapter's less compact style. About half the chapter on Matthew reproduces his popular article on the text of Matthew 1:16.<sup>62</sup>

None of the remainder of the book (a little more than half) is derived from his writings, though he does refer to them here and there.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the sections on the early church, Luke, and Matthew are largely based on previous publications, while the sections on history and background are mostly new.

#### IV. *Outline of the Argument*

Chapters 1 to 11 present the positive evidence for his thesis that the virgin birth accounts are based on a miraculous fact; chapters 12 to 14 refute

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entirety of the data"; René Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II*, EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1957), 14, n. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> In comparison to the article, in the book a few details were omitted and some updates were made. See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 18–20, 33, 39–41.

<sup>58</sup> Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 424. Starting in 1907–1908, Machen offered every year an elective on the "Birth Narratives." *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>59</sup> Machen confesses, "If the book presents any distinctive feature, it is to be found, perhaps, in the argument for the integrity of the Lucan narrative." Machen, *Virgin Birth*, vii.

<sup>60</sup> J. Gresham Machen, "The Integrity of the Lucan Narrative of the Annunciation," *PTR* 25 (1927): 529–86. A. Faux describes Machen's article as "remarkable." A. Faux, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 24 (1928): 759–60. Cf. *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 17 (1928): 350; *Congregational Quarterly* 6 (1928): 272.

<sup>61</sup> Additions on pages 164 to 168 are partly based on "The Origin of the First Two Chapters of Luke," 272–77.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. J. Gresham Machen, "Matthew 1:16 and the Virgin Birth," *The Presbyterian* 85 (1915): 8–11. On pages 170–71 of *Virgin Birth*, discussion on the interpolation theory are based on his "Account of the Birth of Jesus," 61–62.

<sup>63</sup> See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 189, n. 2, 211, n. 3, 257, n. 10, 265, n. 16, and 273, n. 5. On p. 320, n. 7, he alludes to his debate with Arthur McGiffert and refers to his *What Is Faith* (1925) and a book review in *PTR* 22.4 (1924). He also cites his *Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921) when speaking about the Jewish expectation of a Davidic Messiah (p. 296, n. 14).

alternative theories. Chapter 1 aims to show that belief in the virgin birth is already evident at the beginning of the second century. Some heretical groups denied the virgin birth but were motivated by “philosophical or dogmatic” presuppositions (p. 43). Thus, Machen aligns himself with the greater Christian tradition and argues that it has roots in the apostolic age.<sup>64</sup>

Most of the exegetical section is dedicated to the infancy narrative in Luke (Luke 1–2; cf. chs. 2 to 6). Chapter 2 shows that Luke is “a genuine unity,” of which Luke 1–2 is part (pp. 60–61). Biblical writers may have employed sources, but they were authors who shaped their works (p. 60).<sup>65</sup> Consequently, “the true interpreter must rather seek to enter ... into the very spirit of the writer” (p. 56). The next chapter describes how the infancy narrative in Luke fits well into the whole. The style (“parataxis,” parallelism, and phraseology) indicates its Semitic character (pp. 62–63). The religious atmosphere is pre-Christian and predates the “revolutionary in the Pauline mission,” that is, the way Gentiles were received into the church.<sup>66</sup> The proper interpretation of Luke 2:22 confirms the author’s knowledge of the Jewish law (pp. 70–74).<sup>67</sup>

In chapter 4, Machen focuses on the Magnificat and the Benedictus. He argues, building partly upon Hermann Gunkel’s analysis, against Harnack’s view that those hymns “are artificial compositions of a Gentile Christian” (p. 101). In his typical fashion, he concludes that “the element of truth in both these two views can be conserved, we think, and the element of error avoided, only if we suppose that the hymns actually originated in the situations where they are now placed in the infancy narrative” (p. 101, cf. p. 95). Writing on “the origin and transmission of the Lucan narrative” (ch. 5),<sup>68</sup> he wants to account for its Palestinian character (p. 102). He admits that there is some uncertainty with respect to sources (p. 118) and remains open to various way of handling the Synoptic question (pp. 108–9). However, it emerges that “the author of Luke–Acts certainly had a part in the production of the present form of the infancy narrative” and used sources (pp. 111,

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<sup>64</sup> Belief in the virgin birth was “the conviction of Christendom throughout all the ages,” and “a true historical exegesis must recognize [it] as being in the mind of Luke” (p. 56). Daniel Treier places a similar weight on the early Christian tradition; see “Virgin Territory?,” *Pro Ecclesia* 23.4 (2014): 379.

<sup>65</sup> This emphasis was picked up by Ned Stonehouse in his work on the Synoptic Gospels and anticipates redaction criticism.

<sup>66</sup> See pp. 64 and 66. Cf. Vos and Machen, *Origin of Paul’s Religion*, 17–20.

<sup>67</sup> For an updated discussion, see “The ‘Presentation’ of the Infant Jesus in Luke 2:22–24” by Michael C. Mulder in this issue.

<sup>68</sup> His treatment was perhaps influential on Ned B. Stonehouse’s *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

113). He concludes that “the birth narrative formed part of the Third Gospel” and “is genuinely primitive and Palestinian” (p. 118).

Chapter 6, on the integrity of the Lukan narrative, contends against various interpolation theories that assert that the verses on the virgin birth were added to an earlier original text. These theories allow scholars to maintain the Jewish character of the narrative and the pagan origin of the doctrine (p. 119, cf. ch. 14).<sup>69</sup> Yet one cannot easily excise the verses presenting the virgin birth, and at many places in the infancy narrative the fact is presupposed (e.g., Luke 1:26–27; 2:5; 3:23). Up to page 148, Machen considers arguments in favor of the interpolation theories (arguments based either on style or thought, p. 136), and afterwards arguments against them. The Davidic descent of Jesus is shown to be compatible with the virgin birth—both in Luke’s mind and in the thought of the early church (pp. 126–35). He thinks that Protestants have often overlooked Mary (p. 134). On Luke 1:34 and its interpretive challenges (pp. 141–48), he rejects the Catholic doctrine of perpetual virginity (p. 143), but advocates a more human view of Mary against the cold modern scientific conception projected on her (pp. 146–48), thus showing sensitivity to the characters in the narrative. One of his strongest narrative arguments involves a tight comparison between the announcement of John’s birth (Luke 1:11–20) and that of Jesus’s birth (Luke 1:28–38; pp. 152–64), the outcome of which is not only that Luke 1:34–35 belongs integrally to the narrative structure, but also that Jesus’s birth is greater than John’s, and the greater virgin birth contrasts with a birth from parents in old age.<sup>70</sup> Machen concludes that “all the attacks upon the integrity of Lk. i–ii which would represent the mention of the virgin birth as a secondary element in the narrative have signally failed” (p. 168).

In chapter 7, he makes a similar argument about Matthew, which seems addressed “particularly to the Jews.” He cautiously states that “exaggerations ... should be avoided at this point” and that Matthew’s Jewishness does not conflict “with the principles of the Gentile mission” (pp. 169–70).<sup>71</sup> Manuscript evidence and style militate against the minority view that Matthew 1–2 were not part of the original Gospel (pp. 170–73). Though “less markedly Semitic”

<sup>69</sup> Either Luke 1:34–35 or “seeing I know not a man” (v. 34) or vv. 34–37 have been added (p. 120).

<sup>70</sup> Machen applies “the terminology of textual criticism” to the question of sources and interpolation (pp. 155–56). This shows the familiarity with textual criticism that resulted from his training as a classical philologist and New Testament scholar. On textual criticism and other aspects of the study of the New Testament, see J. Gresham Machen, “Forty Years of New Testament Research,” *Union Seminary Review* 40.1 (1928): 1–12.

<sup>71</sup> A similar balance can be observed in Stonehouse’s works; see, e.g., Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Luke to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 5–6, 177.

than Luke, Matthew 1–2 are “essentially Jewish and Palestinian [in] character” (pp. 173–74),<sup>72</sup> and “Mt. ii presupposes the virgin birth as it is narrated in Mt. i.18–25” (p. 176). In the rest of the chapter he rejects the textual reading of Matthew 1:16 that implies that Joseph is the physical father of Jesus.

In the next four chapters, Machen leaves “the sphere of literary criticism” and enters the “sphere of historical criticism.”<sup>73</sup> In chapter 8, he addresses the question of the relationship between the infancy narrative in Luke and that in Matthew, concluding that the differences (not contradictions) show the “independence of the two narratives” and offers his own harmonized outline of the events (p. 197; cf. p. 210). Matthew might have received his information through Joseph and Luke through Mary, but even if both got their information from Mary, Matthew represents Joseph’s viewpoint and Luke Mary’s (pp. 200–201). Then he argues “that the differences [in the genealogies] ... are not irreconcilable” (p. 209).<sup>74</sup> The historical reliability of the Gospels is defended at every point, even if his formulations are at times tentative.

Machen then handles the issue of miracles and the supernatural. He challenges the rationalist view that keeps some historical elements while rejecting the supernatural (p. 211). He perceives in Harnack’s approach some resurgence of rationalization (pp. 214–16)<sup>75</sup> and reiterates Strauss’s alternative: “Either accept the narratives as they stand ... or ... regard them as myths” (pp. 216–17). Machen opts for the former and explains the miracles as representing “a new era in the course of the universe” where God’s “creative power” is at play. He asserts that the recognition of miracles must presuppose a theistic worldview and rejects the distinction between faith and history (pp. 217–18, cf. p. 228).<sup>76</sup> In comparison with the apocryphal gospels, the canonical Gospels are fairly sober (pp. 219–20).<sup>77</sup> He then

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<sup>72</sup> Here he cites Box for support while rejecting his view that details of the narrative are unhistorical.

<sup>73</sup> Chapters 9 to 11 deal with the “inherent credibility of the narratives,” their relations to secular history and to the rest of the New Testament (pp. 210, 238).

<sup>74</sup> Howard Marshall still considers Machen’s discussion significant. Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 158, 161, 163.

<sup>75</sup> Machen considers Box’s approach of partial historicity to be very different from the rationalizing approach (p. 216).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. J. Gresham Machen, “History and Faith,” *PTR* 13.3 (1915): 337–51; and George M. Marsden, “J. Gresham Machen, History, and Truth,” *WTJ* 42.1 (1979): 157–75.

<sup>77</sup> N. T. Wright makes a similar argument about another parallel: “But in comparison with other legends about other figures, Matthew and Luke look after all quite restrained”; N. T. Wright, “Born of a Virgin?,” in Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989), 175.

responds to objections about angels (pp. 221–23), the star (pp. 223–28),<sup>78</sup> and Matthew's genealogy (with its inclusion of "Thamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah" [p. 230]). In chapter 10, Machen answers difficulties arising from comparisons with secular history: "the massacre of the innocents" (pp. 238–39) and "the census of Quirinius" (pp. 239–43).<sup>79</sup>

The subsequent chapter deals with the silence of the rest of the New Testament on the virgin birth. He admits that it was not known in Palestine and among Jesus's contemporaries (pp. 244–52) and explains Mark's silence as a manifestation of Mark's intention to report what he heard from witnesses (pp. 252–54). The explanation of the silence in John's Gospel is similar (p. 255). On John 1:13, he is rather inclined to reject any allusion to the virgin birth.<sup>80</sup> Regarding Paul, Galatians 4:4–5 and Romans 1:3–4 are neutral on the subject of the virgin birth (pp. 259–62). Further, in Paul the life of Jesus is in the background, topics (e.g., the Lord's Supper) come up as the occasion arises, and the virgin birth is "congruous with Paul's teaching about Christ" (p. 262).<sup>81</sup> Machen concedes that the teaching about the virgin birth was not as prevalent in the early church as teaching about the resurrection and thinks that it is fitting with the character of Mary that she would have shared this "secret" only later on (pp. 263–66).<sup>82</sup> Further, the virgin birth makes sense in view of the New Testament teaching about Christ (p. 267). His nuanced analysis does not downplay the silence of "the rest of the New Testament" and offers plausible explanations for its relative absence early on.<sup>83</sup>

Chapters 12 to 14 raise the question of alternative theories about the rise of the belief in the virgin birth (ch. 12). In contrast to Vincent Taylor, Machen does not consider it an irrelevant question (p. 270), but he is more cautious than H. R. Mackintosh about the strength of the argument concerning the difficulty of alternate options (p. 271, n. 2). Machen remarks that this

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<sup>78</sup> The narrative of the star does not need to be an account of a supernatural phenomenon. "The poetical, oriental way of describing" has to be taken into account (p. 225), and at times modernists rather than conservatives are the literalists (p. 226).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Wright, "Born of a Virgin?" 174–75, and C. E. B. Cranfield, "Some Reflections on the Subject of the Virgin Birth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41.2 (1988): 182–85.

<sup>80</sup> This goes against the conclusion of his former colleague Vos. Cf. Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 258, n. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Machen, *Origin of Paul's Religion*, 117–69 and "Jesus and Paul," in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1912), 546–78.

<sup>82</sup> This secret was more naturally revealed after the resurrection (p. 276). Cf. Cranfield, "Some Reflections," 180.

<sup>83</sup> Though Cranfield is more reserved than Machen about proving the virgin birth, he is more open to finding allusions to it in Mark, John, and Paul. Cranfield, "Some Reflections," 177, 178–80.

question has occupied “the best efforts of modern scholarship” (p. 271). Also, if Jesus was born illegitimately or simply of Joseph and Mary, modern scholars need to explain how the theory of the virgin birth came into being (p. 278). Two options have been suggested: Jewish and pagan derivation.

Machen discusses several obstacles in Jewish thought to a virgin birth: the presence of extraordinary births but no virgin births in the Old Testament (pp. 280–81), God’s transcendence (p. 282), and the expectation of a Messiah descending from David (p. 285). However, key to this discussion is the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and its quotation in Matthew 1:22–23 (p. 287). Machen considers it a prophecy, but since Jews did not interpret it to refer to the virgin birth of the Messiah, it cannot account for the rise of the virgin birth notion on Jewish soil (p. 293).<sup>84</sup> Alleged parallels in Philo to the infancy narrative in the Gospels are too divergent to be taken into consideration (pp. 297–311).<sup>85</sup> He concludes against the theory of Jewish derivation.

The theory of pagan derivation appears to be the majority view (ch. 14), especially of the history of religion school. Kattenbusch’s theory of an indirect pagan influence through stages did not take hold (pp. 317–19). At the outset two objections arise: the Christian church and the Greco-Roman world are very distinct (pp. 319–21, cf. pp. 338–39), and the infancy narratives have a distinctly Palestinian character (pp. 321–22). The interpolation theory, or the idea that the virgin birth “was already naturalized in pre-Christian Judaism,” does not answer the latter objection (p. 322). Christ’s birth has been compared with heroes “begotten by the gods” or the stories of great men containing narratives of extraordinary births (p. 324). Confirmation is seen in the use of such stories by church fathers like Justin Martyr or Origen (pp. 327, 329). However, these fathers argued more by analogy, and their apologetic methods differed from that of the New Testament (p. 331).<sup>86</sup> Crucial differences emerge between pagan stories and the accounts of Jesus’s birth: these stories do not relate a “*virgin birth*” (p. 335), the pagan gods are represented anthropomorphically (p. 336), and these narratives betray a polytheistic worldview (p. 338). Parallels have also been sought elsewhere, such as in the “religions of the East” (p. 339).<sup>87</sup> Hugo Gressmann (pp. 349–58)

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<sup>84</sup> The reception of Isaiah 53 in Jewish circles is similar (p. 294). On biblical prophecies, see pp. 314–15.

<sup>85</sup> The discussion on Philo anticipates the next chapter (p. 310).

<sup>86</sup> In this context, Machen writes revealing words: “though the content of revelation cannot be deduced by human reasoning, the credentials of the revelation become clear to a human reason that has been freed from the blinding effect of sin.”

<sup>87</sup> For example, later Buddhist (pp. 339–42) and Babylonian sources (pp. 344–45). Bousset suggests a comparison with the Arabian god Dusares (pp. 345–48). For Machen such an appeal indicates “the weakness of the more usual hypotheses” (p. 348).

and Eduard Norden (pp. 358–63) have compared Jesus's birth with stories from Egypt. However, "the supposed 'adaptation'" of the myth into the New Testament implies "the removal of the very heart and core of the pagan myth" (p. 362) and fails to appreciate "the inner spirit of the New Testament" (p. 363). Machen then refutes the work of Hans Leisegang, who redefines the work of the Holy Spirit in Luke in light of comparative studies (pp. 363–79).<sup>88</sup> The result is "that if the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ did not originate in fact, modern critical investigation has at any rate not yet succeeded in showing how it did originate" (p. 379).

Finally, positive evidence and the failure of alternate theories plead in favor of the virgin birth (p. 380),<sup>89</sup> and this miraculous birth is in harmony with the biblical presentation of the person of Christ. The discussion implies that first, since the Bible teaches the virgin birth, to reject it is to reject the authority of the Bible (pp. 382–87); second, belief in the virgin birth is a better test that someone holds to a supernatural Jesus than faith in the resurrection (pp. 387–92); and third, the virgin birth is essential to Christianity (pp. 392–97), as it sheds light on "redemption" and the "incarnation" and so is an integral part of the gospel (pp. 393–94, 396). He concludes that "even if the belief in the virgin birth is not necessary to every Christian, it is certainly necessary to Christianity." Thus, to profess the virgin birth is to uphold a fuller understanding of the Christian faith.

## V. Reception of Machen's Virgin Birth

Machen's work received international acclaim. Ned Stonehouse states, "Some ninety reviews in magazines and newspapers of several countries have been preserved, many written by the most distinguished theologians of the day."<sup>90</sup> Reviews on the *Virgin Birth* can be classified as mostly positive, sympathetic but critical, and mostly negative.<sup>91</sup> There is also evidence of

<sup>88</sup> Bultmann's critique reinforces Machen's challenge (p. 378).

<sup>89</sup> His overall argument is similar to Wright's case ("Born of a Virgin?" 176) and Cranfield's argument (Cranfield, "Some Reflections," 186). Machen makes a similar argument about Paul; after having pitched the liberal disjunction between Paul and Jesus against Bousset's reconstruction of the Lordship of Christ in Paul in light of Hellenism, Machen presents Paul's real encounter with the resurrected Lord as key for understanding Paul's theology (Machen, *Origin of Paul's Religion*, 30, 58–68).

<sup>90</sup> Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 515. His numbers can be confirmed by the reviews collected by Machen's mother, Minnie G. Machen, "Scrapbook on the Virgin Birth of Christ" [MA Scrapbook]. See also Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I–II*, 208, and Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 191. Cf. Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 55.

<sup>91</sup> MOSTLY POSITIVE: H. John Chapman, *Dublin Review* 95 (1931): 150–53; Samuel Craig,

dialogue between Machen and some of the reviewers.<sup>92</sup>

### 1. *Comprehensiveness and Importance*

All reviewers agree that Machen's research was comprehensive, especially with his inclusion of German scholarship and specifically the works of Norden, Leisegang, and Gressmann (Chapman, p. 152; Cadbury; Charue, p. 88; Lowe, p. 266; Kolffhaus). Morton Enslin marvels, "It is amazing that a man can find so much to say about this subject" (p. 518). Kattenbusch writes, however, "He names many (foreign, American, English) writings which I do not know. That he does not know all (some German) ... is natural" (p. 454).

*The Virgin Birth* is seen as an essential work of apologetics and scholarship. According to Kattenbusch, "it is clearly the most comprehensive work on the subject that has appeared" (p. 454; cf. Bartlet, pp. 224–25).<sup>93</sup> Mackintosh acknowledges, "his book must rank as *the* book on the strictly conservative side." William McGarry considers it "one of the finest pieces of apologetic for the virginal conception in the English language" (p. 491).<sup>94</sup> Machen's *Virgin Birth* was taken into account, not only by Reformed theologians,<sup>95</sup> but also by exegetes like Oscar Cullmann and Bultmann.<sup>96</sup> In recent scholarship,

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*Christianity Today* 1.1 (1930): 13–14; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Revue Biblique* 39 (1930): 514–15; John Mackay, *Evangelical Quarterly* 2.2 (1930): 203–6. SYMPATHETIC BUT CRITICAL: G. H. Box, *Laudate* 9 (1931): 77–88, 147–55; Henry Cadbury, *Christian Century* (1931): 307; A. Charue, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 27 (1931): 86–88; August Deneffe, *Scholastik* 6.1 (1931); MA Scrapbook, 61; Morton Enslin, *Crozer Quarterly* 7 (1930): 518–20; F. J. H., *Living Church* (May 3, 1930): 14; MA Patton Material; Ferdinand Kattenbusch, *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 102 (1931): 454–74; Wilhelm Kolffhaus, *Reformierte kirchenzeitung* 80 (1930); MA Scrapbook, 60–61; John Lowe, *Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* (1930): 266–67; MA Patton Material; H. R. Mackintosh, *British Weekly* 88 (July 17, 1930): 313; William McGarry, *Biblica* 12.4 (1931): 490–93; *Times Literary Supplement* 29 (April 10, 1930); MA Scrapbook, p. 9. MOSTLY CRITICAL: Vernon Bartlet, *Congregational Quarterly* 9 (1931): 224–27; A. D. Beittel, *Journal of Religion* 10 (1930): 600–602; James S. Bezzant, *Modern Churchman* 21 (1931): 94–96; Martin Dibelius, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 4 (1932): 147–50; Burton Easton, *Anglican Theological Review* 12.5 (1930): 454–55; Maurice Goguel, *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 10 (1930): 585–90.

<sup>92</sup> Machen sent the second edition his book to Box and they had a friendly letter exchange. G. H. Box, to J. G. Machen, 16 June 1932. MA, Box 21, *The Virgin Birth of Christ: Responses*. Chapman sent Machen a long appreciative handwritten note with his review. H. John Chapman, Letter to J. Gresham Machen, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, 14 February 1931. MA, Box 21.

<sup>93</sup> Walter Bauer, perhaps thanks to Kattenbusch, refers to Machen's book alongside Kattenbusch's review. *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1958), 1243 ("παρθένος"; BAGD 627).

<sup>94</sup> The great Catholic exegete Lagrange offers a very positive review; see also Deneffe.

<sup>95</sup> E.g., Packer, "Fundamentalism" and *the Word of God*, 35, n. 1, and Henri Blocher, *Christologie* (Vaux-sur-Seine: Faculté Libre de Théologie Évangélique, 1986), 2:235.

<sup>96</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 295–96. Rudolf Bultmann, *History*

Andrew Lincoln, in his book on the virgin birth, though mostly reaching opposite conclusions from Machen, still considers his work unavoidable.<sup>97</sup>

## 2. *The Most Interesting Part*

For many reviewers, the argument for the integrity of Luke's narrative is the strongest and most interesting part (e.g., Mackay, p. 204; Kolffhaus). John Chapman wrote to Machen, "The vindication of Luke i-ii is an extraordinarily brilliant piece of argumentation, because it is at once so explicit and complete and moderate in tone" (Chapman, letter to Machen). Others consider the treatment of Luke the center (Bezzant, p. 95; Goguel, p. 587). For Martin Dibelius, however, his section on "the religious-historical derivation of the virgin birth" is the "most interesting part" (p. 149), and McGarry finds both parts "most cogent and instructive" (p. 492).

## 3. *Between Fundamentalism and Catholicism*

The reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* comments that "the writer's presuppositions are not merely conservative, but ultra-conservative." Conservatives welcomed Machen's scholarly defense: Chapman rejoices that it is not only "conservative" but also "a book one must admire and praise" (p. 150; cf. Craig, p. 14). Less conservative voices acknowledged his scholarship: his "fundamentalist ... attitude to Holy Scripture" is accompanied by wide reading (Bezzant, p. 94).<sup>98</sup> Machen's rejection of Box's mediating position is held as a sign of his conservatism (Easton, p. 454). Box himself acknowledges Machen's "conservative conclusions," but considers him "eminently fair to the scholars with whom he disagrees" (Box, p. 78).

Likewise, reviewers criticized Machen's attempt to prove the historicity of every detail in the biblical narrative (*Times Literary Supplement*; Easton, p. 454). Bezzant ironically states, "In an argument which consists of a whole series of hypotheses ... the cumulative uncertainty remains" (p. 96), and Mackintosh argues that "his argument would probably have gained in persuasive force" if he had not followed the "all or nothing" motto. Yet Chapman appreciates the "cumulative effect" of the argument against assumed results of criticism (p. 151).

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*of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1963), 292, n. 1; 295, n. 3; and 296, n. 3.

<sup>97</sup> Lincoln writes, "[*Virgin Birth*] remains an erudite classic defence of this doctrine ... [and] continues to exercise significant influence among evangelical Christians"; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 245.

<sup>98</sup> F. J. H. states that "his fundamentalism," which comes out only once, "does not ... disqualify him as a patient and careful scholar." Cf. Goguel, p. 585.

There were other perceptions of Machen. One Catholic reviewer wrongly identified him as an “Anglican theologian.”<sup>99</sup> Machen’s broad knowledge of the literature (*Belesenheit*) and his “prolixity” remind Dibelius of Catholic authors (p. 147). For Vernon Bartlet, Machen’s understanding of Scripture is “Catholic” not “Reformed” (p. 227). One Catholic reviewer affirms that although Machen is not Catholic, if he would “reconsider his own principle,” he would acknowledge the authority of the church (Deneffe). Catholics were among the most enthusiastic readers, taking exception, however, to his denial of the perpetual virginity of Mary and his views on the brothers of the Lord.<sup>100</sup>

#### 4. *History and Background*

For James Bezzant, “the historical rather than ... the doctrinal standpoint” is presented (p. 94), but Burton Easton questions Machen’s “historical sincerity” (p. 455). Maurice Goguel feels that Machen has not established the virgin birth historically (p. 586; cf. Bartlet, 225) and further questions whether “traditional dogma” can be based upon “an historical inquiry” (p. 590). Other reviewers more in line with Machen’s presuppositions differed.

For Machen, background information does not account for the virgin birth, but the real event itself does. But A. Beittel accuses him of lacking “appreciation of the good qualities in many of the religions of the Graeco-Roman world” and considers his view that “Christianity developed ... without being influenced to any extent by its environment” obsolete (p. 601). For Dibelius, one cannot easily separate Jewish from pagan elements (p. 149).<sup>101</sup> Bezzant writes about Isaiah 7:14, “The question is not, What interpretation was possible to the first century Jews? but, What interpretation became possible to Christians?” (p. 96). Though Machen’s argument could be nuanced, he has adequately shown the gulf between the biblical texts and their background.

#### 5. *Repetitious or Clear?*

Evaluations of Machen’s style vary. Chapman finds the first chapter “hard reading” and the book as a whole plagued by “many avoidable repetitions” (pp. 150–51; cf. Enslin, p. 518); this can be partially explained by the genesis

<sup>99</sup> *The Ecclesiastical Review* (May 1930); MA Scrapbook, 27.

<sup>100</sup> Despite reservations, McGarry states that in contrast to rationalism in biblical studies, “the book comes as a refreshing surprise” (p. 491). Cf. Chapman, p. 152; Lagrange, p. 615; Charue, p. 88; F. J. H.

<sup>101</sup> More recent studies on Hellenism in Palestine perhaps confirm Dibelius’s point. See Bernard Aubert, *The Shepherd-Flock Motif in the Miletus Discourse (Acts 20:17–38) Against Its Historical Background*, SBL 124 (New York: Lang, 2009), 49–50.

of the book.<sup>102</sup> Yet for John Mackay, “the style is crisp and clear and the concatenation of paragraphs as logical as the Shorter Catechism” (p. 203; cf. Charue, p. 88; and Lowe, p. 267). As for the tone, in some parts there is “an apparent gravity, beneath which the author’s amusement does not fail at times to emerge” (Chapman, p. 152). Henry Cadbury remarks that he “avoids ungentlemanly tactics of controversy.”

## 6. *Apologetic Character*

Craig notes the balance of Machen’s apologetic approach as he “steers midway between the position of Vincent Taylor ... and that of H. R. Mackintosh” (p. 13; see also McGarry, p. 492; and Box, p. 147).<sup>103</sup> Cadbury observes that “presuppositions are a determining factor” and that “he will play the liberal theories against one another, with their contradictions.”<sup>104</sup> For Goguel, the book cannot “convince anyone unless he was already persuaded before” (p. 589).

Wilhelm Kolffhaus, who is otherwise appreciative, asks, “Does he hope through proof to force unbelievers [to believe]? ... Should the truth of the Bible be proved?” John Lowe similarly asserts that he attempts to demonstrate “the obviously indemonstrable” (p. 267). Dibelius and Bultmann note the “apologetic tendency,” which was for them not a compliment (Dibelius, p. 147; Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 292, n. 1).

## VI. *Machen’s Response*

### 1. *Second Edition*

Machen’s *Virgin Birth* was first published in 1930; two years later a revised edition appeared that took into account reviews of his work and recent publications. The pagination of the two editions is the same, so small cuts had to be made to make space for additions.<sup>105</sup> He also added a preface (pp. vii–x) where he interacts more in depth with evaluations of his book. This

<sup>102</sup> That Machen worked on *The Virgin Birth* for years did not go unnoticed. Easton, p. 454; D. B. Botte, *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* (1930); MA Scrapbook, 47; and Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I–II*, 208.

<sup>103</sup> Not surprisingly, Mackintosh finds that the second part comes “with a force ... difficult to resist.”

<sup>104</sup> For Enslin, it “is not without its grotesque side” (p. 519).

<sup>105</sup> A comparison of the two editions reveals that Machen made changes on the following pages (not including the preface and index): 16, 29, 61, 63, 90, 120–21, 137, 157, 165, 209, 213, 275, 296, 307, 317, 323, 359, 374–76, 378, and 385. Among the changes, one could cite interactions with Bultmann and Kattenbusch, small corrections, and discussion about the proto-Luke hypothesis of B. H. Streeter and Taylor.

revised edition shows Machen's continued attention to detail and engagement with key scholars.<sup>106</sup>

## 2. A Few Targeted Responses

In his response to the complaint of the British theologian Mackintosh that he defends the historicity of all the details,<sup>107</sup> Machen indicates that this was not a criticism of Box but of "rationalizing treatment."<sup>108</sup> Further, he wants a comprehensive defense (not just of a few central doctrines) to protect "the outer defence of Christianity" (i.e., "plenary inspiration of the Bible").<sup>109</sup> For him, inspiration is "the starting-point of systematic theology" but "the goal ... in apologetics," and, if one "believe in the true resurrection of Jesus ... and yet reject the particular miracle of the virgin birth," he or she still shares in God's grace.

Machen responds to Kolffhaus on apologetics in a letter.<sup>110</sup> In line with "the position of B. B. Warfield and others of our Princeton School (now, alas, deprived of its centre in Princeton itself)," he feels that Kolffhaus places less weight on apologetics. Likewise, "there was a difference between Abraham Kuyper and Warfield ... but ... that difference was [not] so great in practice as it was in theory."<sup>111</sup> Machen attempts to hold together the impact of sin on the mind and reason: "A truly open mind" accepts the evidence of the New Testament, but "the mind of sinful man is not truly open," and the Holy Spirit through regeneration has to remove "the noetic effects of sin." The "truths" of the Bible are not found "by unaided human reason," but the Spirit does not work "in defiance of the scientific evidence or in independence of it."<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

Machen's *Virgin Birth* grew out of years of research and various publications, and out of concern for the church. His achievement remains considerable,

<sup>106</sup> No such revised edition exists for Machen's *Origin of Paul's Religion*.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 216.

<sup>108</sup> Machen, "The Virgin Birth: Is the Doctrine Crucial?" *British Weekly* (August 21, 1930); MA Scrapbook, 50. He distinguishes views that accept "as historical the central miracle in the birth narratives and rejects details, from views of those who accept only details and reject the central miracle" (Machen, *Virgin Birth*, x).

<sup>109</sup> In his preface, Machen puts it like this: "A thoroughgoing apologetic is the strongest apologetic in the end" (ibid.).

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Kolffhaus, January 31, 1931; MA, Box 21.

<sup>111</sup> Note that Cornelius Van Til also defines his approach in relation to Warfield and Kuyper yet probably places more emphasis on Kuyper than Machen does. See Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 229–54.

<sup>112</sup> Letter to Kolffhaus.

as more than half the book was new material. His interaction with critical scholarship and appreciation for Catholic scholarship set him apart from fundamentalism. His book was welcomed in America and Europe by conservative Protestants, critical scholars, and Catholic scholars.<sup>113</sup> His scholarship, also well grounded in the Reformed tradition, makes him relevant for the international Reformed community.

Here are a few of Machen's contributions. First, his comprehensive defense of the doctrine remains a significant achievement. It is sensitive to others' views and often nuanced. In an era of renewed interest in theological interpretation, his book deserves a second look.<sup>114</sup> Second, he continues Old Princeton and anticipates Cornelius Van Til.<sup>115</sup> His views about reason and sin, presuppositions, and antithesis, and his attempts to show the bankruptcy of opposing explanations, point toward Van Til. Thus his New Testament apologetics has commonalities with Van Til's philosophical apologetics. Third, he offers valuable insights into New Testament studies and is a master at synthesis.<sup>116</sup> He contrasts acceptance of supernatural facts with offers of alternate solutions, the virgin birth and putative Jewish/pagan backgrounds; the origin of Paul's religion in a personal encounter with the risen Christ and Paul's Hellenistic background. Machen remains a model of confessional biblical scholarship (e.g., philology and textual criticism, Synoptic studies, source criticism and historical analysis, and narrative analysis), especially as such issues in biblical studies did not vanish. Of course, new answers and interaction with the most recent scholarship is certainly what Machen would have expected. His following comments are still relevant as we commemorate Erasmus's anniversary:

The new Reformation ... will be accompanied by a new Renaissance; and the last thing in the world that we desire to do is to discourage originality or independence of mind.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> This reinforces the importance of a transatlantic approach advocated by Annette Aubert; see her "J. Gresham Machen and the Theology of Crisis," 337–62, and Dennison, "Machen and Bultmann."

