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Patristic Exegesis: Reading Scripture in the Eucharistic Gathering

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I. An Enlightened Reading?

"Hunting truth is no easy task; we must look everywhere for its tracks."[1] With these words, Basil, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea, introduces his work *On the Holy Spirit*. These words reveal a hermeneutic that guides Basil's approach to the Spirit's divinity and governs his reading of the Scriptures. Theological truth is neither something the ignorant stumble upon by accident, nor an obvious object that everyone recognizes. Rather, theological truth must be hunted. The hunter is neither an unbiased observer nor a disinterested spectator. The skilled hunter already knows what he seeks; he enters the woods with a definite prejudice, that is, with a preconceived notion of what to look for in the hunt. The skilled hunter knows not only his prey—its shape, color, and form—but also the signs and patterns of its existence. He recognizes the impressions in his surroundings that signify its hidden presence. For Basil of Caesarea, the reading of the Scriptures will bear no fruit unless the reader's senses have been trained in what to look for in the Scriptures.

Basil's statement caused no controversy in the fourth century; indeed, such a perspective was taken for granted in the ancient church by both orthodox and heretical readers. Basil's statement does, however, express precisely the kind of perspective that has received severe critique among modernist readers.[2] Beginning with the Enlightenment, the reading of the Scriptures has been subjected to a scientific discipline, and above all else the scientific method has sought to eliminate the biases and prejudices of

[1] St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 16.

[2] Cf. especially Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Peter Schouls, *The Imposition of Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Isaiah Berlin, *The Great Ages of Western Philosophy,* vol. 4: *The Age of Enlightenment* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1957).

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the scientist. At the heart of the Enlightenment was the conviction that the scientific method is the one and only way to a firm, unshakable, and secure truth. The scientific method grounds this truth in the object of its study and, therefore, claims to offer an "objective truth." The adjective "objective" refers to the kind of truth that consists in those facts that reside in the object itself—its substance and its observable existence. The scientific method offers a distinctly material truth—one that can be measured, quantified, and systematized; it offers a truth that is independent of any observation and external to all human engagement. The scientist claims to be a *tabula rasa*, one who has cleansed his senses—the tools that enable scientific observation—of all preconceptions and prejudices in order to allow the object to speak for itself.

The scientific method began as a necessity for the natural sciences and for the study of objects that existed outside of humanity. It is, however, the distinctive character of the Enlightenment that the method of discovery in the natural sciences became the method of choice for the discovery of all truth in every area of study, whether in other sciences or in the humanities.[3] The causes of this rise to prominence are perhaps many;[4] a chief cause, however, must be a distrust of church hierarchies and the apparatus of tradition as a viable avenue for the delivery of truth. For Enlightenment thinkers, tradition consisted in a prejudice that prevented objects from speaking for themselves; tradition was the means by which objective data had been distorted by biased, self-serving, and unenlightened interpreters. This assumption was well received by many Protestant theologians, for whom the language of tradition betrayed Romanist sympathies.[5]

The Enlightenment's rejection of tradition, however, was more profound than that of most Protestant reformers. The Lutheran articulation of *sola scriptura* was originally an attempt to preserve the ancient and authentic tradition of the early church. For the early Lutherans, the true tradition consisted in the person of Christ himself, who was handed over by the Father, in the Spirit, for the salvation of the world. The true tradition

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[3] For this discussion, I am indebted to Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*.

[4] Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, 8, mentions the simple seductiveness of scientific success.

[5] Cf. Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, trans. Bailey Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 268–281. Here Harnack offers a mainly positive evaluation of Protestantism, especially its rejection of "all formal and external authority in religion . . . all traditional arrangements for public worship, all ritualism" (278), and finally, "sacramentalism" (279). Harnack's search for the original element of Jesus' message is clearly colored by an anti-catholic, anti-tradition prejudice.

is identified precisely with the gospel itself enacted at the church's font, pulpit, and altar. In other words, while specific teachings of the medieval church were rejected, tradition as an avenue or method by which truth is transmitted remained largely intact.

While Protestant reformers sought to correct false traditions, the Enlightenment took a more pessimistic view and sought a more wholesale rejection of tradition itself. Tradition as the act of transmission in which Christ is handed over by the Father in the Spirit through the *kerygmatic* and sacramental life of the church was hopelessly biased. Tradition as an avenue for truth was tainted by human involvement and could not be trusted; the church's catechesis could claim no objectivity and, therefore, no scientific validity. If the authentic meaning of the Scriptures was to be discovered, then original texts had to be quarantined from the prejudices of the church's sacramental life and subjected to a more objective and scientific reading. Historical criticism claimed to offer just such a reading. Tradition as the path by which scriptural meaning is carried from the past into the present was replaced by a "scientific" method. Instead of the transmission of truth through the church's mystagogy, historical criticism claimed the ability to access ancient texts without the biased mediation of the church.

The development of a scientific method by which ancient documents and cultures could be studied encouraged the study of the Bible apart from the church's sacramental life. The Bible was moved from the lectern, pulpit, and altar into the library and lecture hall of academia. Scientific methods promised to expose the objective meanings hidden in ancient texts and to define the "kernel" of Christian truth.[6] Such a "kernel" of truth could only be exposed if the superfluous husk were stripped and cast aside. Miracles, supernatural events, authoritative doctrines, and mystical rituals were all victims of the historical critic's shucking of the Christian cob. For such modernist readers, the miraculous narrative of the Bible was merely a metaphor authored by an ancient, non-scientific, and superstitious humanity. The modernist reader sought to use scientific methods to trace metaphorical literature to the natural religious "feeling" that lay within the consciousness of the author. Through the historical-

[6] Cf. Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 55, who emphasizes the importance of "the historian's task of distinguishing between what is traditional and what is peculiar, between kernel and husk." The kernel Harnack seeks is that which is peculiar to Jesus' message, while the traditional is the external husk that can be discarded.

critical method, the reader sought to accomplish an "imaginative leap"[7] over the wall of ecclesial tradition into the mind of first-century authors hopelessly in bondage to unenlightened ways of thinking.

The influence of the Enlightenment is revealed not only in the historical critic, but also in the fundamentalist, whose critique usually points to the naturalism of modernist readers as itself a prejudice producing a biased interpretation. In other words, it could be said that, for fundamentalists, the historical-critical reading is not "scientific" enough. Despite their disagreements, historical-critical and fundamentalist readers share an important assumption. Seduced by the successes of the natural sciences, they both value the scientific method and seek to employ it in their reading of the Bible. Both seek to uncover an "objective truth" that inheres in the material text—a truth independent of the reader and visible to anyone, whether pagan or Christian. For the fundamentalist, the objective truth is limited to the text itself and the historicity of the events it narrates. Such an objective, material, and historical truth can be defined and summarized by any reader regardless of personal faith. A relationship to the church or engagement with its tradition is no longer necessary to read and understand the Bible. Fundamentalists thus tend to restrict the inspiration of the Scriptures to the original author and the production of the text, while for the New Testament and the early fathers the doctrine of the Spirit's inspiration applied more broadly to both the production of the text and its reception in the church.[8] For fundamentalist readers, inspiration allows the text to be seen as an immediate revelation of God independent of the subjectivity of its transmission through human writers and hearers. Inspiration functions as a way of protecting sacred texts from tradition, that is, from the unenlightened prejudices of its original hearers.

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[7] Cf. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, 12–35, where he uses this language to describe the Romantic method for interpreting ancient cultures. Louth roots this method in Voltaire and Spinoza. Voltaire's "good sense" (*le bon sens*) accepted what was credible according to modern man's sensibilities, but rejected the incredible. Spinoza, however, calls the reader to refrain from a hasty rejection of the incredible. Louth writes, "Spinoza called for an act of imaginative conjecture whereby we try to see the world through the eyes of the ancients who describe a world that seems so strange to us" (12). Thus, for Spinoza, when one encounters what is credible to our modern sensibilities, it can simply be accepted. When, however, one encounters what is incredible (miracles, etc.), then the reader, rather than discard it immediately, attempts to imagine the natural religious feeling or idea that underlies the metaphor. For Louth, this progression continues in the Romantics, who applied Spinoza's "imaginative leap" to every text and author regardless of its credibility.

[8] 1 Cor 2:6–16 is an example of a text in which the Spirit is as active in its hearing as he is in its production.

While fundamentalist readers are content with the text itself, liberal readers recognize the human subjectivity, prejudice, and bias inherent in the Bible. Historical-critical readers recognize that scriptural texts exist as acts of tradition, which colors their form and meaning. In order to access the truly scientific kernel of the Christian message, a kernel independent of the prejudices of an unenlightened humanity, the historical critic seeks to move behind texts to the religious feeling or consciousness of the writer. Both historical-critical and conservative readers thus employ the scientific method to acquire an objective meaning in the Bible. This objective meaning is defined in two ways. First, it is untainted by human subjectivity and the apparatus of tradition. Both parties possess a fundamental distrust of the later church, treating its councils, traditions, and rituals as external husks that hide the pure kernel of the Christian message. Second, the objective meaning is independent of the reader. For both critics and conservatives, the meaning of the text is confined to the past; meaning is located in the purity of the text's original production. The discovery of such an original meaning demands a reader with a blank slate, a reader emptied of biases who can let the original message speak for itself.