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Treier, "Virgin Territory?," 373.

<sup>115</sup> For more on Machen and Van Til, see Greg L. Bahnsen, "Machen, Van Til, and the Apologetical Tradition of the OPC," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936–1986* (Philadelphia: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 259–94, and John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 39–44.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Aubert, "J. Gresham Machen and the Theology of Crisis," 361–62.

<sup>117</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 18–19.



# Paul's Preaching and Postmodern Skepticism

VERN S. POYTHRESS

## Abstract

By focusing on Paul's own descriptions of his preaching, and especially on 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, we can see several ways in which Paul's own views provide answers to postmodern skepticism. Paul presupposes that God exists, the same God who is set forth in the Old Testament as the creator and sustainer of the world. In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, Paul affirms that his message has divine authority, divine truthfulness, divine power to overcome resistance to its claims, and divine presence through the glory of Christ. Paul's message also shows how, in the midst of the Roman Empire's situation of multiple cultures and multiple languages, he preaches a gospel with universal claims, in "the open statement of the truth" (2 Cor 4:3).

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**V**arious trends in postmodern thought have contributed to increased skepticism concerning the very possibility of infallible revelation in human language. What response should we give? It should be clear that the Bible is antithetical to this skepticism. It claims to carry a message from God. It announces truths communicated from God and salvation coming from God. Included in this salvation is a process of healing in knowledge, through fellowship with God in Christ.

There are many aspects of biblical teaching on which we might focus. I propose to focus on the preaching of the Apostle Paul, and particularly

on 2 Corinthians 4:1–6, which exposes Paul’s own view concerning his preaching.

The Apostle Paul in his own time and place did not directly confront postmodernism, but he did confront philosophical skepticism as well as more banal forms of incredulity (Acts 17:32; 19:9; 14:2; 17:5). He did not deal with modern multiculturalism, but he dealt with multiple ethnicities in the Roman Empire. So it is worthwhile exploring the relation of his preaching to skeptical challenges in our day.

### ***1. Roots of Postmodern Skepticism in Issues of Worldview***

Paul’s preaching is best considered against the background of the larger worldview that he inherited from the Old Testament. So, before turning to details about Paul’s preaching, let us briefly consider the contrast between the worldview in the Old Testament and the worldviews characterizing trends in postmodern thought.

What does the Bible say? There is one God, who created and sustains the world (Gen 1; Ps 104). This God speaks (Gen 1:3). And he has given the gift of speech and language to human beings. He is sovereign over all cultures and present in all languages and cultures through general revelation (Ps 19:1–6; 104; 148). Since the time of Adam, human beings have been in systematic, rebellious flight from his presence. But through Christ God has granted a rich salvation that is able to overcome human resistance, to bring about forgiveness of sins, to transform human hearts, and to bring us into the light of God’s truth. A sound approach to fundamental issues concerning languages, cultures, and ethnicities will build on these truths. It leads to a very different structure of understanding than is typical in the halls of modernism and postmodernism.

I have elsewhere undertaken to give a more wide-ranging response to modernism and postmodernism by developing a biblically based approach to truth, language, culture, and society.<sup>1</sup> I cannot repeat everything here. But it is worthwhile illustrating some of the principles by focusing on Paul’s preaching. So we now turn to 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 as a key text about the nature of his preaching.

In considering the implications of Paul’s preaching, it is useful also to be aware of the international context of gospel proclamation. The origins of

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<sup>1</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009); Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Sociology: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Vern S. Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

postmodernism lie primarily in Western cultures, but they are spreading throughout the world. So it is fitting to address these issues in an international context.

## II. *The Presence of God*

In the key passage 2 Corinthians 4:1–6, Paul has this to say about his preaching:

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

This passage is relevant to modern challenges especially because it is God centered and Christ centered. The differences in worldview are most profound right here. Paul—and the Bible as a whole—differs from postmodernism on the question of God. Is there a God? Is he the creator of the world, as verse 6 presupposes when it alludes to Genesis 1:3 and God's creation of light? Is God the *kind* of God who not only created the world long ago but continues to act in it? Verse 6 indicates that God continues to act in revelatory presence: he "has shone in our hearts." This God imparts genuine religious knowledge, not mere opinion: "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (v. 6).

The answers that people give to questions about God make a profound difference in their view of what kind of world we live in. Is ours a world in which God manifests his authority, exerts his control, and expresses his presence?<sup>3</sup> Is it a world in which God actually makes himself known to human beings?<sup>4</sup> Paul clearly believes we live in this kind of world. In 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 he does not offer an elaborate discussion about the nature of God and the doctrines of creation, providence, and revelation. Rather, he presupposes them. Even before he was a follower of Christ, he was a Jew, a Pharisee of

<sup>2</sup> Biblical quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.

<sup>3</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 15–18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–20.

Pharisees (Acts 23:6). When he came to believe in Christ, he did not abandon his allegiance to the Old Testament. Since in 2 Corinthians he is writing to fellow Christian believers, he can take for granted this Old Testament foundation. But other people within the Roman Empire did not share it. In Acts there are occasions when he addresses pagans, and he speaks directly about the nature of God (Acts 14:15–17; 17:22–31).

Paul's view of the world is in pointed contrast to the typical worldviews of modern skeptics. For the skeptic, the world is a place that is dead with respect to God. Maybe the skeptic says that there is no God. Or, if there is a God, he is fundamentally inaccessible. If so, modern people should take it for granted that God is absent and not interfering, and try to craft their human existence and meanings based on that assumption.

When postmodern skeptics confront a passage such as 2 Corinthians 4:1–6, they have a response already in place. They have learned from sociology of knowledge and sociology of religion to be skeptical about claims for transcendent knowledge of God and knowledge of spiritual things. Second Corinthians 4:1–6 and all of Paul's preaching belong to the sociological category of "religious discourse." The framework for most postmodernist analysis puts all religious discourse on fundamentally the same level. Religious discourse offers merely human, social, cultural attempts to discuss and communicate about transcendence and the spirit world.

In other words, everything in Paul's preaching belongs to human language, interacting with human hearers, within a human cultural context. And so it does. But does Paul's preaching *also* involve God speaking through him? There is a fundamental error underneath the typical modern sociological description, because Paul has a worldview in which God is present right in the midst of the process of human communication. To ignore God is to ignore the heart of communication events and to falsify their true nature. It is to *pretend* that God is absent and that the message is *merely* human (as opposed to being human *and divine*). To say that the message about Christ is merely human implies that the message is without a transcendent claim to divine authority and without a transcendent power to create new life and new understanding (v. 6).

So which is it? Is Paul right? Or is the skeptic right in supposing that God can be ignored? Answering the question involves apologetics. Cornelius Van Til in his apologetics clarified for us how to respond to such skepticism.<sup>5</sup> A

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<sup>5</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008); John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015).

Christian response has two sides. First, on the positive side, we continue today in the path that Paul laid out. We make known the gospel. We make known what Paul says, taking into account his worldview, and we maintain that his proclamation makes a divine claim to the allegiance of hearers, because God crafts Paul's words and is speaking in them. God is present and confronts the hearers with his light.

Second, we examine critically the foundational assumptions (presuppositions) underlying various forms of opposition and objection. We endeavor to overthrow opposition by showing its delusions. Paul himself describes his zeal to overthrow all opposition to Christ: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor 10:4–5).

When we confront modern skepticism, our analysis might begin with the issue of claims to knowledge. How does the skeptic *know* that God is absent and that religious discourse is always merely human? He thinks he knows because he already has his own worldview, which assures him that God is absent. Secretly, perhaps unconsciously, he prides himself on the idea that he has superior insight concerning the actual state of affairs. According to his view, Paul and other religious preachers are deluded in thinking there is a divine presence and divine authority in their claims. Such claims to divine authority are merely means for human manipulation.

The skeptic, I say, claims to have such insight. But such a claim is itself a claim to have impressive knowledge about God, even if it is a kind of negative knowledge about his absence. The claim dissolves once we observe that the skeptical claim does not even pretend to be based on revelation from God, but only on human insight. And why should not this alleged insight itself be delusional, because it has suppressed the knowledge of God (Rom 1:18–23)? The sense of insight has been generated in the context of the limitations of post-Enlightenment worldviews, which are culturally parochial in their ignorance of the spirit world. In the absence of divine revelation, the claim to know the nature of religion and culture before detailed examination of each of the many religions and cultures is not a form of openness but of arrogance.

### **III. Confidence in Preaching**

But let us focus on what Paul says on his own terms. Paul expresses personal confidence in his preaching in three respects. First, the origin of his message is divine, and its authority is divine. It is "God's word" (2 Cor 4:2). Second,

the content of the message is sound; Paul preaches the truth, what he calls “the open statement of the *truth*” (v. 2). Third, Paul is confident in the power of his preaching to overcome opposition. His confidence is not based on his own rhetoric (1 Cor 2:1–5) or his human qualifications (Phil 3:4–8), but on God (2 Cor 3:4–6). Through the gospel, God works with the same divinely creative power that he showed when his words first produced the light of creation (4:6; compare Gen 1:3). In sum, the gospel that Paul preaches includes divine authority, divine truthfulness, and divine power. All three are important for its integrity.

#### **IV. Preaching and Manipulation**

One of the concerns running through postmodernist circles is the concern for propaganda. Sly people can use manipulative language for the sake of molding and controlling others. And the same can happen even in circles that *claim* to be Christian. Some preachers who claim the name of Christ craft a message that they use to enrich their own personal pockets (see 2 Cor 11:12–13). The concern about manipulation is one that Christian ethics can recognize, because sin infects the use of language.

The Apostle Paul voices this very concern when he contrasts his message with manipulation: “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word” (2 Cor 4:2). Paul contrasts his work with others’: “For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ” (2 Cor 2:17).

The expression “in the sight of God” in 2 Corinthians 2:17 and 4:2 indicates that Paul is aware of having to answer to God for his manner of communication. He lives in the presence of God. He must be truthful and faithful to God’s message. He must not practice “cunning” or “underhanded ways,” because he is aware of the all-important weight of God’s evaluation. Contrast this view with postmodern skepticism. In the skeptic’s eyes, God is absent, and therefore there is no transcendent checkpoint either for evaluating truth or for exposing underhanded motives. In that case, the job has to be done merely by human beings, and their finiteness leaves everything in doubtful shadows in the end.

Some people are deathly afraid of being “taken in.” They refuse to give themselves to anything. Sometimes this fear comes from the postmodern atmosphere; sometimes from repeated doses of experience with human treachery. Fear can lead modern people into extreme skepticism concerning all religious claims or any kind of exalted claim to truth.

As usual, in accordance with Van Til's apologetics, the response is two-fold. On the positive side, we continue to present the gospel, which has divine power to overcome all opposition. We point first of all to the self-authenticating divine authority of the message. But second, the message itself, the message of Christ and his cross, is a message that shows its divine origin by its utter contrast with worldly thinking (1 Cor 1:18–31). It overthrows selfish human ambitions to serve money, power, fame, and pleasure. It denounces manipulative speech. It addresses the very concerns that drive people into skepticism. It shows that the work of Christ on the cross is designed as the God-given answer to the sinfulness of the human condition. In addition, Paul's apostolic behavior complements his apostolic message. He comes as a servant of Christ and a servant of the truth, presenting Christ as Lord and himself as a servant (2 Cor 4:5).

On the negative side, we challenge the assumptions of skeptics. The skeptics are afraid of being taken in. But they have already been taken in —by the propaganda of postmodern skepticism. A universal fear that avoids all allegiances produces its own dissolution, because it must repudiate allegiance even to itself. Skepticism is like a universal acid that, if left uncontained, dissolves all truth, including even the alleged insight that there is no accessible truth.

The skeptic thinks it is safest to see through language and to see through people in order to discover sinister and manipulative motives. And in a sinful world, there are plenty of such motives, here and there. But to see through everything is to see nothing at all. If a person tries to do it, he also has to see through even his skepticism, and to see through even himself. But he can never plumb the depths of his own sin. And to see through himself would also be to dissolve himself and any claims to significance that he attributes to his own opinion.

Skepticism cannot save. Christ as he is presented in the gospel does save.<sup>6</sup> That is what Paul knows. And it is what the Holy Spirit demonstrates in the power of Paul's preaching, because people are saved! Their transformed lives are further, confirming evidence that this message, unlike the deceitful counterfeits and substitutes in false religions, really is divine (2 Cor 3:1–3; 1 Thess 1:6–10).

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<sup>6</sup> Vern S. Poythress, "Christ the Only Savior of Interpretation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50.2 (1988): 305–21.

## V. *Multiple Cultures*

Let us consider another postmodern challenge. Postmodern skeptics are queasy about absolute claims partly because they are aware of multiple cultures. They ask, “How can one claim within one culture be universally true, when it is relativized by its cultural setting? How can one religion be right when we find competing religious claims originating from different cultures?”<sup>7</sup>

It is well to remember that the existence of many cultures and their troublesome diversities is not a fresh discovery. Paul in his own time had contact with multiple cultures. He had Jewish parents but grew up in the Gentile city of Tarsus. He also studied under Gamaliel in a scholarly subculture in Jerusalem, in the heart of Judaism (Acts 22:3). He knew the Old Testament Scriptures. He also knew about Greek philosophers and Greek athletic games (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 9:24–26). He was not naive about culture. Nor was he naive about religion. He had Jewish parents, but as a participant in the Roman Empire he saw emperor worship and multiple forms of idolatry (1 Cor 10:19–28; Acts 17:16, 22–23).

The Roman Empire in which Paul labored was united by Hellenization, by Roman military power, by Roman law, and by Roman-regulated trade and economics. It was what we call a “civilization,” Greco-Roman civilization. But the Roman conquerors did not homogenize the population. Roman power sat uneasily on top of troublesome diversities and tensions, some of which could smolder and burst into rebellion (as with the Jewish revolt of 66 A.D.). Multiple ethnic divisions persisted, as the list in Acts 2:9–11 testifies. The Empire contained multiple people groups, multiple political divisions, multiple languages, and multiple religions. Paul in his travels saw the gamut.

In this context, Paul gives us strong testimony concerning a universal message that goes to all cultures. He speaks about “the open statement of the truth” (2 Cor 4:2). His proclamation makes a public statement, such as could be heard by members of any subculture within the Roman Empire. He implies that the truth is accessible to all through his public proclamation.

The responsibility for hearing it is also underlined by the common character of all human reception. Paul appeals “to everyone’s conscience” (v. 2). He does not explicitly discuss the unity of the human race at this point, but in the background stands the unity of mankind in Adam, as expounded in Genesis 1–2, Romans 5:12–21, and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 44–49. The unity

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<sup>7</sup> See Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 3–21; Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview*, chapter 1.

of the race is closely connected with the universality of human responsibility to worship the true God and the universality of conscience. Paul touches on this responsibility directly in his sermon on Mars Hill:

He himself [the true God] gives to *all mankind* life and breath and everything. And he made *from one man every nation of mankind* to live on *all the face of the earth*, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, *that they should seek God*, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. (Acts 17:25–27)

Such a universal statement reaches even beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire, to encompass all people belonging to all ethnicities. Paul refers to “*every nation of mankind ... on all the face of the earth*” (v. 26). The gospel “is the power of God for salvation to *everyone* who believes” (Rom 1:16). The obedience for which the gospel calls is “obedience of faith ... among *all nations*” (Rom 1:5). This universality includes the “barbarian,” beyond the bounds of Roman civilization (Rom 1:14; Col 3:11). The universal reach derives not merely from Paul’s understanding of common human nature in Adam, and from the universal reach of the implications of Christ’s salvific work, but from Old Testament promises that include the nations in salvation (for example, Rom 15:9, citing 2 Sam 22:50 and Ps 18:49; Rom 15:10, citing Deut 32:43; Rom 15:11, citing Ps 117:1; and Rom 15:12, citing Isa 11:1, 10). Before coming into contact with any particular people group, Paul already knows that the same gospel that he preaches to others is also for them. It is for them because God has already promised it. Moreover, God made and governs all people groups. The God who knows the end from the beginning has guaranteed that this gospel, and not another (Gal 1:6–7), will result in actually saving people in these groups. Paul’s mention of “conscience” (2 Cor 4:2) is only one dimension within a larger creation order that Paul presupposes in his preaching.

## **VI. *God’s Presence in Culture***

It is no wonder that postmodern skeptics have trouble with idea of universal human responsibility, because of their worldview. If God is absent or non-existent, who is to say what “human nature” is? Who is to say whether there is anything in conscience that is absolute and not overridden by cultural molding? And who is to say whether conscience should be attended to, if God is no longer present and giving testimony to his standards through conscience? If God is absent, personal meaning is absent. And because human beings cannot live without meaning, they must undertake to create

their own meanings, individually and corporately (through cultures). According to this view, any religious message that does not completely mesh with humanly created meaning is construed as an intrusion, an oppressive denial of the freedom of each and every person to create the meaning of his life.

The response from a Van Tilian point of view is twofold. Positively, we proclaim the presence of God, not only in his message of salvation, but in the very constitution of mankind and the constitution of conscience. The gospel comes not as an intrusion, but as a message of salvation, of rebuke, or transformation, and of healing, according to the design of the same God who made us all.

Negatively, we may observe that a humanly constructed meaning is ultimately meaningless, because it is arbitrary if it is based on merely human willing.

## **VII. *Paul's Adjustments***

Does Paul adjust his message to meet his audience? It depends on what kind of “adjustments” we are talking about. The record in Acts shows adjustments in starting point and in emphasis. Paul’s two main speeches to pagan audiences contain material about monotheism, creation, and providence (Acts 14:15–17; 17:22–31), while his speeches in synagogues tend to start with elements from the Old Testament story of Israel and God’s promises of salvation through the Messiah.<sup>8</sup> But the differences in starting point are compatible with the language of 2 Corinthians 4:3 about “our gospel.” Paul’s letters indicate that he had a consistent core message about Christ and his work of salvation (see, e.g., Rom 1:1–6; 1 Cor 15:1–11; Gal 1:3–10; 3:1; 1 Thess 1:9–10; 2 Tim 2:8–10). Paul at various points stresses that the same

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<sup>8</sup> I am presupposing here the divine inspiration and consequent historical reliability of Acts, as a testimony about Paul’s modes of preaching. But even those who do not agree with my presupposition should see that the kind of adjustments that we find in Acts are consistent with Paul as he appears in his letters. The main difference in mode of approach in Acts is understandable, because Paul does accept the Old Testament worldview, but does not have to articulate that worldview explicitly when he is addressing fellow Jews. There is much to learn here about a proper kind of contextualization. Today missionaries, like Paul, must still think about what they can presuppose when they address their audiences. Pagan contexts are not religious vacuums, but contexts of false religions. In such environments, much darkness has to be overcome, and the doctrines of God, creation, providence, and fall have pointed relevance. There can be many adjustments to take into account the reigning mindset of the audiences. But the nature of the true God must be proclaimed over against the distortions of false religions and false unbelief, not merely trimmed to fit in with unbelief. Paul rejects syncretism, and so should we.

message of salvation—the same gospel—goes to both Jew and Greek (Rom 1:5, 16; 3:29–30; Gal 2:9, 15–16; 3:28).

Then what about 1 Corinthians 9:22, where Paul says, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some”? The context, beginning with 9:1, focuses on Paul’s behavior and conduct, not on his message. For example, he says, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews” (v. 20). It means that he did not needlessly offend Jews by eating unclean food in their presence. It does not mean that he trimmed the gospel so as to make it inoffensive (cf. Gal 5:11).

### **VIII. *Multiple Languages***

Consider another postmodern concern. Postmodern skeptics worry about the alleged limitations of languages. Together with multiple cultures come multiple languages, and—so it is alleged—multiple versions of truth, one version (if not more) for each language. Language becomes a prison from which human thought and human notions of truth cannot escape. The bounds of language are the bounds of what can be described and asserted and thought. And, supposedly, that leaves no room for a robust divine revelation in language.

The Apostle Paul was not naive about language, any more than he was about culture. Growing up in Gentile Tarsus, he would have learned Greek (cf. Acts 21:37). We do not know whether his Jewish parents or a synagogue school in Tarsus taught him some Hebrew. But he studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). At that point, he would have had to know Hebrew. And studying in Jerusalem, he would have picked up Aramaic on the side. At one point he gave a speech “in the Hebrew language,” either Aramaic or Hebrew (v. 2).

Thus, Paul knew by firsthand experience that ideas can be translated from one language to another. In 2 Corinthians 4:2, the expression “open statement” shows in compressed form that Paul was not troubled about merely theoretical difficulties about translation, nor about the fact that not every single nuance from a discourse in one language can be easily captured in another. He knew by experience that the gospel can be expressed in more than one language.

So what are the real problems? The more painful issues lie at a deeper level. Consider the mockery at Mars Hill (Acts 17:32). The Athenians did not mock because they literally did not understand the basic meaning of what Paul said about the resurrection. Rather, they mocked precisely because they *did* understand, and they thought that Paul’s claim was absurd on the face of it. Their incredulity was not generated merely by Paul’s use

of the Greek language. Paul and the diaspora Jews and the Athenian Gentiles all spoke Greek. The incredulity was generated by a cultural mindset among pagan Greeks. Pagans did not expect an afterlife in the body, but (if anything) an afterlife only for the disembodied soul. Bodily resurrection did not cohere with their existing belief system. Their resistance was spiritual, not linguistic.

Believing that God is absent, postmodern skeptics have no easy way of adjudicating between differing belief systems. The differences are therefore treated as ethically neutral, and mere “tolerance” becomes the preferred social solution. Paul has a different answer, which appears in 2 Corinthians 4:1–6. He frankly acknowledges that some receive his gospel and some do not. The difference, however, is not ethically neutral. “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (v. 4). As most commentators agree, “the god of this world” designates the devil. The devil has blinded some hearers.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul does not elaborate on the activity of the devil. He makes it clear elsewhere that this demonically induced blindness goes together with human responsibility when people reject the truth (Rom 1:18–23; Eph 4:17–19; 2 Thess 2:9–12). Moreover, the blindness in question has a corporate as well as an individual dimension. Whole groups of people can live in darkness.

Paul’s language about the devil seems to postmodernism even more absurd than the claim that God can give us a transcendent message in language. Belief in the devil is viewed as a primitive superstition from which modernity has delivered us irreversibly. Moreover, from a postmodern standpoint, Paul is being politically incorrect. His description seems insulting to non-Christians. But of course this appearance of insult comes against the background of postmodern worldviews. The problems are the usual ones: (1) Postmodern skepticism, while claiming a kind of religious neutrality, actually rejects the truth of the gospel, and with that rejection shows that it is part of the problem. As a movement, it participates in the blindness induced by the devil. (2) Postmodern skepticism shows a complete lack of skepticism about its own vision of the world, including the assumption that the devil does not exist. Claiming to be multicultural, it shows its own cultural captivity to a limited, Western narrative. This narrative confidently proclaims the nonexistence of evil spirits not on the basis of investigation but on the basis of immersion in post-Enlightenment propaganda.

## IX. *God's Presence in Language*

Paul, we say, is confident that the gospel is capable of being translated. Indeed, it has already been translated when Paul explains it in Greek, because it was prophesied beforehand in Hebrew in the Old Testament (Rom 1:2). Paul is confident not merely for pragmatic reasons, not merely because he sees some people believing the gospel. Implicitly, he has a philosophy of language. He hints at but does not develop such a philosophy, based on the presence of God in language. The allusion in 2 Corinthians 4:6 to Genesis 1:3 presupposes that God was able to speak and did speak even before any human beings existed. God said, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3). God is not only the master of language, but in certain ways he is the origin of language. He is the original speaker. Language that human beings use is therefore ultimately a divine gift. It is not a prison from which God is excluded.

This theistic philosophy of language forms the larger context in which Paul uses the expression "God's word" in 2 Corinthians 4:2. Paul presupposes that the gospel that he himself proclaims is not merely human words but words spoken by God: "When you received the *word of God*, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the *word of God*, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13). The Holy Spirit provides these words:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in *words* not taught by human wisdom but *taught by the Spirit*, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor 2:12–13)

## X. *Multiple Meanings*

Postmodern skeptics have still another difficulty. They are skeptical about meaning in general, even within a single human language, because any one piece of language can be interpreted in multiple ways and sponsor multiple meanings. Who is to say which meaning is "right"? Once again, the difficulty makes sense if God is absent, because then there is no clear authority rising above the diversity of human interpretations and human opinions.

Second Corinthians 4:1–6 provides the beginning of an answer, because the gospel is "God's word." That expression presupposes that God is the ultimate judge of its meaning. It does not mean whatever various people claim it means, but what God means by it. Moreover, as we have already observed, 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 acknowledges a kind of diversity of meaning when it speaks about those blinded to the truth (v. 4). People say all kinds

of things about the meaning of a particular verse in the Bible, or the meaning of the Bible as a whole. That kind of diversity in meaning *conforms* to biblical teaching about meaning, because the Bible has its own explanation for such diversity. As usual, its explanation is politically incorrect. The Bible does not level all meanings on the basis of common humanity, but distinguishes truth and error on the basis of divine judgment and divine truth.

## **XI. God's Presence in Meaning**

God is present as he speaks in the gospel. He is present not only in the process of speaking, but in the process of receiving. The Holy Spirit comes to interpret the gospel, and when the Holy Spirit creates us as new creatures indwelt by the Spirit, we receive the Spirit's message with positive understanding:

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The *spiritual* person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:14–16)

Paul pointedly distinguishes two *kinds* of reception. Whether a person receives the right understanding depends on whether that person is "natural" or "spiritual." The fundamental divide is between those who believe in Christ and those who do not, or between covenant keepers and covenant breakers, or between the regenerate and the unregenerate. In addition, of course, we can contemplate fine-grained changes in understanding taking place over time among these two categories of people. The believer can grow in knowledge (Eph 4:12–16).

## **XII. Is Paul Right?**

All in all, we can see several ways in which Paul's understanding of his own preaching is supported by a larger worldview context. Within that context, Paul's preaching has decided contrasts with postmodern skepticism. And at least in implicit form he offers answers to that skepticism. The gospel he preaches is a universal gospel for all nations, because God designed it to reach every segment of humanity, in multiple cultures and languages.

But for those troubled by postmodern skepticism, the question remains, "Was Paul right?" As long as the postmodernist remains in his skepticism, he thinks he must continue to treat Paul's gospel as merely one more

human “religious discourse,” trapped within the finite prison of language and culture.

But Paul’s gospel says, among other things, that it is really the skeptic that is trapped—trapped in demonic darkness. The solution is found in Christ and in the gospel that proclaims his salvation. The gospel provides facts about Christ’s work (1 Cor 15:3–11). It is a public proclamation, referring to the real event of Christ’s resurrection, and confirmed by multiple witnesses. But, more than that, the proclamation is “God’s word,” confronting all who hear with the very presence of Christ himself in his glory. As the gospel comes, it brings “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” and “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:4, 6). The God who created light by speaking with divine power also creates saving knowledge of himself by shining the light of his glory, when he speaks with divine power in the gospel (Rom 1:16).<sup>9</sup> The skeptic who turns away from the gospel is blind to reality, the reality of God in Christ working through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the reality of a created world in which the Creator himself can speak.

But in a day influenced by postmodern thinking, we must also consider people who claim to be Christian believers, who claim to receive new life from Christ, but whose perception of God and the world is colored by various skepticisms. They may affirm the gospel in some sense, but still say that in some ways Paul was “a man of his time.” Allegedly, he was captive to his first-century environment, to his rabbinic background, and to “outmoded” ideas from the Old Testament. These modern voices then claim that some of these outmoded ideas found their way into his teaching in his letters. Allegedly, Paul said some things that we now “know” to be flawed. According to such thinking, Paul’s proclamation of the gospel is authentic, but he may have flawed ideas about culture, language, conscience, and perhaps also the very status of the gospel that he preaches.<sup>10</sup> So, according to this line of thinking, 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 should not be received and believed uncritically.

The orthodox doctrine of inspiration has never claimed that the human instruments of inspiration, like Paul, were flawless in every sphere of knowledge. It does claim that when they wrote as inspired messengers of

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<sup>9</sup> See John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> For a critique of neo-orthodox views of inspiration, which find errors in the Bible, see John M. Frame, “God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 159–77.

divine truth, they consistently proclaimed truth and not falsehood. They spoke the words of God (2 Pet 1:21; cf. 1 Cor 14:37). Paul shows that he is in line with this doctrine when he proclaims his gospel as “God’s word” and his instruction as “a command of the Lord” requiring obedience (1 Cor 14:37).

Can we still believe such a thing? Really? Yes, we can, but only if we are prepared to reckon with the difference between Paul’s approach and the atmosphere of postmodern skepticism. If the claim concerning divine speech has become incredible in our day, it is not because the actual evidence has changed significantly over the last fifty or even two hundred years, or because scholarly evangelical defenses of inerrancy have suddenly disappeared off the face of our planet. There was unbelief even among sophisticated ancient Greeks who gathered on Mars Hill. There was unbelief at the time of the Reformation. There was unbelief in nineteenth-century German scholarship. Why is unbelief attractive? Unbelief has become “easier” and belief “harder” partly due to cultural atmosphere. Has this atmosphere given us a new insight superior to Paul? I think not.

What Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 and in other passages where he reflects on the gospel is not a trivial part of his message. It guides us in understanding how we are to understand the gospel itself as it comes from his lips and his pen. If Paul were wrong about the nature of his proclamation, it would corrupt the ability of his hearers (like the Corinthians) to receive the gospel with proper understanding about its actual import. And if this reception were corrupted, we would no longer have the gospel itself with confidence. And without that confidence we would be in no position to sift between true and false religious claims. Rather than exercising skepticism toward Paul’s words, we should turn that skepticism to a better use: to be skeptical of the skeptics and their dependence on a culturally myopic and patronizing Western narrative, which sustains skepticism toward the Bible.

# What Paul Says about the Covenants in Galatians 3-4

DONALD E. COBB

## Abstract

The present article explores Paul's use and meaning of the *διαθήκη* (*diathēkē*, "covenant" or "testament") in Galatians 3-4, as well as the relation between the covenants mentioned or presupposed in these chapters: the Abrahamic promise covenant, the Mosaic law covenant, and the Davidic and eschatological ("new") covenants. The article first highlights elements that suggest that "covenant" is an important aspect of Paul's biblical-theological argument in Galatians. Two sections develop the content of these covenants. In the final section, the relation between the covenants is brought to bear upon the covenant and Mosaic law in Reformed theology. A historical-redemptive approach is considered necessary for understanding Paul's statements on the Mosaic Torah and covenant in Galatians 3-4, as well as in Reformed theology generally.

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**P**aul uses *διαθήκη* (*diathēkē*) three times in Galatians 3-4.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this for his thinking on the covenant or for framing a biblical understanding of covenants in Scripture is not always noted. Paul uses the term fairly infrequently<sup>2</sup> and, especially since E. P. Sanders's work on Paul and Palestinian

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<sup>1</sup> Gal 3:15, 17; 4:24.

<sup>2</sup> *Διαθήκη* is used nine times in the *corpus paulinum*: Rom 9:4; 11:27; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6, 14; Gal 3:15, 17; 4:24; Eph 2:12.

Judaism, there has been a tendency to affirm that participationist categories have superseded covenantal perspectives in Paul's soteriology.<sup>3</sup> Paul's relative silence on the covenant is thus taken as a rejection of the Jewish understanding of salvation as such.

The usefulness of these chapters for grasping Paul's understanding of covenant is further complicated by the fact that *διαθήκη* can be translated, at least in Galatians 3:15 and 17, as "testament." This is, of course, the usual meaning of the word outside of Jewish religious literature, and one that would naturally come to mind for Paul's Greco-Roman contemporaries. This has led most commentators to assume that Paul here is not thinking, or is thinking only tangentially, of the *covenant* with Abraham. An important question in understanding these chapters thus turns on the meaning of the *word* covenant and, hinging on that, the place the covenant *concept* occupies in Paul's argument.

Only a close reading of Galatians 3–4 can answer these questions. Even beyond that, though, other questions in connection with the covenant remain: given that Paul *does* use the term—and at least, in Galatians 4:24, clearly understands it as "covenant"—what does he mean by it? What role does he see the *διαθήκη* playing as he recounts the history of the Abrahamic promise and the Mosaic law? In 4:24 he speaks unambiguously of "two covenants." These are clearly the Mosaic law covenant and either the Abrahamic promise covenant or, more likely, the fulfillment of that covenant, the eschatological "new" covenant spoken of by Isaiah, from which Paul derives his biblical quotation.<sup>4</sup> Assuming that these statements are not merely *ad hoc* rhetorical devices but reflect a stable aspect of Paul's thinking, what theological relationship can be seen between them?

While not able to fully justify the statement here, it is possible, in my opinion, to affirm with Scott Hahn that "in Gal. 3 and elsewhere, Paul does not abandon the covenantal framework of Judaism; rather, he works within it."<sup>5</sup> The present article will draw out some of the implications of this

<sup>3</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> This point will be further developed below.

<sup>5</sup> Scott W. Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994–2004)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3.2 (2005): 284, summarizing the conclusions of his previous article, "Covenant, Oath, and the Aqedah: ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ in Galatians 3:5–18," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67.1 (2005): 79–100. See also his *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). I have attempted to demonstrate how *διαθήκη* functions as one organizing element of Galatians 3–4 in my PhD dissertation. Some aspects of that work have been presented in Donald E. Cobb, "Galates 3–4: une alliance ni abrogée ni modifiée," *La Revue réformée* 66.3 (2015): 1–30. The attentive reader will notice several points of agreement in the overall

affirmation for Paul’s theology and attempt to relate them to a few perennial concerns of the classical Reformed understanding of covenant and law. My approach will take its point of departure in exegesis, then move—albeit to a lesser degree—toward “biblical theology” and make some suggestions that could perhaps be integrated into a more systematic approach to God’s covenant(s).

## I. *Preliminary Questions*

Space does not allow a full demonstration of how the word *διαθήκη* functions in the context of Galatians 3–4. It is helpful, however, to clarify some key elements in this connection. Three points can be briefly highlighted.

### 1. *A Tripartite Argument*

Galatians 3–4 is Paul’s theological response to the argument his adversaries—most likely (self-proclaimed?) Jewish-Christian teachers from the church in Judea—were using to convince the largely Gentile Galatian churches to submit to Mosaic Torah, specifically circumcision. Given the role circumcision played in the Jewish Scriptures and Second Temple Judaism, it can safely be said that the argument must have run pretty much in this way: Circumcision, to which Abraham himself submitted, is the sign of the covenant Christ fulfilled at the cross; those who would enter into that covenant must therefore also be circumcised, thereby becoming “sons of Abraham.” Without circumcision, entry into the covenant is precluded, and access to the righteousness that is at the heart of the covenant cannot be considered as granted.<sup>6</sup>

Although the main points of Paul’s response to this argument are clear, some aspects are tantalizingly indirect. One decisive element is the sequence developed in verses 6–14: *Abraham* (vv. 6–9), *the law* (vv. 10–12) and *the work of Christ* (vv. 13–14). Central to these verses is the gift of the Spirit, which fulfills God’s promise of blessings to Abraham (v. 14). It is especially important to note that *Paul builds on this same sequence* in verses 15–29, repeating

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perspective, but also a number of differences, with N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Volume 4, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013). Space unfortunately prevents interaction with this major work.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Jubilees 15:26: “And every one that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, *belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, but to the children of destruction*; nor is there, moreover, any sign on him that he is the Lord’s, but (he is destined) to be destroyed and slain from the earth, and to be rooted out of the earth, for he has broken the covenant of the Lord our God” (italics added). Cf. also Acts 15:1.

it and adding the element of the *διαθήκη*: *Abraham* (vv. 15–17), *the law* (vv. 18–24), *the coming of Christ* (vv. 25–29). The biggest difference is the focus, not on the Spirit, but on the status of the Galatian Christians as “heirs” or “sons of God” in Christ and, *a fortiori*, “sons of Abraham” (v. 29). The same elements are again reprised in Galatians 4:1–7 (although without Abraham): existence under *the law* (vv. 1–3) and the *work of Christ* (vv. 4–7). This section *combines* the foci of the two previous ones, the gift of the *Spirit* and the status of *heirs*.<sup>7</sup>

This tripartite development is key to an understanding of the coherence of Galatians 3–4: although Paul constructs his argument from different viewpoints, he builds each time on the basic pattern set out in verses 6–14. This, however, means that when he returns to Abraham in verses 15–17, speaking there of God’s *διαθήκη* with him, *he is referring to concepts already alluded to in verses 6–9, more specifically the Abrahamic covenant underlying the Old Testament quotations in those verses*: that is, the covenant established in Genesis 15, independently of circumcision (Gen 15:17–21), and based solely on the patriarch’s faith in God (v. 6).<sup>8</sup> It is this *διαθήκη*, which, in Galatians 3:15–17, precedes the giving of the law by 430 years. And because of this earlier-coming *διαθήκη*, becoming “sons of Abraham” (v. 7) is connected, not with circumcision, but with faith and union with Christ, the true heir of that *διαθήκη* (3:16, 26–29).

## 2. Testament or Covenant?

This brings into particular focus the question of how *διαθήκη* should be understood in verses 15 and 17. Based on the preceding, it would seem natural to interpret it in accordance with typical LXX and Second Temple usage; that is, as “covenant.” The choice, however, is complicated by the fact that the language of these verses closely reflects typical testamentary usage: the verbs *κυροῦν* (*kyroun*, “validate, make legally binding”), *ἀθετεῖν* (*athetein*, “declare invalid, nullify”), and *ἐπιδιατάσσειν* (*epidiatassethai*, “add a codicil”), or their cognates, are frequent in testaments of the period. The expression “a man’s *διαθήκη*”<sup>9</sup> likewise suggests that it is the *διαθήκη* of

<sup>7</sup> “And because you are *sons*, God has sent *the Spirit* of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but *a son*, and if *a son*, then *an heir* through God” (Gal 4:6–7). Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV.

<sup>8</sup> When Paul quotes Gen 15:6 in v. 6, he thus has in mind the overall context of the chapter, which issues, in vv. 17–21, in the establishment of the covenant.

<sup>9</sup> My translation. The Greek text reads *ἀνθρώπου κεκυρωμένην διαθήκην*. The above definitions are taken from W. Arndt, F. W. Danker, and W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Henceforth BDAG.

*one person*, that is, an individual's testament that is under consideration. That said, the apparent simplicity of this data runs up against a serious difficulty—one not always given its due weight in commentaries—in Paul's affirmation, "Even with a man-made *διαθήκη*, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified." This statement contradicts established Greco-Roman practices of stating, in explicit and stereotypical terms, that a testament could be modified for any reason by the testator!<sup>10</sup>

Given the apparently conflicting data, commentators generally suggest one of three interpretations: understanding *διαθήκη* 1) unequivocally as "covenant," 2) as merely "testament," or 3) the most often, positing a semantic shift from "testament" in v. 15 to "covenant" in v. 17. In my opinion, the answer lies somewhere between the three: a *διαθήκη* that no one would modify, by definition, can hardly be a testament. As Hahn has shown, the meaning of "a human covenant," such as those sometimes seen in the LXX, corresponds well with Paul's statement: even with a man-made *covenant*, no one introduces a modification.<sup>11</sup> Paul, however, elaborates this idea *using vocabulary that intentionally carries testamentary overtones*. He does it in order to introduce the metaphors he will develop from 3:18 through to 4:7, dealing with heirs, a heritage, guardians set over underage children, and tutelage instituted over those children until they become of age to receive the inheritance. In other words, Paul is talking about *the covenant with Abraham*, but he plays on the language in order to illustrate it with closely related *testamentary practices* with which his readers would be familiar. This, however—combined with what we saw in the preceding section—means that the *διαθήκη*, far from functioning as a merely rhetorical illustration, plays a prominent role through at least Galatians 4:7. Paul thus takes up the motifs of verses 6–14 and explicitly develops the covenantal foundation already latent there.

### 3. *The Relationship between Promise, Law, and Covenant*

In terms of strict usage, the terms "promise" and "law" are significantly more frequent in Galatians 3–4 than "covenant."<sup>12</sup> This sometimes leads to the conclusion that "promise," *as opposed to covenant*, is central to Paul's argument.<sup>13</sup> "Promise" and "covenant" are thus played off against each other

<sup>10</sup> "So long as I survive, I am to have power over my own property, to make any further provisions or new dispositions and to revoke this will. But if I die with this will unaltered ..." See *P. Oxy.* 490:3–4; 491:3–4; 492:4, and often.

<sup>11</sup> Hahn, "Covenant, Oath, and the Aqedah," 84–85.

<sup>12</sup> Paul uses "promise" (*ἐπαγγελία*, *epaggelia*) ten times in Galatians 3–4 (Gal 3:14, 16–18, 21–22, 29; 4:23, 28). "Law" (*νόμος*, *nomos*) is used nineteen times (Gal 3:2, 5, 10–13, 17–19, 21, 23–24; 4:4–5, 21).

<sup>13</sup> Cf., e.g., James D. G. Dunn, "Did Paul Have a Covenant Theology? Reflections on

or at least sharply separated. In the same way, it has been suggested that Paul does not recognize the connection between Mosaic law and “covenant,” reserving the term exclusively for the arrangement with Abraham.<sup>14</sup>

I would contend that careful analysis leads to different conclusions. It is striking, first of all, to notice that Paul’s use of *ἐπαγγελία* (*epaggelia*, “promise”) in Galatians 3:15–16 is nestled between the two occurrences of *διαθήκη* in verses 15 and 17. Moreover, the interplay between the two shows that, in Paul’s thought, they are closely connected, indeed interwoven, concepts:

Even with a man-made *covenant*, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now *the promises* were made to Abraham and to his offspring. (Gal 3:15)

This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, *does not annul a covenant* previously ratified by God, *so as to make the promise void*. (Gal 3:17)

Although “covenant” and “promise” are not synonymous, they cannot be separated. Even less can they be opposed! Without entering into detail at this point, we may safely suggest that the covenant with Abraham is *the concrete form* of the promise. The covenant formalizes and makes possible the promise’s fulfillment. To put it another way, the Abrahamic covenant, as Paul presents it, *is fundamentally characterized by God’s promise*.<sup>15</sup> What, specifically, is this promise? The link with verses 6–14, already highlighted, makes it clear: it is the blessing promised to Abraham for the nations, defined by justification and the gift of God’s life-giving Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

The connection between the covenant and Mosaic law is more tenuous. Of course, in Jewish Scripture the two are nearly synonymous concepts, and they would have been presented as such by Paul’s adversaries. In Galatians 3:1–4:7, Paul seems to deny the connection altogether, reserving the “covenant” for that made with Abraham. This actually runs counter to his practice elsewhere; for example, in 2 Corinthians 3 he speaks of the “old covenant” with Moses, that of “the letter,” contrasting it with the “new covenant” of “the Spirit” (vv. 3, 14). Even in Galatians, though, Paul does

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Rom 9:4 and 11:27,” *The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, ed. S. E. Porter and J. C. R. De Roo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 291–92.

<sup>14</sup> J. Louis Martyn, “Covenant, Christ, and Church in Galatians,” *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander E. Keck*, ed. A. J. Malherbe and W. A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 143.

<sup>15</sup> Or, “promises” in the plural (vv. 16 and 21). This plural probably refers to the different aspects of the one promise globally considered. Note that the same overall perspective, and in similar terms, is developed in Eph 2:12, speaking of “the covenants of the promise.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. esp. v. 14: “in order that in Christ Jesus *the blessing of Abraham* might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive *the promise* of the Spirit through faith” (NASB).

not deny the foundation of the Torah in the covenant given at Sinai. We see this in Galatians 4:24, where he talks about two *covenants* (δύο διαθήκαι, *dyo diathēkai*), “one . . . from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery.”

Paul does, then, recognize the connection between the law and the Mosaic *covenant*, just as he affirms the connection between the promise and the Abrahamic *covenant*. This remains true, even if other terms receive a greater focus. The reason for this will be touched on later.

## II. *The Content of the Law Covenant and the Promise Covenant*

The preceding paragraphs have sought to show that the covenant *concept* plays a greater role than is often recognized in the structure and content of Paul’s argument, even before the term itself is introduced in verses 15–17.<sup>17</sup> How, then, does he understand the role and the content of these covenants?

### 1. *The Foundational Character of the Abrahamic Covenant*

Galatians 3:6–9: the primary and teleological nature of the Abrahamic covenant

Galatians 3:6–14 makes up the first section of the biblical-theological argument of 3:1–4:7 (vv. 1–5 setting the stage through a series of rhetorical questions). Because these verses present a chain of quotations from Scripture, the content being largely determined by the way the quotations are strung together, Paul’s logic is as much implied as it is explicated.<sup>18</sup>

At bottom, verses 6–9 presuppose a typically Jewish manner of reasoning: since Abraham was the “ancestral founder” of God’s people, his relationship to God also defines the *modus vivendi* of those who come after him, that is, his “sons.” According to Scripture, Abraham was justified through faith (Gen 15:6); it follows that his true “sons” will be those who, like him, are also justified through faith. Additionally, since the blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3) was promised “in” or “with” him (“*In [or ‘with’] you shall all the*

<sup>17</sup> Covenant concepts can actually be traced back to 3:1–5, where Paul clinches the argument from the outset by focusing on the Spirit (cf. v. 2: “This is the only thing I want to find out from you,” the idea being that, if this point is conceded, the rest of the argument necessarily follows). As elsewhere, Paul is probably basing his teaching on Old Testament texts centered on the eschatological (“new”) covenant and the gift of the Spirit (Ezek 36:25–27; 37:1–14; Isa 44:3–4). Since his Judeo-Christian adversaries contested the Galatians’ belonging to the covenant (and, consequently, access to God’s righteousness), Paul points to the reception of the Spirit as proof that they are already in the covenant.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Moises Silva, “Abraham, Faith, and Works: Paul’s Use of Scripture in Galatians 3:6–14,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 253.

nations be blessed,” v. 8), the content of that blessing must be defined in connection with what was given to Abraham, that is, again, justification received through faith.

Without developing this point, we should note that the expression “sons of Abraham” in rabbinic Judaism is itself a covenant expression: Abraham’s “sons” are the “sons of the covenant.” The expression designates the true members of God’s covenant.<sup>19</sup> In the same way, the “blessing” terminology, especially when coupled with that of “curses,” is typical covenantal language.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of these verses can hardly be overstated. Against his adversaries, who were insisting on circumcision as the means for the Galatian Christians to enter into the covenant and gain access to God’s righteousness, Paul shows that the basic *modus vivendi* of the covenant and the means by which its promised blessings were to come to fruition were, from the beginning, *through faith*. The covenant—as it was established in Genesis 15—has all to do with faith. Circumcision in no way enters into the purview of this text; circumcision and the Torah cannot, therefore, fundamentally define those who are in the covenant and how they are to live.<sup>21</sup>

Galatians 3:10–14, which introduces the opposite covenantal term (“curse”) and another covenantal text (Deut 27:26), is a traditional *crux interpretum*. We can summarize its basic thrust by saying that Torah in Scripture, and particularly in Deuteronomy, is characterized by a curse on unfaithfulness. As such, God’s giving the law to Israel cast a shadow, as it were, on the trajectory set out for the promised blessing to the nations. For even the casual reader of Scripture, this threat was far from theoretical: Old Testament history is largely a history of Israel’s national disobedience, God’s punishment on that disobedience, and the ultimate fulfillment of the Deuteronomic curse, in the form of Assyrian, then later Babylonian, exiles. Consequently, the perspective of many Jewish texts, from the biblical prophets to Second Temple literature, is one of defeat and, at the same time, hope in God: *for the prophetic promises of blessing and salvation to come to realization, and for that blessing to extend outward to the nations, the curse of the law had first to be dealt with*. In a word, the law, though a gift from God, went hand in hand with judgment. This statement does not, of course, exhaust the contents of Galatians 3:10–14; individual and “existential” aspects

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Lawrence H. Schiffman, “The Rabbinic Understanding of Covenant,” *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987): 289–98.

<sup>20</sup> Gen 12:3; Deut 11:26, 29; 30:1, 19; Josh 9:2, etc.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Donald Garlington, *An Exposition of Galatians: A Reading from the New Perspective*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 189–90.

need to be recognized, alongside national and historical perspectives.<sup>22</sup> But it does help us to better understand the thrust, in particular, of verses 13–14: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.”<sup>23</sup> Christ’s work on the cross removed the curse of the law, so that the blessing promised to Abraham might finally become a reality for the nations.

All this means that, in contradistinction to Mosaic Torah—and, therefore, to the Mosaic *covenant*—the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant is the primary content of God’s plan going back to at least Genesis 12. The patriarchal covenant enshrines the foundational *modus vivendi* of God’s people, independently of circumcision and other “typical” aspects of Old Testament Torah. It is also, for Paul, the teleological goal of God’s working in history since, beyond Jewish law, which was given in a specific place and for a specific time, it is how *all* the “sons of Abraham” are to live, now that God has fulfilled his promise in present-day history.

Galatians 3:15–17: The originating *διαθήκη* and the later-coming law  
The same point is brought out in a slightly different way in 3:15–17. According to these verses, the Abrahamic *διαθήκη* cannot be modified or revoked. From the beginning, that covenant had as its goal the fulfillment of the promised inheritance through Abraham’s one “seed,” the Messiah (v. 16). This messianic “inheritance” must be understood, in connection with the preceding section, as justification through faith, eschatological life, and the gift of the Spirit. That inheritance, Paul states, could never come through the law: obedience to Torah could not take the place of God’s covenant promise as the means by which the Messiah would come. Additionally, because “promise,” by definition, calls for faith—that is, looking to God for

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<sup>22</sup> On this whole subject, see the contrasting treatments of, on the one hand, N. T. Wright, “Curse and Covenant: Galatians 3.10–14,” *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 137–56, and James M. Scott, “‘For as Many as Are of Works of the Law Are Under a Curse’ (Galatians 3:10),” *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 187–221, and, on the other hand, A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 145–70.

<sup>23</sup> This takes the two mentions of “us” here as a reference to Old Testament Israel. The perspective widens, however, at the end of v. 14. The “we” in the final clause (“so that *we* might receive the promised Spirit through faith”) should thus be taken as inclusive of all those, Jews and Gentiles, who are in Christ. See, e.g., Régis Burnet, “Les ambiguïtés du ‘nous’ dans l’épître aux Galates,” *Regards croisés sur la Bible. Etudes sur le point de vue. Actes du iii<sup>e</sup> colloque international du réseau de recherche en narrativité biblique* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 467–76, and Terence L. Donaldson, “‘The Curse of the Law’ and the Inclusion of the Gentiles: Galatians 3:13–14,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 94–112.

fulfillment—the law could not alter the covenant’s basic structure of promise received through faith.<sup>24</sup>

The Abrahamic covenant thus has priority over the law in respect to both its goal and its foundational character. The law (covenant), coming as it did several hundred years later, did not introduce another way of bringing the promise to fulfillment, nor did it modify the fundamental promise–faith structure of God’s dealings with humans (v. 17).

This also means, as Paul goes on to insist, that the law was not, and was never intended to be, *in competition* with the promise covenant: “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (v. 21). This is perhaps one of the most important statements in Paul concerning the intrinsic limits of the law: the law *was not given so that life—i.e., the Spirit-given life that is inseparable from justification itself—might be obtained by obedience to it*. Because the law, by definition, is incapable of creating life, this was not the purpose for which it was given. The language harks back to verses 11–14, where justification, life, and God’s life-producing Spirit are the essential components of the promise.<sup>25</sup> The law, in sum, is not an intruding institution that could change God’s dealings with men or introduce an alternate way of relating to God.

## 2. The Secondary Character of the Mosaic Covenant

All this logically raises the question: if the law did not have the purpose of justifying the members of the covenant, why was it given in the first place? Paul brings up this question in verse 19: “Why then the law?”

The answer, especially in the context of Second Temple Judaism, is surprising. Far from being a life-giving institution, Torah was added, says Paul, specifically *in connection with transgressions* (παραβάσεων χάριν, *parabaseōn charin*). The statement is ambiguous and has been translated either as “it was added *because of* transgressions”<sup>26</sup> or “it was added *for* transgressions.”<sup>27</sup> Grammatically speaking, both are possible, and commentators have often preferred the former, seeing the law as a salutary gift to curb inherent sin. However true that may be, it is probably *not* what Paul is saying. “Transgressions” here are specifically acts of *overstepping an established boundary*.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Thus Paul’s insistence in v. 18: “But to Abraham, God gave it through grace, by way of promise (δι’ ἐπαγγελίας κεχάρισται ὁ θεός)” (my translation).

<sup>25</sup> See also Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45; 2 Cor 3:6.

<sup>26</sup> ESV, NRS, NASB, etc.

<sup>27</sup> NAB, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. BDAG. As Daniel B. Wallace, “Galatians 3:19–20: A *Crux Interpretum* for Paul’s View

The idea is more likely that the law was given as the established norm. In going beyond or against it, one not only “sins” but, more specifically, *transgresses*. The law was thus instituted in order to define sin and bring it to manifestation as acts of transgression.

This means that, in Paul’s description, the law is emphatically *not* a “law of liberty,” or “life”—and his adversaries would have doubtless affirmed—but a law that, negatively, serves to reveal one’s sinfulness. Verses 22–24 confirm this, stating that Scripture, including the law, “shut up all things under sin” (v. 22).<sup>29</sup> As a law touching on all areas of existence, it showed God’s people that wherever one looked, sin was present and Israel’s transgression a reality. The law was designed to function in this way, “so that *the promise by faith* in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (v. 22b).<sup>30</sup>

Paul drives his point home with the “custodian” metaphor in verses 24–25. In antiquity, a “custodian” (παιδαγωγός, *paidagōgos*) was, first of all, a household slave charged with taking the slave owner’s children to school. He shared in some of the rudimentary education (manners, etc.) but was not, as such, a tutor. The idea of the law as a “schoolmaster,” frequent in theological formulations, may be correct as such, but it is more a construction based on the wording of this passage than a deduction from the text itself. Beyond positive or negative connotations connected with the “custodian” figure, Paul’s concern is to show that, as long as “the child” Israel was under the law, he could not be said to be free; he was under the Torah’s constant surveillance, which hemmed in his existence on all sides, pointing out his sin and lack of righteousness.

Three points in these verses help clarify Paul’s thought. 1) As in Galatians 3:13, Paul discusses the Torah’s function *as it concerned God’s people, before*

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of the Law,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 236, has written, Rom 4:15 (“where there is no law there is no transgression [παράβασις, *parabasis*]”) is practically a definition of the term “transgression.”

<sup>29</sup> My translation. The usual rendering, “the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin,” in my opinion, goes beyond the language, which nowhere evokes prison images. See Marc Rastoin, *Tarse et Jérusalem: La double culture de l’apôtre Paul en Galates 3,6–4,7* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2003), 210–12.

<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to compare these statements with that of Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:173–174: “But for our legislator, ... beginning immediately from the earliest infancy, and the appointment of everyone’s diet, he left nothing of the very smallest consequence to be done at the pleasure and disposal of the person himself. Accordingly, he made a fixed rule of law what sorts of food they should abstain from, and what sorts they should make use of; as also, what communion they should have with others, what great diligence they should use in their occupations, and what times of rest should be interposed, that *by living under that law* as under a father and a master, we might be guilty of no sin, neither voluntary nor out of ignorance” (italics added). Cf. also *Letter of Aristaeus* 142. From a Jewish standpoint, Paul’s formulation is in fact only truly surprising in that this “shutting up” is viewed negatively!

*Christ's coming.* The “we” in verses 23–25 is, specifically, Old Testament Israel. He is thus not speaking of “law” as a timeless entity, but of the Mosaic Torah’s role during the period separating its giving from Christ’s appearance. 2) The law (covenant) is therefore, according to Paul, a *temporary institution*. Verse 25 states this clearly: “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian.”<sup>31</sup> This repeats what Paul has already affirmed in verse 19: the law was added only “until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.” Paul will make the same point again in Galatians 4:1–5, where the testamentary connotations are the most explicit: the Mosaic laws and stipulations were “guardians and administrators,” set up to regulate the child’s life until that time when, as an adult, he could receive the inheritance willed by testamentary disposition. The overall point is clear: *the Mosaic covenant was given as a provisional institution to regulate Israel’s existence until the coming of Christ, the true “heir” of the Abrahamic covenant.* 3) It is worthwhile to note that, in Paul’s metaphors here and in the final biblical argument of Galatians 4:21–31, the law is consistently represented as a *household slave* (“custodian,” “guardians and administrators,” “concubine”). This shows both the law’s God-given status and its limits. It was appointed by the “household master,” God himself. However, in relation to the promise covenant, it has a merely ancillary function: it is in service to the promise.

### III. *The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant in Christ*

In Paul’s perspective, the Abrahamic διαθήκη finds its fulfillment in Christ. That said, a close reading of Galatians 3–4 also reveals fairly strong underpinnings of both the Davidic and new covenants as they are presented in Jewish Scripture.

#### 1. *The Coming of Christ and the Davidic Covenant*

References to the Davidic covenant are discrete, evinced primarily through allusions to key Old Testament texts used elsewhere in Second Temple literature. Together they present a coherent picture of God’s dealings in Christ. The most widely noted is Galatians 3:16, where Paul says, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but to one, ‘And to your seed,’ who is the Messiah (καὶ τῷ σπέρματι σου, ὃς ἐστὶν Χριστός).”<sup>32</sup> The logic of Paul’s argument has

<sup>31</sup> My translation.

<sup>32</sup> My translation. Cf. Matthew V. Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs: Christ Language in*

often puzzled commentators. Beyond what one might consider a grammatical sleight of hand, there is most likely a sustained theological reflection: using a technique later rabbis would call *gezerah shawah*—i.e., drawing together seemingly unrelated Scripture passages by means of common vocabulary (and sometimes similar subject matter)—Paul ties together the mention of the “seed” God promised to Abraham, and through whom “all nations will be blessed,” and the messianic “seed” promised to David in 2 Samuel 7: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you (*καὶ ἀναστήσω τὸ σπέρμα σου μετὰ σέ*) . . . I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (vv. 12–14).<sup>33</sup> Connections can already be seen between the two “seeds” in Second Temple Jewish texts, as well as elsewhere in Paul, so they would not be particularly surprising here.<sup>34</sup>

Another allusion often noted by specialists comes a few verses later, where Paul states that the law was added “until the offspring (*σπέρμα, sperma*) should come to whom the promise had been made” (3:19). This could well echo Genesis 49:10, a text regularly referred to in reference to the expected Davidic seed, as in the Jerusalem Targum: “Kings shall not cease from the house of Judah, *nor scribes teaching the law from his children’s children, until the time that the King Messiah shall come, whose is the kingdom, and to whom all the kingdoms of the earth shall be obedient.*”<sup>35</sup> As in this text, but with a more negative outlook, Paul affirms that the Mosaic Torah was to remain—only—until the coming of the Messiah, the Abrahamic “heir.”

Thirdly, it is possible that the language of an “inheritance” and an “heir,” though immediately inspired by the Abrahamic covenant<sup>36</sup> and testamentary practices, is also rooted in the biblical presentation of the Davidic covenant.

*Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138–42.

<sup>33</sup> So, e.g., Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 85.

<sup>34</sup> A clear example can be found in LXX Ps 71:17 (MT 72:17), which translates thus the Hebrew text announcing the ideal Davidic descendant: “Let his name be blessed through the ages; his name shall endure longer than the sun. *And all the tribes of the earth will be blessed in him; all the nations will pronounce him happy*” (NETS, italics added). Cf. Gen 12:3. In a similar way, Paul states in Rom 15:8: “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, *in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.*” He then gives Scriptural confirmation of this by quoting a number of passages, several of which allude to David or his ultimate descendant (vv. 9–12). Many commentators have seen in these Davidic allusions an *inclusio* with Rom 1:1–5 (cf. vv. 3–4: “his Son, who was descended from David [*ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ*] according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness”).

<sup>35</sup> My translation. One can find Gen 49:10 paraphrased or alluded to in explicitly messianic contexts in such passages as Testament of Judah 22:3; 4QpatrBIV 1–4, etc.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Gen 15:4, 7–8.

In Psalm 2:8, habitually interpreted as a messianic text in Second Temple literature and the primitive church, the Davidic king is established as heir to the nations in terms borrowed from 2 Samuel 7: “The LORD said to me, ‘You are *my Son*; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and *I will make the nations your heritage*, and the ends of the earth your possession.’” At the end of Galatians 3, this idea of Messiah as universal heir is quite possibly fused with the eschatological promise in Hosea: in the future, when God establishes his covenant, all God’s people will be “sons of the living God” (Hos 1:10 NASB).<sup>37</sup> Paul seems to allude to this passage (which he will later quote in Rom 9:25–26), combining it with perspectives from Psalm 2, and stating that, because the heir and ultimate Abrahamic/Davidic “Son” has entered into his inheritance, those who are “in him” become “sons” and “heirs” with him: “For in Christ Jesus *you are all sons of God*, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, *heirs* according to promise” (vv. 26–29).

Intertextual allusions must be approached with a certain caution. The least that can be said about those proposed here is that 1) they provide a consistent picture of fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise via the Davidic covenant and Messiah, and 2) they reinforce Paul’s argument that the Mosaic law is a provisional measure, until Christ’s coming. The law is *not*, and never has been, God’s appointed means of salvation! The practical upshot is, of course, that, since the covenant promises have found their fulfillment in Christ, the Davidic Messiah, those who are “in him” have no need of circumcision in order to enter the covenant and obtain its righteousness. They are already “sons of God” through the true Son and so, *a fortiori*, “sons of Abraham,” members of the covenant in full standing.

## 2. *The Coming of Christ and the New Covenant*

As we have just seen, Galatians 3:26–29 suggests that Paul alludes to the end times covenant announced in Hosea. This covenant, which in Jeremiah is termed a “new covenant,” is a regular feature of New Testament texts, including Paul’s letters. New covenant allusions in Galatians 3–4, though, are not limited to these verses. Without seeking to be exhaustive, we see that two other sections also evidence new covenant perspectives.

First, Galatians 3:13–14 speaks of the curse of the law falling upon Christ in order that “the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that

<sup>37</sup> Hos 2:1 in MT. This chapter explicitly mentions God’s end-times covenant in 2:18–23 (MT 2:20–25): “And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground” (NETS).

we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (NASB). As we look to biblical texts that “promise” the eschatological outpouring of God’s Spirit, Ezekiel 36:25–27, or 37:1–14 with its vision of God’s Spirit breathing life into Israel’s dry bones, immediately come to mind, all the more so since Paul alludes to these passages elsewhere in similar contexts.<sup>38</sup> The gift of “life,” in close proximity with the Spirit’s renewing power (3:11–12, 21; cf. 2 Cor 3:6) is a hallmark of the “new covenant” as prophesied in the Old Testament.

Second, and more explicitly, in Galatians 4:21–31, Paul develops an extended allegory on Abraham’s two “women,” treating them as “two covenants” (v. 24). This section, which is particularly important since it concludes Paul’s biblical-theological argument in Galatians 3–4, speaks explicitly of the Mosaic institution in terms of a “covenant.” But what is the other covenant, represented by (the unnamed) Sarah? Commentators have long puzzled over this. Major headway has been made as recent scholars<sup>39</sup> have become more sensitive to the larger context presupposed by the quotation of Isaiah 54:1: “For it is written, ‘Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband’” (Gal 4:27). In Isaiah, this verse reads as the direct result of the work of Yahweh’s servant (Isa 52:13–53:12): it introduces a situation of blessing in which redeemed Jerusalem—a “barren woman” actually compared to Sarah in 51:2–3—finds herself to be the mother of innumerable children.<sup>40</sup> In this way the Lord is faithful to his “covenant that brings peace to his people” (Isa 54:10 LXX). Isaiah 55:3 further describes this as “an eternal covenant,” that of God’s holy and faithful promises to David. Although recent commentators often view the covenant represented by Sarah as God’s original covenant with Abraham, in context Paul is more likely referring to the eschatological “new” covenant, made possible by the suffering servant’s atoning work.<sup>41</sup>

In all these passages, the progression is identical: the Abrahamic covenant, which promises blessing to the nations (i.e., justification, life and the

<sup>38</sup> See in particular 2 Cor 3:1–6.

<sup>39</sup> Cf., e.g., Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 114–15; Karen H. Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians 4:21–31,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 299–320.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Isa 49:18–21.

<sup>41</sup> So, rightly, Steven Di Mattei, “Paul’s Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics,” *New Testament Studies* 52 (2006): 116–18, Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 140, Joel Willitts, “Isa 54,1 in Gal 4,24b–27: Reading Genesis in Light of Isaiah,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96 (2005): 200, etc.

generous gift of God’s Spirit) finds its fulfillment and full “unfolding,” via the Davidic covenant, in the eschatological “new” covenant. The Abrahamic covenant, unlike the Mosaic, is not abolished—those who have obtained covenant righteousness in Christ have been made “sons of Abraham.” The ancient promises have come to concretization in the eschatological covenant through Christ’s death on the cross. Again, the Galatian Christians need not submit to circumcision, for, as those who have received God’s end-time Spirit and the status of “sons of God,” they are already members of God’s new covenant.

#### **IV. *The Covenant in Galatians: Its Relevance for Reformed Theology***

If the preceding is a fair representation of Galatians 3–4, it must be conceded that the covenant is a consistent and important element of Paul’s overall argument in these chapters. In the following paragraphs, I would like to step back from the exegetical details and ask, from a more systematic viewpoint, what conclusions can be drawn concerning the relationship between the covenants as Paul sees them.

##### **1. *The Law, a Covenant?***

Before we enter into the terrain of systematics, though, one question needs to be addressed briefly: if Paul does recognize the Sinai covenant as a covenant, why does he avoid using the term in connection with the law? It is often claimed that Paul denies the law any covenant status. Galatians 4:24, as we have seen, refutes such a conclusion, but it must be stated that Paul does seem to shy away from using *διαθήκη* here to designate the law.

In my opinion, it is not that he refuses to acknowledge the covenant status of the Sinaitic Torah; rather, his burden is to show that the Abrahamic covenant is the covenant *par excellence*. God’s covenant with Abraham, as established in Genesis 15, embodies the basic thrust of what a covenant is, that is, God’s promise to be received in believing trust and outside of any consideration of works of the law that would bring one into a relationship with God. The Abrahamic covenant is primary and, in Paul’s eyes, it is only as the foundational, promissory nature of this covenant is understood that the idea of “covenant” can then be extended—secondarily—to the Mosaic Torah. “Covenant” thus derives its basic definition, not from the law but from the Abrahamic promise. It is also for this reason that Paul favors the use of “promise” over “covenant.” Given the proximity in Jewish interpretation

between “covenant” and “law,” Paul prefers to speak of “promise,” thus insisting on the covenant’s fundamental content.

## **2. Paul’s Redemptive-Historical Understanding of the Mosaic Law**

It would be easy to think, and has often been assumed, that Paul’s argument in these chapters centers on what the law is and always has been, or what it does and always has done. Closer inspection shows that Paul is concerned to describe what the law *was* before Christ’s coming and *what it has now become*. This is immediately apparent in his metaphor of the law as a “custodian,” established for a set period and situation—Israel during its “childhood”—and rendered obsolete by the coming of the “heir” (Gal 3:23–25). Specifically, the Mosaic law, during the time for which it was given, was a “vector” of the Abrahamic promise: its purpose was to focus Israel’s attention on the promise and its coming fulfillment in Christ (Gal 3:22–23). From a more systematic viewpoint, and bringing other biblical texts into the discussion, we could say that, in the Old Testament, it was through obedience to the Mosaic law that believing Israelites expressed their faith in the God of the promise, their attachment to the promise itself, and their relationship with the God who gave it.<sup>42</sup> Once that promise came to fulfillment in Christ, however, the Mosaic law reached its goal; it thus no longer plays the role for which it was originally given.