Much more could be said about the effects of the Enlightenment on the reading of the Bible. Our brief journey can be summarized in two points. First, the scientific conquest of the humanities and the reading of sacred texts changed the ontology of the Bible itself. Since the Enlightenment, the Bible ceased to be the living communication of God for his church and was interpreted as a material artifact testifying to the religious sensibilities of an ancient culture. Second, the application of the scientific method to the reading of the Scriptures has changed the position and role of the reader. The scientific method depends upon the objective and external position of the scientist, and so its adoption places the reader outside the text; the meaning of the Bible is objective in the sense that the reader has no involvement or engagement with it. The enlightened exegete purges his eyes of all prejudices and sees only what is objective, historical, and sure; mystical, spiritual, and devotional readings are excluded *a priori*.

II. Patristic Exegesis: Eucharist as Natural Habitat for the Bible

For the early Christians, the reading of the Bible was a liturgical act. The gathering of the church in a certain place to enact the Eucharist was *the* condition for the reading of the Bible.[9] "And on the day called Sunday,"

[9] The church defined dynamically as the gathering of the baptized for the Eucharist is a hallmark of early Christian literature. See 1 Cor 11:17–20, 33; *Didache* 9.4; and Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 4–5; *Magn.* 7; *Phld.* 8.

writes Justin Martyr, "all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. . . ." (*1 Apol.* 67). For Justin, Baptism incorporated one into that gathering where the Scriptures were read and the Eucharist was given. As the condition for the reading of the Bible, the ecclesial gathering established a fundamental unity between the reading of the Scriptures and the administration of the Lord's Supper. Neither the Eucharist nor the Scriptures could be engaged properly without the other. This interdependence is evident at the end of Luke's Gospel. In Luke 24, Jesus' "opening" (διανοίγω) of the Scriptures (24:32) is associated with the "opening" of the disciples' eyes (24:31) in the breaking of the bread so that they can see Jesus; it also accompanies the "opening" of the disciples' minds (24:45) so that they can understand the Scriptures.[10] The gathering of the church is the assembly of the baptized—those whose minds and eyes have been opened by the Spirit.

For the early Christians, the Eucharist reverses the first sin and challenges the devil's claim that his food will open the eyes of humanity. Early Christians noted the role of the physical senses in the fall of mankind. In turning his face toward the devil, Adam experienced a dulling of the senses; he had eyes but could not see, ears but could not hear. It was as if sinful man could only see in two dimensions; the spiritual, divine dimension could no longer be sensed, seen, or experienced. As Maximus the Confessor, a seventh-century defender of Chalcedon, puts it:

> Adam did not pay attention to God with the eye of the soul, he neglected this light, and willingly, in the manner of a blind man, felt the rubbish of matter with both his hands in the darkness of ignorance, and inclined and surrendered the whole of himself to the senses alone. Through this he took into himself the corruptive venom of the most bitter of wild beasts, and did not benefit from his senses apart from God. (*Difficulty* 10.28)

For the early Christians, the eucharistic gathering of the baptized consisted in those whose senses had been retrained to see and hear the theological, christological, and spiritual dimensions present in, with, and under the Scriptures. The baptismal and eucharistic life was thus indispensable for

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[10] In Luke 24, three "openings" occur. First, in 24:31, the eyes of the Emmaus disciples are opened in the breaking of the bread. Second, in 24:32, the Emmaus disciples comment on how their hearts burned as Jesus "opened" the Scriptures to them. Finally, in 24:45, Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." For Luke, the opening of the tomb is only recognized in the church, where Christ is revealed in the Scriptures and the meal to open-minded disciples. It is perhaps significant that the opening of the eyes in the meal precedes the understanding of the Scriptures.

the reading of the Scriptures and was intended to shape the way such texts were heard. Conversely, the Scriptures were likewise indispensable for the church's participation in the Lord's Supper and were meant to influence the way it was received.[11]

How did the reading of the Bible and the administration of the Lord's Supper affect one another within the liturgical gathering of the church? For the ancient church, the eucharistic gathering was the place in which the Scriptures could live and move and have their being. The sanctuary was the habitat in which the Bible could roam most naturally, in prayer, praise, love, and eucharistic fellowship. Reading the Scriptures in the academy is like observing wild animals behind bars in the safety of a zoo. Reading the Scriptures in the liturgical assembly, on the other hand, is like interacting with the same animals on safari. In the manmade prison, the lion can be observed without fear of consequence; it can be studied objectively; even little children turn their backs on such a lion and happily walk away. On safari, however, in its natural habitat, the lion is engaged on a completely different level; the lion is experienced in accordance with the fear, awe, and humility it inspires. The observer cannot remain objective, but must be conscious of his own vulnerability. In the same way, the historical critic reads the Bible in the classroom objectively, that is, without personal engagement. In the academy, the Bible loses its teeth and its danger; it can be read without fear and without consequence to one's life. In contrast, the eucharistic assembly allows the Bible free rein to rebuke, inspire, correct, judge, and create. Such a gathering, therefore, is the context in which the Scriptures are heard properly and according to their true purpose. In other words, the eucharistic gathering is the home in which the Scriptures can be themselves—the living Word of the Father received in the Spirit.

III. Irenaeus: Baptism, Virgin Birth, and the Ebionites

What is new about the New Testament? What precisely is the change that is effected between the covenant made with Moses and the new

[11] It is the eucharistic assembly as the condition for the reading of the Scriptures that allows Ignatius of Antioch to make his famous rebuke. Some Judaizing opponents were saying that "they do not believe it in the Gospel unless it is found in the archives [OT]." Ignatius retorts, "But for me, the archives [OT] are Jesus Christ and the inviolable archives are his cross and death and resurrection and the faith that comes through him" (*Phld.* 8). Two components are expressed in Ignatius's statement. First, the Scriptures are identified with Christ himself; second, they are identified with the evangelical narrative of Christ's passion. The Scriptures thus have both ontological and narrative dimensions, which for Ignatius are rooted in the eucharistic gathering where the Scriptures are read (narrative dimension) and the Lord's Supper is administered (ontological dimension).

covenant in Jesus' blood? These questions express the fundamental issue that confronted early Christians. Yet the struggle to answer such questions was not limited to the realm of hermeneutical theory or philosophical discussion; rather, such questions were felt at the very heart of the church's life and consisted in her struggle to understand her own Christian identity. No one could undergo Baptism in the ancient world without experiencing a fundamental break with his past—his family, his pagan or Jewish heritage. Yet how was such a break, the experience of such a discontinuity, to be understood?

Irenaeus entered this struggle for Christian identity in the latter half of the second century. He engaged this theological debate with an impressive pedigree: he was catechized by the famed martyr Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of the apostle John. Following a violent and brutal persecution around AD 177, Irenaeus became the new bishop of Lyons and governed its congregations through the end of the second century. His episcopal tenure was defined principally by his struggle with the heresies of Valentinus and his successors. In his *magnum opus*, however, the five books collected under the title *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus engages not only Valentinian and Marcionite teachings but also the distinctive character of the Ebionite perspective.[12]

The Ebionites were the second-century children of Paul's opponents; they represented a Christian Judaism that refused to ascribe any change or development to the Mosaic Law. The Ebionites preached Christ as a repristinating figure who restored the Torah to its pristine purity. In this context, the Ebionite hostility toward the virgin birth becomes understandable. The Ebionites asserted the generation of Jesus in the normal way through the natural union of Joseph and Mary. The Ebionite rejection of the virgin birth, however, proceeded not from a skeptical mind, but from a larger theological agenda. The virgin birth represented a fundamental change, and therefore distortion, of God's original intent manifested in creation, marriage, and natural generation.[13] From the

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[12] This work has come down to us chiefly in Latin translation, only isolated fragments remaining in the original Greek, to which I have referred here wherever possible. The translation used is that of Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 1885–1887 (Repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 1.

[13] Cf. the insightful discussion of Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 61–64. Brown points out that in the second century, Judaism and Christianity were experiencing "an irreparable parting of the ways," a

Ebionite perspective, humanity was defined in its original purity as a stable genealogy, in which fathers generate children through women. Humanity is intended by God to proceed from the marital union and its procreative power.[14] The Ebionites rejected the virgin birth because it contradicted the early chapters of Genesis. Their rejection amounted to a stubborn refusal to ascribe any change to God's original relationship with humanity or any real newness to the New Testament.

On the other hand, the Valentinian interpretation of the virgin birth followed a fundamentally different path. While Ebionite teaching refused to allow any newness to infiltrate the natural order of human generation, Valentinians and Marcionites employed the virgin birth to exclude the material flesh from Christ's spiritual identity. Thus, Irenaeus describes such interpreters as those "who allege that he (the Word) took nothing from the Virgin" (μηδὲν εἰληφέναι ἐκ τῆς παρθένου).[15] The virgin birth represented a spiritual birth that transcended the flesh, abrogated marriage, and repudiated the material generation that belongs to the inferior realm of the Old Testament God. At one extreme, the Ebionites rejected the virgin birth and the discontinuity between Christianity and the Torah it implied. At the other extreme, Valentinians and Marcionites used the virgin birth to proclaim the radical newness of Christ, a newness that excluded marriage and its fleshly generation from the Gnostics' spiritual identity.

In this polemical context, Irenaeus seeks to accomplish two goals in his interpretation of the virgin birth. First, against his Valentinian and Marcionite opponents, Irenaeus must demonstrate that the virgin birth supports a real, fleshly continuity between Christ and Adam. Irenaeus

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divergence which, Brown maintains, surrounded "the issue of marriage and continence" (61).