It could be said that Paul, in these chapters, is operating with an unstated question: what can be said of the law—what can the law offer—now that the promise has found its fulfillment in Christ? The clear answer is this: all the law can do, separated from the promise, is pronounce a curse on those who, living by it, seek God’s righteousness but do not attain it. The only promise that remains is, “Do these things (fully) and you shall live.” But this is not—and never was—the way of faith (Gal 3:12–13). It is not that for which the law was given (v. 21).

A reading of Galatians that is sensitive to the redemptive-historical perspective also allows for a better understanding of one of the more difficult passages—at least from a classical Reformed perspective. Galatians 4:24 affirms that the Sinai covenant is “bearing children for slavery (εἰς δουλείαν γεννώσα).” Neglecting to take account of Paul’s historical viewpoint could lead one to understand that the Mosaic covenant *as such* produces slaves and has done so since its inception. Galatians 4:1–3, thematically and formally close to this verse, gives the key to its meaning. At the beginning of

<sup>42</sup> Cf., e.g., Ps 119 and Thomas E. McComisky, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 72–76, 150–53, and *passim*.

chapter four, Paul speaks of the faithful members of Old Testament Israel living in *quasi*-slavery, although they were “owners of everything” (Gal 4:1). The *condition* of the child in this metaphor is likened to that of a slave although, clearly, his *status* is qualitatively different: from the outset, he is established as heir to his father’s belongings! This quasi-slavery is to be distinguished 1) from the very real slavery the Gentiles Christians had experienced in paganism (v. 7), but also 2) from the slavery for which the law is *presently* “bearing children,” now that the *new* covenant—that embodied by the “new Jerusalem”—has come. Israel, during its period of infancy, was destined to inherit the promised legacy, once the true Davidic heir came. However, to seek to remain, or to place oneself, in that situation defined by the Mosaic law now that the heir has come, is to truly place oneself into slavery! Again, the underlying issue is, what can be said of the law now that the promise has come to fulfillment in Christ?

### **3. The Sinai Covenant, a Continuation of the Abrahamic?**

Paul’s presentation of the promise covenant and the law covenant in Galatians also raises an important question for the relationship between the covenants: should they be seen in continuity or discontinuity? Evangelical theology, particularly classic Dispensationalism, has tended to drive a wedge between the Old Testament generally and the New Testament. Reformed theology, on the contrary, has had a marked tendency to see the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants as various dispensations of the one overarching “covenant of grace,” God’s response to the covenant of works violated by Adam’s sin. Recent “new covenant theology” seeks a mediating position, but with a fairly pronounced disjunction between the Old Testament covenants and the new covenant in Christ.

It is my conviction that the classical Reformed position is, on the whole, a close approximation of the biblical witness. That said, Paul’s presentation of the covenants can lead to a somewhat more nuanced understanding. Rather than speaking in binary terms of “continuity” or “discontinuity,” it may be helpful to speak simultaneously in terms of “continuities” and “discontinuities,” in the plural.

Clearly, for Paul there is a provisional character to the Mosaic covenant that is not present in the Abrahamic. This includes specific laws, but also extends to the whole of the Mosaic covenant as such. Israel’s *situation*, controlled by the Mosaic covenant, is characterized by an absence of liberty. It is fundamental to grasp, however, that, in Paul’s eyes, the Mosaic covenant was never designed to exist or to have effect *independently of the Abrahamic covenant*. The Mosaic covenant was established as a means of focusing faith

on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of turning Israel's expectation toward the coming Messiah and the righteousness in him.

Much of the discontinuity between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant is also determined by the historical-redemptive situation. Two elements should be highlighted here. First, the specific contours of the new covenant are defined by the gift of the Spirit. Although the Spirit was present and active already in Old Testament times,<sup>43</sup> it is only in the new covenant that he assumes the specific role of “the Spirit of the Son,” reproducing Christ's active obedience in those who belong to him.<sup>44</sup> Only in the new covenant, therefore, does the Spirit's transformative work become *a central, defining aspect* of the Church's life.<sup>45</sup> A second aspect of discontinuity is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing toward the nations: God's people are no longer delimited by—that is, limited to—Israel's national frontiers. It now extends to the nations. As Paul says in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . , for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In principle, both these elements were present in Old Testament times and, more specifically, in the Sinai covenant. But with the fulfillment of the promise, they become central components of the new covenant situation.

That said, the continuity in these chapters is no less striking. In Paul's argument, the underlying foundational element giving continuity to all the covenants is the promise. The promise, received by faith, is the central element of the Abrahamic covenant; this same promise grasped through faith continues throughout the Mosaic covenant, providing the latter its—only—*raison d'être*. And it is the fulfillment of that same promise, in Christ's death on the cross and the bestowal of the Spirit, that signals the coming, and the present reality, of the new covenant.

The continuity between the Abrahamic and eschatological covenants is particularly conspicuous: already in Galatians 3:8, the promise to Abraham is the gospel “proclaimed beforehand (*προευηγγελίσαστο, proeuēggelisato*).”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, one must go further: the new covenant in Christ does not terminate the Abrahamic covenant. Rather, it permits its full flowering, for through the gift of the Spirit, justification now goes out to the nations as a present reality. One could well say that in the new covenant the Abrahamic covenant finds its concrete fulfillment, as the blessing that accrues from Christ's work flows out to the nations, now reaching the uttermost parts of the earth!<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ps 51:13; Isa 63:10–11, 14; Hag 2:5, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Gal 4:6; Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11.

<sup>45</sup> Gal 5:17–25; Rom 2:29; 5:5; 7:6; 8:1–17; 14:17; 1 Cor 3:16; 12:13; 2 Cor 3:3–8, 17–18, etc.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Martyn, “Covenant, Christ, and Church in Galatians,” 149.

<sup>47</sup> A question that typically divides Reformed and Calvinistic theologies touches on the status of children in the covenant: does the new covenant abolish the genealogical principle

#### 4. *Is Galatians Antinomian?*

One final question: it could be possible to conclude from Galatians that Paul has nothing positive to say about Torah, and that the ideal Christian relation to the Old Testament is one in which the law is no longer a binding reality. The last two chapters of Galatians oblige us to nuance this conclusion as well. In Galatians 5:14, Paul highlights the fact that mutual Christian love is a true “fulfillment” of the law. In chapter 6, he says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). The expression τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ here can fairly be paraphrased as “the messianic Torah.” Without entering into the difficult question of how later rabbinical writings conceived of Torah in the messianic age, it is obvious that Paul differentiates between “Mosaic Torah” and “messianic Torah.”<sup>48</sup> It would not be excessive, therefore, to distinguish between the law as it found provisional expression in the Mosaic covenant and as it is permanently and fully expressed in the “eschatological Torah,” fulfilled in the lives of believers through the Spirit’s transforming work.

Classical Reformed theology has long distinguished between ceremonial law, civil law, and moral law in the Old Testament: with Christ’s coming, the first two have been removed, leaving only moral law.<sup>49</sup> This comes close to Paul’s presentation but can be helpfully completed. Paul’s primary concern in Galatians is with Gentile circumcision as a means of entry into the covenant, and thus of access to righteousness. It could be claimed, therefore, that he simply points to the removal of ceremonial law and focuses, in chapters 5 and 6, on moral law. That said, the distinction between Mosaic

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that characterizes both Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants? For many commentators, Paul’s driving question in these chapters is, “How does one become a member of the new covenant?” the response being, “Through faith in Christ.” This reading of Galatians would obviously preclude the inclusion of believers’ children within the covenant. It seems to me that, in its historical context, the question of Galatians 3–4 is more pointed and situational, i.e., how can the Gentile Christians of Galatia know that *they are, already*, members of the eschatological covenant? The answer is the gift of the Spirit and sonship in Christ, both of which already characterize these uncircumcised believers. As J. Zeisler put it: “For Paul, the indisputable fact that they have the Spirit is proof that they are God’s people (cf. Ezek. 36.22–27), and his argument is that the law had nothing to do with it. It therefore cannot be a necessary condition for being the people of God” (Quoted in Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998], 211). In reality, the genealogical question must be answered by responding to another question, not raised in this epistle, i.e., does the covenant relationship, as a historical reality—thus also including the new covenant—and the promises it enshrines extend *per se* to the offspring of its faithful members? See also my article, “La place des enfants dans la nouvelle alliance et dans l’Église,” *La Revue réformée* 63.4 (2012): 9–25.

<sup>48</sup> See also 1 Cor 9:21.

<sup>49</sup> Cf., e.g., *Westminster Confession of Faith* 19.3–4.

law and Christian behavior in Galatians goes beyond simply the categories of Old Testament “moral” and “ceremonial law.”

Clearly, Paul sees the sacrificial and outward expressions of Mosaic Torah as no longer binding because of Christ’s sacrifice and the new situation it has brought about. But the moral aspects of the law also receive in the new covenant *a deeper and more explicitly ethical formulation, as well as a more pervasive practical—and, among other things, collective—expression*. A good example of this can be found in Galatians 6:1–2, which we have been considering: “If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” One can find similar injunctions in Jewish Scripture (particularly in Wisdom literature); but such a consistent focus on “gentleness,” on heart attitudes and care for fellow believers, really only comes into its own in the new covenant. Expressed in a slightly different manner, the moral content of the law was indeed present in Jewish Scripture, but its inward character, manifesting itself in particular as love for one’s neighbor, was not expressed as pointedly and was made to accompany other expressions of obedience that were not as immediately ethical in character.

At any rate, one cannot say that Paul is against the law as such: he is certainly opposed 1) to *the Mosaic expression of the law* being imposed on new covenant believers, 2) to it being used as a condition for righteousness, a use for which it was never intended, and 3) to it—rather than the Spirit—functioning as the primary impetus for Christian life. The law, reconfigured as “messianic Torah,” continues to *define* obedience in the New Covenant era and furnishes the imperative demands the church is called to put into practice. But obedience flows not only from gratitude for God’s prior salvation as in the Old Testament already, but even more fundamentally from the initiating, transforming work of the Spirit.

## Conclusion

The present article began by noting that Paul’s scant use of the term *διαθήκη* is often taken as an indicator of his abandonment of Jewish—and, more specifically, Old Testament—soteriological categories. Upon closer investigation, it appears that although the in-breaking power and attendant newness of salvation in Christ are indeed fundamental for Paul’s proclamation, salvation finds its deepest roots in the redemptive-historical work of the God of Abraham as it unfolds in Jewish Scripture. The covenants that structure the Old Testament narrative are for Paul—at the very least—an

adequate way of describing those stages through which God moved his promise forward to its fulfillment in Christ.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the use of the term, covenantal texts, concepts, and categories continue to determine the way in which Paul describes the work of Christ, the gift of the Spirit, and the life of believers. Said otherwise, that which allows the church to understand God's redemption in Christ is the Old Testament, structured by the promises and law of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and eschatological covenants.

Clearly, Paul redefines the covenant concepts held by his fellow Jews and, no doubt, much of first-century Christianity. For Second Temple Judaism, the fundamental aspect of covenant is the life-giving Torah. Paul, in a very unique way for his time, sees faith in the promise, in contradistinction to obedience to the law, as its most decisive element. But even this redefinition, stemming from the discovery of salvation in Christ, seeks its foundation in Scripture. And it is because Paul seeks to reconcile the joyous discovery of the Messiah and the reception of God's Spirit by the nations with the abiding message of those Scriptures that his inspired grappling with the issues of promise, law, and covenant continues to be relevant for the task of theology today.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> As Bernard C. Lategan, "Paul's Use of History in Galatians: Some Remarks on His Style of Theological Argumentation," *Neotestamentica* 36 (2002): 128, aptly puts it, "Paul does not dispute the accepted sequence of major events of the history of Abraham. He also does not change this story, nor does he offer an alternative history. What he does do, is to show ... what was always there, but what was never properly realised or what has become hidden in the course of Torah-centric revision of Israel's past. He does so by bringing into sharp focus what has been overlooked by the dominant tradition—the Torah-less nature of Abraham's calling, of the promise and covenant with God."

<sup>51</sup> The author wishes to thank Paul Wells and Alistair Wilson for their comments on an earlier version of this article.

# The Fourth Gospel and the Apostolic Mission: John's Common Evangelical Theology

MATTHEW D. JENSEN

## Abstract

This article seeks to redress the imbalance of seeing John's theology as distinctive and dissimilar to the other Gospels and New Testament documents by observing the essential consistency between the theology of the Fourth Gospel and the apostolic mission described by Paul in Galatians 2:1-10. First, it considers the origin of the New Testament documents in the mission of the apostles described in Galatians 2:1-10 and locates the apostles' commonly agreed-on gospel message in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. Second, the article examines the Fourth Gospel, paying close attention to the intrusive narrator's comments about the purpose (John 20:30-31) and explicit use of the Old Testament (12:38, 39-40; 19:24, 28, 36-37) to demonstrate that John's theology and epistemology was fundamentally the same as that of the other apostles.

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**T**he discussion of the relationship between John and the other Gospels is as least as old as Clement of Alexandria, who famously proposed one very early solution: "John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels, urged on by his disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a

spiritual Gospel.”<sup>1</sup> Many other explanations of the relationship between the Gospels and John’s contribution as a Gospel have been proposed over the course of the last two thousand years. A recent review of the secondary literature has found nine different proposals as to the relationship between the synoptic Gospels and John: supplement, complement, displacement, dependence, aural influence, mutual influence, interlocking tradition, synoptic-like sources, and independence.<sup>2</sup> This article will not enter into a discussion of the relative merits of each proposal. Rather, it will argue that the Fourth Gospel shares the same theological perspective and epistemological method found elsewhere in the apostolic mission.<sup>3</sup>

In order to do this, the article has two main parts. The briefer first part discusses the mission of the earliest church and its message. It aims to show the necessity of such an approach and to sketch out in broad terms the categories of thought that would be expected in the theology of John as a member of the mission. The longer second part then examines the content of the Fourth Gospel, paying particular attention to the author’s metacomments that inform the reader about the purpose, content and/or meaning of the text.<sup>4</sup>

## **I. The Mission of the Early Church**

The collection of documents that we call the New Testament arose as a direct result of the apostolic mission.<sup>5</sup> The resurrected Jesus appeared to the Twelve (Matt 28:18–20; Luke 24:47–48; Acts 1:8) and to Paul (Acts 26:15–18), commanding them to testify to his life, death, resurrection, and universal lordship. As a consequence of their obedience to Jesus’s command, the apostles and their respective circles wrote the Gospels, letters, and Revelation to disseminate the message about Jesus and to encourage believers in the face of their circumstances.

The earliest firsthand description of this mission occurs in Galatians 2:1–10 in the context of Paul defending his apostleship.<sup>6</sup> Paul relates his

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.7 (Oulton, LCL).

<sup>2</sup> Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 194–211.

<sup>3</sup> I am treating John’s Gospel as a finished whole and not following the more radical approaches that identify different editors or strata of composition of John’s text. One of these more imaginative approaches is Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> The term “metacomment” is borrowed from Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 101–6, although it will be slightly modified below with regard to narrative texts.

<sup>5</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Paul W. Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity

meeting with the “pillar” apostles James, Peter, and John, and in doing so states that they all shared the same gospel message yet had different target audiences. James, Peter, and John would go to the circumcised while Paul would go to the nations (Gal 2:7–9). Since this background gave rise to the New Testament documents, it is important that the documents themselves be understood in this historical and theological context.<sup>7</sup>

So when approaching John there are two points that need to be taken into consideration:<sup>8</sup> first, John’s audience is primarily Jewish; second, John shares the same gospel message as Paul and the other apostles. The first of these requires little explanation but may require modification as the Gospel is read because Paul’s statement may be historically conditioned. That is, John may have changed his audience after this meeting. He appears to have continued the mission for another fifty years post the events described in Galatians 2:1–10.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, given John’s distinctive vocabulary and writing style, the second statement requires some unpacking. What is the gospel message that the apostles agreed on?

Paul reports in 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 a summary of the gospel message that he received prior to his visit to Corinth in 50 A.D. and then passed on to them in his preaching. Its style and vocabulary are not readily evident elsewhere in Paul outside other possible creeds, and the highly structured fragment allows for easy memorization. So it seems fair to conclude that Paul is here quoting (or at the very least using) a traditional saying, one that was probably a common summary employed in the earliest church.<sup>10</sup> Given the historical sequence of the events recounted in Galatians 1–2, Paul would have had this summary when he visited the pillar apostles.<sup>11</sup> Thus this

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Press, 1999), 300, states that this “passage, more than any other in the New Testament, explains the subsequent actual history of the apostolic age” (emphasis original).

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller explanation and defense of this method, see Matthew D. Jensen, “The Gospel and the New Testament: Understanding the New Testament in Light of the Gospel Mission,” in *Let the Word Do the Work*, ed. Peter G. Bolt (Camperdown: Australian Church Record, 2015), 85–91.

<sup>8</sup> This assumes that John wrote the Gospel that bears his name. For a defense of this assumption, see Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 39–51.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief discussion of the dating of John and the issues involved, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 82–83.

<sup>10</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PTNC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 745–46.

<sup>11</sup> The dating of Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem according to Galatians is difficult. The sequence “then after three years I went up to Jerusalem” (Gal 1:18) ... “then after fourteen years I again went up to Jerusalem” (Gal 2:1) could be read either consecutively as 17 years (see C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ICC

summary reflects the gospel that Paul put before them (Gal 2:2) and that was the commonly accepted gospel message (Gal 2:6–7)—or, maybe better, it was the agreed-on theology of the apostles. Therefore, the gospel message that the apostles had in common was this:

1. That Christ died on behalf of our sins according to the Scriptures
2. and that he was buried
3. and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures
4. and that he appeared to Cephas then to the Twelve.<sup>12</sup>

Since this was the shared gospel message, a close examination of this summary should reveal the theological content and the mode of reasoning that we should expect to see reflected in the Fourth Gospel as one of the missionary documents.

First, John should be drawn to the historical events in this gospel statement—the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus. Second, the historical events are not an end in themselves, but each has significance. The parallelism of the first and third lines indicates that the second and fourth events are the proof of the first and third. That is, the evidence for the death of Jesus is his burial, just as the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus was his appearances. The historical events in the first and third lines are also described in terms of their theological significance. Jesus’s death is understood to be on behalf of our sin, just as his resurrection happened on the third day.<sup>13</sup> Third, the epistemological basis for understanding the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection is the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

So understanding the historical situation of the earliest Christian mission in this way enables some working assumptions about the theology that should be evident in the Fourth Gospel, since it is one of the mission documents. First, John wrote for a Jewish audience, because this was the mission

[Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998], 2:711), or concurrently as 14 years (see Richard J. Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, Volume 4: Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard J. Bauckham [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 469–70). Since Paul’s Damascus Road meeting of Jesus seems to have occurred in 34 A.D., it is most likely that the meeting with the “pillar” apostles occurred in 48 A.D. (i.e., the concurrent option). So the gospel summary would have been fresh in Paul’s mind when he entered Corinth in 50 A.D.

<sup>12</sup> Author’s translation.

<sup>13</sup> For the significance of Jesus’s resurrection on the third day, see Michael Russell, “On the Third Day, According to the Scriptures,” *Reformed Theological Review* 67.1 (2008): 1–17.

<sup>14</sup> “According to” (*κατά*) can refer to both the fulfillment of the Scriptures (that is, they happened as the Scriptures foretold) and as the basis for understanding the significance of the events (that is, Jesus’s death was for sin as revealed in the Scriptures). See further Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (London: Paternoster, 2006), 22–24.

field that he and the other apostles agreed on. Second, John should share the same basic gospel message as the other apostles. In particular, his theology should move from the historical events of Jesus's death, burial, resurrection, and appearances to their implications for sin and his lordship. Further, there should be an epistemological appeal to the Old Testament to justify these implications. Even though John should share this message in common with other apostles, we should also expect to see him as an individual expressing it in unique terms.

That John's theology is generally the same as that of the other apostles finds some external support in Irenaeus. Little is said explicitly about the content of John's teaching other than that it was consistent with that of the other apostles (*Against Heresies* 2.22.5), is contained in John's writings, is about the plan of salvation, and declares that there is one God, who created heaven and earth and spoke by the law and the prophets, and that there is one Christ, the Son of God (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1–2; 3.11.1–2).

With all this in mind, this article will now turn to the Fourth Gospel in order to ascertain something of John's theology.

## II. *John's Gospel*

The second part of this article has four sections. After defining metacomments and discussing their value in ascertaining the meaning of a text, the article examines two sets of these comments in John: the purpose statement in John 20:30–31 and the narrative intrusions that introduce quotes of the Old Testament (John 12:38, 39–40; 19:24, 28, 36–37). Finally, the article considers some of the possible objections to the understanding of John's theology established in this manner.

### 1. *Metacomments and Meaning*

One of the difficulties in moving from a text to theology is ascertaining the meaning of the text within its historical situation. John alleviates this difficulty more than the other biblical writers because he makes a number of metacomments. Steven Runge defines a metacomment as "when speakers stop saying what they are saying in order to comment on what is going to be said, speaking abstractly about it."<sup>15</sup> In terms of a narrative, this is where the narrator intrudes into the story to explain the story itself.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 100.

<sup>16</sup> On the intrusive narrator in John, see Merrill C. Tenney, "The Footnotes of John's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 117 (1960): 350–64; John J. O'Rourke, "Asides in the Gospel of John," *Novum Testamentum* 21.3 (1979): 210–19; Tom Thatcher, "A New Look at Asides in the Fourth

These types of comments provide parameters for establishing the intended meaning of the text. So in John, the narrator intrudes into the narrative and provides a purpose statement for the gospel (John 20:30–31), an explanation of textual details (e.g., John 2:21–22), and some justification for the interpretation of events (e.g., John 12:37–41).<sup>17</sup> Each of these indicates how the text should be understood, thus limiting possible misinterpretation. Sometimes these statements cover the whole text (20:30–31), and on other occasions they refer only to the immediate context.

As such, these metacomments anchor the meaning of the text in the text itself, ensuring that its theology is heard. Thus particular attention to these metacomments will ensure that the theology of the apostle John, generated from the mission context above, is not read into the Fourth Gospel but rather found within the text of John's Gospel itself.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. *The Purpose Statement (John 20:30–31)*

Following the climax of Jesus's death and physical resurrection, the narrator intrudes into the text with a metacomment that describes to the reader the contents, purpose, audience, and result of the Gospel as a whole:<sup>19</sup>

Then Jesus also did many other signs before his disciples that are not written in this book. But these have been written so that you might believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus and in order that, by believing, you might have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)<sup>20</sup>

John describes the contents of his writing as signs (σημεία). Other metacomments in John also contain this same description (John 2:11, 23; 4:54;

Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (1994): 428–39. There is disagreement among these scholars as to the number and purpose of the intrusions. It is beyond the scope of this essay to enter into this debate in any meaningful way other than to note that the scholars agree that the intrusions indicate the author's intended meaning when taken at face value.

<sup>17</sup> This is not confined to John's Gospel but appears to be a feature of his writing style. So in 1 John he makes a number of statements about not only the purpose for writing (e.g., 1 John 2:1) but also the reason for the letter (e.g., 1 John 2:12) and the content of the letter (e.g., 1 John 2:26). On this see further Matthew D. Jensen, *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ: A Reading of 1 John*, SNTSMS 153 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34–36.

<sup>18</sup> Since Tenney, "The Footnotes of John's Gospel," O'Rourke, "Asides in the Gospel of John," and Thatcher, "A New Look at Asides in the Fourth Gospel," fail to agree on the exact number of narrator's intrusions, this article limits itself to the purpose statement and the Old Testament quotes. A fuller study identifying each intrusion and then examining it is beyond the scope of this essay. It is sufficient for the argument of this article to observe the intrusive narrator's purpose (John 20:30–31) and use of the Old Testament, to see the similarity of John's theology to the apostolic mission.

<sup>19</sup> Since this purpose statement covers the whole of the work, it is dealt with first.

<sup>20</sup> Author's translation.

6:2, 14; 12:18, 37), and even the characters in the narrative understand Jesus's actions to be signs (2:18; 3:2; 6:30; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47). The signs display Jesus's glory (2:11), lead to false belief (2:23; 4:48), and result in Jesus being identified as "the Prophet" (6:14) and "the Christ" (7:31). They cause division between the people and the Pharisees (9:16; 12:37). The greatest sign in the Gospel is the death and physical resurrection of Jesus's himself.<sup>21</sup> Although the noun *σημείον* (sign) is not explicitly used in describing Jesus's death and resurrection, there are two reasons why Jesus's death and resurrection should be understood as the ultimate sign in John's Gospel. First, the location of this purpose statement points to John having achieved his overall goal at this point in the Gospel. The opening chapter identifies the divinity of Jesus as the Word who was God (John 1:1) and who became flesh (1:14), a point that the readers see the disciples realize in John 20:28 when Thomas confesses Jesus to be Lord and God because of the physical resurrection. That is, the disciples only achieve the same knowledge as the reader after Jesus's death and resurrection. Second, the intrusive narrator presents the death and resurrection of Christ as the key events that give meaning to the signs. So in John 2:22 it is only after the resurrection that the disciples understand that Jesus was talking about his body when discussing the temple with the Jews.<sup>22</sup> These observations about the contents of the Gospel fit neatly with the working gospel outlines above. The key events are the death and resurrection of Jesus—the common elements with the other apostles in their mission.

John 20:30–31 also indicates the purpose of the Gospel: so that the reader might believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus. That is, John wrote to present a depiction of Jesus's signs so that the reader would identify the anticipated Christ, the Son of God, with the human Jesus. This purpose shaped John's choice of material to include in the Gospel (cf. John 21:25), so it should shape how the events in the Gospel are read. Sometimes this is obvious, as in John 7:31, where Jesus's signs lead many of the people to ask if the Christ would do more signs than Jesus. This poses the question to the

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<sup>21</sup> Köstenberger (*A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 328–32) does not think that Jesus's death and resurrection should be understood as a sign due to his definition of "sign" as "a symbol-laden, but not necessarily 'miraculous' public work of Jesus selected and explicitly identified as such by John for the reason that it displays God's glory in Jesus who is thus shown to be God's true representative" (p. 328). On the other hand, D. A. Carson (*Gospel According to John*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 661) states that "the greatest sign of them all is the death, resurrection and exaltation of the incarnate Word."

<sup>22</sup> See also John 7:39; 12:16; 16:7. Carson (*The Gospel According to John*, 434) argues that the term "glorification" that occurs in this references incorporates both Jesus's death and resurrection.

reader of the Gospel about what they make of Jesus and his signs with regards to his identity—is he the Christ of Old Testament expectation? On other occasions the question of Jesus’s identity revealed in his signs is used to prompt the reader to consider their personal confidence in Jesus. For example, are they willing to make the identification that may lead to them being put out of the synagogue (John 9:16–22; 12:37–43)? On still other occasions the exact impact of the events is not obvious, but rather the cumulative effect of the signs is mounting up to achieve the purpose.

This discussion of the purpose also confirms the mission audience of the Gospel—that John wrote his Gospel to Jews. The syntax of the purpose statement indicates that the identification it desires the reader to make is that the Christ, the Son of God is Jesus.<sup>23</sup> That is, the question that is being answered in the Gospel is, who is the Christ? This is a Jewish question because this is a Jewish title, as is the question, who is the Son of God?—the second part of this desired identification. In the Old Testament, the title “Son of God” was a way of speaking about the king of Israel (2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:7, 12; 80:15; 89:26–27).<sup>24</sup> These two titles are grammatically in apposition and thus synonymous. That John understands these two titles as synonymous is evident in John 1:49, where Nathanael confesses Jesus to be “the Son of God . . . the king of Israel,” putting the titles in apposition, thus indicating that they have the same meaning. This indicates that the intended audience of the Fourth Gospel are Jews who are trying to answer the question, who is the Christ, the Son of God? John’s answer is Jesus, as demonstrated in the signs, the greatest of which is Jesus’s death and resurrection.

John 20:31 also reveals the intended result of reading John—that the identification of the Christ, the Son of God as Jesus would lead to life. This statement presupposes that the audience is in a state of death and needs life. The Fourth Gospel teaches this elsewhere, either as the words of Jesus and John the Baptist or as comments of the intrusive narrator.<sup>25</sup> So, for instance, John 3:16 understands that people are perishing without God’s Son being sent into the world. Or again in John 3:36 it is stated that without obedience to the Son, God’s wrath remains on individuals.<sup>26</sup> This indicates that the

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<sup>23</sup> D. A. Carson, “Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30–21: One More Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 693–714; Matthew D. Jensen, “John Is No Exception: Identifying the Subject of *εἰμὶ* and Its Implications,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135.2 (2016): 341–53.

<sup>24</sup> The title “Son of God” as it occurs in John and elsewhere in the New Testament is sadly beyond the scope of this article. It is an area of my current research in which I hope to publish in the future.

<sup>25</sup> For discussion about the limits of the speeches in John 3, see Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 203–4; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 113–14.

<sup>26</sup> See also 5:24.

Gospel itself has at least some evangelistic intent. Much is made of the text critical issues involved in John 20:31, whether the verb “believe” is in the aorist (πιστεύητε) or the present (πιστεύετε), as though from the tense one can determine whether the Gospel was written for evangelistic (aorist) or edificatory (present) purposes.<sup>27</sup> Putting aside this false dichotomy, the desired result of “life” indicates that at the very least the Gospel is evangelistic in purpose because it aims to convince the reader to believe that the Christ, the Son of God is Jesus and as a result gain life.

So from the metacomment of John 20:30–31 it becomes evident that John’s Gospel was written to Jews about some of the historical events in the life of Jesus, the chief of which was his death and resurrection. It was written in order that the readers would believe that the Christ, the Son of God, was Jesus and so have life. This understanding correlates with some of Paul’s descriptions of the apostle’s theology. It does not explicitly indicate the theological significance of the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection beyond giving life, nor does it rely explicitly on an epistemological appeal to the Old Testament to justify its interpretation of the events (although the titles “Christ” and “Son of God” both implicitly require that the reader be familiar with the Old Testament, as both are meaningless without an understanding of its categories).

### 3. Old Testament Quotations

That the Old Testament is the epistemological basis for the theological understanding of the historical events in John is widely acknowledged in scholarship. For example, Judith Lieu states,

More than in any of the other Gospels, Scripture provides the indispensable reference point and scaffolding for the argument and the thought of John. From apparently inconsequential allusions through to John’s distinctive Christology, it is Scripture that makes the Gospel ‘work.’<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See Gordon D. Fee, “On the Text and Meaning of John 20:30–31,” in *The Four Gospels*, ed. F. V. Segbroeck et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 3:2193–205; Carson, “Syntactical and Text-Critical,” 693–714.

<sup>28</sup> Judith Lieu, “Narrative Analysis and Scripture in John,” in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North*, JSNTSup 189, ed. S. Moyise (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 144. Other scholars who also express this position include C. K. Barrett, “The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1947): 155–69; D. A. Carson, “John and the Johannine Epistles,” in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 245–64; and Johannes Beutler, “The Use of ‘Scripture’ in the Gospel of John,” in *Exploring John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 147–62.

There are seventeen explicitly acknowledged quotes from Scripture in John. They come from the mouths of the narrator (John 1:23; 2:17; 12:14–15), the crowd (6:31; 7:42), Jesus (6:45; 7:38; 10:34; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12), and the intrusive narrator (12:38, 39–40; 19:24, 28, 36, 37). The intrusive narrator's Old Testament quotes further demonstrate the Gospel writer's understanding of the gospel as being the same as the one outlined in Paul's summary.

There are two sets of metacomments in John where the narrator intrudes into the narrative in order to explain the reason for an event happening by explicit appeal to the Old Testament and thus to indicate its theological significance.

First, there are four quotes in the passion narrative where the intrusive narrator appeals to the Old Testament for the significance of Jesus's death. The casting of lots to determine who got Jesus's clothes (John 19:24) was in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. Further, Jesus's calling out about his thirst (John 19:28) was likewise in fulfillment of Psalm 22:15. That is, the narrator understands and explicitly presents Jesus's death as fulfilling the expectations of Psalm 22, a psalm where David cries out to God to be with him and rescue him from the many enemies around him who are causing his pain and demise. Hence the intrusive narrator, via his explicit appeal to Psalm 22, presents the event of Jesus's death as fulfilling the persecution of David at the hands of others. Jesus's death is at the hands of the people in the same way David spoke of his persecutions.<sup>29</sup>

The intrusive narrator also states that Jesus bones were not broken, fulfilling the expectations associated with the Passover lamb of Exodus 12:46 (see also Num 9:12).<sup>30</sup> That is, John presents Jesus as the Passover lamb whose death causes God to pass over the people and not count their sins against them. Finally, John records the piercing of Jesus's side (John 19:37) as fulfilling Zechariah 12:10, where the king of Israel was pierced for the people leading to the mourning of the nation and their cleansing from sin (Zech 13:1). That is, the narrator understands that Jesus was the king of Israel (John 18:33, 39; 19:3, 14–15, 19, 21) whose death would result in both Israel's mourning (20:11, 13) and the forgiveness of her sin (20:23).

So from the intrusive narrator's comments in the passion narrative the reader should understand that the event of Jesus's death fulfilled the

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<sup>29</sup> It should also be noted at this point that both Matthew (27:46) and Mark (15:34) have Jesus quoting Ps 22:1 on the cross as he is dying, thus revealing the consistency of the apostolic gospel message and its understanding of events.