[14] Brown cites *Babylonian Talmud: Yebamoth* 63b, trans. W. Slotki (New York: Traditional Press, 1983), 426: "He who does not engage in procreation of the race is as though he sheds human blood," and *Midrash Rabba: Genesis* 21.9, trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 179: "When Adam saw that his offspring were fated [through his fall] to be consigned to Gehenna, he refrained from procreation. But when he saw that . . . Israel would accept the Law, he applied himself to producing descendents" (cited in Brown, *Body and Society*, 63). Following the destruction of the temple, rabbis rose to prominence defining Judaism as a religion of the book and placing Jewish communities on the stable foundation of marriage, procreation, and the Law. These currents flowing from Jewish rabbis also coursed through Ebionite communities and informed their reading of Scripture.

[15] *Haer*. 3.22.1; cf. *Haer*. 3.16.1, where Irenaeus describes the Valentinian perspective on the virgin birth in terms of Jesus being he "who passed through Mary (*qui per Mariam transierit*)."

expresses this continuity in a truly imaginative and creative reading of Genesis 2.

> For as by one man's disobedience sin entered, and death took possession through sin; so also by the obedience of one man, righteousness having been introduced, shall cause life to fructify (*vitam fructificet*) in those who in times past were dead. And as the first-formed (*protoplastus*), Adam himself, had his substance (*substantiam*) from untilled and as yet virgin soil (*de rudi terra et de adhuc virgine*), "for God had not yet sent rain, and man had not tilled the ground. . . ." So he who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in himself (*recapitulans in se Adam*), rightly received a birth from Mary, who was yet a virgin. (*Haer.* 3.21.10)

In this passage, Irenaeus's typical way of interpreting the Scriptures is on display. For most modern exegetes, Irenaeus's reading seems dubious because it is difficult to imagine that Moses intends the "untilled soil" mentioned in Genesis 2 to be a prophecy of the virgin birth. For Irenaeus, however, the meaning of the text is not located simply in the original intent of the author but in Christ and the fourfold Gospel that narrates the salvific economy of his passion. Irenaeus thus starts with the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth and allows these accounts to enlighten aspects of the Old Testament previously unnoticed.

Irenaeus's reading of Genesis 2 certainly roots the virgin birth in the earthy soil of creation against Valentinian and Marcionite teachers, yet it also challenges the Ebionite rejection of the virgin birth as something foreign to the Mosaic Law. Irenaeus continues:

> If, then, the first Adam had a man for his father, and was born of human seed (ἐκ σπέρματος ἐγεννήθη), it were reasonable to say that the second Adam was begotten of Joseph. But if the former was taken from the dust (ἐκ γῆς ἐλήφθη), and God was his Maker (πλάστης), it was incumbent that the latter also, making a recapitulation in himself, should be formed as man by God, to have a likeness of generation (τῆς γεννήσεως ἔχειν ὁμοιότητα) with the former. Why, then, did God not take dust again, but worked so that the formation (τὴν πλάσιν) should be made of Mary? It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should be saved, but that the very same formation should be recapitulated, preserving the likeness (τηρουμένης τῆς ὁμοιότητος). (*Haer.* 3.21.10)

For Irenaeus, Jesus' substantial unity with Adam is revealed in the "likeness" of their origins. Against the Ebionites, who define humanity as a natural, paternal genealogy, Irenaeus demonstrates that Adam himself—the very icon of what it means to be human—was brought forth without a

human father. Thus, the virgin birth neither undermines the reality of Jesus' humanity, nor is it a generation that is alien to the ancient Torah.

For Irenaeus, the Ebionites' idolization of the beginning—Genesis, marriage, and its generative power—prevents them from ascribing any real newness to the Christian life. Marriage, procreation, and the Torah must neither be repudiated as belonging to an inferior god, nor idolized as an end in itself. Irenaeus's reading of the virgin birth demonstrates not only a substantial continuity between the testaments, but also a real change or growth from the old to the new.

These two emphases—continuity and newness—are certainly evident in Irenaeus's interpretation of the virgin birth. While maintaining a real continuity on the level of substance, Irenaeus asserts the fundamental newness of birth manifested in Jesus' generation from Mary.

> But again, those who assert that he was merely human, generated from Joseph, persevering in the bondage of the old disobedience, are in a state of death, not commingling with the Word of God the Father (*nondum commixti Verbo Dei Patris*). . . . Not receiving the incorruptible Word, they persevere in mortal flesh (*perseverant in carne mortali*) and are debtors to death, refusing the antidote of life (*antidotum vitae*). . . . Such ones [Ebionites] do not accept the gift of sonship (τὴν δωρεὰν τῆς υἱοθεσίας), but despise the fleshly character of the pure generation of the Word of God (σάρκωσιν τῆς καθαρᾶς γεννήσεως τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ), defraud humanity of the ascending way into God (τῆς εἰς Θεὸν ἀνόδου), and become ungrateful (ἀχαριστοῦντας) to the Word of God, who on their behalf became flesh. For to this end, the Word of God became human and the Son of God was made the Son of man, in order that humanity having passed into the Word (τὸν λόγον χωρήσας) and receiving sonship might become a son of God. (*Haer.* 3.19.1)

For Irenaeus, the virgin birth is more than merely an event in the historical narrative of Jesus; it is a theological sign that manifests the essence of the gospel and God's will for the human race. The Ebionite rejection of the virgin birth means that they choose to "persevere" in that old generation that stems from Adam and his sin.[16] For Irenaeus, the virgin birth manifests a fundamentally new kind of generation that is now opened up

[16] Irenaeus makes the same point in *Haer.* 5.1.3: "Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man, but who remain in the old leaven of natural birth." He continues his argument with eucharistic language: "Therefore do these men reject the commixture of heavenly wine, and wish it to be water of the world only, not receiving God so as to have union with him, but they remain in that Adam who had been conquered and was expelled from Paradise."

to the whole of humanity.[17] In the womb of Mary, human flesh and blood experiences something unprecedented. The virgin birth is the means by which humanity is assumed into an internal relationship with the Son of God. By denying the virgin birth, Irenaeus's opponents are denying not only God's birth from a human mother, but also humanity's birth from the divine Father.

Irenaeus's interpretation of the virgin birth is intimately connected to his experience of Baptism. The virgin birth represents a new mode of generation in which the church now lives and moves and has her being. On the level of substance, it is certainly one and the same humanity that is brought forth from virgin soil in the beginning and from Mary's womb in the end; through the virgin birth, however, human flesh and blood experiences a fundamentally new and absolutely unprecedented relationship to God. In creation, humanity was generated by the will of God; in the fall, humanity was generated from Adam's sinful will and subjected to corruption. In the virgin birth, however, humanity is incorporated into the divine Logos himself, shares in his divine generation from the Father, and experiences a new mode of existence that conquers the grave. Irenaeus writes:

> He (the Christian) will judge also the Ebionites; for how can they be saved unless it was God who wrought out their salvation upon earth? Or how shall man pass into God (*homo transiet in Deum*), unless God has passed into man? And how shall he escape from the generation subject to death (*mortis generationem*), if not by means of a new generation (*novam generationem*), given in a wonderful and unexpected manner (but as a sign of salvation) by God—that regeneration which flows from the virgin through faith (*ex Virgine per fidem regenerationem*)? Or how shall they receive sonship from God if they remain in this kind of generation (*permanent in hoc genesi*), which is naturally possessed by man in this world? (*Haer.* 4.33.4)

For Irenaeus, the virgin birth is not a solitary event limited to the past; rather, through the virgin birth, God has inaugurated a new kind of generation that continues to be experienced in the church's baptismal life. In this way, the virgin birth gives Irenaeus's understanding of Baptism a horizontal and narrative dimension, and the sacrament of Baptism gives his interpretation of the virgin birth a vertical, mystical, and ecclesial significance.

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[17] Another parallel to the above passage revealing the sacramental interpretation of the virgin birth is found in *Haer.* 4.33.11. Here Irenaeus describes the virgin birth as "the pure one opening purely that pure womb which regenerates men unto God and which he himself made pure."

Interpreting the virgin birth as a baptismal narrative compels Irenaeus to describe Jesus' generation from Mary as a regeneration of the human race. It is this baptismal perspective that leads Irenaeus to offer a unique and truly creative interpretation of Luke's genealogy.

> Wherefore Luke points out . . . the pedigree which traces the generation of our Lord back to Adam. . . . And the prophet, too, indicates the same, saying, "Instead of fathers, children have been born unto you" (Ps 45:17). For the Lord, having been born (*natus*) "the first-begotten of the dead," and receiving into his bosom the ancient fathers (*in sinum suum recipiens pristinos patres*), has regenerated them into the life of God (*regeneravit eos in vitam Dei*), he having been made the beginning of those that live (*initium viventium*), as Adam became the beginning of those who die (*initium morientium*). Wherefore also Luke, commencing the genealogy with the Lord (*initium generationis a Domino*), carried it back to Adam, indicating that it was he who regenerated them into the Gospel of life (*in Evangelium vitae regeneravit*), and not they him. (*Haer.* 3.22.3–4)

Irenaeus recognizes that Luke's genealogy reverses the normal course of generation, which moves from father to son. This normal movement from father to son is the pattern followed in the book of Genesis and Matthew's Gospel; it is also the natural movement that fuels the theological vision of the Ebionites. Luke, however, reverses the movement, beginning with Christ and tracing the genealogy from son to father backwards to Adam. In addition, the fact that this genealogy occurs following Jesus' baptism suggests to Irenaeus that Luke is recording a genealogy of regeneration.