<sup>30</sup> The Old Testament text quoted could be Ps 34:20 instead of Exod 12:46. However, given the context of Jesus's death happening at Passover (John 18:28, 39) and the identifications of Jesus made by John the Baptist in John 1:29 and 36 as the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," it seems more likely that Exod 12:46 is in view here.

expectations of Scripture that the people would reject the Davidic King, persecuting him to the point of death. This death was as the Passover lamb for the sin of the people, and it resulted in forgiveness. This seems in accord with the gospel summary of 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, where Jesus’s death was for sin in accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures.

Second, the intrusive narrator explains the reason for the Jewish rejection of Jesus (John 12:38, 39–40) with two explicit quotes from Isaiah. Jesus performed many signs, but the people did not believe in him, and so the words of Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10 were fulfilled. That is, just as the people of Isaiah’s day rejected the suffering servant of God, Jesus was also rejected. Here John presents Jesus as the suffering servant, and so at this turning point in the Gospel, where Jesus has just spoken about his death (John 12:32–33), the quote from Isaiah 53:1 generates expectations that Jesus would die for the sin of the people (Isa 53:6–9)—the very thing that the rest of John describes. The rejection of Jesus was also because the people were hardened to the message about Jesus, just as were the people of Isaiah’s day (Isa 6:10). As in Isaiah’s day, this hardening was required in order that judgment be brought on the nation of Israel so that they would turn and be comforted with the words of forgiveness. Jesus needed to be rejected by the people so that God’s judgment for sin would fall on him at his death, with the consequence that some of Israel would receive the comfort of forgiveness (John 21:15–19). So the second set of explicit Old Testament quotes in John reveals that Jesus was the suffering servant whose death was for sin and whose rejection by Israel fulfilled Isaianic expectation.

Thus the intrusive narrator appeals to the Old Testament as the basis for the understanding of the significance of the events surrounding Jesus’s death. His death is presented as being for sin as the suffering servant and the Passover lamb. This death as the Davidic King of Israel results in forgiveness of sin for the people of Israel, who are under the judgment of God because of their hardened hearts. This significance and its epistemological basis in the Old Testament Scriptures accords with the gospel summary agreed on when the pillar apostles met to discuss the global mission they were undertaking in response to Jesus’s command. Thus John’s Gospel is an evangelistic book written to Jews presenting the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection and explaining their significance for sin and Jesus’s lordship on the basis of the Old Testament Scriptures.

#### **4. Possible Objections**

There are three possible objections to this mission understanding of John’s theology just outlined: the notion that the audience was Jewish, the negative

depiction of “the Jews” if indeed it was written for a Jewish audience, and the theological emphasis of the atoning work of Jesus in John rather than the more traditional understanding that John’s theology affirms the incarnation.

There are a number of features in John that have led some scholars to understand John’s audience as including Gentiles. For instance, John translates key Jewish terms for the readers as if they would not have known them, specifically *Rabbi* (John 1:38), *Messiah* (1:41), *the pool of Siloam* (9:7), and *Rabboni* (20:16). Further, he also discusses the tension between Jews and Samaritans (4:9), Jewish practices (stone water jars, 2:6; purity at Passover, 18:28; burial, 19:40) and geography (Bethany was two miles from Jerusalem, 11:18). However, this does not prove that the audience were Gentiles, only that the readers required some explanations in order to understand the text. They could have been diaspora Jews who had not visited Jerusalem and fallen out of the Jewish practices. Further, John explains some terms by putting them into Aramaic, a strange thing to do if he were writing for Gentiles (the Jerusalem pool by the Sheep Gate, which in Aramaic is Bethesda, 5:2; the stone pavement, which in Aramaic is Gabbatha, 19:13; the place of the skull, which in Aramaic is Golgotha, 19:17). It makes better sense that these were known to a Jewish audience and he was making sure that the place names used were easily understood to Jews who may only have known them by their Aramaic names.

This leads to the next objection: if John was written for an evangelistic purpose for Jews, why characterize some of the opponents of Jesus so negatively as “the Jews” (John 9:22)? This is a simplistic objection that fails to note that the phrase “the Jews” is also used positively (4:22) and in a neutral manner (11:45–46). The “negative” uses seem to occur as part of John’s irony or even sarcasm.<sup>31</sup> These opponents claim to know Moses (5:39–47) and be children of Abraham (8:31–58) and so reject Jesus. The irony is that both Moses and Abraham were preparatory for Jesus, so Moses will be the accuser of these opponents (5:45–47). These “Jews” want to have a version of Judaism without the fulfilling figure—Jesus. In this way, this “negative” characterization is a warning to the Jewish audience that the authentic version of Judaism is belief in Jesus and not some aberrant denial that was doing the rounds in the first century.

It is interesting to note that three of the remaining explicit Old Testament quotes in John stand out because the narrator intrudes to explain their significance from the situation post Jesus’s death and resurrection. So Jesus’s zeal

<sup>31</sup> Martinus C. de Boer, “The Depiction of ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel: Matters of Behavior and Identity,” in *Anti Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. R. Bierenger, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2001), 271–80.

for the temple (John 2:17, quoting Ps 69:9) is followed with the statement in John 2:22 that it was only after Jesus's resurrection from the dead that the disciples believed the Scripture and understood that Jesus's discussion of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple referred to his body. In John 7:38 Jesus's quote is followed with the explanation of the Scripture being fulfilled with the gift of the Spirit post Jesus's glorification (7:39), and Jesus's triumphal entry on a donkey (John 12:14–15, quoting Zech 9:9) is again only understood after Jesus's glorification (John 12:16). Not only is the Old Testament used to make sense of the events of Jesus's death and resurrection, the death and resurrection are a vital piece of information needed to understand the Old Testament. There is a recursive relationship between the two, which means John presents them as being understood only in relationship to each other. The Jewish opponents of Jesus appeal to the Old Testament (Abraham and Moses) but fail to see Jesus in it, resulting in a misunderstanding of the very texts they cite. This leads to their ironic description as "the Jews."

Finally, it could be objected that this understanding of John's Gospel focuses too much on the death and resurrection of Jesus instead of the incarnation. After all, the prologue starts with an affirmation of the incarnation (John 1:1, 14), the Gospel discusses Jesus's Sonship, and the church fathers looked to John (in particular the title "Son of God") in formulating the doctrine of the incarnation reflected in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. Each of these objections has problems. First, even though the prologue affirms Jesus's divinity, the vocabulary of "the Word" does not occur again in John. This should temper understanding the prologue as containing a complete summary of the Gospel. It could just as easily be giving the background information that is needed to understand the Gospel rather than outlining its key themes. Further, it is a false dichotomy to stress the incarnation as the theological theme in John as opposed to the death and resurrection, because it is the crucified and resurrected incarnate Christ who appears to Thomas, resulting in the declaration of Jesus's divinity at the end of John (John 20:28). The event that moves the disciples to confess the divinity of Jesus is the resurrection. Second, the language related to "son" in John needs to be read very carefully. "Son" occurs on its own, in relationship to "Father," and in the titles "Son of God" and "Son of Man." To confuse these or import the meaning of one into the other is problematic. The title "Son of God" is clearly not the same as "Son of Man," so caution should be exercised when understanding "Son of God" in the context of the Father-Son passages. Finally, it is anachronistic to read the church fathers' use of titles into John. When writing the creeds, the fathers were not strictly exegeting the text of the Fourth Gospel, but rather formulating a statement of belief to combat

particular heresies. Understanding “Son of God” as a divine title in John seems to owe more to Chalcedon than to the Old Testament background. This same problem is evident in some theological works that understand Christology as the doctrine of the incarnation rather than the study of the title “Christ.”<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that the creeds do not express the theological content of the Scriptures, but rather to sound the warning that the titles used in the creeds may not match New Testament usage.

### Summary

It is evident from examination of some of the metacomments and narrative intrusions that John’s Gospel is a record of the events of Jesus (climaxing in his death and resurrection) that are given theological significance (death for sin as the suffering servant and Passover lamb) and justified by appeal to the Old Testament. This sits squarely in accordance with the gospel summary that the pillar apostles agreed on. Further, the Gospel of John was written to Jews with the evangelistic purpose of convincing them that the Christ, the Son of God, was the man Jesus. This again agrees with what is known of the mission of the earliest church.<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusion

John’s theology is in accord with that of the other apostles. He takes the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection, views them through the lens of the Old Testament Scriptures, and concludes that Jesus’s death was for sin.<sup>34</sup> Although there is much in the Fourth Gospel that marks it as different from the Synoptics, the same fundamental theology of the apostolic mission found in the Synoptics is not only evident but explicitly recorded in the metacomments for the reader to see and understand. Thus any discussion of the relationship between the Gospels should start on this basis and with this assumption before the value of the unique presentation of each Gospel can be appreciated.

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<sup>32</sup> An example of this is James D. G. Dunn’s book *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), where the book’s subtitle is “A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation.”

<sup>33</sup> I have applied this same methodology to 1 John to show that it shares the same mission theology and epistemology. First John was not written to deal with a denial of the incarnation by some Docetic, (proto-)Gnostic, or Cerinthian teachers, but rather to affirm the resurrection leading to the identification of the Christ, the Son of God with the person Jesus. See Matthew D. Jensen, “‘Jesus Is the Christ’: A New Paradigm for Understanding 1 John,” *Reformed Theological Review* 75.1 (2016): 1–20.

<sup>34</sup> He does not explicitly do this for the resurrection, but the grounds are laid for such an activity in his use of the glorification language. See John 7:39; 12:16.

# The Power of Literary Art in Revelation 12:1–6

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## Abstract

Revelation's symbolisms and catastrophic descriptions greatly influenced the Western world. Yet the book has not been much examined for its literary and narrative qualities, except by some critics who were more interested in fragmenting it into disconnected sources than understanding the richness of its literary production. A thorough analysis of its literary resources, however, reveals the greatness of its style, the sense of its purposes, and the unity of the book. There are rich intertextual relations with the Old Testament, especially with Genesis and Daniel, as well as repetition, numerology, cross-references, and a cyclic plot. When the art in the narrative (especially in 12:1–6) is considered, not only does the book become extraordinary for the readers, but its theological and moral meanings become more accessible.

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## Introduction

**T**he book of Revelation is *sui generis* in its literary style. It seems to be a fictional work. Sometimes Christian readers and scholars seem to ignore this completely. Perhaps they consider it unspiritual to think of an inspired, canonical book, as a story with fictional aspects. Many readers, as well as commentators, hasten to find theological meanings in its texts with little regard for the “instrument” through which these concepts are transmitted, which is *literature*, and in this case, apocalyptic literature.

An analysis of major studies of Revelation shows that the prime concern of most scholars is not the identification of the existing literary aspects' influence on the process of building the narrative text.<sup>1</sup> R. H. Charles saw in some of the literary aspects (such as the repetitions) marks of composition or interpolation, but paid little attention to the narrative form of the book.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, J. Massyngberde Ford admits that "the construction of this apocalypse is unique; in fact, it is the most exquisitely and artistically constructed of all the apocalypses";<sup>3</sup> nevertheless, he considers this exquisite and artistic construction definite proof that the text as we have it is the work of an editor. Adela Yarbro Collins, in her acclaimed Harvard University thesis, tries to understand the use of mythological material in chapter 12 from Greek literature, but does not do the same research regarding the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> Richard Bauckham, in one of the better works on the subject, approaches some of Revelation's literary qualities in isolated texts that he considers "pioneering and preliminary."<sup>5</sup> David Aune devotes much room in his three-volume commentary to "literary analysis," but the phrase in his commentary means identifying the Jewish, and mainly the non-Jewish, origins of the symbols.<sup>6</sup> Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland study how the book has been received;<sup>7</sup> their work confirms how most readers throughout the history of interpretation have not been aware of its literary genre. David Barr is one of the few who tries to read Revelation as a narrative, offering resources to understand the complexity of the plot; he does it, however, at only an introductory level.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Obviously, there are exceptions, such as Victorinus of Pettau in the fourth century.

<sup>2</sup> Charles argues that John, Revelation's original author, died before finishing the book, and the almost-ready series of independent documents he left was put together by a faithful but unintelligent disciple. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:1.

<sup>3</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, HDR 9 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 1. Bauckham's other work on Revelation is also useful: Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Revelation's text, according to Aune, came be in the present literary form in two main stages, which he defines as "first edition" (1:7–12 and 4:1–22:5), and "second edition" (added 1:1–3 and 22:6–21). These two main editions represent the two primary stages in the composition of Revelation that are easier to detect. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC 52a (Dallas: Word, 1997), cxxi.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998). See also the helpful chapter by Leland Ryken, "Revelation," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand

According to Barr, artistic literary aspects in general include the constitutive internal elements of the meaning of a text, such as plot, characterization, point of view, and temporal distortions.<sup>9</sup> According to Robert Alter, the analysis of artistic literary aspects also includes “discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units.”<sup>10</sup> Obviously, it is not always possible to analyze all these aspects in only one text.<sup>11</sup> The aim here is not to provide a substitute for traditional exegesis; on the contrary, it is to reinforce exegesis by focusing on one scene, Revelation 12:1–6.<sup>12</sup> My primary goal is to identify its relation with the Old Testament, besides its essential narrative aspects, which make the vision so splendidly meaningful. In the case of Revelation, the literary art of narrative is the instrument through which the theology of the book is built and transmitted.

### I. *Contextual Aspects in Chapter 12*

The long-awaited sounding of the seventh trumpet, as the opening of the seventh seal, ends up being an anticlimax. Instead of a detailed description of Christ and his church’s victory over the forces of evil, there is a simple description in the form of a proclamation that the world has become God’s world and his kingdom has been established (Rev 11:15–18). This represents progress when compared to the seventh seal, which has only revealed silence in heaven for half an hour.<sup>13</sup> However, there are no details of how the forces of evil have been destroyed; there is a report of “voices” in heaven celebrating the victory that has already happened. On the other hand, the description is not surprising, for it maintains the pattern established earlier of simultaneous recapitulation and anticipation of coming events, delaying the full

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Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 458–69, and the work of James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse* (Boston: Brill, 1998). It is a useful work, with an interesting narrative approach, but it is more topical than discursive.

<sup>9</sup> David L. Barr, “The Apocalypse of John,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 647.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 13.

<sup>11</sup> In a previous article I presented the literary aspects involving the numbers in Revelation. Leandro A. de Lima, “The Numbers in Revelation: The Importance of Literary Analysis to the Interpretation of the Book,” *Fides Reformata* 18.1 (2013): 9–23 (Online: cpaj.mackenzie.br/fidesreformata/arquivos/edicao\_33/artigos/230.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> The scene in Rev 12:1–6 is a piece of the big picture in chapters 12–13.

<sup>13</sup> However, this silence does not mean emptiness; rather, it evokes significant content. Already in the Old Testament, silence may have a sense that involves enemies’ destruction as well as rest for the saved ones (Pss 31:17; 115:17; Isa 47:5; and Ezek 27:32). For more concepts related to this silence, see G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 446–54.

description in order to create a thrilling and expectant effect as to the continually postponed outcome, as it seems common in the book of Revelation.

By announcing the ending without describing it, John raises the readers' expectations for more details and information while gradually introducing new elements. This aspect of progress and repetition is one of the main literary devices of the work, as perceived since the days of Victorinus at the end of the third century.<sup>14</sup>

Chapter 12 starts a new section, the fourth one,<sup>15</sup> which is central in the book's pattern of seven as a whole.<sup>16</sup> This section is decisive in terms of content, for it reveals the details about the great battle previously announced by the seventh trumpet and in the sixth seal, emphasizing what really is behind the conflict between the church and the world. When we study this part, "everything invites us to consider Revelation 12 as a second treatment of the themes of the preceding chapter. But this parallelism should not be allowed to mask the progression in thought that marks the new elements."<sup>17</sup>

The last verse of chapter 11 describes that after the seventh trumpet is sounded, "God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm" (Rev 11:19).<sup>18</sup> As in Revelation 4:5, 8:5, and 16:18, the announcement anticipates something grand: in this case, the central description of the book with the main characters of the plot: the woman, the son, and the dragon (and the two allies of the dragon of chapter 13).

These are followed by an abrupt transition, when the scene focuses on heaven and we see a woman and a dragon. According to Bauckham, "we must accept that the abrupt transition is intentional. John has made it abrupt precisely in order to create the impression of a fresh start."<sup>19</sup> In chapter 12

<sup>14</sup> As far as we know, Victorinus (who died around A.D. 304–305) was the first to notice that the book of Revelation recapitulated a story. He says, "We must not regard the order of what is said, because frequently the Holy Spirit, when He has traversed even to the end of the last times, returns again to the same times, and fills up what He had before failed to say." Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John* (ANF 7:352).

<sup>15</sup> This follows the idea, current since Victorinus, that the book recapitulates the same story, and, since Tichonius, that it is divided into seven sections (according to Augustine's and Bede's accounts). The sevenfold division was also established by the Venerable Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, trans. Edward Marshall (Oxford and London: James Parker, 1878), 3–4; and by many modern authors, such as William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1949).

<sup>16</sup> The seven sections probably are Rev 1–3; 4–7; 8–11; 12–14; 15–16; 17–19; 20–22.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean*, CNT 14 (Lausanne: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1981), 176.

<sup>18</sup> All citations follow the NIV.

<sup>19</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

the story of redemption is recapitulated; however, it is not done repetitively and monotonously; rather, it makes use of symbolic, bellicose language, which revives the great themes of the Old Testament in the scene of confrontation between the pregnant woman and the dragon and applies them to the consequences of this battle in heaven and on earth. In the elements used by John the entire Old Testament (as well as the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old Testament) is before the readers, and they will see it in a new, significant way as they realize how it thoroughly applies to their own situation.

## II. *The Creative Use of Genesis 3*

Collins's thesis is that the battle between the woman and the dragon is a Christian rewriting of the Python-Leto-Apollo myth and the Seth-Isis-Horus myth.<sup>20</sup> Based on the study of Joseph Fonterose,<sup>21</sup> Collins shows that the Greek version of the myth was well known in the regions where Revelation was read at the end of the first century, besides identifying similarities with Revelation 12.<sup>22</sup>

John possibly knew about this myth and about many others,<sup>23</sup> and it may be that he used them for his purposes<sup>24</sup>—perhaps to establish a dialogue with Greek readers. Nevertheless, scholars such as Bauckham and Greg Beale have demonstrated in a more consistent way that the apocalyptic imagery used by John is based mainly on Old Testament imagery. Bauckham notes that the narrative of the woman and the dragon recalls the enmity between the woman and the serpent (Gen 3:15) and portrays the people of God (Israel) as the Messiah's mother.<sup>25</sup> Beale also sees “the beginning

<sup>20</sup> Although the scholar has become known for the theory, Charles had already mentioned it at the beginning of the twentieth century, and he considered that it was said for the first time in 1794 by Dupuis. Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1:312.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Fonterose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), 262–64.

<sup>22</sup> Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Other combat myths referred to include the source of the Gnostic *Apocalypse of Adam*, the Babylonian myth of creation regarding Tiamat and the monster with seven heads, which was killed by the god Marduk when Tiamat swept a third of the stars out of the sky. Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, NTC 20 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 353. Charles posited almost a century ago that part of the combat story comes from the Zend religion of Persia. Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1:308. For other propositions, see Prigent, *L'Apocalypse*, 177–82.

<sup>24</sup> The same John to whom the fourth Gospel is attributed has also made use of terms known outside of Judaism, such as the concept of the Logos used in Neoplatonic philosophy, which he applied to Jesus in John 1:1–2, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

fulfillment of Gen. 3:15–16” in the text.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, chapter 12 of Revelation echoes, broadens, and interprets the old narrative of chapter 3 of Genesis. The table below shows how the themes and characters of Genesis 3 are expanded in Revelation 12:

<i>Genesis 3:14–16</i>	<i>Revelation 12:1–4, 9</i>
<p>14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! <u>You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust.</u></p> <p>15 And I will put <u>enmity</u> between you and the <u>woman</u>, and between your <u>offspring</u> and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”</p> <p>16 To the woman he said, “I will make <u>your pains in childbearing</u> very severe; with <u>painful</u> labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”</p>	<p>1 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a <u>woman</u> clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.</p> <p>2 She was <u>pregnant</u> and <u>cried</u> out in pain as she was about to give birth.</p> <p>3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red <u>dragon</u> with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.</p> <p>4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. <u>The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.</u></p> <p>9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was <u>hurled to the earth.</u></p>

The two texts refer to a pregnant woman who suffers the pains of labor and to a woman’s son (offspring); they show the enemy (dragon-serpent) and mention enmity, besides establishing the enemy’s debasement. Up to this point, the similarities are clear, but the broadened meaning given by the Revelation text through its symbolism is remarkable. The woman (who was naked in Genesis, then clothed with leaves, and finally with garments of skin) is now dressed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a

<sup>26</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1123.

crown of twelve stars on her head. We can also see the elevation of the dragon. In Genesis 3 it is a deceitful, devious serpent, using guile, trying to deceive with words, but it is debased and has to slither. In Revelation 12, on the other hand, the dragon sweeps a third of the stars out of the sky and channels its rage towards the woman in order to devour the son, and it is finally hurled from the sky to the earth. Thus, Revelation is pointing to a higher and broader fulfillment of this passage.

We note then that the source of chapter 12 is more naturally found in Genesis 3 than in the Greek and Egyptian myths. Revelation interprets the narrative of Genesis 3, applying its story as a pattern to describe the whole of God's history with his people.

So we can perceive how Revelation makes use of creative intertextuality. As Barr says, "intertextuality refers not only to the relation between one and another text, but to their mutual influence."<sup>27</sup> And also notice that Revelation 12 interprets the figure of the serpent-dragon as the devil himself, an interpretation unique in the Scriptures. By reading only Genesis 3 one cannot conclude with certainty that the serpent was indeed a fallen angel. However, John explicitly reveals this (Rev 12:9), changing the way his readers understand Genesis 3.

### III. *Analysis of the Narrative Plot in Revelation 12:1-6*

I will now investigate the plot in Revelation 12:1-6, analyzing the textual choices of figure and action that interpret the Old Testament.<sup>28</sup>

According to Tzvetan Todorov, narrative not only consists of action or a state, but "requires the unfolding of an action, change, difference."<sup>29</sup> Two principles Todorov considers essential units of a narrative are succession and transformation.<sup>30</sup> So a narrative begins with equilibrium, goes through a state of disequilibrium, and then does not return to the original equilibrium, but moves to a new state, a new equilibrium. As Yves Reuter summarizes it, "narrative would define itself as transformation of a state into another state."<sup>31</sup> Narrative texts are built by devising elements that give sense to the

<sup>27</sup> Barr, "The Apocalypse of John," 640.

<sup>28</sup> A more complete analysis of other literary resources of chapters 12-13 of Revelation is found in the author's doctoral thesis: Leandro A. de Lima, "Apocalipse como Literatura: um estudo sobre a importância da análise da arte literária em Apocalipse 12-13" (PhD diss., Universidade Mackenzie, São Paulo, 2012). Freely translated as "Revelation as Literature: a study on the importance of the analysis of literary art in Revelation 12-13."

<sup>29</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Os gêneros do discurso* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1980), 62.

<sup>30</sup> Todorov, *Os gêneros do discurso*, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Yves Reuters, *Introdução à análise do romance* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1996), 49.

narrative. Among these are the construction of characters, the definition of the time of the narrative, construction of scenery or the definition of space, and the way the narrator tells the story, conducting the development of the plot. Todorov defines plot thus:

The minimal complete plot can be seen as the shift from one equilibrium to another. ... The two moments of equilibrium, similar and different, are separated by a period of imbalance, which is composed of a process of degeneration and a process of improvement.<sup>32</sup>

Todorov proposes this as the structural pattern found in most narratives. Moreover, to understand the multiplicity of narrative actions, scholars indicate “functions” that may “be reduced to a finite set, common to all stories.”<sup>33</sup> Reuter cites the study of Russian Vladimir Propp, who found thirty-one “functions” that build the common foundation of narratives. From the initial situation, where characters are introduced, the plot develops through situations involving departure, interdiction, transgression, interrogation, information, reaction, displacement, and reconciliation; it concludes with the false hero’s punishment and the true hero’s reward.<sup>34</sup> Because of the complex structure of “functions” in narrative, a “quinary scheme” (with five stages), or “canonical scheme of narrative”<sup>35</sup> was developed:<sup>36</sup> an initial state, conflict (or disturbing force), dynamics, solution (or balancing force), and final state.<sup>37</sup>

In the discussion of Revelation 12 presented here, the following terms corresponding to those presented by Reuter are used in a flexible way: introduction, conflict, development, climax, and outcome. Attention is given to characters, time, setting or scenery, and the narrator’s style. The focus is on the symbolic and artistic use of the Old Testament in the interpretation of the messianic story as a whole, in the context of John’s readers.

### 1. *Introduction (vv. 1–2)*

The scene starts with the introduction of the main characters in a cosmic conflict, as well as the place of conflict.

According to John, the entire vision is “a great sign ... in heaven.” Aune believes the “sign” may be a reference to a sign or constellation in Greco-

<sup>32</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *A estruturas narrativas* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1970), 88.

<sup>33</sup> Reuter, *Introdução à análise do romance*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–49.

<sup>35</sup> “Schéma quinaire” and “schéma canonique du récit.”

<sup>36</sup> Yves Reuter, *A análise da narrativa: o texto, a ficção e a narração* (Rio de Janeiro: Difel, 2002), 35–36.

<sup>37</sup> 1. Etat initial (EI); 2. Force transformatrice (FT); 3. Dynamique d’action (DA); 4. Force équilibrante (FE); 5. Etat final (EF).

Roman astrology.<sup>38</sup> However, the Old Testament discloses heaven as the stage for the signs of God on earth (Gen 1:14–17). Moreover, the stars symbolize Abraham’s posterity (Gen 15:5; 26:4). Therefore, the great “sign in heaven” situates the readers on the Creator’s great stage (Ps 19:1), through which he unveils his gracious purposes to his listening people.

The first character to appear in heaven is “a woman.” We can notice that she herself is a narrative. Her arrival is beset with great meaning for John’s audience.<sup>39</sup> Some interpreters have thought of her as Jesus’s mother Mary, and others have identified her as the church.<sup>40</sup>

The character’s two given descriptions, which point to her physical and psychological states, identify her and the scene as a whole. A physical description of her garments and her suffering due to pregnancy is reinforced by the torment of the dragon’s persecution. As well as Genesis 3, another passage in the Old Testament adds relevant information: Joseph’s dream (Gen 37:9), which refers to Joseph’s father, mother, and eleven brothers, and he himself the twelfth one, or the twelfth star (i.e., the core of Joseph’s family with the twelve tribes of Israel,<sup>41</sup> represented by their patriarchs).<sup>42</sup> John seems to infer that the glorious woman is in fact the people of Israel,<sup>43</sup> genealogically ascending to Eve, who was tempted by the serpent (dragon) in Genesis 3.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, she represents the promised descendants, from Eve to Mary.

The woman’s labor pains are also important, for the divine promise was embedded in the mitigated curse, as Eve would conceive in great pain. It is important to remember that in Genesis God threatened man and woman with death if they disobeyed him (Gen 2:17). God’s great gift to the woman is conception and childbirth, which guarantees the continuity of life. Many times in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is described as a woman,

<sup>38</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC 52b (Dallas: Word, 1998), 664.

<sup>39</sup> In the seven churches, the scroll would be read by one person and “heard” by the others (Rev 1:3).

<sup>40</sup> In biblical literature, and mainly in rabbinic literature, the image of woman is not usually associated to virtue. The text about Eve is the chief example of this. The woman was tricked by the serpent, as Paul confirms even while highlighting the honor of her motherly function (1 Tim 2:12–15).

<sup>41</sup> Victorinus wrote, “And the crown of twelve stars signifies the choir of fathers, according to the fleshly birth, of whom Christ was to take flesh.” Victorinus, *Apocalypse* (ANF 7:355).

<sup>42</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1123.

<sup>43</sup> The *Testament of Naphtali* mentions the sun and the moon; Levi is identified as the sun and Judah as the moon (5:1–4).

<sup>44</sup> Hippolytus insisted that by using the image of a woman John intended “most manifestly the Church, endued with the Father’s word, whose brightness is above the sun.” Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* (ANF 5:217). Tyconius and Methodius also insisted on this classic ecclesiastic interpretation of the woman. Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 136.

the wife of Yahweh, an unfaithful wife at times, just as Eve was (Jer 31:31; Ezek 16:1–58; and Hos 3:1).<sup>45</sup> Sometimes the nation of Israel also appears as “pregnant” or feeling the torments of pregnancy (Isa 26:17–18; Jer 30:6). Therefore, although the woman’s image is a description of all promised “offspring” from Eve to Mary (Gal 4:4), she alone wears the “clothes” of Israel, the ancient covenant people, the redeemed church of the Old Testament.

Therefore, the crying out of the glorious woman echoes from the sky and evokes hope and the expectation of her son’s birth, which has been announced throughout the Old Testament. It is the divine announcement that the Messiah is finally going to be born. This may be considered as the state of original equilibrium (Todorov), which evokes the situation restored by God in Genesis 3, after the cursing of the serpent.

## 2. Conflict (vv. 3–4a)

With the glory and frailty of the woman, another great sign also appears in the sky. At this moment, John catches his readers’ attention. He says, “Look!”—an imperative (καὶ ἰδοὺ)<sup>46</sup>—and then describes a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns. In this way, John directs the readers’ view away from the pregnant woman’s radiant beauty to the dragon’s abhorrent might. So the antagonist enters the scene, but the readers now understand he has always been there, since the start.

The dragon is a common creature in the mythology of many peoples. Jean Chevalier characterizes the dragon figure as an “active and demiurgic principle; divine power, spiritual breath, celestial symbol, power and life, that which is part of the beginning of the world, coming out of primordial waters.”<sup>47</sup> In the Old Testament, the dragon is an image of a great sea monster; it receives many titles, such as *tannin* (Job 7:12; Isa 27:1), Rahab (Pss 87:4; 89:10), and Leviathan (Job 3:8; 41:1; Pss 74:14; 104:26; Isa 27:1; and Jer 51:34). At some moments, the figure symbolizes the nations of Egypt and Babylon (Isa 51:9; Jer 51:34; Ezek 29:3; 32:2). “It therefore seems hardly reasonable to have recourse to the hypothesis of a borrowing from mythology in order to account for an image that comes straight out of the OT and Judaism.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, throughout the biblical text the dragon is the opponent, the great threat to the people of God, which uses the nations to oppress the woman.

<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, in the book of Revelation, it is clear that God’s people, redeemed by the Lamb, are a faithful wife to the Lamb (Rev 19:7; 21:9).

<sup>46</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 356.

<sup>47</sup> Jean Chevalier, *Diccionario de los Símbolos* (Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 1986), 429.

<sup>48</sup> Prigent, *L’Apocalypse*, 187.

In Revelation the dragon is explicitly identified as Satan, the one who desires to deceive the nations (Rev 20:3). In the narrative of chapter 12, six characteristics of the dragon display its power: it is enormous (*μέγας*) and red (*πυρρός*), it has seven heads, ten horns, seven crowns on its heads (*διαδήματα*), and with its tail it sweeps a third of the stars out of the sky and flings them to the earth. The description of the tail's movement sweeping and flinging stars out of the sky, besides pointing to the creature's colossal size, probably also conveys the idea of the number of angels Satan led in his rebellion and who, because of him, ended up flung to earth.<sup>49</sup> In both Revelation and the Old Testament stars sometimes symbolize angels.<sup>50</sup> The location of the dragon in the sky also points to something paradoxical. It should not be there, for the sky is the place of God's presence. It is a usurper.

A terrible picture is presented. What will the monstrous dragon do regarding the glorious, though fragile, pregnant woman?

### 3. Development (v. 4b)

The readers' worst fears are confirmed when the narrator says that the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that it might devour her child at the moment of birth. The dragon's intentions are revealed, increasing the tension. The gigantic, terrifying creature stands in front of the woman with the malign intention of devouring the son, frustrating the people of God's expectations of promised life and blessing, and annulling the divine curse pronounced against it.

Thus, the author develops a scene of initial tension, which will later unfold in several sections throughout the book, and consequently the reality behind the whole of Revelation: the efforts of the dragon to destroy the Son of God and, consequently, his "mother." Both looking back at the Old Testament and visualizing the future, the author shows this destruction to be the main goal of the persecutor, the reason for all his actions; this is how he interprets Christ's history, as well as the history of the people of God in both testaments.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For the theory that it refers to the saints of God, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 637.

<sup>50</sup> In the Bible, "stars" are associated with celestial creatures, God's servants who obey his orders, i.e., angels. In the book of Job, it is said that the stars were present at the creation of the world: God laid the cornerstone "while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:6-7).

<sup>51</sup> Lenski is correct when affirming that "Satan's intention towards the child is not difficult for us to understand either, for Satan certainly manifested this from the beginning, with Herod's homicidal scheme, and in Christ's temptation, extending up to his crucifixion." Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 367.

In Genesis 3:15 God announced to the serpent that a descendent of the woman would crush its head. It is therefore possible to interpret the reference in Revelation to the moment the dragon “stood in front of the woman” awaiting the birth of the Son to devour him, as the curse uttered by God to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 predicts.<sup>52</sup> It is also possible to see it as implied every time the Old Testament indicates that the continuity of the “woman’s seed” is threatened. The passages in Genesis are examples of this, such as when Cain murders his brother Abel and when God himself decides to destroy the world with the flood. Each step of the story narrates that the woman’s promised offspring is at risk of disappearing but is always rescued through God’s intervention, as when Abraham is supposed to have a son but Sarah is sterile, or when God orders Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and later provides an offering in his place. Throughout the Old Testament, the royal offspring faces threats of extinction but escapes by divine help in unusual ways (2 Kgs 11:1–2). This is the background of the “torments” (βασανιζομένη) suffered by the pregnant woman.

Finally, since the dragon failed to prevent the birth of the woman’s son, the only action left for it was to try to kill him while he was still a child. The mass murder of males under the age of two in Bethlehem ordered by Herod was certainly engraved in the minds John’s readers when they read this description.<sup>53</sup> It is possible to notice, however, that the son was taken away (Matt 2:13–18), in this case not a mere escape from one country to another, but by the beginning of the great dragon’s final defeat.

#### 4. Climax (v. 5a)

As the scene goes on, the son’s birth is announced as that of a great king, and so the scene reaches its climax: “She gave birth to a son, a male child, who ‘will rule all the nations with an iron scepter’” (Rev 12:5). The quotation, taken directly from Psalm 2, contains the promise that the Messiah will rule the nations (Ps 2:7–9). This “son,” therefore, is at the heart of the cosmic conflict recorded in the Bible. No name is given; he is simply called “son” or “male child.” As son, he will rule the nations with an iron scepter. For John’s readers, there could be no doubt to whom the text referred: Jesus the Messiah. In the scene of chapter 12 he is, to a certain extent, a helpless baby. In weakness and strength the humanity and divinity of the lamb and

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<sup>52</sup> Alluded to in Rom 16:20 in reference to the church. The church will triumph above Satan.

<sup>53</sup> As Bede writes, “And a figure of this deceit was shewn in Herod” (Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, 82).

the lion are intertwined (Rev 5:5–6). The climax of the tension is reached with the question, will the dragon achieve its intent to devour him?

### 5. *Outcome (vv. 5b–6)*

The closure of the narrative is reached with the assertion that the dragon failed in its malign purpose: “And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne” (Rev 12:5). Here is found a temporal abbreviation, an ellipsis, for Jesus’s entire life is described by the act of being born and raptured to the throne of God. According to Isbon Beckwith, “the words are added to emphasize the completeness of Satan’s failure; the Messiah, so far from destroyed, is caught up to a share in God’s throne.”<sup>54</sup> This rapture is a symbolic reference to Jesus’s ascension in Acts 1:9. The effect of temporal abbreviation highlights two elements in the redemptive work of Jesus: his birth and ascension.

The rise of the son up to the throne of God is the description of this son’s victory, which has already been celebrated in the chapter 5 of Revelation, when the lamb “took” the scroll from God’s right hand and was recognized by all inhabitants of heaven. He is “on the throne,” that is, he assumes the power and authority to rule heaven and earth (Matt 28:18–20).

While the son is raptured to the throne, the woman escapes to the wilderness, where she is threatened by the dragon but protected by God.<sup>55</sup> There is an explicit temporal reference to the period she is sustained in the wilderness: one thousand two hundred sixty days. Despite being temporal, it is not a literal reference.<sup>56</sup> The time that the outer court of the temple is trampled on by Gentiles is the same prophesied by the two witnesses clothed in sackcloth (Rev 11:2–3). These all happen in the “post-paschal”<sup>57</sup> period when the church (the other descendants of the woman) will testify while enduring the dragon’s persecution. Therefore, “it is a reminder that the story of God’s people as John witnesses is the story of a new Exodus.”<sup>58</sup>

The remaining questions at the end of the scene are the following: What will the dragon do now? Could not such a terrible, ferocious, creature devour

<sup>54</sup> Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 624.

<sup>55</sup> It is important to notice that “wilderness” in the Bible is the place of temptation as well as the place of opportunity to encounter God. Beale notices that “place” (τόπος) in the New Testament is a synonym for “temple” and in the Septuagint is a common synonym for “sanctuary.” Beale, *Revelation*, 649.

<sup>56</sup> The period is probably a “consistent reference to the final three and one-half years of the 70-week prophecy in Daniel 9.” Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 266.

<sup>57</sup> Prigent, *L’Apocalypse*, 176.

<sup>58</sup> Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2006), 181.

a little baby? Will it accept defeat? Who is its immediate target, since the son has been raptured to heaven? The woman who has escaped to the wilderness comes into view again. Suddenly, the dragon finds itself without the slightest possibility of reaching its prey. What will happen to the woman? Will the dragon be able to pursue her in the wilderness?

After describing the dragon's banishment from the sky as an after-effect of the son's rising to the throne (Rev 12:7–17), John returns in the next scene to the woman's persecution after the birth of the Messiah, showing that the dragon's banishment from heaven is one of the reasons for its rage against her. John associates the dragon's persecution of the woman with that of the "rest of her offspring" (Rev 12:17). He tells the believers of the seven churches that they are the woman's "offspring" who continue to exist in the world and that for this reason they are under the dragon's temporary rage. This is why they are suffering persecution.

## Conclusion

Through one scene with celestial pictures John succeeds in telling the whole story, involving his readers in the plot in an extraordinary way. He summarizes the great biblical story of the Old and New Testaments—substantiated by the grand promise of the coming of the Messiah, and of the consequent persecution God's people go through before and after Jesus's birth. The literary power of this encompassing scene unveils before the readers the great cosmic battle originating in Eden and going on until the end of time. John's readers saw themselves in this scene, not only because they understood what it represented in the past of biblical history, but also because they understood what it represented in their present: they were under torment imposed by the dragon, the Roman Empire. At the same time, the victory of the woman, who amidst suffering gave birth to the Messiah, and the victory of the Messiah, who was raptured from the dragon's grip and rose to the throne of God, remain as a testimony to the readers that the path to victory does not lead to escape through human means. On the contrary, the path to victory is through relying completely on God's purposes, as shown by being faithful to his calling even when undergoing suffering.

This is a strong message: the power the dragon seems to have in the world is an illusion. It is subjugated, suffering successive defeats. This is the reason for its rage against the church, before and after the coming of Jesus. However, Christ's victory is the guarantee of the definitive victory of the church, which is protected by God.

This analysis of Revelation 12:1–6 shows the same narration pattern as the rest of the book of Revelation: powerful scenes rooted in the Old Testament bring deep disclosures of the biblical story, shedding bright light on the Old Testament, and unveiling for the readers their place in God’s extensive plan. Studying Revelation by considering its literary art may enable a better understanding of its theological and ethical content.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Editorial note: The author of this article was not able to consult *Reading Revelation: A Thematic Approach* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012) by W. Gordon Campbell, whose article on Calvin’s *Harmony* appears in this issue.



## A Panel on Vatican II

Since Martin Luther's reformation, three major events in the life of the Roman Catholic Church have marked its reaction not only to Protestantism but also to developments in the modern culture: The Council of Trent (1545–1563), Vatican I (1869–1870), and most recently Vatican II (1962–1965). Whereas the first two are often considered as hardening the arteries of the church in their reaffirmation and defense of traditional doctrine, Vatican II is seen as a renovation that makes the life blood of the Roman church flow swifter, opening a way to greater receptiveness to the world, bringing hope for a new ecumenical era with respect to Protestantism and openness to other religions. But since then, what has happened, and where is the Roman church headed? Italy, Poland, and Spain are important pillars of the church in Europe, and we asked three Reformed theologians to comment on how things have fared for their country.

### ITALY, LEONARDO DE CHIRICO

#### *1. How did Roman Catholic theology change in your country after Vatican II?*

Vatican II brought significant changes in the theological landscape of Roman Catholicism. Roman theology found itself pushed toward a season of *aggiornamento* (update). The retrieval of patristic influences introduced by the *nouvelle théologie* softened the rigidity of neo-Thomism as the main theological grid and nuanced many clear-cut boundaries that were prevalent before. Modern biblical criticism was introduced into biblical studies, thus blurring Rome's previous commitment to a high view of biblical inspiration. After Vatican II, there has been practically no distinction between critical scholarship done by Catholic exegetes and that done by liberal Protestants in their study on Scripture. More broadly, after Vatican II, Roman Catholic theology connected with many modern trends like

evolutionism, political theories, existentialism, feminism, and religious studies, all developed in a highly sophisticated “sacramental” way that is typical of Rome. Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology has become more “catholic” and diverse in the sense of being more open to anything, embracing all trends, and hospitable to all kinds of tendencies without losing its Roman institutional outlook. “Dialogue” seems to be its catchword: dialogue with religions, dialogue with other Christian traditions, dialogue with the sciences, dialogue with social trajectories, dialogue with the secular world.... We need to understand what dialogue means, though. I think it means expanding the boundaries, stretching the borders, rounding the edges, but not changing or moving the institutional center. Roman theology seems to reflect the catholicity project launched at Vatican II.

*2. How has it continued to change, and what new directions do you note since the turn of the twenty-first century?*

At times the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (i.e., the former Inquisition) felt it right and necessary to warn about possible theological derailments. For example, the 2000 document *Dominus Iesus* reaffirmed the centrality of the role of the Roman Catholic Church in God’s salvific purposes, trying to silence dangerous moves towards universalism and relativism. The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tried to provide a comprehensive magisterial presentation of Catholic doctrine that would define and confirm the basic contours of Roman teaching in an age of much theological diversity and confusion. The catholicity of Rome does not mean that anything goes. It is always and organically related to the focal center of the system on Rome. The former is at the service of the ever-expanding, universal scope of the catholic vision; the latter maintains the whole process connected to the sacramental, institutional, and political hardware of the Church.

With Pope Francis, a new development that can be seen is the increasing role of the “theology of the people,” a specific theological motif that has been shaping Latin American theology over the last few decades. It is a version of theology “from below.” Instead of jumping top-down from the official magisterium to the peripheries of the world, it makes the voices, concerns, and traditions of the “people” central for theology. This insistence on the “people” explains Francis’s endorsement of folk traditions and devotions, even ones that are idiosyncratic with regards to biblical teaching.

*3. Are there signs of biblical renewal because of Bible reading by Roman Catholics?*

After centuries of stigmatization if not prohibition of the use of Bible translations in the vernacular languages, the Bible is finally accessible to the

people. Official documents are replete with Bible quotations. The present pope gives a short daily homily based on Scripture, focusing on a kind of sacramental-existential reading of it but often missing the redemptive flow of the Bible. There are some lay movements that encourage a spirituality that gives Scripture a significant role. The theological framework of Vatican II, though, while recognizing the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church, has placed it within the context of Tradition (capital T), which precedes and exceeds the Bible and which ultimately speaks through the magisterium of the Church. Besides these positive developments, post-Vatican II theology has increasingly aligned itself to a critical reading of the Bible: the last document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (“The Inspiration and the Truth of Sacred Scripture,” 2014) echoes the typical liberal skepticism on the reliability of the Old Testament stories, the miraculous nature of certain events, and the full inerrancy of the Bible, thus needing the magisterium to fill the vacuum with its authoritative teaching.

So the Bible is important but not conclusive. It is trustworthy, but only in a limited sense. It is therefore read as a written record of Tradition that surpasses Scripture in its being the living form of the Word of God. In spite of all this, *Scripture alone* is an alien concept, as it was at Trent. The accessibility of Scripture gives a new opportunity to promote biblical literacy in terms of evangelism and apologetics, but the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Bible is in no way coming closer to an Evangelical account of it.

#### *4. How is Pope Francis changing things now?*

Francis is the first Jesuit pope in history. It is sort of an irony to think that a pope who appears to be close to Evangelicals actually belongs to the religious order that was founded to fight Protestantism. The former soldier Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1566) gathered a group of friends who called themselves The Society of Jesus (*Societas Jesu*), and eventually they were commissioned by the pope to stop the spread of Protestantism. Their task was to imitate the strengths of Protestantism, that is, spiritual depth and intellectual brightness, but to use them as Catholic weapons against it. The Jesuit order provided the “alternative” Catholic way to the Protestant faith. It comes as no surprise then that the first saint that Pope Francis proclaimed in 2013 was Pierre Favre (1506–1546), a first-generation French Jesuit with a “smiling face,” who more than others tried to look like a Protestant in order to drive people back to the Roman Church.

Furthermore, the Jesuit side of Pope Francis is clear enough, given his published (and never retracted) opinion that Luther and Calvin destroyed man, poisoned society, and ruined the church! In his 1985 lecture on the

history of the Jesuit order, he gave severe evaluations of Luther (a “heretic”), and especially of Calvin (a “heretic” and “schismatic”), accusing them of bringing about the “Calvinist squalor” in society, in the church, and in man’s heart. According to that lecture, Protestantism lies at the root of all evils in the modern West. The fact that this lecture was republished unchanged in 2013 in Spanish and translated in 2014 into Italian with his permission, but without a mitigating word of explanation, indicates that this assessment still lingers in the pope’s heart and mind.

In a recent book, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2015), Cardinal Walter Kasper argues that Francis is not a liberal but a radical in the etymological sense of the Latin word “radix,” meaning root or originating principle. According to Kasper, the pope is challenging the church to be radical in the sense of rediscovering the roots of the gospel, which are joy, mission, frugality, solidarity with the poor, freedom from legalism, and collegiality. Kasper’s reading of Francis is clever and insightful. It encourages us to move beyond the usual polarizations between “liberals” and “conservatives” within the church by introducing a third category, that of “radicals.”

Francis appears to be radical on certain issues, but much less so with others. He is radical on poverty, but silent on the massive financial power of his church. He seems to be radical on mercy, but never mentions original sin and divine judgment of all sinners outside of Christ. He is radical in advocating for simplicity, but keeps the expansive apparatus of the empire of which he is the head. He is radical in denouncing the tragedies of unethical capitalism, but seems to be much less outspoken toward the immoral deviations of one’s personal sexual life. In other words, his radicalism is somewhat selective: radical in one area, much less so in another. In a certain sense, “liberals” are radical on social issues, while “conservatives” are radical on doctrinal issues. Everyone is radical in some sense. There are different shades of radicalism. Francis’s radicalism is much closer to the liberal version than the conservative one. Therefore, playing a bit with words, I ask whether his radicalism is radically different from a more liberal tendency. The historical root of theological liberalism is the preference given to religious feelings over doctrinal expressions. And this is exactly what the pope seems also fond of.

##### *5. What can we expect from the Roman church in future?*

In our fragmented and violent world, *unity* is one of the catchwords that many people are attracted to. Francis is strongly advocating for Christian unity and ultimately the unity of mankind. His passion for unity makes many Evangelicals think that he is the person who may achieve it. Francis

developed his idea of ecumenism as a polyhedron, a geometric figure with different angles and lines. All different parts have their own peculiarity. It's a figure that brings together unity and diversity.

Where does this view of unity come from? In pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic ecumenism, other Christians were invited to "come back" into the Catholic fold and to conform to its doctrines and practices under the rule of the pope. With Vatican II, Roman Catholicism updated its ecumenical project and embraced a concentric circle type of unity in which the one and only church "subsists in" the Roman Catholic Church; other churches and communities gravitate around this center according to their degree of nearness or distance from it. According to Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teachings, Christian unity is threefold: (1) professing the same faith, (2) celebrating the same Eucharist (i.e., the Roman Catholic way), and (3) being united under the same sacramental ministry in apostolic succession (i.e., under the pope).

How does the polyhedron kind of unity as advocated by Pope Francis fit with this post-Vatican II view of unity? For example, as far as the second mark of unity is concerned, is the pope saying that the sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist and the theology of transubstantiation belong at the center of Christian unity, or are they particulars that can accommodate differences? Or is the pope saying that apostolic succession, which is the basis of the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church, is still part of the center, or is it a variable that is secondary to Christian unity?

Polyhedrons are fascinating figures, and Francis's use of the image of a polyhedron is thought provoking. However, the problem for Christian unity lies primarily not in the metaphors used, but in the theological vision that nurtures it. If the Catholic Eucharist and the Catholic sacramental system are part of the center of Christian unity, one can make reference to spheres or polyhedrons all one likes, but the substance of the problem still remains. The unity proposed by Francis still gravitates around the Roman Catholic Church and its distinct outlook, and not around the biblical gospel that calls all Christians to conform to the mind of Christ.

Certainly, with Vatican II a different period began that needs to be understood. It is wrong to have a flattened or static view of Catholicism. On the other hand, Vatican II and Pope Francis, who is its most successful incarnation, are only the latest evolutionary step in a system that was born and developed with an "original sin" from which it has not yet been redeemed, but which instead has been consolidated. No ecumenical diplomacy will be able to change it, nor will even the addition of a new Evangelical offer to the traditional menu. The real new time, God willing, will be when Roman

Catholicism breaks the imperial ecclesiological pattern and reforms its own catholicity, basing it no longer on its assimilation project, but on the basis of faithfulness to the gospel.

## **POLAND, DARIUSZ M. BRYĆKO**

### *1. How did Roman Catholic theology change in your country after Vatican II?*

In the sixties, Polish Roman Catholics were preoccupied with the struggle against communism, and later Poland's peaceful overthrow of the regime in the nineties had much to do with Catholic leadership in the post-Vatican II era (which has been well explained by George Weigel and others).

Even though Vatican II assisted in that anticommunist struggle, my sense is that laypeople in Poland, early on, did not understand the changes introduced by the Roman magisterium. As a high school student, at the time when Communism fell in Poland and religion was reintroduced into public school, hardly anyone in my class owned a Bible or knew much about it. Also, I do not recall our new religion instructor being well versed in the Bible, but he did talk to us about Søren Kierkegaard (an interest which I suppose could develop easier after Vatican II). Many people found non-Catholic Christians rather odd and often confused them with Jehovah's Witnesses at that time.

On the other hand, there were also several factors which made many Catholics much more open to interacting with Protestants. These included two renewal movements, the Oasis and the Light Life Movement, as well as pilgrimages to a French ecumenical monastic community in Taizé, France. It is also important to mention Polish Catholicism's close and vibrant cooperation with Campus Crusade for Christ (in Poland called the New Life Movement), which continues until today.

Interestingly, some of these post-Vatican II renewal groups later departed from Roman orthodoxy to such an extent that they were asked to leave the Catholic communion, or they left on their own. As a result, they have formed independent quasi-Protestant congregations (usually with a mishmash of charismatic and Evangelical theology) or joined already-existing small Protestant congregations. However, arguably, this exodus did not really strengthen Polish Evangelicalism, as the new Evangelicals could not find much-needed doctrinal (and intellectual) leadership in these mostly anti-intellectual and pietistic churches (which have a strong anti-Calvinist bias).

Also, Poland has received considerably fewer Evangelical missionaries than countries like Ukraine or Romania; this has not helped to build up Polish Protestantism. In effect, Catholic renewals, even though often fueled by American Evangelicals and charismatics, came temporarily as a source of blessing to Catholics but did not benefit Evangelicals in the long run,

except perhaps in establishing some sort of unofficial Catholic–Evangelical pact of non-aggression. So now various tiny Evangelical communities operate without being bothered, but also without really making any substantial impact on Polish society. Catholic Poles seem to treat Protestants less as “heretics” and more as “separate brothers,” a sentiment which is not always returned by Polish Evangelicals, since so many of them are former Catholics who see serious doctrinal error in the Roman Church.

*2. How has it continued to change and what new directions do you note since the turn of the twenty-first century?*

In 2006, while working on my doctoral dissertation, I spent one year in Poland and audited a year-long course, “The Primacy of the Pope and the Holy See,” at Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw. This course was taught by a well-known and prolific Polish Dominican professor, Jacek Salij, OP. While I was the only Protestant and my classmates were mostly priests, monks, and nuns, along with a few lay theologians, I was welcomed with genuine hospitality and felt that my dissident views were respected. Interestingly, despite the very ecumenical spirit, many of my fellow classmates were skeptical of the reforms introduced by Vatican II and were much more drawn to the Council of Trent and Latin Mass. Many of them associated Vatican II with liberalism and a kind of slippery slope into compromise with secularism and/or Protestantism. (I am not sure if my professor shared these sentiments.) Also, most of the students seemed well versed in the Scriptures and took its authority seriously, but within the bounds of the interpretive framework of the Holy See, also known as Tradition.

*3. Are there signs of biblical renewal because of Bible reading by Roman Catholics?*

Yes. Over the last twenty years, Polish Catholics have been increasingly interested in the Bible. For instance, during my last visit to a Polish post office, I noticed several Bible editions (including one for children) for sale.

*4. How is Pope Francis changing things now?*

That is hard to say at this point. Polish Catholicism is rather conservative, and I sense that much of his leadership is being questioned or found provocative.

*5. What can we expect from the Roman Church in future?*

I think there will be an increasing emphasis on uniting global Christianity under one bishop, the Bishop of Rome. In my conversations with Catholic seminary students at the Cardinal Wyszyński seminary I sensed openness to tolerating a certain amount of Protestant distinctiveness (married clergy,

simplicity of worship, justification by grace as understood in current dialogue with mainline Lutherans, etc.) as long as the primacy of the Pope and the Holy See is recognized. This was already done once at the end of the sixteenth century, in the establishment of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which the Eastern Church viewed (and still views) as a stab in the back. Naturally, this unquestionably genuine desire for unity is still at the expense of truth and thus altogether invalid. The Reformers addressed this already in their exchanges with Erasmus as well as with Catholic apologists of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods.

## SPAIN, JOSÉ DE SEGOVIA

### *1. How did Roman Catholic theology change in your country after Vatican II?*

The news of the *Aggiornamento* brought in by Pope John XXIII (1958–63) with the Second Vatican Council created unmistakable tensions within Spanish Roman Catholicism. Spain was then still under the dictatorship of General Franco, who imposed a national Catholicism in which there was no place for religious liberty, an issue discussed by the Council. The first signs of tolerance came with the Law of 1967, which allowed the right of religious liberty, using the language of the Council, even though this tolerance did not become freedom until the further Law of 1980.

The pressures from within the Roman Church for a change in Spain were only reinforcements of world opinion. A secret meeting of the Metropolitan Council, composed of fifteen ranking prelates, met in Madrid in early 1963 to discuss a religious liberty law. They approved the Foreign Affairs Minister Castiella's *Statute for Non-Catholic Religions*. The substance of the statute, while prohibiting proselytizing, allowed judicial recognition to the major Protestant churches as religious groups.

The irony of it all is that the consideration of a law for religious liberty did not keep the Spanish delegation from opposing the idea when it was presented in session at the Vatican Council. We still were more popish than the pope! The Spanish and Italian delegates and some Latin American delegates fought back. Cardinal de Arriba y Castro opposed free worship, saying that it “will ruin the Catholic Church if it is put in effect in those states where Catholicism is the leading religion,” because “only the Catholic Church has the right to preach the Gospel” (Paul Blanshard, *Paul Blanshard on Vatican II* [Boston: Beacon, 1966], 78).

### *2. The Problem of Religious Liberty*

The opposition of the Latin delegates to the declaration on religious liberty of Vatican II brought instant criticism from around the world. The political

maneuverings behind the scenes by the Spanish and Italian delegates caused delays and almost succeeded in keeping the proposal from reaching the floor for a vote. In the year I was born, 1964, the pope told one of the Spanish cardinals, "Don't be afraid of religious liberty. I know full well that the circumstances in Spain are very special, and I will be with Spain, but the Spanish should be with the pope: they must not fear religious liberty" (*Ya*, October 10, 1964).

In Barcelona the Catalan Reformed theologian José Grau and his printer Salvador Salvado were sentenced to a month and a day in prison for publishing an unauthorized religious book ("American Money and Spanish Tyranny," *Christian Century* 79.3 [January 17, 1962]: 76). Early in 1963 ten more Evangelical churches were allowed to reopen, but six churches were refused permission. On February 15, 1964, it was reported in the London *Sunday Telegraph* that the pope had received for study the text of a proposed Spanish law to grant more freedom to the Protestants, and in March 1964 the Supreme Court ruled against the government and authorized an Evangelical church in Valencia.

Eugen Gerstenmaier, President of the West German Bundestag, came to Spain to discuss the possibilities of Spain's entrance into the European Common Market. At the press conference he stated that "the treatment of problems of the Protestants in Spain is the touchstone of Spain's earnestness in joining the other European nations." The Spanish Archbishop Alonso Muñoz of Sión answered that full religious liberty would enslave the conscience of the country's Roman Catholic majority and destroy the Catholic unity in Spain (Betty Thompson, "Protestants, Catholic View Religious Liberty," *Christian Century* 82.24 [June 16, 1965]: 788–90). This fear was not only propagated by the majority of prelates, but had also become the focal point for conservative political leaders.

During the debate to approve the 1967 law in the *Cortes* (Franco's Parliament), the dominate theme of the opposition was to preserve the unity of the state. Mr. Barcena expressed it this way: "We do not fear religious liberty, but that our unity will be undermined by harmful proselytizing." Another member of the *Cortes*, Coronel de Palma, added, "In the name of 30,000 persons who do not profess our religion, they seek to limit the rights of the 30 million Catholics" (Juan Antonio Monroy, "Los debates en las Cortes," *Restauración* [July/August, 1972]: 20). Even at the time of the final vote to approve the Law, the Minister of Justice took special care to reassure the *Cortes* that the Law would not in any way disrupt the unity of the state.

Spain, like other traditional Catholic countries, found its unity in religion. This is why Franco used the expression *national Catholicism* to bring back

the unity imposed by the Catholic monarchs when Spain was founded in the fifteenth century, expelling the Jews and Muslims or forcing them to convert to Christianity. Since then, to be Spanish is to be Catholic. Historic Catalanian and Basque nationalisms have also a strong Catholic uniting factor.

### 3. *The Influence of Vatican II and Changes*

Vatican II brought many changes in image and language, but not in dogma. A similar ambiguous ethos is expressed by the present pope when he says, “Who am I to judge a homosexual?” At the same time, however, he vetoes the appointment of a French homosexual ambassador to the Holy See and campaigns against homosexual marriage in Italy. The same happens with regard to communion for divorced Catholics. Pope Francis says they have to be accepted, but at the same time there is still no communion for the divorced and remarried. In the language of Lampedusa’s Gattopardo, “Everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same.”

What John XXIII did was “to open the windows.” There is fresh air, but a change of climate is not a change of dogma. Vatican II updated the position of the Roman Catholic Church in relation to the world, but the trick is that it has done so without changing the traditional doctrine. Francis is not the first pope known for his fatherly and warm attitude. “Good Pope John” was gentle in spirit, meek in manners, and approachable by the people. Roncalli was the first modern pope to be seen not as a king, but as a pastor. His language was simple and his human demeanor was humble. Like Francis, John XXIII did not want a rigidly “doctrinal” church that judges the mistakes of the world, but a loving “mother” who would offer protection and understanding for all, as Leonardo de Chirico says in *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to the Papacy* ([Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2015], 72).

There are two main schools of thought about Vatican II. One sees it as breaking with the traditional and bringing a progressive trend to the Church. According to this interpretation, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI imposed a rigid reading in areas of potential change in ecclesiology, liturgy, and morality. The mainstream school insists that Vatican II stands in continuity with Vatican I (1870–71), completing what was left unfinished. There is no doctrinal change. It is a pastoral approach to what Benedict XVI called a reform-in-continuity, a dynamic restatement of the well-established Roman Catholic heritage.

The leading Spanish Reformed theologian José Grau (1931–2014) used to say that the key word for understanding the Second Vatican Council is integration. There are theological values modern Catholicism wants to integrate and make part of its framework, like interest in the study of the Bible, the use

of common language in the liturgy, the importance of preaching, the place of the laity in the life of the Church, a notion of episcopal collegiality, and the admission of certain pluralism. Even more, modern Roman Catholicism wants to integrate “all the values of humanity.” Why? As Paul VI said, “all is Catholic.”

According to the Vatican II decree on ecumenism, “Everything comes from Christ and leads to Him, because it belongs by natural right to the only Church of Christ” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3). The idea “to make the world Catholic” comes from the notion of *totus Christus*, Rome as the continuity of the incarnation of Christ in history, not by delegation, but by substitution. According to Paul VI in *Ecclesiam Suam* (I), quoting John XXIII in *Mystici Corporis*, “we have to get used to seeing the Church as Christ himself.” This is still for us today, according to a former Catholic scholar, the Spanish Reformed theologian Francisco Lacueva (1911–2005), the main problem with Roman Catholicism. *Totus Christus* is *alter Christus*!



# Interview with Dr. Robert George

**PETER A. LILLBACK**

(June 6, 2016)

Dr. Robert George is the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University. He serves as director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions and is the Herbert W. Vaughan senior fellow of the Witherspoon Institute. He is frequently a Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School. He has served on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the President's Council on bioethics, and as Chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. He holds degrees from Swarthmore College (BA), Harvard Law School (JD in Law), Harvard Divinity School (MTS), and Oxford University (DPhil in philosophy of law, BCL and DCL). He is the author of numerous books, among others, *Making Men Moral: Civil Liberties and Public Morality* (Oxford University Press, 1993); *Clash of Orthodoxies* (ISI Books, 2001); *In Defense of Natural Law* (Oxford University Press, 1999); *Great Cases in Constitutional Law* (Princeton University Press, 2000); with Christopher Tollefsen, *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life* (Doubleday, 2008); and with Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson, *What Is Marriage?: Man and Woman: A Defense* (Encounter Books, 2012).

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This interview of Dr. George, a noted conservative scholar and committed Catholic, seeks to present his perspectives and commitments clearly and does not necessarily represent the views of *Unio cum Christo*.

**PETER LILLBACK:** *It's a pleasure today to interview Dr. Robert George at Princeton University, at Whelan Hall, home of the James Madison Program, which is part of the University, and the Witherspoon Institute, an independent research center in Princeton. These two ministries or scholarly centers are works he has been involved with for many years, helping to shape conservative thought that impacts a secular world. This interview is on a special topic: the Jubilee of Vatican II (1962–1965). Dr. George is a devout Catholic scholar, and I am a Presbyterian minister working with Westminster Theological Seminary. In this anniversary year of Vatican II there are many questions about the relationship between Catholics and Protestants, the impact of that extraordinary council, and how it's still shaping the world. So, we are very grateful for this interview, and thank Dr. George. Can you give us a little bit of background on your own religious pilgrimage?*

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Well, my grandfather came from Syria fleeing the oppression of the Ottoman Turkish government. He came originally to New York, worked on the railroads up in Upstate New York around Ithaca, and then found work in the coal mines in Appalachia. I grew up in West Virginia. Being Syrian and Christian he was Antiochian Orthodox, so that's one side of my family.

**PL:** *Some would say that's the original Christian church. Is that right?*

**RG:** Antioch is where the label Christian got attached to the disciples of Jesus; it's a very ancient and beautiful tradition, imbued with the spirit of early Christianity, deeply mystical, and also deeply Trinitarian, with a profound sense of the Triunity of the One God. My mother's father came from southern Italy. He was fleeing not political oppression but abject poverty. And he came again to New York and then went out to Utah where—he was literally a child—he was working in the coal mines out near Sunnyside, Utah. He then moved back east, where there was work in the mines in West Virginia. While there, he saved up his money and did what a lot of Italian people who came to the United States did: he went into the grocery business and built himself a nice little business. So my parents were both children of immigrants. Of course, my mother's family being Italian was Catholic, so I've had the advantage of having one side of the family being Eastern Christian and the other side Western Christian, of experiencing both of these profound traditions of Christianity.

And at the same time, of course, I was growing up in West Virginia, which was predominantly Protestant. We didn't in those days say "Evangelical," but certainly the people I grew up with, by and large, were people who would be today described as Evangelical Protestants, so I got an appreciation of

that tradition. My very best friend, when I was a little boy, was the son of a Southern Baptist preacher. Now by the time we became friends his father had died, so I never knew his father. He died when my friend was a baby. But I knew his widow, my friend's mother, and she would take us to the movies of the Billy Graham Crusades when they came to town, so I got exposed to Evangelical Protestantism in the first case through growing up around Evangelicals in West Virginia.

**PL:** *And today would you be part of the Orthodox Church or the Catholic Church?*

**RG:** I'm part of the Catholic Church. We were brought up in the Catholic Church. There was not a Syrian Orthodox Church anywhere near where we lived. Actually, the closest one was across the border in Pennsylvania, up towards Pittsburgh, in the town of Brownsville. So when there were events in my father's family, baptisms, weddings, and so forth, we would drive up to Brownsville. It seemed like a long way away then, before the Interstate highway was built.

**PL:** *As you think about Vatican II in this Jubilee Year, what does that great council mean to you personally as a Catholic scholar and as a professor? What implications does it have for your work?*

**RG:** Well, it's first of all a very important council. A lot of conservative Catholics are at least a little skeptical because the Second Vatican Council seemed to unleash liberal forces within the Church that began to undermine the Church's historic doctrinal and moral teachings. I don't, myself, see it that way. Now, I do understand that a lot of people used the Second Vatican Council as an excuse to begin selling out to worldly moral conceptions, but that wasn't the Council's fault. What the Council taught in my judgment was good and true. It was really drawing from the great treasury of Christian faith some important implications that the Catholic Church had not really fully taken on board; for instance, the importance of a robust conception of religious freedom. The Catholic Church had been skeptical all the way through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century about the concept of religious freedom.

**PL:** *Is it fair to say that the American influence had some impact?*

**RG:** Oh, yes. There's no question that the American influence had a positive impact. But let me first say why the Catholic Church had historically been skeptical. The Catholic Church, of course, was largely, for most of its history, a European church. Rome was headquarters. They had the bones of Peter and Paul. The papacy has been in Rome, at least most of the time, when the

pope wasn't fleeing for one reason or another. Most of the cardinals, who elected the popes, and most of the popes were Italian until very recently. We had a five-hundred year run of Italian popes before John Paul II, who was from Poland, then Benedict XVI, who was from Germany, and now Pope Francis I, who is from Argentina. But, of course, as Europeans, much of their thought was shaped by the experience of the French Revolution—the bloody, dreadful, horrific experience of Revolution and revolutionary ideology. Now French revolutionary ideology, you don't need me to tell you, was deeply anticlerical and antireligious. And when the French revolutionaries proclaimed religious liberty, the conception they had in mind had components that no Christian could accept: the idea of the comprehensive subservience of the church to the state, the idea that religious vows didn't bind in conscience or that it was immoral to take religious vows because you were trying to bind your conscience against a future change of mind. Obviously no Christian, no Catholic, and certainly no pope or bishop could accept that conception of religious freedom, but as Europeans that was what they understood when the words *religious freedom* were mentioned.