IV. Conclusion

For early Christians, the sacraments are less like external rituals and more like internal organs that are essential to the body.[18] While one may move external appendages like fingers and feet according to personal will, internal organs, such as the heart, liver, or lungs, are not subject to individual choice. We may prefer to hold our breath for a moment or two, but soon the fundamental need of our humanity overwhelms our personal will. While one may survive the loss of fingers and toes, the activities of heart and lungs are more essential. Humanity exists precisely in and through the breathing of the lungs and the pumping of the heart. For early Christians, Baptism and the Eucharist are implicit to the church's very being. The church subsists in and with such activities. The sacraments are

[18] This analogy occurred to me when contemplating *Didache* 10:2. After partaking of the eucharistic bread, the church is instructed to give thanks to the Father "for your holy name which you have caused to dwell (κατεσκήνωσας) in our hearts." The word "dwell" suggests an internalizing of God's presence.

not merely ritual events the church chooses to perform from time to time; rather, they constitute a persistent and eternal relation to God in which the church has her subsistence. The sacraments cannot be removed without serious organic consequences for the Christian's inner identity.

Thus, the sacraments are simply implicit in Christians as they engage the Scriptures. The church's sacramental life allows the Bible to be heard within the economy of divine tradition. While the Scriptures can be studied by academia as an inert artifact of a dead past, the same Scriptures are heard by the baptized as the preaching of the Father that comes through the Son to be received in the Spirit. Thus, for the early church, the Eucharist thickened the meaning of the Bible, giving it a vertical and mystical dimension. On the horizontal level, the Scriptures were certainly historically true. For the church, however, the meaning of the Bible could not be flattened into mere objective facts about the past. Rather, the Eucharist demanded that the historical narrative be interpreted as a "sign" that reveals the mystery of God's own being manifested in Christ and his gift of the Spirit. Sacred texts were more than a record of historical events; they were the rhetorical proclamations of God revealing himself for his people through his Logos.

While the Eucharist provides the Bible with a mystical dimension, the Bible gives the Eucharist a historical and rational framework. Without the Scriptures, the sacraments can easily be reduced to mystical, ecstatic experiences of individuals lacking any rational content. Therefore, the liturgical reading of the Scriptures means that the God mysteriously present in the Eucharist is the God who has spoken, taught, and interacted with his people throughout history. The Christian God is as rational (*logikos*) as he is mystical. Thus, the flesh and blood that is received at the church's altar has a narrative dimension; it is precisely that flesh that was generated from the dust of Paradise, assumed from Mary by the Son of God, put to death under Pontius Pilate, and raised on the third day. The reading of the Bible compels Christians to experience the Eucharist as their participation in that humanity redeemed and perfected through the evangelical narrative of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. The eucharistic gathering held together the church's head and heart, her mystical experience and rational knowledge, her apostolic doctrine and life of prayer in one evangelical tradition.

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The Church's Scripture and Functional Marcionism

Daniel L. Gard

The Scriptures are collected in what is known as the "canon," that is, a grouping of writings received as authoritative and normative for faith and life. The reception of the canon by the modern church is inhibited, it seems to me, by "Functional Marcionism." By this I mean the partial victory of Marcion in the modern church, which excludes his fundamental theological aberrations but embraces in different ways the canonical consequences of those aberrations. Those consequences have less to do with the theoretical authority of the Old Testament than with the actual determinative value of those books.

To my knowledge, the term "Functional Marcionism" is without precedent. Perhaps its closest equivalent is found in the debates about supersessionism, or the relationship between Israel and the church, understood as the former being replaced by the latter. R. Kendall Soulen[1] identifies three categories of supersessionist theology: punitive (i.e., the Jews lose their place as a punishment for rejecting Jesus), economic (i.e., the practical role of Israel is surrendered to the New Testament church), and structural, which, writes Soulen, "refers to the narrative logic of the standard model whereby it renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping Christian convictions about how God's works as Consummator and as Redeemer engage humankind in universal and enduring ways."[2] Functional Marcionism shares with structural supersessionism the unfortunate marginalization of the Old Testament both in the church's self-understanding as the people of God and in her understanding of who God is.

While certainly there remain those who share Marcion's dualism and Docetism in various forms, those heresies are generally rejected by Christians. And yet, though the doctrinal aberrations of Marcion are condemned, the consequent Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament is

[1] R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). See also Craig A. Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 442.

[2] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology,* 181, n. 6.

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present even if not explicitly affirmed. The judgment of Marcion that the entire canon cannot be used in the church remains a reality of function if not always of theory. I would propose that modern functional Marcionism occurs in four variations: Reverse Marcionism, Semi-Marcionism, Hyper-Marcionism, and Unintentional Marcionism.

I. Historical Background of Marcion

The second-century Marcion, of course, held theological positions rarely explicitly shared by voices within the broader Christian church of the twenty-first century. Although his own works are not extant, we know the position of Marcion and the Marcionite church through the writings of Fathers such as Tertullian,[3] Justin,[4] Irenaeus,[5] Origen,[6] and others. To some extent, these sources must be read as coming from the opposing parties, and thus a certain hermeneutic of suspicion is warranted.

Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament was extensive and theologically driven. One of the earliest theologians, if not the first, to wrestle with the question of canon as a list of books received or rejected, he excluded not only the Old Testament but large portions of the New Testament as well. It has been observed that it was due to Marcion that the idea of canon as authoritative list was first considered by the orthodox church.[7] For example, only some of Paul's letters and the Gospel of Luke were accepted by Marcion, and even those were redacted by the exclusion of all Old Testament references. As a mid-second-century thinker, Marcion was strongly anti-Semitic, a position perhaps encouraged by the debacle that was the revolt of Bar Kokhba around AD 135 and its signal of the collapse of Jewish messianic expectation.

In that context, Marcion held a dualistic theology which distinguished between a god of this world (worshipped by the Jews) and a god who is known in the gospel (worshipped by Christians and proclaimed especially

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[3] Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem.*

[4] Justin, *1 Apologia* 58

[5] Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.27.

[6] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.54; 6.53, 74.

[7] F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1964), 252. Bruce writes, "The chief importance of Marcion in the second century lies in the reaction which he provoked among the leaders of the Apostolic Churches. Just as Marcion's canon stimulated the more precise defining of the NT canon by the Catholic Church, not to supersede but to supplement the canon of the OT, so, more generally, Marcion's teaching led the Catholic Church to define its faith more carefully, in terms calculated to exclude a Marcionite interpretation." See also K.S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd., 1955), 134.

by Paul). The creator god of the Old Testament not only created the universe, but ruled it in bloodshed and cruel justice. The Supreme God, that is to say, the God of Jesus and Paul, however, is loving, forgiving, and full of grace.

Marcion's positing of different gods to explain the problem of good and evil resulted in patristic (Tertullian, Hippolytus, Irenaeus of Lyons) identification of Marcionism as a form of Gnosticism. Modern scholars tend not to classify Marcion as a Gnostic, though it is possible that Marcion was influenced by an acquaintance with the Gnostic Cerdo.[8] More likely, however, is that Marcion reached his conclusions independently of Gnostic schools.[9] Justo Gonzales has distinguished Marcionism from Gnosticism in three ways. First, Marcion does not claim a secret knowledge. Second, Marcion does not engage in speculation on astrology, numerology, or multiple aeons, so fundamental to Gnostic systems. Finally, Marcion founds not a school but a church, thus exhibiting an interest in organization unknown to Gnostic sects.[10]

One doctrinal position Marcion did hold in common with the Gnostics was Docetism. For Marcion, Christ was not truly man. If Jesus had been made human, he would have become part of the lesser, creator god's world. Hence Luke, the only Gospel recognized by Marcion, was stripped not only of its Old Testament references but also of the Infancy Narratives—Jesus appears as a fully grown man in Tiberius's fifteenth year.

The Old Testament teaching was incompatible with Marcion's view of the God of Jesus. He carefully denounced the hermeneutics and

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[8] Benjamin Walker, *Gnosticism: Its History and Influence* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1983), 143, gives this summary concerning Cerdo: "Cerdo (d. 143), a Syrian gnostic, had started his career as a Simonian (follower of Simon Magus) and then branched out on his own. He taught that God the Father was merciful and good. He was the Supreme Being, but unknown, until first made known to man by Jesus. The god proclaimed in the law and the prophets of the Old Testament was the creator of the world, and inferior to the supreme being. He was a god of justice who demanded obedience. Cerdo believed that only the soul and not the body shared in the resurrection."

[9] W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 213, observes that Marcion "may well have come to similar conclusions by another route, namely, by attentive study of the Scriptures and in particular the key work for Christians, Isaiah 39–66. There he found in 45:7 the claim made by Yahweh, 'I make weal and create woe, I am the Lord, who does all these things,' and this was fundamental to his interpretation of Christianity."

[10] Justo Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 1:142–3.

interpretive method of the allegorists,[11] leaving no room for the kind of interpretation that understood the Old Testament as saying one thing but meaning another. In other words, he was a strict literalist. Old Testament narratives thus could not be explained as the Alexandrians explained them. They had to be taken literally, with the result that they were to be rejected. And reject them Marcion did—not just the Old Testament, but also all writings except those of Paul and Luke redacted to exclude all Old Testament references.