What the American experience showed was that there was an alternative conception of religious freedom that, far from being hostile to religion, was affirming of religion, and created circumstances in which faith could flourish. And so some American Catholic thinkers, led by a great Jesuit theologian, John Courtney Murray, began to have an impact. They began to get through, and so at the Second Vatican Council one of the documents promulgated was *Dignitatis humanae* (On Human Dignity), in which the argument is made both philosophically and theologically that the very dignity of man, given the nature of man, requires that he be free in matters of religion. Free, not merely to believe as conscience dictates but to express and advocate those beliefs, even where someone or the Church itself thinks those beliefs are wrong. Human dignity requires that a person be free to advocate beliefs, free to change religions, free to take one's religiously inspired moral convictions into the public square and vie for the allegiance of one's fellow citizens on fundamental issues of justice, the common good, and human rights. In other words, to do what Martin Luther King did.

Now, that conception of religious freedom is very different from that of the French revolutionary. It's also very different from the modern liberal conception, the secular liberal conception, according to which religious freedom is reduced to mere freedom to worship, and religion is privatized; where the idea is that you should keep your religion in the closet—that it's a matter for prayers around the dinner table or on your knees at bedtime, or for the church, synagogue, or mosque, but not actually for impacting

public life. Of course, the embarrassment of that secular liberal conception of religious freedom is that it would rule out the kind of prophetic Christian witness that was given by Martin Luther King.

**PL:** *Two questions to follow: What view of the First Amendment would properly reflect this whole discussion? Did Vatican II basically get the First Amendment right? Are secular thinkers getting it right today? How would you look at that from your perspective?*

**RG:** Secular liberalism has got it all wrong. It's a complete misunderstanding of both the dimensions of the words "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The dominant view among secular liberals, although there are exceptions, is essentially that of a privatization of religion. Religion is pushed into the private sphere and it can have no real purchase in our public life. People ought not to act in their role as citizens or as lawmakers on the basis of religiously inspired moral convictions, including convictions about justice and the common good. It's their way of trying to put pro-life, or pro-marriage people, for example, into the closet. This is entirely inconsistent with the original understanding—the understanding that was held by the people who gave us the First Amendment. According to that understanding, religion is not to be private; it is to be public as well as private, that is, not the mere freedom to worship but the free exercise of religion, the freedom to act on one's religiously inspired convictions. It is not to impose doctrines—which of course, is wrong, and the founders of our country and the framers knew that and wanted to protect against it. The Catholic Church in *Dignitatis humanae* affirms that it is wrong. Even an erroneous conscience has dignity and must be respected. You cannot force a Muslim to affirm the Trinity. That's not only unwise and imprudent, it is morally wrong. Not because the Trinity is false—we as Christians believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is true, profoundly true—and yet it is wrong to impose it. But it is not wrong to act on one's Christian convictions, or Jewish convictions, or Muslim convictions, prophetically in the public square to oppose racial injustice or the taking of an innocent human life by abortion or in an unjust war.

**PL:** *The Council of Trent had a very negative view toward the Protestant Reformation; Vatican II reassessed the Roman Catholic Church in light of the dignity of the human conscience and our views. How do you think Vatican II changed the way the Roman Catholic Church looks at those who protested against the ancient Church of Rome?*

**RG:** Well, first, I'd encourage all my Protestant friends to understand that

the Catholic Church is not just the Western Church—it's not just the Roman Catholic Church—it's also the Eastern Catholic Church. It's not referring here to the Orthodox Churches but to the many, many Eastern traditions that are in communion with Rome, but are not themselves Roman, or Western Catholic Churches, so I prefer to just speak of the Catholic Church.

**PL:** *Some of us still say “the Holy Catholic Church” in the Apostles’ Creed as we approach the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.*

**RG:** That’s true. We are indeed marking the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, so this is a good moment for Protestants and Catholics to think about this history together, to overcome misunderstandings, to engage the points where we do disagree but engage in a deeply respectful and fraternal way because we are brothers, and this is basically what the Second Vatican Council is affirming, not in the *Dignitatis humanae* document, which was about religious liberty, but in other documents addressing Christian unity. And here you have a very clear affirmation that our “separated brethren,” as it’s sometimes put—those with whom we for now, at least, do not share the Communion Cup—are nevertheless our Christian brothers and sisters.

**PL:** *So now let me probe for a moment: the Council of Trent used the word “anathema” toward Protestants, which is a strong word: let them be accursed. And now we are, Protestants, from a Catholic perspective, errant brothers, erring in Catholic doctrine but in a fraternal relationship. What changed in the Catholic mind from strong condemnatory language to more a sense that we disagree but are a part of a common family? What’s going on there in the Catholic perspective?*

**RG:** Catholics don’t even refer these days to Protestants as “errant” brothers. Something more profound has happened. Now of course, to some extent there are still points of disagreements. However, some of the points that we thought we were in disagreement about turn out to have been misunderstandings, and those have been cleared up, especially in the area of justification by faith.

**PL:** *Let me just stop for a moment; some would say, “That’s shocking! We don’t think we’ve agreed on that!” How would you say there has been an agreement on justification by faith between Catholic and Protestant?*

**RG:** A good place to look is the formal document agreed upon by the Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999, which makes clear that we believe that justification is by faith and not by works. It is by grace, through faith, that we are justified. We cannot do this ourselves. The Catholic Church

rejects Pelagianism just as the Lutheran church or the other Protestant churches reject Pelagianism. Now, what about works? Well, both sides agree that works are ways in which we contribute to sanctification. They do not justify us, but it's by our good works, as the New Testament letter of James makes clear, that faith is manifested concretely, that we sanctify ourselves and the world. There's a holiness that will be reinforced and expressed when we do the good that our faith impels us to do. So Catholics tend no longer speak of Protestants as our errant or erring brothers.

And part of the reason for that is that Catholics (including Pope emeritus Benedict, who was himself an eminent theologian who conducted many dialogues with Protestant colleagues) now acknowledge—as many Protestants do from the other direction—that we have things to learn and not just things to teach to our conversation partners. What Catholic, for example, would claim not to have something to learn from the thought and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer? Any Catholic who said that would be a fool! As would any Protestant who said he didn't have something to learn from the work and witness of John Paul II or Mother Teresa of Calcutta. We've had divergent paths. We've been separated for too long, but in our separation we have learned things, we have built things, we have spiritual treasures that we have acquired that we need to make available to each other.

Let me give you another area concretely where I see this to be true. Catholics have nurtured a tradition of philosophical reflection that goes all the way back in our Western civilization to Plato and Aristotle, the great Greek thinkers, and some of the Roman jurists. That is a gift that Catholics can make available to Protestants. Protestants have nurtured a love for the word of God in Scripture, a depth of understanding the Bible which is not common among Catholics, and the use of the Bible as a devotional resource. This is a gift that especially Evangelical Protestants have to share with their Catholic brothers, and this is now happening everywhere.

It's interesting that it did not begin with formal retractions of some of the anathemas used against each other historically, but in a more practical way. It began in the trenches of the pro-life movement when Catholics and Protestants found themselves because of shared devotion to the sanctity of human life and then later in the struggle now ongoing to protect marriage. They found themselves together with shared principles and values and soon came to understand that they are not strangers or foreigners to each other, but that they had a lot of misconceptions about each other, and misunderstandings of what they thought the other side believed. Obviously there are still differences, but the differences turn out to be far narrower and capable of being engaged than either side believed. So what began

perhaps as a marriage of convenience in the pro-life and the pro-marriage movement, and now in the pro-religious liberty movement, became a real spiritual brotherhood. I think that is the great good that God has brought out of the evil of the efforts of contemporary secularism to undermine the pro-life cause, the institution of marriage, and religious liberty. God always brings good out of evil. You know that, Peter. And you've taught me that. You've preached it, and that's what God is doing.

**PL:** *Now let me raise a pointed Protestant question of the Catholic movement. One of the aspects of the Catholic tradition is infallibility in its teaching office and councils. So we have the Council of Trent with its condemnatory language, and Vatican II which has brought about some remarkable things. In fact, the Second Vatican Council makes me comfortable to interview you and delight in our shared concerns for the positive impact of Christianity on culture, and yet Trent and Vatican II take different viewpoints from each other. How can the Church move from one to the other without explaining what has been set aside and saying, "We were wrong back there," and yet still be an infallible Church? This causes a Protestant to scratch his head and say, "You claimed infallibility. But this now sounds like you are saying, 'We were wrong in saying that. We're going to say this instead now.'" How does that work out in the Catholic ideology and its epistemology of religious truth?*

**RG:** The doctrine of the infallibility of the Church, and relatedly the infallibility of the pope in the Catholic tradition, is widely misunderstood, including among Catholics. It is a far narrower doctrine than people imagine. It's still a substantive important doctrine, but it is not the caricature that some people have in mind when they think that if the pope says it's going to rain today, it's going to rain. The key thing, when it comes to understanding where the Church has changed her teaching despite the fact that she claims infallibility within a certain domain, is to try to understand what propositions were being asserted by the Fathers of the Council to be held definitively as matters of faith by the faithful. You can't just read these documents in an uncritical or a superficial way. The same is true of reading the Scriptures. Just as we need to understand what is being asserted by the writers of sacred Scripture and what is to be held definitively as a matter of faith, the same is true in the Catholic understanding when it comes to the historic teaching of the Church, including the teachings of councils and the teaching of popes. Take the teaching on religious liberty we talked about earlier. The Church condemned "religious liberty" and "democracy"—as it understood these things—in the nineteenth century and now the Church affirms religious liberty and promotes democracy. It's the leading institution today in the

United States fighting for religious liberty. Even the people of other faiths are looking to the Catholic bishops for leadership, for example, on the odious abortion-drug, and contraception mandates of the Obama administration. The people are looking to the leadership of the Catholic Church. Same thing with democracy: the Church condemned it in the nineteenth century; today the Catholic Church is a leading force for democracy throughout the world. What happened?

We need to get clear on what the Catholic Church was condemning in the nineteenth century: for example, the French revolutionary idea that all religions were equally true or equally false, or the idea of the comprehensive subservience of the church to the state, or that religious vows don't bind, or that it's immoral to bind your conscience against future changes of mind. The Church would still condemn those, but "religious liberty" today, in the American context, at least, refers to what Americans understand as religious liberty, which is radically different from the French revolutionary understanding.

The same is true of democracy: the Church in the nineteenth century was condemning a conception, prominent at the time, associated with moral relativism, the idea that there is no truth and that what can make something true is a majority endorsing it. No Christian can believe that. No Christian or other morally sane human being would say that Hitler was legitimate because he was legitimately elected. Catholics don't believe that. And so what the Church affirms today is not what it condemned then, and we need to have the same kind of critical attitude when we're looking at what the Church teaches on other topics.

**PL:** *To clarify, infallibility doesn't always hold to what the Church condemns, it has a narrower application in the Church's teaching.*

**RG:** Infallibility has to do with what the Church is stating or condemning to be held specifically *de fide* [of the faith]. And that's why the Church can lift *anathemas*. One of the things that happened at the Second Vatican Council is that the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church (we leave the Protestants for the moment), the Eastern and Western Churches that had been divided and had anathematized each other for more than a thousand years, lifted the anathemas. Well, if they were infallible, they couldn't be lifted, but neither Church regarded that as infallible.

**PL:** *Have they been lifted vis-à-vis Protestants?*

**RG:** The Catholic Church anathematized certain propositions, but it has in certain cases acknowledged after study and dialogue that the propositions

are not, as previously believed, held by certain of those to whom the anathemas were directed. The best example is from the joint Lutheran-Catholic declaration we discussed a moment ago.<sup>1</sup>

**PL:** *So have the Council of Trent's anathemas been removed at this point?*

**RG:** I think if you look at the actual teaching of the modern popes and the Second Vatican Council on Protestant Christians, as brothers, affirming truths of the faith, you would say that as a matter of fact, some of the anathemas have been [lifted], if not formally. No pope would say today that Protestants just as such are anathema.

**PL:** *So would I be quoting Professor George correctly to say that the anathemas of the Council of Trent have de facto been removed, if not de jure?*

**RG:** We would have to look at the precise propositions being anathematized. If it's a particular teaching, it might have been mistakenly attributed to Protestants or certain Protestants, but if it's something that the Church condemns and anathematizes, then that is certainly the case. But, of course, without critical examination, you could no more be certain that this is in fact what the Protestants held, than you could be certain that in the nineteenth century what was asserted as religious liberty is what the Church has in mind when it talks about religious liberty.

**PL:** *Well, the most important cause in the Reformation was justification by faith alone and I don't know in the agreement that was made that the condemnation of that phrase was ever fully removed.*

**RG:** The teaching of the Catholic Church is that justification is by grace alone through faith alone; that's agreed upon. The Catholic Church not only doesn't anathematize the Protestants, it agrees with that. And because you are absolutely right that the central cause of the Reformation was the

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<sup>1</sup> "Opposing interpretations and applications of the biblical message of justification were in the sixteenth century a principal cause of the division of the Western church and led as well to doctrinal condemnations. A common understanding of justification is therefore fundamental and indispensable to overcoming that division. By appropriating insights of recent biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification, with the result that this Joint Declaration is able to formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification. In light of this consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner." The Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," section 13, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html).

insistence on justification by faith, that's important. There are other important issues of course, such as the Catholic insistence on freedom of the will (a point debated by Luther and Erasmus), but they are less central.

**PL:** *So would you say then that the Catholic Church today would say that Luther got it right when it comes to justification at that point?*

**RG:** Once again we'd have to look at precise formulations, to the extent that the claim is simply that justification is by grace alone through faith alone, then yes, the Catholic Church would say that he got it right. It would also say that Luther was incorrect in claiming that the Church denied it, or that its affirmation is incompatible with belief in, say, the freedom of the will.

**PL:** *Now, let's take it a few steps forward now. We're living fifty years after Vatican II, and Protestants and Catholics have been in the trenches together. Pro-life issues have been important as well as the defense of marriage. The most recent example is the Affordable Care Act [the federal legislation that established a national health care program in the United States that has also mandated all nonchurch organizations to provide abortion services regardless of its conscience and scruples]. The Little Sisters of the Poor got the limelight, but Westminster Seminary was right there as one of the groups seeking to speak for the sacred rights of conscience. What's happened in our government that would turn conscience to such a secondary issue that now the government says that we don't care what you believe, you must agree with our values? Going back twenty years ago I couldn't imagine our government doing that to any faith organization. What has happened intellectually?*

**RG:** The logic of secular liberalism's embrace of the sexual revolution is playing itself out. If there's one thing that is given priority among secular liberals, again not all, but in the mainstream over everything else, it is sexual revolutionary ideology. It's that conception of freedom that we got originally, I suppose, from people like Margaret Sanger and Wilhelm Reich, that was given scientific credibility by that old fraud Alfred Kinsey, glamorized and mainstreamed in the form of soft-core pornography by Hugh Hefner, and ideologized by Herbert Marcuse, who was a prominent thinker in the sixties and had a great impact on contemporary academic liberalism, forming the people who now are the leaders of contemporary academic liberalism. Well, that ideology is now dominant. You can see it, for example, in the debate over so-called "transgenderism," how sexual revolutionary ideology is prioritized over everything, including feminism. It's telling when feminist heroes like Germaine Greer criticize transgenderism as undermining the tenets of feminism. She is suddenly an outcast. Ironic!

Even issues of racial justice are shunted aside when they get in the way of sexual revolutionary ideology. So an African-American graduate student in counseling is told that she can't be a counselor despite the great work that she wanted to do, because as a Christian she cannot in conscience counsel same-sex relationships in ways that morally affirm their sexual partnership. She wasn't proposing to counsel people in same sex relationships or asking them to separate. She was simply preparing for a career counseling men and women who were married or in a relationship that could lead to marriage. But because she wouldn't—and in conscience couldn't—bend the knee before the gods of the sexual revolution, she's not allowed to be a counselor. They won't permit her to continue in the program or give her a license in counseling. And you see this all over the country time and time again.

**PL:** *Dr. George, you've answered very fully so let's wrap up this interview. Let's discuss Pope Francis I. He seems unsure about where the Catholic Church is going, or maybe we're misreading some of his statements. Do you think there might be a Vatican III and that Pope Francis is saying it's time for married clergy, to reconsider divorcees coming to the Mass, or that perhaps the Catholic Church needs to be open to the LGBT agenda and the old tradition has been too harsh. Do you think that's possible? What are your thoughts?*

**RG:** The Catholic Church and Pope Francis are not going to embrace the sexual revolutionary agenda. The Bible is very clear on questions of divorce and remarriage and on same-sex partnerships or any nonmarital sexual partnerships. On these things the Catholic Church will not change because no change is possible. At the Second Vatican Council, when it came to issues like religious liberty or ecumenism or even the outreach to the non-Christian faiths, it was drawing from the treasury of Christian faith, most centrally the Bible, the teachings of the church fathers, [and] the tradition of the Church itself. It was in the words of the pope who called the Council, John XXIII, an "opening of the window to the world," not so that pagan worldly ideas could influence the Church but so that the Church could engage the world where it actually is and more effectively bring the gospel to the world.

There are some issues on which change is clearly possible and could happen. For example, nothing requires that clergy be unmarried. In fact, we have married clergy in the Catholic Church, not just former Lutheran, Episcopalian, or Anglican priests who converted to Catholicism and then were ordained as Catholic priests and kept their wives and their marital relationships. Not only that, but there are married priests in the Eastern Catholic Churches, fully in communion with Rome, and have been from the very beginning. In fact, priestly celibacy is a fairly late doctrine even in

the Western Church. The apostles were married. Saint Peter, the first pope, was married. We know about his mother-in-law from the Scripture. However, there's a reason for the celibacy doctrine in the Church and a spirituality built up around it. I myself think it's a good but not a necessary thing. That could change.

What cannot change and therefore will not change is, for example, the teaching that women cannot be priests. John Paul II set forth the reasons in his document on the subject called *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* [On the Ordination of Priests]. Jesus did not authorize the ordination of women, and the Church isn't authorized to do so. Of course, Jesus reached out to women. He treated them as equal in dignity to men. In fact, it was a woman, even before the apostles, who first knew of the most important event in human history, the resurrection of Jesus. Or if there was a more important event, it was still a woman who knew it, that is the woman who first learned that she would be the Mother of the Savior, in the incarnation. So Jesus certainly elevated women. No question about that, but he did not designate them to be apostles. Nor is the Church going to change the Bible's clear teaching on the nature of marriage going all the way back to Genesis 2, to which Jesus points when confronted with the marriage and divorce question. Marriage is the conjugal union of husband and wife, the one-flesh partnership made possible by the sexual reproductive complementarity of man and woman. The Church isn't going to change on that, or on the question of divorce and remarriage, or even Holy Communion for the divorced and civilly remarried. Now, the civilly remarried have always been invited, in fact required, if they are Catholics, under Catholic teaching to assist at Mass on Sunday, but so long as they are in a nonmarital partnership, in other words, an adulterous relationship because of the existence of the first marriage which has not been annulled, they cannot receive Communion. So that's where it will continue to stand because the logic of Jesus's teaching requires us to be there.

Of course, there's a debate, and some Protestants have a different view on the question of what the *porneia* exception (of Matthew 19:9) refers to. Jesus says if a man divorces his wife and marries another, he's committed adultery against her, and vice versa, and then says that the case of *porneia*, to use the Greek, is different. Does that mean in the case of adultery, or does it mean in a case in which the marriage was unlawful because of consanguinity (or some other impediment) in the first place? There is also a different understanding about what the consequences of the sinfulness of divorce are, but the Roman Catholic Church has historically held a certain view, and I do not see that changing at all. So I think that we should not rush to the conclusion that Vatican II represented an embracing of secular worldly ideology

and therefore Pope Francis could easily move still further down that line. Vatican II was not an embracing of secular liberal ideology; it was Christian teaching through and through, in some cases correcting or clarifying mistaken teaching or teaching that was based on too narrow an understanding of the possibilities, religious liberty being a good example, democracy being another good example.

**PL:** *But what do we make of Pope Francis's open-ended statements on issues of homosexuality and maybe the Mass and divorce? This has caused conjecture. Some have interpreted his statements as saying maybe it's time to change our interpretation.*

**RG:** I'd respond in part by saying everything I said a moment ago, trying to distinguish change that is a clarification or deepening of authentic Christian understanding, and a change that is rather the embracing of an alien secular liberal neopagan (often Gnostic) ideology. So overcoming the narrow French revolutionary understanding of religious liberty to enable the Church to embrace a sound understanding and actually affirm it is one thing. But saying that the Bible is wrong about the nature of marriage and two men or two women can marry is completely different. And there is no possibility, of that under this pope or any other pope.

**PL:** *Let me ask more pointedly, has the pope been misunderstood or has he spoken ill advisedly on some issues that have caused confusion?*

**RG:** If the pope, any pope, were asking me for advice—and so far I have been spared that burden—but if Pope Francis were to burden me by asking me for advice, I would say it's not good, wise, or prudent for a pope to speak off the cuff, to hold press conferences on airplanes, or to give interviews to people who don't even record or take notes and then report from memory. If you do those kinds of things, you will end up issuing an awful lot of clarifications or having your press office issue an awful lot of clarifications. I think it's better, on the whole, for popes not to speak extemporaneously, but rather to speak through documents like exhortations and encyclicals, because it's important for the world, not just for the Catholics.... When it comes to controversial issues on which the faith is being challenged today by secular liberal leadership, speak in formal documents, in writing, and not in extemporaneous or informal ways.

**PL:** *Twenty-seventeen is the five-hundred year anniversary of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, which most believe launched what became the Protestant Reformation. In light of this coming year, how do you consider the Lutheran and Calvinist*

*contributions to the world in light of Vatican II? Do you celebrate it? Are you glad for it? What is your assessment of this long history, specifically about Calvinism, since we're at Princeton, which has deep Calvinistic roots, with the Hodges, the Warfields, and other great figures of the past, not forgetting Witherspoon?*

**RG:** As with any movement, the record is mixed, but there have been some great achievements. You would not have had the American founding without the Protestant Reformation, which, through its doctrine of religious liberty enshrined in our First Amendment, had a positive impact on the ability of the Catholic Church to develop her own teaching in the area of religious liberty. So Protestantism made an important contribution through the Enlightenment to thinking about freedom. And the Catholic Church has embraced the best in that. So, if the mission of the Reformation was to reform the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church, it's done important reforming from a Catholic point of view.

Another positive thing is that the Protestant Reformation has taught us all, including Catholics, to read and value Scripture, not simply to leave it to the priests. Our Evangelical Protestant friends in particular have encouraged us to use the Scripture in our own devotional practice, and to love the Scripture, to encounter Jesus in the Gospel as a written text. Now what could be more important than that? So there again, the Reformation reformed even those of us who are Catholic. And I could point out other areas where it's been positive.

Now on the more negative side, [we have] the fragmentation of Christianity. What Luther and Calvin unleashed has led to more and more division within the Protestant world and the fragmentation of the Christian church. If we're ever going to put this back together again, and of course, we can't do it, that's a job for the Holy Spirit, well we've made the Holy Spirit's job a little harder.

Another thing in the philosophical and doctrinal area I think is important. If I could talk my Protestant brethren into one important philosophical and doctrinal position, it would be the need to affirm the freedom of the will. Calvinists in particular, because of the laudable desire to preserve a sense of the sovereignty of God and the fact that our salvation is in God's hands and not our own, effectively deny the freedom of the will and walk into one or another form of determinism. I think that's a bad mistake. It undermines the foundations of ethics and of personal responsibility. Working with my Protestant friends on common projects and in those rarer moments when I'm engaging and arguing with them, I want to make the case for the freedom of the will. In the dispute between Erasmus and Luther, Erasmus got this one right. I invite my Protestant friends to go back to that debate. It's a

wonderful debate—Luther, of course, a brilliant man by anybody’s account, Erasmus, equally brilliant, so the sides were equally represented when it came to intellectual horsepower. It seems to me that Erasmus has the better case, and the Catholic Church was right to hold to the doctrine of the freedom of the will. We can do that, I believe, without compromising the important belief in the ultimate sovereignty of God.<sup>2</sup>

My late beloved friend Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran minister most of his life, son of a Lutheran minister, with deep roots in the Lutheran tradition, eventually, having said that he would never do such a thing, became a Roman Catholic, and a couple of years later was ordained as a priest. I asked him what changed that caused him to become a Catholic. He said he really didn’t think it was anything theological, and he did not think that properly understood the Lutherans and Catholics were badly divided on the actual theological issues. But he had always thought, for example, on the freedom of the will, that the Catholics actually had the better argument, and what changed was a judgment of his, not theological, but sociological. He had always believed that the purpose of the Reformation and the Reformed traditions was to reform the Church and then fold themselves back into the Catholic Church so that there would be one Church. He believed that was possible for most of his life, but sociological developments, especially in the Lutheran Church, his branch of it, the ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America], had become very liberal in its moral teachings, it had opted for the ordination of women, it had done things that he believed would simply make it impossible for his wing of Lutheranism to integrate itself into the Catholic Church, having effectively done the work of reformation. At that point, he believed, when it wouldn’t be a corporate reentry, he would enter himself. So I like to say to my Protestant friends, Peter, I think you guys should declare victory and come home.

**PL:** *That’s an interesting perspective! We appreciate that the Scriptures have deepened the understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church on both sides of our discussion. And our hope is that God’s grace is working in our lives. So I’m going to conclude with this question: even though you believe in the freedom of the will, you deny that you are a Pelagian. Is that right?*

**RG:** That’s correct, I do not think that you need to be a Pelagian, or even a semi-Pelagian to believe in the freedom of the will. What we should believe is the freedom of the will and the grace of God; without the grace of God, we are lost.

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<sup>2</sup> An article on the Erasmus-Luther debate is planned in the next number of the journal (Editor).

**PL:** *So would you call yourself a semi-Augustinian then?*

**RG:** Well, yes, in some ways I would call myself an Augustinian, but so did Saint Thomas Aquinas, who understood himself as an Augustinian.

**PL:** *The Protestant movement has deep roots in the Augustinian theological tradition.*

**RG:** Well, Luther, of course, was an Augustinian monk. Peter, thank you for your work and witness and for coming to Princeton to see me. It's such a joy to be with you.

**PL:** *Thank you. God bless.*



# Book Reviews

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Paul A. Rainbow. *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, The Epistles and The Apocalypse*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. Pp. 496.

In recent years, English-speaking scholarship has yielded an admirable harvest of expository reflection on the Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation of John. Within that harvest, those efforts to synthesize John's writings have typically confined themselves to the Gospel and the Letters. Paul A. Rainbow has now completed the first and "only English-language textbook on John's theology" that "comprehensive[ly]" seeks to incorporate the testimony of each of the five books attributed to the apostle (p. 9). Rainbow's acceptance of the Johannine authorship of each of these five books and defense of the fundamental historicity of the Fourth Gospel particularly commends his work to readers interested in a Johannine theology that aims to give all the exegetical data of these books their due.

Reasoning that "the Johannine universe is essentially personal," Rainbow purposely outlines his work around "personal entities" rather than topics or themes (pp. 31–30). The Father, the Father's self-revelation in the Son, and the Holy Spirit receive dedicated treatment, as do the "world" and believers (p. 32). To the degree that additional topics or themes surface in Rainbow's survey, they do so in relation to these divine and human figures that loom largely in John's writings.

For Rainbow, John's theology, while "christocentric," is "at its deepest level, theocentric" (p. 72). To say, however, that John's theology is theocentric in no way necessitates diminishing the central place that the person and work of Christ occupies in John's writings. This is so because the Father "becomes manifest in Jesus' acts," and "the Son of God came to draw people not to himself ultimately, but to his Father" (p. 75).

The first half of *Johannine Theology* addresses what John says about the Father (ch. 2); the person and work of the Son (chs. 4–5); and the “Spirit-Paraklete” (ch. 6). Curiously, the chapter on the world (ch. 3) follows the chapter on the Father and precedes the chapters on the Son. Likely Rainbow places this chapter where he does in order to set the Johannine context for the Son’s ministry (cf. p. 145). Even so, this placement disrupts the successive expositions of John’s teaching about the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The remainder of the book addresses believers in distinct lights. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss how a believer comes to Christ and abides in Christ, respectively. Chapter 9 gives attention to the believer in relation to the community of believers of which he is part. Chapter 10 addresses the believer in relation to the world of which he was once part. The church, while not “of the world” is nevertheless “in” the world and “for” the world.

Rainbow’s survey of John’s theology has a number of commendable features. *Johannine Theology* helpfully compiles and explains terms that are central to John’s writings. Examples include a discussion of the various “offices” or titles of Jesus in John (pp. 182–90), “propositions about God” in John (pp. 76–85), and recurring “terms” and phrases that John uses to describe the Christian life (pp. 323–38). Rainbow, furthermore, offers concise and exegetically-restrained readings of such difficult passages as John 7:37–39 (pp. 258 and passim) and John 14:12 (p. 411). His explanation of the meaning of “world” in John’s writings is balanced and nuanced. His description of the meaning of the verbs “believe,” “know,” and “love” in John is an invaluable entrée to the apostle’s conception of the Christian life (pp. 289–311).

*Johannine Theology* also accents aspects of John’s writings that surface elsewhere within the New Testament. One such topic is union with Christ. For John, “union with Christ ... is the relation in which all other gifts and graces of God are now available to human beings” (p. 274). Rainbow helpfully enumerates from John the distinct benefits that are the believer’s in Christ (pp. 274–86). Another such topic is the eschatological character of the salvation that Christ has won for his people. Rainbow persuasively responds to some critical scholars’ insistence that John’s realized eschatology has “displaced the end of the world” by surveying the wealth of data in John’s writings concerning the future (pp. 280–81). Further, Rainbow notes, what John describes as transpiring in the future is said to be “coming about ... in the present” (p. 281). John may therefore speak of “resurrection” as both already and not yet (John 5:24–29; 11:25–26).

An additional positive feature of *Johannine Theology* is its recognition and insistence that subsequent Christian theological reflection has been faithful

to John's writings. Rainbow unapologetically concludes that his own discussion of the person of Christ in John is but "a reaffirmation" of the Nicæan and Chalcedonian formulations (p. 182). This is so because "the Johannine data allow of no different conclusion today from those reached by the early church after long debate" (ibid.). Readers interested in an exegetical defense of the eternal generation of the Son (pp. 100–105) and a refutation of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father (pp. 165–66) will find this book a helpful guide.

One way in which *Johannine Theology* could have been strengthened is by greater attention to Revelation. The outline and content of the book are weighted heavily toward the Fourth Gospel and, to a lesser degree, the Johannine Epistles. More than once, material from Revelation is introduced to corroborate a finding established from the Gospel (e.g., pp. 128–89, 284–85). The net effect of this approach is unintentionally to relegate Revelation to a position of secondary or tertiary importance in Rainbow's survey. One way to remedy this inequity is to develop, more than Rainbow has done, the Old Testament background to both the Gospel and the Revelation. Incorporating such findings into a theology of John would permit greater parity of treatment of both books. It would also provide an ideal avenue for illuminating the genuine affinities between the Gospel and Revelation.

*Johannine Theology* also raises but does not satisfactorily answer an important question posed by John's writings. Rainbow observes that, "in the Johannine corpus," the "world" is the object of God's saving action" (p. 139). Rainbow rightly affirms that John is not a universalist in the sense that every human being will be saved. This observation prompts Rainbow's further reflection upon "the scope of God's saving intent" with respect to the world (p. 141). For Rainbow, John "assumes the fact of the predestination of the elect but leaves its basis unexplained," even as he says that John has no corresponding doctrine of reprobation—only "human stubbornness explains the nonelection of the remainder" (pp. 288–89, cf. p. 142). Furthermore, if one gives "the cosmic passages . . . their natural force," we will find that they "resist all attempts to reduce them to a limited divine saving intent" (p. 142). Neither "Augustinian monism" nor "Arminian dualism," Rainbow argues, can satisfactorily account for all these data. The best resolution he is able to offer is that John evidences affinities with both monism ("God's all-embracing sovereignty") and dualism ("a genuine contest between good and evil") without fully identifying with either (p. 144).

John's writings, however, admit of harmonization at this point. As Jesus's prayer in John 17 indicates, the elect are the eternal gift of the Father to the

Son (cf. Rev 13:8). At no point in the Gospel, the Letters, or Revelation, does John suggest that the decree of election is grounded upon anything seen or foreseen in the creature. John 15:16 and 1 John 4:19 point, in fact, in the opposite direction. Furthermore, to choose some is necessarily to pass by others. Upon these others, John stresses, “the wrath of God remains” (John 3:36). They are justly subject to God’s displeasure for their sin. God purposefully withholds from these sinners the light and life that are found in Christ alone (see John 12:40). It is within this Johannine framework that we must endeavor to explain what John says regarding God’s intentions towards the “world.”

Rainbow’s *Johannine Theology* is an admirable undertaking. Rainbow has demonstrated that John’s writings are coherent precisely at the point of their great concern—the Triune God and the work of salvation that he has purposed and accomplished and now applies in the lives of his people. Though more work surely remains to be done, we may be grateful for the many ways in which *Johannine Theology* helps us to become more attentive and faithful readers of the Beloved Disciple.

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Michael Bräutigam. *Union with Christ: Adolf Schlatter’s Relational Christology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015. Pp. xv + 240.