Marcion has been thoroughly condemned, and rightly so. Still, his distinctions between sections of the canon live on as Functional Marcionism. An icon of this is the Gideons' pocket New Testament. These small volumes may also contain the Psalms and Proverbs but otherwise limit the canon to the books of the New Testament. I am aware that production costs and portability are both issues for the Gideons' organization and that they also distribute complete texts of the Bible that include the Old Testament. But the end result is a familiar booklet minus two-thirds of the Scriptures which is, thus, symbolic of Functional Marcionism.

II. Functional Marcionism Type 1: Reverse Marcionsim

The first form of Functional Marcionism I will call "Reverse Marcionism," a form most clearly observable in American civil religion. Unlike the historical Marcion, the public face of religion in America de-emphasizes the claims of Jesus and Paul and seeks the presentation of a generic "god" to whom all can give their assent. Understandably, there is a concern for sensitivity to the pluralistic nature of American society.

Neutrality on the part of government toward religion is assured by the United States Constitution. The "Establishment Clause" in the First Amendment, however, which reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," often receives attention to the exclusion of the immediately following "Free Exercise Clause," which continues, "or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The same First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech and free assembly, yet those terms may not mean what they seem to mean when it comes to Christianity.

The god of civic religion is a god who is as Marcion described him. He is loving and embracing but lacks attributes such as justice and wrath. Unlike Marcion's god, however, the god of civic religion is not known in

[11] Origen, *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 15.3.

Jesus of Nazareth, and access to this god has nothing to do with Christ. In fact, civic religion demands that Jesus be excluded from all religious discourse in the public forum. Who Jesus claimed to be and who his followers believe him to be—the only Son of God who was incarnate, died, and rose again for the sins of the world—is the ultimate anathema. If he is mentioned at all, it must be as "a son," not "the Son," and as one of multiple options for access to God. No single concept of God can claim to be the exclusively correct one. All religions are equally true. Any assertion to the contrary is unwelcome and is implicitly banned from the public forum.

In other words, despite the First Amendment guarantees, a specific religion has in fact been established and freedom of speech is abridged. The god of that religion is not the God and Father of Jesus. The god of American civil religion comes in whatever shape one might choose to give to him. He may be addressed as you see fit, but with one exception: when a civic event involving prayers is held, the expectation is that the prayer will be offered to and through any name but the name of Jesus. The *New York Times* gave the following report about a prayer that would be offered by V. Gene Robinson, "the openly gay Episcopal bishop of New Hampshire," at the inauguration of Barak Obama:

> "I am very clear," he said, "that this will not be a Christian prayer, and I won't be quoting Scripture or anything like that. The texts that I hold as sacred are not sacred texts for all Americans, and I want all people to feel that this is their prayer."
>
> Bishop Robinson said he might address the prayer to "the God of our many understandings," language that he said he learned from the 12-step program he attended for his alcohol addiction. [12]

This is quite remarkable. Not only Jesus will be excluded, but also the Scriptures he has given. And this by a bishop of a Christian community in a prayer delivered, ironically, on January 18, the Festival of the Confession of Saint Peter!

What does this have to do with the church's Scriptures and Marcionism? As I said, it is Reverse Marcionism. Often, scriptural texts will be read at civic "events" (a euphemism for civic worship services). In many—if not most—civic contexts, those texts will not be from the New Testament since they tend to mention the name that cannot be named in civic religion: Jesus. If a text is read from the Bible, it will be from the Old

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[12] Laurie Goodstein, "Gay Bishop is Asked to Say Prayer at Inaugural Event," *New York Times*, January 12, 2009.

Testament, because Christians, Jews, and Muslims all in some way recognize those books. Of course, no such restrictions are expected of minority religions, and it is quite possible to hear a reading from the Koran with references to the Muslim god, Allah, as well as prayers to that god. Yet even the Old Testament readings will not, when read to uninformed hearers, reference Messiah or the exclusivity of the Christian God. Incidentally, they also will not call anyone to repentance, since the concept of sin is as open as the concept of God.

Civic religion, therefore, approaches the idea of canon in a way similar to Marcion, but with opposite results. It is theologically driven by the generic god of the culture. It reduces the list of acceptable books and redacts those that remain. But it is the reverse of Marcionism in what its theological motivations and presuppositions are and what part of the canon remains intact: only the Old Testament, and only those Old Testament texts that do not offend civic sensibilities.

III. Functional Marcionism Type 2: Semi-Marcionism

If there is a "Reverse Marcionism" which rejects the New Testament, there is also a widespread "Semi-Marcionism." I define this as the tendency to use a pick-and-choose hermeneutic in regard to the Old Testament. In other words, the authority of the Old Testament is recognized, but those texts and teachings of the Old Testament that make the interpreter uncomfortable can be simply ignored or, perhaps, classified as belonging to a different dispensation. Though lacking unanimity in details among its adherents, Semi-Marcionites are proponents of a "canon within a canon."

An example of this is the treatment of the doctrine of original sin by American Evangelicals. About AD 405, or two-and-a-half centuries after Marcion, another teacher appeared in Rome by the name of Pelagius. His doctrine, especially as promulgated by his friend and disciple Coelestius, would occupy a great deal of the time of Augustine. Pelagius seems to have been a prominent and early Semi-Marcionite. As he read the account of Genesis 3 and the fall of humanity, his semi-Platonist worldview shaped his reading. The text and its implications for both anthropology and soteriology were stripped of determinative value. For Pelagius, original sin did not exist: the sin of Adam affected only Adam. All subsequent human beings were assumed to begin with a clean slate which would be marred not by Adam (i.e., original sin) but only by the choice and habit of sin by the individual (i.e., actual sin). Consequently, since babies are born

without the taint of sin, infant baptism was unnecessary for the remission of sin. You cannot remit that which does not exist.[13]

What does this mean for modern semi-Marcionism? Perhaps the dominant voice in American Christianity today assumes the same separation of Old and New Testaments as did Marcion, with the same results as Pelagius. That mystical, indefinable moment of attainment of an "age of accountability" denies the implications of the sin of Adam as children are held to be sinless until that time. Baptism of infants is unnecessary and brings nothing to the child. Even when the more mature individual is baptized, that baptism is a non-sacramental "outward sign of an inward grace." It is simply a step the person takes toward exercising his ability to lead a holy life. Sin is not inherent in the human being but is instead a bad habit to be overcome.

This is combined with variations of dispensationalism, theories which assign applicability to biblical texts only in certain dispensations.[14] In other words, dispensationalism fails to understand the canon as one narrative, one story, one Scripture. All this rests upon the notion that the inspired text of the Old Testament is not to be taken as determinative for the doctrines of Christianity. This form of Functional Marcionism generally does not share the theological motivations of Marcion. Instead, while the Old Testament is acknowledged as being inspired, its teachings are read through Pelagian eyeglasses. The end result is not dissimilar from Marcion: a functionally reduced canon.

IV. Functional Marcionism Type 3: Hyper-Marcionism

A third form of Functional Marcionism is what I will term "Hyper-Marcionism." Unlike historical Marcionism, this approach toward the Scriptures does not necessarily acknowledge divine inspiration, nor is it

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[13] For a fuller discussion see Daniel L. Gard, "Saint Augustine and Pelagianism," in *A Justification Odyssey* (St. Louis: Luther Academy, 2002).

[14] *The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (September 1989), 45: "4. Dispensational premillennialism underestimates, and even ignores, the significance of Biblical typology. All prophecy points to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment. He is the antitype of the Old Testament types. When the reality to which the Old Testament points does come, one cannot revert back to the 'shadows,' such as the Old Testament temple (Col 2:16–17; Heb 10:1). 5. The compartmentalization of Scripture into distinct dispensations seriously overlooks the Law/Gospel unity of the Old and New Testaments. For example, it makes a radical distinction between the Mosaic 'law' period and the church age of 'grace.' The relationship between the Old and New Testaments is that of promise and fulfillment, not one of distinct dispensations."

necessarily averse to allegorical interpretation. Like Marcion, however, it does impose theological presuppositions on the biblical text, rendering it functionally limited at best. I call this "Hyper-Marcionism" because it stands in judgment of any text, any book, either testament, or the Scriptures in their entirety.

What are those theological presuppositions? They are the classic starting points for critical studies. For example, the assumption is made that there can be no predictive prophecy, resulting in a reading of the Old Testament that is in absolute discontinuity with the New Testament. The Old Testament reflects Israelite thinking about God; the New Testament reflects Christian thinking about God. The person of Jesus offers no unifying theme—any Old Testament prophetic texts claimed by the New Testament to speak of Jesus are nothing more than misappropriations of Hebrew thought to bolster the early church's mythology about Christ. This is Functional Marcionism with no pretense: no Scripture is of value for anything or anyone except as a document for those with antiquarian interests. It is also Functional Marcionism with at least the virtue of consistency: both the Old and New Testaments are rendered equally suspect and therefore functionally useless as canon for the church.