For a couple of generations now, stretching back to a study by Oxford’s Robert Morgan (*The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter* [Naperville, IL: Alex R. Allenson, 1973]), a few primarily NT scholars have sought to call attention to the importance of the Swiss polymath Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) for biblical and theological studies. German theologian Werner Neuer provided a much-needed biographical foundation for Schlatter studies with a massive critical biography (*Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche* [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1996]). English speakers were able to access Neuer’s popular-level biography in a short work translated and published a year earlier (*Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany’s Premier Biblical Theologian* [Grand Rapids: Baker 1995]). Numerous German-language dissertations have been devoted to his hermeneutical and theological contribution in recent years. But until now there has been no sustained scholarly attention in English to Schlatter’s systematic-theological views as presented particularly in his *Das christliche Dogma* (2nd ed. 1923) and *Die christliche Ethik* (3rd ed. 1929), along with many other works in his corpus of some 450 publications.

The lamentable dearth of attention to Schlatter by theologians in English-speaking circles has now ended with the appearance of the volume under review. It opens with a foreword by Andreas J. Köstenberger, who is well qualified to commend a monograph on Schlatter, as he has translated more of his work into English (notably Schlatter's two-volume NT theology) than anyone. Köstenberger aptly previews the book's distinctives and contributions, adding that "Schlatter may emerge as more influential in the twenty-first century than he was in the twentieth century," citing his "refusal to follow scholarly trends of his day" as a point in favor of optimism regarding his prospects for future significance (p. x). How can resisting scholarly trends lead to anything but being left in the dust of progress?

The answer is that Schlatter was marginalized throughout his long scholarly career (he lectured from 1880–1930 and published prolifically right up to his death), most of all due to his confessional approach to life, to the Scriptures, to the church, and to his academic output. He resisted the neo-Kantianism and Ritschlian liberalism (discussed and defined on pp. 8–9 and *passim*) that dominated Swiss and German university thought throughout his life. So while he had significant interaction with figures like Harnack, Barth, Bultmann, and Bonhoeffer, as a Bible-believing professor he was a rare voice in a wilderness created by post- and anti-biblical hermeneutical syntheses. He could be important for the future because there is always the chance that scholars of truly Christian conviction will regain the presence in mainstream dogmatic discussion that was largely lost by the end of the nineteenth century in great centers of Western learning from Berlin to Oxford to Harvard, Old Princeton being one of the notable exceptions. The dust that buried Schlatter was not of progress but of mass defection from key elements of historic Christianity by the Western theological hegemony. Christology was perhaps chief among those elements.

For that reason, Bräutigam's study could be a harbinger of brighter days ahead for dogmatics (as well as NT studies, which has still barely taken his measure). For Christian teaching as classically conceived stands or falls with its Christology, which since Reimarus and Schleiermacher has fallen on hard times due to Jesus's demotion to mere man, however impressively faith communities may have hyped and massaged mythic memories into creedal shape. Schlatter argued for a high view of Christ, as high as that affirmed in the classic creeds. But he did so in a way that was distinct and creative, in addition to remaining faithful to history, to Scripture, and to the truths (redemptive and otherwise) they convey.

The book divides into two parts of roughly equal size. The first, "The Genesis and Context of Schlatter's Christology," sketches Schlatter's

biography and theology (chapter 1) and then takes up the all-important topic of Schlatter's intellectual milieu (chapter 2: "Where was Adolf Schlatter?," the "where" referring to his place in the shifting hermeneutical landscapes of his career). Although this chapter's length is about three times that of others, the coverage is justified, because standard histories of the period ignore not only Schlatter but also the ways in which theological movements of the era had distortion or even outright rejection of biblical Christianity in their DNA. Thus Bräutigam covers "Between Idealism and Revival Movement," "Between Ritschl and Confessionalism" (detailing the rationale for Schlatter's rejection of liberal Christology and the basis for his alternative), and "Schlatter *Zwischen den Zeiten*" (presenting the most extensive account of the Schlatter-Karl Barth connection thus far in print). "Schlatter affirms, to a greater extent than Barth, the possibility of human knowledge of God through the created order" (p. 103), but not along the lines of classic natural theology, for he thinks merely human knowledge is never salvific. For Schlatter, saving knowledge of God is God's doing, albeit *through* human cognition, not in the absence of it (as in Kant and his heirs). In the same vein, "Schlatter highlights, perhaps more than the early Barth, our experiential viewpoint as he stresses the *relational* aspect of revelation" (p. 104, Bräutigam's italics). Schlatter's interaction with Barth (in the wake of his equally firm repudiation of the very different Ritschlian Christology long before Barth appeared on the scene) yields the mechanics behind a Christology that will prove to be "not only empirical-realist," and thus capable of doing justice to history and the biblical witness, "but also ... existential and communal," promoting both personal and ecclesial dimensions of Scripture's Christological treasure (p. 104).

The second part of the book is "The Shape of Schlatter's Christology." The goal is to furnish an extended systematic-theological presentation of Schlatter's views. Schlatter does not claim to comprehend or explain mysteries like the hypostatic union or the incarnation, both of which (in contrast to many of his times) he affirmed. But in Bräutigam's estimation, "Schlatter not only expands on traditional accounts of Christology, but also offers a unique approach that establishes him in the vanguard of today's relational christological accounts" (p. 106). It is the main service of Bräutigam's study to have teased out that unique approach.

Bräutigam seeks not only to give an exposition of Schlatter's views but also to test their validity. Here he draws on criteria proposed by Bruce McCormack and others. The criteria include questions such as, Are Christ's person and work adequately integrated? Does Schlatter make sense of Jesus's simultaneous humanity and divinity? Is there adequate handling of his cry

of dereliction? Is there sufficient Trinitarian character in the picture that emerges of the Son of God in his relation to Father and Spirit?

But such testing first requires that Schlatter's views be laid out. Bräutigam does this with a chapter devoted to the observer's *Sehakt* (act of seeing), two chapters to the *Denkakt* (act of thinking), and a chapter to the *Lebensakt* (the act of living, i.e., living out the implications of "seeing" and "thinking").

The *Sehakt* (chapter 3) yields "a unified picture of Jesus Christ" through exegesis that is not only textual and historical but also open to the theological dimension of the texts' witness that the classic historical-critical method bans from consideration, as Ulrich Wilckens helpfully notes in *Kritik der Bibelkritik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2012). Before venturing to construct a Christology, it is vital that adequate appropriation of the Scripture's witness emerge. This requires *seeing* rather than *imposing on* the texts the convictions and often biases of the interpreter.

The *Denkakt* reflects on what the *Sehakt* observes. Schlatter finds that the biblical witness has much to say about "Jesus in Relation to God" (chapter 4) and "Jesus in Relation to God and Humanity" (chapter 5). In each domain, Bräutigam seeks to determine "what is Schlatter's specific contribution to Christology, and how viable is it?" (p. 124).

"The *Lebensakt*: Organic Volitional Union with Christ" (chapter 6) explores how exegesis and dogmatic reflection lead to "fundamental experiential and ethical change through the encounter with Jesus Christ" (p. 176). "Union with Christ" (*Anschluß an Christus*) occurs in conjunction with the work of Christ and the Spirit in the interpreter through life in the church and in the world. A Christology that does justice to Jesus is verified in the everyday lives of those who claim to grasp and appropriate it. Schlatter's is not a speculative Christology that ignores ethics but an attempt to grasp Christ through knowledge and faith in a way that transforms the will and thereby the life, on the analogy of how Jesus's knowledge of Scripture and his world, in conjunction with his unfolding union with the Father, conformed his will to that of the Father. These factors determined the steps of his obedient life, not in a demeaning way but in a fashion that resulted in the perfection of his humanity. In Schlatter's Christology, this (through what the cross achieved; pp. 159–61) is the key for individuals and for the church to reach their highest potential. "Jesus' submissive obedience actually reveals his divinity" (p. 197). Schlatter, Bräutigam concludes, arrives at "both an existential and an ecclesial application of his Christology" (p. 198).

Bräutigam is a lecturer at the Melbourne School of Theology and has also published on Jonathan Edwards, Dutch Neo-Calvinism, and the relation between theology and culture. His knowledge and explanations of

Schlatter, his times, and his Christology are comprehensive (within the scope of his focus) and compelling. This book deserves wide and careful reading. It should also spark interest in exploration of Schlatter's underrated dogmatics in numerous other directions.

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Martin Wallraff, Silvana Seidel Menchi, and Kaspar von Greyerz, eds. *Basel 1516: Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament*. Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation 91. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016. Pp. xix + 319.

As the editors explain in the preface (p. x), this volume on Erasmus's 1516 edition of the New Testament reproduces contributions to a commemorative conference on Erasmus in Basel in late summer 2014. Thus, the date of the conference corresponds to the five-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Erasmus in Basel in 1514, and the date of the publication of this volume marks the five-hundredth anniversary of the publication of Erasmus's groundbreaking New Testament.

*Basel 1516: Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament* contains studies by sixteen international scholars. While four chapters are in German, most were written in English, and a few (originally written in French, Spanish, and Italian) were translated into English. Naturally, given the location of the conference, several Swiss scholars participated, but there were also Dutch scholars (from the country of Erasmus's birth) and representatives from Canada, England, France, Spain, and Italy. The reading of the volume is facilitated by a detailed preface by the three editors and English abstracts following each article. The book contains numerous reproductions of pages of editions and manuscripts, figures, and charts. While there is an index of proper names, an index of sources and topics would have been helpful.

The chapters introduce either the results of many years of studies on Erasmus or newer approaches to his contributions as a humanist. For instance, Erika Rummel, who penned *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian* (1986), and Jan Krans, who wrote *Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament* (2006), both contributed to the volume. Others are actively involved in the critical edition of Erasmus by Brill (Erasmus's *Opera Omnia* [1969–] = ASD): Andrew J. Brown, for example, edited several of the volumes of the text of *Novum Testamentum*, and Mielske van Poll-van de Lisdonk is

involved in the edition of the *Annotations*. In this edition, the texts connected to the *Novum Testamentum*, Latin and Greek text, annotations, and prefaces have either been recently published or are in preparation. Some of the essays, by contrast, reflect more emerging studies. Martin Wallraff, for his part, explores the neglected paratexts (i.e., accompanying materials such as introduction, apparatus, and notes) to the various editions of the *Novum Testamentum*, and Valentina Sebastini explores the marketing of Erasmus's New Testament.

This collection of essays, as hinted at in the preface, reveals that there are a variety of views about Erasmus and his New Testament. Thus, it will be helpful to consider the following questions in relation to this book. When was the idea of the *Novum Testamentum* conceived? What is the relationship between the Greek text and the Latin translation in Erasmus's project? How do we evaluate him as a New Testament text critic? In what ways do his endeavors relate to those of the Reformers?

Regarding the origin of the *Novum Testamentum*, the book follows Brown's groundbreaking study, where he shows that the Latin translation dates from 1516, not from ten years earlier, as P. S. Allen and many others claim (p. 14, n. 32; cf. p. xiii and Mark Vessey's essay).

The discussion of the relative importance of the Greek text vis-à-vis the Latin translation is influenced by the claim by Henk Jan de Jonge that for Erasmus, the role of the Greek text was secondary to establishing an accurate Latin translation (p. 15, n. 35; cf. pp. xiv–xv). Krans underlines the significance of the Greek text five hundred years later, but claims that ironically it was “not Erasmus' main concern” (p. 187). By a consideration of understudied elements of Erasmus's edition, Krans shows that Erasmus's chief goal was “deconstruction [and correction] of the Vulgate” (p. 205). Historically speaking, the Greek text had the last word (p. xviii). Rummel observes a crucial difference between the Complutensian Polyglot and Erasmus's edition: “[The former] corrected the Greek text on the basis of Greek manuscripts, the Latin Vulgate by collating Latin texts. ... Erasmus ... did not shy away from changing the Vulgate text on the basis of the Greek original” (p. 40), a much more radical approach at the time! On the subject of the connection to the Complutensian Polyglot, Ignacio García Pinilla proposes, in contrast to previous views and partly based on the analysis of readings in John, that Erasmus's New Testament was likely relying on the Polyglot.

Text critics have usually offered a negative assessment of Erasmus's work as a text critic, especially as his work helped shape the *Textus Receptus*, which such critics view as representing New Testament manuscripts of lesser worth. Patrick Andrist, by studying the “structure and history” of the

Greek manuscripts used by Erasmus, concludes that he employed “not five but up to eight biblical direct witnesses to the New Testament” (p. 124). Thus, Erasmus would have access to a greater variety of textual evidence. Brown offers a reassessment of the “textual character” of Erasmus’s Greek text; he offers a more positive picture of Erasmus as a textual critic partly by challenging the consensus about the Byzantine manuscripts and the criteria of the “shorter reading” and the “harder reading” (pp. 138–42). Krans advances a different view: though he acknowledges Erasmus to be an “astute” text critic, he considers that he got into difficulty by correcting the Latin Vulgate with the help of Byzantine manuscripts (pp. 203–6). Christine Christ-von Wedel uncovers the limitations of the Erasmus-Beza paradigm and the merits of later efforts of text critics such as Hugo Grotius and Jean Le Clerc (pp. 300–309). Though different opinions arise here, a more positive picture of Erasmus as text critic emerges.

The complexity of Erasmus’s relation to the Reformation is reflected in this volume. Rummel shows how Erasmus tempered his criticisms of the Catholic Church as the Reformation gained ground (p. 41). Silvana Seidel Menchi argues that Erasmus’s declining interest in translating the New Testament into the vernacular (expressed early in the *Paraclesis*) was not chiefly the result of accusations of heresy against him, but rather due to the success of the Reformation on this front (pp. 220–21). Marie Barral-Baron claims that Erasmus intended “a return of the Golden Age” through a biblical renewal with his 1516 New Testament, but that instead he unintentionally pushed the rift in the church that resulted in the Lutheran Reformation (pp. 253–54). Greta Kroeker shows, by contrast, how Erasmus impacted Catholic cardinals (e.g., Jacopo Sadoletto). Sundar Henny discusses the impact of Erasmus on Beza: though Beza was more open to the Semitic character of the New Testament than Erasmus, Beza relied on the authority of Erasmus’s Greek text for the church. Christ-von Wedel points to aspects of the Reformation in which Erasmus anticipated the Reformers (pp. 292–300).

*Basel 1516* is a must-read for those interested in Erasmus and his *Novum Testamentum*. It provides a one-stop compendium of up-to-date research, well grounded in previous scholarship and open to new vistas. It will be of interest not only to historians of the Renaissance and the Reformation, but also to New Testament scholars.

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Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman. *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of John Foxe's "Book of Martyrs."* Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xiii + 388.

This is a book about the making of another book. Normally this would excite no one—but this is about the creation of one of the most influential Christian books in the English language: Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. The life of this book is important; it has shaped not only the modern memory of the English Reformation but also the later accounts of martyrdom in English. Until now there has never been a deep study of the book—at least not to this extent—and so this offering by Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas Freeman is designed to fill that gap in history.

Those researching Tudor England or John Foxe will immediately recognize the names of Evenden and Freeman, as they have published on John Foxe, English history, and the formation of book culture in early modern England. The launching of Acts and Monuments Online (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/cics/support/hri-online>)—a free database with all editions of *Book of Martyrs* and a critical apparatus—has been an influential feature behind this book as well, as it is now the standard database for any scholar on the subject of Foxe and early modern England.

The eight chapters of the book follow an essentially chronological account of the making of the *Book of Martyrs*, though with several moments when the lens pulls back to see the book in its context. Chapter 1, for example, begins with the challenging world of book traders in sixteenth-century England. This chapter reveals how unique the influence of the *Book of Martyrs* would be, as the industry was focused on such a narrow slice of the populace—educated and literate persons. It was a “relatively backward industry” (p. 26), and so the creation of influential bestsellers running to multiple editions was an abnormality in early modern Europe.

Chapters 2 and 3 then focus on the men who would make the book, John Foxe and John Day. Foxe, of course, is the author and compiler of the material, and Day is the eventual publisher; both are evangelistically motivated, living first in the significant times of the Protestant Edward VI and the backlash under Catholic Mary I. The context and biographical pieces here are especially helpful in the sweep of the book, as it allows us to see not only the hands at work, but also some of the motivation behind those hands.

Chapters 4 through 8 and the conclusion then focus on the creation of the *Book of Martyrs*, both in terms of the sources Foxe used and the life of the book from its first edition in 1563 until its greatly expanded fourth

edition in 1583. One of the more intriguing portions is chapter 6, which looks at the woodcut illustrations in the book—many of which are still seen today, such as the execution of Tyndale. This chapter is a helpful reminder that the *Book of Martyrs* has had a visual legacy in later history as much as its words themselves.

Evenden and Freeman have written an exceptionally good book that is both readable and authoritative. It surpasses anything written on the subject until now—a rare feat. The book is obviously needed in scholarship, and Evenden and Freeman being so thorough in their analysis, their work should receive plenty of praise.

The book is especially strong on two key points: it has a tight thesis focusing on the creation of the *Book of Martyrs*, yet the authors do not limit themselves by simply sticking to the book itself. Along the way we learn countless things about the book industry, literacy in early modern England, the lives of Foxe and Day, and their connection to the wider Reformation. The only limitation of the book is that it is not for the novice or casual reader who lacks extraordinary interest in the subject: one needs at least basic familiarity with the Elizabethan world to read it through. This indirectly raises the question of the need for a popular presentation of Foxe's important book, as it is still in print and read today. But Evenden and Freeman cover the material so thoroughly that those who write on the *Book of Martyrs* will have this book as their guide.

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Christopher A. Daily. *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii + 261.

In *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China* Christopher Daily offers a fresh account to supplement the growing number of studies treating China's first Protestant missionary, the Presbyterian minister Robert Morrison (1782–1834). Eschewing the almost hagiographical tone of earlier, deliberately edifying biographies of the missionary, Daily's monograph is a work of critical scholarship not only in tone, but also in its divergence from the usual canon of Morrison material. Meticulously researched, and relying on previously unexplored archives, Daily tells the story of Morrison's undertaking in light of his training at the London Missionary Society's seminary of choice under the tutelage of David Bogue. Underlying Morrison's

success, Daily argues, was Bogue's prescient plan for the propagation of the gospel in heathen lands—a program followed to the letter by Morrison and his closest colleagues.

Chapter one tells the story of the first (failed) missionary endeavors of the Society, in which untrained men and women were sent to the South Pacific with assurances that their task of evangelization would be easily and almost inevitably successful. Against the advice of Bogue and other ministers, the London Missionary Society (LMS) naively assumed that a simple laborer from London or Lancaster was the ideal person to bring the gospel to the even more simple Pacific islander. The mission was an almost immediate disaster, with the result that the Society's leadership returned to Bogue with a new openness to his counsel.

Daily's account turns in the second chapter to a detailed study of Bogue's Gosport Academy and his multipart preparations and strategies for missions. For someone with almost no history of missions on which to draw himself, and no missionary experience, Bogue anticipated to a remarkable degree both the challenges evangelists would face and the potential work-arounds that a creative missionary could employ. Bogue's assessment of the missionary's character, gifts, and training was only deficient when it came to foreign language acquisition. While Bogue had sage advice for translators, including a specific template and a description of the tools and talents needed for translation, he grossly underestimated the difficulty that missionaries would experience in learning a language for which no lexical aids were available. Morrison followed his teacher's every step and eventually mastered Chinese; he also found himself agreeing with Bogue when he encountered biblical and theological concepts foreign to the Chinese and needed to decide when to coin a new term or, as he generally preferred, to pour new content into existing Chinese words—including words embedded with long associations with pagan philosophy and doctrine. Nonetheless, the process of learning the language was arduous beyond all that Bogue, or Morrison, had imagined.

The study of Bogue's seminary and his Protestant plan is, as the title suggests, the centerpiece of Daily's book. Certainly this focus on the prologue to the mission rather than the mission itself is the feature that distinguishes this book from so many lives of the great missionary pioneers. Daily's sustained reflection on the training behind the Morrison's endeavors may be of particular interest to those who continue to train missionaries today. Indeed, even as the narrative progresses, this foundational chapter is never far from sight, since the remainder of the book is one sustained demonstration that Bogue, not Morrison, is the genius behind the first missionary

movement to China. Indeed, it was Bogue's idea to send missionaries to China in the first place.

But perhaps the book could have been entitled the *Protestant Plans for China*, for there were tensions between Bogue's vision for mission work and the London Missionary Society's. Bogue's vision was fixed, the Society's more fluid. At the time that Morrison was set to depart for China, the LMS was hopeful that Western cultural superiority would awe the Chinese and make them more receptive to the teaching of Christian missionaries. The Society, accordingly, wished to supplement each missionary's training with a dose of scientific study and to supply outgoing missionaries with modern scientific instruments to impress their Asian audiences. Bogue never doubted the ascendancy of the British, or indeed of all Europeans, in matters cultural and educational, but insisted on the preeminent importance of language acquisition and translation for a successful mission and an enduring impact. Morrison was willing to accommodate the Society's vision, but chapter three explains that already on the voyage to China he began to doubt the utility of his continuing education in mathematics and science and, after finding these studies distracting, and then failing as an on-ship evangelist, gave himself over wholly to the language study he had already begun in London.

The remaining chapters offer an account of Morrison's work in China where (except for one visit home to England) he remained until his death. Woven into the narrative of hard work and slow progress is a second story, the gradual disintegration of his relationship with the Society. Upon arrival in China, Morrison discovered that it was illegal for the Chinese to teach Europeans the Chinese language, and a capital crime to print Christian literature in Chinese. Understandably, it was hard for Morrison to acquire and to retain language instructors. He frequently wrote home detailing his greatest difficulties, looking for encouragement and advice, but his sending agency was ill-acquainted with the benefits of mentoring its missionaries. Morrison's perseverance during these first years as a lone, unmarried man in a hostile country is a testimony to his dedication. Unlike the Dutch East India Company, the British East India Company (operating throughout much of Asia) was cold, even hostile to the spread of Christianity in its territories, and Morrison felt himself blessed to forge relationships with even a few company officers who assisted his work indirectly, and quietly. The continued lack of moral and financial support from the Society, which routinely ignored Morrison's letters and requests for help, sometimes for years at a time, contrasted sharply with the experience of the American missionaries that Morrison met, and from time to time the frustrated young missionary highlighted these differences in his letters home.

Morrison had attracted the attention of educated persons through his translations of Chinese classics into English, and he was eventually invited to serve as a translator for the East India Company. Bivocational ministry gave the newly married Morrison financial solvency and enabled him to further hone his language skills. But he felt keenly the political awkwardness of his position, attempting to reach the Chinese while an employee of the hated company. Work for the company was also time consuming and hampered his progress in missionary work. Nonetheless, in stages, Morrison was able to report success. With assistance, he translated the Bible into Chinese, along with other Christian works and linguistic aids. In partnership with another Bogue-educated minister he started a seminary for training additional missionaries, thus providing a self-perpetuating ministry led by Chinese pastors, a couple of whom became believers through his own witness and testimony. It was an impressive quarter-century of work, but Daily's monograph ends, appropriately, in a minor key. Morrison was deserted by the Society and died a discouraged man. The circumstances of his final years led his widow to defend his reputation and accomplishments in an adoring biography that remained the source for most book-length treatments of the missionary.

Daily's work is at times ponderous; key points are pressed for whole paragraphs where a line or two would have been sufficient. Nonetheless, his prose is easy to follow and his argument, that a missionary's accomplishments need to be appreciated in the context of the institution and individual(s) who trained him, is clear, and on the whole, persuasive. He shows little empathy for Eliza Morrison's account of her husband's person and work. On the whole, he is more successful in describing a school of training than in illuminating a man's life. Nonetheless, it is this emphasis on education that makes this study one of unique importance for those attentive to the history of Chinese-English relations, missions, and Bible translation.

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Marilynne Robinson. *The Givenness of Things: Essays*. London: Little, Brown, 2015. Pp. 293.

What is the best way to make a seminary professor happy, particularly one who teaches in a Reformed academy? It is to allow him to see the fruit of

the ministry of a graduate years into the former student's work in the local parish. The fruit varies: the gospel applied to poverty relief, souls and bodies being saved from darkness, healing in broken families, young people fired up by the Bible, and—why not?—a successful novelist whose stories and characters reflect the worldview of creation-fall-redemption without being tracts or sermons in disguise. In one of the essays in her collection *The Givenness of Things*, Marilynne Robinson describes herself as a beneficiary from seminary graduates. She doesn't quite put it this way. She praises the virtues of the Calvinist tradition of preaching, which are, or ought to be, at the center of any good seminary curriculum. She unashamedly describes attending her church and the Sunday experience of listening to this “extraordinary moment when someone attempts to speak in good faith, about something that matters, to people who attempt to listen in good faith” (p. 146). When properly delivered the good sermon gives meaning to all of life.

At the seminary where I teach we don't quite explain preaching this way to our homiletics students. But maybe we should. Robinson goes on to describe the heart of a good sermon as wisdom, *sapientia Dei*, which guides the faithful into such sobering truths as the brevity and the beauty of this life. As we begin to sense our utter frailty, let's say listening to a sermon on Isaiah 40 (“all flesh is as grass”), we then can better grasp how unlikely it is that we have been called to live in eternity with God. She goes on to decry the American call to “relevance” in preaching, or anywhere, not because whatever trend or innovation of the moment is bound to become obsolete, which it will, but for the simple reason that it lacks wisdom. And wisdom tells us in many different ways how, despite our myriad weaknesses, we are significant and why we should behave that way. Why are we significant? Simply because we are loved, subjects of the grace of God.

Nothing revolutionary here—or is there? We so want to put religion in a box—to explain it away, to make it “relevant” or defend it from the evidences—that we end up losing the complete wonder of God's forgiveness. And in so doing we disconnect from mystery, a reality significantly absent from Western culture. We need better apologetics, the kind that can only be nurtured through fine sermons.

They are rare, but they do exist. In every generation there are Christian apologists who do more than defend the faith. They persuade. Defenders are adept with proofs, evidences, arguments that appeal to our reasoning ability. When they are good, we listen and say, “You are right, I give up.” Persuaders are adept with the unexpected, with human depth, with imagination. When they are good, we listen and say, “You are right, I'm in love.” Defenses come from argument. Persuasion comes from wisdom. We need

both defenders and persuaders, but there is a dearth of good persuaders.

They do exist. In ancient times we can think of Saint Augustine, particularly his *Confessions*, a book as powerful today as it was when first written (A.D. 397–400). He invites you into his soul and divulges his most intimate secrets, many of them dark. But he prays out loud throughout, and you are drawn in, you begin praying with him. Scripture quotes are so abundant you don't quite know when it is Augustine or the Bible speaking. In our own time we might think of Francis Spufford, especially his *Unapologetic* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013). The full title gives something of the flavor of what follows: *Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*. It's not a therapy book, but a presentation of the gospel from places we are not expecting. Os Guinness is yet another, with his resourceful study of the art of persuasion itself: *Fool's Talk* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

These persuasive approaches do not side-step biblical orthodoxy. Many books do that these days, waffling on the book of Genesis or the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. Instead, the good persuader embraces the historic Christian position hook, line, and sinker, as Americans like to say—in other words, without reservation. Robinson is just such an apologist. I am reasonably certain she would not enjoy the title. But that is what she is. It happens that a substantial part of her oeuvre is fiction. She is a superb novelist, having given us *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008), and *Lila* (2014), a trilogy about the fictional town of Gilead, in the Midwest of the United States. And there is a good deal of nonfiction as well, on subjects ranging from welfare to modern thought to the joys of reading. She has won all kinds of literary awards, and has a host of admirers, including President Obama, a personal friend.

I mention this because to begin with, Robinson is a marvelous wordsmith. Much of our prose is linear, repeating the sequence of subject-verb-object, subject-verb-object. Some prose is overly labored, dense, crowded. Robinson's is elegant, fluid, artistic. Her words serve the content, not the other way round. That is, she is certain of her ideas and thus only needs the right words to set them forth. To pick just one example from many: in one of her discussions of the grandeur of mankind, she counters the positivist view that we are but chemicals. In most ways, these pseudo-scientists argue, the brain is nothing but a piece of meat. Robinson answers simply enough at first. Calling the brain meat is absurd. But then she goes on: "More to the point, what is meat? Complex life. And what is that? The universe's greatest mystery. It is meat that sings and flies and fledges, meat that makes civilizations and pulls them down ..." (p. 230). You won't find such prose in most ordinary defenses of the Christian faith.

And just as important, Robinson knows people. Her exquisite novel *Lila* describes a homeless woman who falls in love with a minister, himself a lonely widower who preaches about life, death, and suffering in ways she had not dared bring to the surface. Through him and through many trials she finds a home. In a way, all of the essays in the present collection are a defense of finding our home. Being human, despite the circumstances—or, rather, often, because of them—means we have significance way beyond the visible, way beyond our circumstances. Her arsenal includes literature from a good many places. She cites Pico della Mirandola, who advocated *On the Dignity of Man* in the fifteenth century, based on his capacity for happiness, a quality which makes other creatures envious, including animals and stars (p. 302). She loves the Lollards and other pre-Reformers. She has a special fondness for John Calvin, with whom she constantly interacts. She persistently quotes from his *Institutes*, protesting that we would love Calvin more if we read him rather than Max Weber. In her remarkable essay “Fear,” she reminds the readers that those who stand in Calvin’s tradition were so courageous they would sacrifice their lives and fortunes for loyalty to God’s will in the face of persecutors who arguably possessed the ultimate weapon: the fear of heresy. In what must be understood as a jibe against certain contemporary politicians in America, she suggests, “If someone had asked a citizen of Lyon, on his way to help exterminate the Calvinists, to explain what he and his friends were doing, he would no doubt have said that he was taking back his city, taking back his culture, taking back his country, fighting for the soul of France” (p. 127).

Robinson’s first love, after Scripture, and after Calvin, is no doubt Shakespeare. The subject of her doctoral dissertation, she knows his works intimately and is able to draw on them for many of the principles she is busy supporting. Her justification for grace comes from various places in Shakespeare. She cites Prospero’s words to his wretched brother, Antonio, in *The Tempest*, Act V: “For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother / Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive / Thy rankest faults—all of them.” If you know this drama, you will remember Antonio has schemed to commandeer Prospero’s title and cause his death and the death of his child. The perfect pretext for revenge? But no, Prospero extends his mercy, though never obscuring his crimes. Similarly, if “simple human forgiveness” entitled Laertes and Hamlet to pass into eternity “as if the madness of earth had never contrived to make them enemies,” how much more the grace of God toward every repentant pagan and infidel? (pp. 44–48).

Robinson loves both the Renaissance and the Reformation. The glory of the Renaissance was Humanism—not in the modern, pejorative godless,

man-centered sense, but what was meant by the term in the fifteenth century, the devoted attention to humane letters and their timeless value. The glory of the Reformation was its concern to make the deepest matters of theology accessible and understandable to the simplest creature. “The bookishness of the Reformation,” she says, “might be said to have generalized itself to become an expectation of legibility in the whole of Creation” (p. 23). And in the bargain, the church tradition that reserved biblical interpretation to the specialists was demolished. Both the Renaissance and the Reformation were, in their different ways, a defense of the human being, every one of them, against oppressive hierarchies.

These essays are a wealth of learned meditations on a large variety of subjects from astrophysics to slavery. They contain surprisingly creative presentations of the classic Christian doctrines, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the sovereignty of God. But if there is any center, any theme that surfaces over and over, it is indeed the dignity of the human being. That nobility found in the human creature cannot have been contrived. Instead it had to be revealed:

Where would we be if the Hebrew God had not said and insisted that human beings share his image and are sanctified by it? Do we have any other secure basis for belief in universal human dignity? There is no evidence at all that this is anything we know intuitively. (p. 170)

Understandably, then, Robinson loves Psalm 8, where the question of man’s identity is raised in the context of the starry heavens and their magnificence. Robinson has gazed into the heavens more than most, so her conclusions are the more impressive. And she realizes full well that our human majesty, called to rule the earth, has become perverted by the fall. Greatness cuts both ways. We are capable not only of creating but of unspeakable destruction. And yet, at the end of the day, or perhaps the end of history, the truth remains that “God is a given, the God of the psalmist and of Jesus” (p. 256). This givenness, the overall title of these essays, is the only assurance that we have dignity.

To train ministers who can preach wisdom to such an articulate Christian makes the career of this particular seminary professor entirely worthwhile.

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## Students Enrollment 2017

Programme

Bachelor of Theology  
Master of Theology  
Doctor of Theology

Documents Submission

*1<sup>st</sup> Period*

**December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

*2<sup>nd</sup> Period*

**March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017**

*3<sup>rd</sup> Period*

**July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

*Successful applicant's entrance  
test and Interview session will  
be informed by phone or email  
by the registrar.*



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## CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR *UNIO CUM CHRISTO*

The editorial committee invites the submission of articles (7000 words maximum including footnotes) for future issues of the journal. Articles should be rooted in the Reformed faith and its confessional texts, and aim to be informative, edifying, missional in perspective, and relevant to current challenges facing the Christian faith worldwide.

We would like to encourage theologians (including research students) and pastor-theologians, particularly from countries in the developing world, to submit articles on issues relevant to the role of Reformed theology in their national and cultural contexts, and also book reviews.

We would also be pleased to consider texts translated into English that have already been published in journals in other languages.

Submissions will be peer reviewed before acceptance.

Upcoming numbers of the journal will present the following general themes:

- 2017/1 Luther and the Early Reformation
- 2017/2 Luther, Calvin and the Reformed Tradition
- 2018/1 Current Debates in Reformed Theology - Doctrine
- 2018/2 Current Debates in Reformed Theology - Practice
- 2019/1 Old Testament Studies
- 2019/2 Ethics and Apologetics

Dates of submission of completed articles are six months before the appearance of the journal in April and October.

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*

The 2016/2 issue of *Unio cum Christo* will be accessible free online at [www.uniocc.com](http://www.uniocc.com) in March 2016. The subsequent issue, 2017/1, will be posted online in September 2017. The two issues in 2017 will be devoted to the theme of Luther and the Magisterial Reformation. Contributions are invited.

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