This Hyper-Marcionism has important implications for anyone who approaches the Bible. Whether one watches PBS, the History Channel, or any other public media treatment of religion, all assume a critical reading of Scripture. For example, one of the more hotly contested issues in contemporary American society is that of "marriage" between homosexuals. *Newsweek*'s December 15, 2008, issue had as its cover "The Religious Case for Gay Marriage." Lisa Miller writes:

> Social conservatives point to Adam and Eve as evidence for their one man, one woman argument—in particular, this verse from Genesis: "Therefore shall a man leave his mother and father, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." But as (Barnard University professor Alan) Segal says, if you believe that the Bible was written by men and not handed down in its leather bindings by God, then that verse was written by people for whom polygamy was the way of the world. (The fact that homosexual couples cannot procreate has also been raised as a biblical objection, for didn't God say, "Be fruitful and multiply"? But the Bible authors could never have imagined the brave new world of international adoption and assisted reproductive technology—and besides, heterosexuals who are infertile or past the age of reproducing get married all the time.)[15]

[15] Lisa Miller, "Our Mutual Joy," *Newsweek* (December 15, 2008), 30.

Miller raises a truly Hyper-Marcionite discussion of the value of biblical texts when she writes:

> Twice Leviticus refers to sex between men as "an abomination" (King James version), but these are throwaway lines in a peculiar text given over to codes for living in the ancient Jewish world, a text that devotes verse after verse to treatments for leprosy, cleanliness rituals for menstruating women and the correct way to sacrifice a goat—or a lamb or a turtle dove. Most of us no longer heed Leviticus on haircuts or blood sacrifices; our modern understanding of the world has surpassed its prescriptions. Why would we regard its condemnation of homosexuality with more seriousness than we regard its advice, which is far lengthier, on the best price to pay for a slave?[16]

Miller exemplifies the end product of critical studies: a Bible (in her case both Old and New Testaments) which is to be read and studied but which has no real function in determining matters of faith and life. This form of Functional Marcionism has one virtue: it has no pious pretenses acknowledging the normative function of the canon. That virtue ultimately becomes Hyper-Marcionism's great liability: it robs the church of any source of truth except the individual's religious ideas.

V. Functional Marcionism Type 4: Unintentional Marcionism

The fourth and final type of Functional Marcionism is perhaps the most difficult to identify because it does not have the strong theological motivation of other types. Its adherents do not, as a rule, denigrate the Old Testament as unworthy of God or as without a role in the life of the church. Quite the contrary, they maintain the inspiration, inerrancy, and significance of the entire Christian canon with great fervor. Yet the Old Testament remains something of a lesser literature than the New Testament. It is a purer Functional Marcionism because it is unintentional.

One might term Unintentional Marcionism "Marcionism by Benign Neglect." Two aspects of the Lutheran liturgical tradition might illustrate this. Until the appearance of *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*,[17] the rich usage of Old Testament texts in the liturgy went by unnoticed. So much of the liturgy is citation of the Old Testament, and yet nothing indicated the source of those liturgical texts. Though familiar through repeated usage, their origin remained unknown. *LSB*, however, among its other virtues, has biblical texts noted throughout.

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[16] Lisa Miller, "Our Mutual Joy," 30.

[17] Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

This may help overcome a tradition of ignoring the Old Testament in liturgical practice. Since *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *Lutheran Worship*, Lutheran congregations have had the Old Testament reading restored to the liturgy.[18] But before these hymnals, the Old Testament was considered optional at best. It is notable that *The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH)*, still in use in some congregations, does not provide for an Old Testament lesson in either the Order of Morning Service or the Order of the Holy Communion. Both an Epistle and a Gospel reading are mandated, but not the Old Testament.[19] In fact, the lectionary of *TLH* lists two sets of readings for both Gospel and Epistle, but only one for the Old Testament. And even that one Old Testament reading for each Sunday appears typeset in a center column indicating its optional character.

The hymnal of my own childhood in a predecessor body to the ELCA is more explicit. The *Service Book and Hymnal* does acknowledge that there is an Old Testament, but it provides in the rubrics, "Here the Minister *may* read the appointed Lesson from the Old Testament" (emphasis added).[20] On the other hand, the rubrics provide, "Then *shall* the Minister announce the Epistle for the Day" (emphasis added) and "Then *shall* the Minister announce the Gospel for the Day" (emphasis added).[21]

Perhaps the liturgical tradition reflects the ancient and honored Lutheran homiletical tradition of preaching only on the Gospel reading on Sunday morning. There is much to commend that tradition, but it assumes that the congregation will gather at other times of the week when the Epistle or the Old Testament might serve as sermon texts. Such is no longer the reality. It is a rare Lutheran congregation that offers services at any time other than Sunday morning, except perhaps a mid-week Advent or Lenten service. And it is rarer still to find attendance at the same level during any mid-week service.

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[18] The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 62, 82, 103, 128; The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 140, 164, 183. The three-year lectionary introduced with these hymnals (*LBW* 13–41, *LW* 10–123) gives prominence to Old Testament lessons that relate to the Gospel lesson of the day.

[19] The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 10, 20.

[20] The Lutheran Churches cooperating in The Commission on the Liturgy and Hymnal, *Service Book and Hymnal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1958), 3.

[21] *Service Book and Hymnal*, 3.

Even when a congregation hears readings from all three (that is, Gospel, Epistle, and Old Testament), there seems to be some reluctance to preach on the Old Testament. I make this assertion without particular evidence beyond personal observation. Several reasons might lie behind this. First is the name itself: "Old" Testament. In many ways, this name is unfortunate, since it may bring to mind the concept of "outmoded," when in fact it is merely an indicator of age. Some refer to the "Hebrew Bible" as juxtaposed to the "Christian Scriptures" (i.e., the New Testament), but this is hardly an improvement, since it distinguishes the Old Testament from the Christian Scriptures as if the Bible were a set of documents that belong to two different groups. I suppose that "Older Testament" and "Newer Testament" might be better. Or perhaps "Hebrew Scriptures" and "Greek Scriptures" might also be an improvement. None of these suggestions will likely gain much currency, and the traditional designations of "Old" and "New" will certainly continue to be used.

Second, there is a myth about Judaism which is widespread in Christianity. It sees later Rabbinic writings—especially the Talmud—as authoritative for interpretation of the Old Testament. In fact, one often hears Old Testament figures such as David, Isaiah, and others referred to as "Jews." This is an anachronism of epic proportions, since the term "Jew" does not come into existence until the Babylonian exile. These figures can rightly be called "Israelites" or "Hebrews," as the Bible itself refers to them. Judaism is a post-exilic development from the old Israelite religion. At the time of Jesus, Judaism was highly fractured into differing sects—we know them from the New Testament as Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and others. All Jewish sects related to the Scriptures in different ways, as well as to the Second Temple, either positively or negatively. But of them, only the Pharisees survived the disasters and the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 and the defeat of Bar Kokhba around AD 135. From Pharisaic tradition sprang the Mishnah and Talmud, the foundation of what we know as Rabbinic Judaism today.[22]

This misreading of Judaism has subtly influenced much Christian reading of the Old Testament. It is as if the Old Testament was a Jewish book that we Christians can at best visit as foreigners to its pages. The New Testament writers do not have that problem, least of all Saint Paul. Writing to the Gentile congregation at Corinth, Paul reflected on the Exodus and wrote:

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[22] Perhaps the best analysis is the classic work of Jacob Neusner in *Judaism. The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981).

> I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10:1–4)

For Paul, the Israelites of the Exodus were the fathers of the Gentile Christians. Moreover, Paul even interprets the following Rock as being none other than Christ himself. It is for this reason that he writes, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). Similarly, Paul affirms the importance of the Old Testament for the Christian community in his Epistle to the Romans: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). It seems that Paul believed the words of Jesus: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39).

Some cannot get beyond the distinctions implied by having two "testaments," one older and one newer. The unity of the people of God is acknowledged, but its implications for understanding the people, places, events, and institutions of the Old Testament remains problematic and thus might be left only as background to the New Testament. One example might be drawn from the opening chapters of the Scriptures, the story of creation and the fall found in Genesis 1–3. Unlike Hyper-Marcionism, Unintentional Marcionism fully acknowledges the historicity of the accounts. Unlike Semi-Marcionites, Unintentional Marcionites believe these chapters to be theologically significant. They point to Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel," as the first Gospel, or *Protoevangelium*. They also read the results of Eve's hearing of the word of promise when she bore a son, Cain, and declared, "I have gotten a man—the LORD" (קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה). But the connection of promise and faith on the part of Eve to Christian faith is not made, and Eve is consigned to some place outside the Christian church. Thus, it is sometimes said that another believing and confessing woman, the Virgin Mary, was "the first Christian" rather than her ancestress Eve. Though Eve erred in identifying Cain as the promised Seed, the fact remains that she believed the promise. Her faith was in the one who would defeat Satan for her. How was she not a Christian? Likewise, how are all the Old Testament saints not Christians?

As I noted earlier, this form of Functional Marcionism is unintentional. It does not share Marcion's theological motivations. It assumes the usefulness of the Old Testament for the church but fails to utilize fully the older Scriptures as a living and definitive sacred text for the church. Its effect is a functionally reduced canon.

VI. The Effects of Unintentional Marcionism

One practical example of the ramifications of neglect of the Old Testament is the debate about the ordained ministry occurring with some regularity among Lutherans in America. We are told that "everyone is a minister" and, more often than not, the "priesthood of all believers" is cited as doctrinal support. If one takes seriously the unity of the Scriptures and the canonicity of the Old Testament, then the roots of New Testament ministry can be seen in the Old Testament.

The *sedes doctrinae* for discussions of the priesthood of all believers is, of course, 1 Peter 2:9. If Peter is to be the source for "everyone a minister," then it is reasonable to ask about Peter's basis for his words. Peter clearly cites a Greek version of Exodus 19:5–6. He speaks of a "chosen race" and "a people for his own possession," paraphrasing the MT and LXX at Exodus 19:5b, "you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine." Peter's reference to Christians as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" simply cites the LXX of Exodus 19:6a, "βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον."

Exodus 19:5b–6a	**1 Peter 2:9a**
You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.	But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.
וְהְיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃ וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ	
ἔσεσθέ μοι λαὸς περιούσιος ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐμὴ γάρ ἐστιν πᾶσα ἡ γῆ ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον.	ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν.

The idea of a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" did not originate with Peter in the New Testament, nor does it signal something new and different from the Old Testament. Its New Testament meaning must be in the context of the continuing people of God if the hermeneutical principle of "Scripture interprets Scripture" is true.

What is that context? Clearly, ancient Israel did not as an entire nation serve as priests. On the contrary, a particular tribe, the Levites, was set apart to serve in priestly functions. Moses, the author of Numbers as well as Exodus, wrote this in Numbers 3:

> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death." And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD." (Num 3:5–13)

The post-exilic Chronicler affirms this as well:

> And their brothers the Levites were appointed for all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God. But Aaron and his sons made offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense for all the work of the Most Holy Place, and to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded. (1 Chr 6:33–34 [Eng 6:48–49])

Several points should be noted. First, while all Israel are priests (Exodus and 1 Peter), the Aaronites and Levites are distinguished from all Israel. Second, while the Levites have responsibility to care for the Tabernacle and later the Temple, only Aaron and his sons are to approach the altar—anyone else is to be put to death (Num 3:10). Finally, the Levites (including the sub-tribe of Aaron) do not exist apart from all Israel—they are the substitute for "every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel" (Num 3:12).

Though all are priests by virtue of their election by God, only those appointed by God to serve in the holy office may do so. Holders of the holy office are set apart as stewards not of what is their own but of the mysteries of God. Thus the Augsburg Confession states, "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry; that is, provided the Gospel and the Sacraments" (AC V), and "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments without a

regular call" (AC XIV). Pastors come from the people of God and are set apart to perform the priestly duties of the people of God. It is a divine vocation within the church which derives its meaning and function from the Lord who calls. And it is the one office whose holders serve as stewards of the mysteries of God.

Many other effects of Functional Marcionism exist, but I will limit myself to two examples. Why does the church seem so enamored of statistics and numbers, and why does she seek to be like the culture around her? Our forefathers in ancient Israel also were often fascinated by head-counting, as if they could measure their success through such things. Every time they elevated the importance of numbers over faithfulness to their calling as the people of God, they met disaster. The problem was not in taking a census, for example. Rather, it was in why they did so.[23] Numbers are insignificant to the Lord of Israel, whose power and care go beyond comparative statistics. For Israel, both the ancient Hebrews and the modern church, the only statistic that matters is, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4). Everything else is unfaithfulness at worst and meaningless at best.

Not only does the church ignore the Old Testament to her own peril in matters of statistics, she also does so when she seeks to organize herself in ways foreign to the biblical witness. Certainly the church on earth is given great freedom in how she structures herself, since the Old Testament monarchy continues in the final Son of David, who reigns forever. Israel is no longer a single kingdom but the spiritual kingdom existing alongside the temporal kingdom.[24] Ancient Israel erred greatly when they tried to be like the nations around them. The modern church is just as endangered when she chooses to function by the rules of the surrounding culture. The loss of full canonical witness is more than a loss of ancient literature—it is the loss of the vivifying word of God to his pilgrim people in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, from Baptism to eschaton.

VII. Toward Reclaiming the Canon

There is only one continuing people of God, whether they lived before or after the incarnation. Though we distinguish between ancient Israel and the church, that distinction is not as absolute as it might at first appear.

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[23] See Daniel L. Gard, "The Chronicler's David: Saint and Sinner," in *CTQ* 70 (2006): 233–252.

[24] For a helpful explanation of this terminology, see Cameron A. MacKenzie, "The Challenge of History: Luther's Two Kingdoms Theology as a Test Case," *CTQ* 71 (2007): 3–28.

Truly, salvation is always by grace through faith, whether that faith is placed in one yet to come or the same Christ who has already come. The church is Israel and Israel is the church at a most fundamental level. The story of Jesus, which is the story of his people, spans the pages of the whole canon, not just the final third.

The core and center of the Scriptures is the person of Jesus. All that the Old Testament conveys points us to him.[25] The Old Testament is more than a series of specific prophecies that find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus, with everything else simply "filler." All of the Old Testament, just as the New, is focused on him. He is "Israel reduced to one." The offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest and King—are understandable only in light of the Old Testament offices. Conversely, the Old Testament offices are understandable only in light of the incarnation. Everything that took place before the incarnation is focused on him as much as everything that has happened since or will happen in the future is focused on him.

The continuity of the two testaments, and the continuity of the ongoing people of God, is all about Jesus. Reading the Old Testament is reading the word of Jesus who spoke by the prophets.[26] He connects the history of ancient Israel with modern Israel, the church. From Genesis to Revelation, there is one narrative, one story, one Scripture. Marcion erred not just in the breadth of his de-canonization of the entire Old Testament but in his de-canonization of any of it. If the church is to be faithful to her own understanding of the Scriptures as the only source and norm for faith and life, the Old Testament must be an equal partner to the New Testament. For, indeed, they are not two but one Scripture, united in their witness to Christ.

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[25] The LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (*The End Times,* 12.) notes: "These observations presuppose that since God is the one Author of all Scripture, an organic unity exists within and between the Old and New Testaments, both with respect to their content (the doctrine of the Gospel in all its articles) and their function of making people wise unto salvation. The hermeneutical principle that Scripture interprets Scripture necessarily presumes this unity."

[26] See also Charles A. Gieschen, "The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology," *CTQ* 68 (2004): 105–126.

CTQ 74 (2010): 225–242

Enjoying the Righteousness of Faith in Ecclesiastes

Walter R. Steele

The message of the book of Ecclesiastes is that life "under the sun" is הבל, *hebel*, that it is vaporous, ephemeral, and even absurd. This clear statement has caused considerable debate as to the book's place within the canon. A sizeable number of scholars understand Qoheleth as either a heretical voice mocking the simplicity of books such as Proverbs, or a pessimist who sees no way out of the superficiality of life, or even an unbeliever whose shocking message must be brought into line by an orthodox epilogist. Not-so-unsympathetic scholars aver that, while part of the orthodox tradition, Qoheleth has pitched his tent at the extreme outskirts of acceptable teaching.[1] A closer look at the book, however, with an eye toward its relation to Genesis, especially chapters two through four, and its author's understanding of righteousness (צדק) and approval (רצה), reveals that Qoheleth's enjoyment imperatives are a believer's proper, albeit paradoxical, response to a penultimate world that is, indeed, vaporous (הבל) "under the sun." This essay will endeavor to demonstrate that a negative view of Qoheleth's enjoyment imperatives is unnecessary; these statements should rather be understood as positive prescriptions. Just as importantly, merely viewing these imperatives as positive statements without clearly connecting them to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith impoverishes them and leads back logically to a negative view.

I. The Structure of Ecclesiastes

Discerning the structure or outline of Ecclesiastes is notoriously difficult. Other than recognizing the epilogue as an integral unit, commentators offer so many varying solutions as to make consensus impossible. Nevertheless, one's understanding of the structure of the book can impact one's interpretation, and thereby how one views the author's argument. Proposals by Norbert Lohfink, Choon-Leong Seow, and James Crenshaw illustrate recent approaches, each with strengths and

[1] Scholars engaged in this essay who present an essentially negative view of the teachings of Qoheleth include James Crenshaw and Martin A. Shields. Scholars that resonate with Qoheleth and see in his writing teaching that is integral to, or at least in concert with, Torah include Michael V. Fox, Eunny P. Lee, and Choon-Leong Seow.

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weaknesses. After a brief survey of their contributions, another proposal will be offered which undergirds the thesis of this essay.

Norbert Lohfink offers an intriguing and complicated solution to the problem of the structure of Ecclesiastes. In his article "Das Koheletbuch: Strukturen und Struktur,"[2] and again in his English-language commentary of 2003,[3] Lohfink posits two schema working at once, one of which appeals to the Hebrew mind and the other to the Greek. According to Lohfink, a linear structure can be discerned which divides the book into four major sections: 1:2–3:15; 3:16–6:9; 6:10–9:10; and 8:16–12:8. Lohfink then detects a chiastic structure that runs concurrently through the book. The value of Lohfink's work is the way in which he shows the inherent balance within Ecclesiastes, especially in his chiastic discovery. While by no means universally accepted, Lohfink's work opens windows into the text, windows that support the thesis that while all "under the sun" is הבל, vaporous, there is still a hidden beauty to the work.

Choon-Leong Seow divides Ecclesiastes into two parts, each further divided into two sections, the first being a reflection upon life and the second concerned with related ethics. The first part is, according to Seow, the teaching that "Everything is Ephemeral and Unreliable." In light of this, the ethical response concerns how to cope with uncertainty. The second part is the reflection that "Everything is Elusive"; the ethic therefore concerns how to cope with risks and death.[4] Seow's outline is simple and useful. Still, the emphasis on ethics seems off-focus from the nature of the questions that Qoheleth is asking. Twice, in 2:3 and 6:12, he asks, "What is good?" Certainly this can be understood as an ethical question. But is this question truly ethical, or is it deeply theological? If the question and its answers are simply ethical, then Qoheleth never raises his eyes from that which is under the sun. If the question is theological, then while the answer may still be ethical on one level, it will be given as a response of faith, which finds meaning "above 'under the sun.'" Furthermore, imposing this simple schema on the structure of the book appears to ignore other structural elements, as will be discussed below.

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[2] Norbert Lohfink, "Das Koheletbuch: Strukturen und Struktur," in *Das Buch Kohelet: Studien zur Struktur, Geschichte, Rezeption und Theologie*, ed. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 39–121.

[3] Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 4.

[4] Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 46–47.

James L. Crenshaw offers more of a list than an outline. He identifies twenty-five divisions—twenty-three if one excludes the superscription and the epilogues.[5] Although Crenshaw's list should be seriously considered, perhaps the search for neat and tidy structures is a modern fascination. In support of this, Michael V. Fox's critique of proposed literary structures deserves a hearing.[6] Fox notes that the drive to outline books has grown out of the Enlightenment. The scholarly preoccupation with outlines, he notes, often has less "effect on interpretation than a ghost in the attic."[7] The debate rages on.

II. A New Proposal

There is a structural element in Ecclesiastes, however, that appears to be ignored by commentators. Qoheleth has significant sections which might be called either "poems" or "proverbs." Five such poetic-proverbial sections can be discerned: 1:2–11; 3:1–8; 7:1–13; 8:1; 10:1–11:4. Some commentators also consider 12:1–8 as a proverb-poem, but most translations do not follow suit, nor does this section break naturally from what precedes it.[8] If the proposal is entertained that these five sections mark off natural breaks in Qoheleth's work, then the intervening words could be understood as his discussion and treatment of the proverb-poems. The theme of the first section, for example, is that "a generation goes and a generation comes." Qoheleth is asking what advantage (יתרון) a man has in all his toil (עמל). Qoheleth's point, as Seow has noted, is that life is ephemeral. What follows is the "Royal Narrative" of Qoheleth's great experiment. In the midst of this discussion is a major question of Qoheleth: "What is good for the sons of man to do under the heavens?"[9] The opening poem seems to imply that there is no advantage to be gained. Nevertheless, Qoheleth asks what is good for man to be doing. He then continues explaining to his readers what he busied himself doing.

Section two begins with a poem about seasons and times (3:1–8). Qoheleth again asks what advantage (יתרון) a worker gets from his toil. Qoheleth's discussion of this extends to the end of chapter six. In 6:12 he

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[5] James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 47–49.

[6] Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 147–152.

[7] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 149.

[8] The new *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) treats more of Ecclesiastes as poetry than does BHS. This will undoubtedly affect future translations. See *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, vol. 18 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004), 25–53.

[9] 2:3: אֵי־זֶה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם

asks the question of 2:3 again, but this time acknowledges human ignorance. Section three begins at 7:1 with a set of proverbs that are in the genre of "better than" sayings. Qoheleth makes some shocking judgments. The day of death is better than the day of birth; the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting. Life is upside-down, and yet, "Consider the work of God, for who can straighten out what he has bent?"[10] His discussion continues with the theme that things are upside-down in this world. The righteous often perish; the wicked prosper.

Section four begins with a very short poem (8:1), in which Qoheleth asks, "Who is like the wise?" and "Who knows the interpretation of a thing?" He then takes up the issue of the benefit enjoyed by the one who fears God. Although he does not use the term "advantage" (יתרון), Qoheleth's statement has that term as its theme. Furthermore, his discussion takes the reader into what this essay claims to be the theological heart of Ecclesiastes: the topic of God's approval (רצה).

Section five begins with a set of concluding proverbs. While 10:1–4 contains many disjointed aphorisms, 11:5–6 appears to be Qoheleth's rebuttal to those who now, once again, assume that life will be predictable. Qoheleth then concludes with a very descriptive picture of the end, which, it will be argued, is at minimum a double-entendre. His conclusion is then summed up in the final two verses of the book, and is consistent with his entire argument. What is good for a man (2:3; 6:12)? "Fear God and keep his commandments." This conclusion is not inconsistent with the enjoyment imperatives, but is part and parcel with them, as this essay will endeavor to show.

As noted by Eunny P. Lee, the book of Ecclesiastes contains eight "enjoyment statements" (2:24–26; 3:12–13; 3:22; 5:17–19; 7:14; 8:15; 9:7–10; and 11:7–12:1). While the "vaporous" (הבל) theme constantly sounds forth, the themes of fearing God and of enjoying life are also clearly present. Lee remarks, "Apart from the meaning of *hebel*, interpretive antinomies are evident in scholarly discussions of two of the most prominent motifs in the book: the enjoyment of life and fear of God. As in the case of *hebel*, these two themes are widely recognized to be critical to the book's teachings. . . . The more prominent of the two is the commendation of enjoyment."[11]

Looking at the proposal that the structure of the book should take into account the poem-proverb sections finds each section of the book

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[10] 7:13: רְאֵה אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֵת אֲשֶׁר עִוְּתוֹ׃

[11] Eunny P. Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Theological Rhetoric* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 2–3.

answering the question, "What is good?" with the answer: Enjoy! Life is ephemeral; therefore, "there is nothing better than to eat and to drink and to cause yourself to see good" (2:24). This comes from God's hand. Man has no control over the times and seasons, and cannot even discern them. Furthermore, life seems unjust. Three times Qoheleth insists on enjoyment (3:12–13; 3:22; 5:18–19). And in that last statement, he goes so far as to insist that enjoyment is good. It is God's gift (3:13; 5:19). Life is upside-down. Rejoice and consider; God has made them both (7:14). "Who is like the wise; who knows the interpretation of a thing?" (8:1). No one is and no one does; only God. Qoheleth commends joy (8:15) and urges his readers to eat and to rejoice (9:7); God has approved their works. Finally, Qoheleth takes up proverbs that appear to say that life is predictable, then urges his readers once again not to think in such a way. In 11:1–4 he says that those who wait for the perfect time end up never doing anything. Now is the time. Do it. And while doing all that you do, rejoice (11:9) and remember (12:1) that you will die, that judgment is coming. Everything under the sun is vaporous (הבל). But the proper response to this is not despair. The proper response of faith is to rejoice in the gifts of God, even the ones under the sun that will pass away.

No one outline of Ecclesiastes is completely satisfying. As Lee remarks, "this perennial problem, like so many issues in the study of Ecclesiastes, has polarized scholarly opinion."[12] Yet there is a progression of thought and a strange kind of balance that becomes more evident the longer one spends time with Qoheleth. Ecclesiastes is not a mess, but a masterwork that, perhaps in its very structure, sounds forth that all "under the sun" is vaporous (הבל), but there is more than just what is "under the sun."[13]

III. Begin at the End: The Eschatological Key

The structure of Qoheleth's argument is such that one cannot read his work piecemeal; it must be read through to the end. While the connection to the creation account of Genesis 2 and the account of the "fall into sin" in Genesis 3 is often recognized, given Qoheleth's statements about mankind's return to the dust, the eschatological notion of impending judgment is less often emphasized.

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[12] Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 15.

[13] Qoheleth "is dealing not with the works of God, which are good, true, and above the sun, but with the works that are under the sun, works that we carry on in this physical and earthly life." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), vol. 15: 15 [henceforth *LW*].

The concluding enjoyment imperative (11:9–10) is followed immediately by the admonition, "Remember your creator" (וּזְכֹר֙ אֶת־בּוֹרְאֶ֔יךָ). What follows is what Lee calls a "vivid depiction of the end."[14] The question is: "What end is being described?" Fox notes three primary lenses through which 12:1–8 has been interpreted. These are the allegorical, the literal, and the eschatological.[15] An allegorical reading understands the poem to describe the degeneration of the human body over time.[16] Fox notes, however, that the problem with an allegorical interpretation is the arbitrariness of the supposed metaphors.[17] The decoding of the metaphors is at the whim of the exegete. Seow also concurs that "an allegorical approach cannot be applied consistently throughout the text."[18] A literal interpretation would take the words at face value. Fox notes a few possible ways in which the text can be read.[19] One is to read the entire passage as a picture of human deterioration.[20] Another interpretation reads the text as referring to a funeral procession. Still, Fox admits, "some symbolism is recognized."[21] A third lens through which to read this passage is to interpret it eschatologically. According to Fox:

> This type of reading can be combined with either of the first two. The imagery that pictures the death and funeral of an individual is also suggestive of a day of vast calamity or even the destruction of the world. Koheleth is not describing the actual day of judgment or the world's end; he is depicting the death of an individual human with overtones of cosmic disaster. It is as if Koheleth is saying, when you die, a world *is* ending—*yours*.[22]

Such an interpretation is much like the impression of Hebrews 9:27 that judgment follows immediately after death, and yet it links that judgment with Christ's return at the eschaton. Seow admits the probability that "an eschatological judgment is meant in 12:14, for the text suggests that everything hidden will be revealed, whether good or bad."[23] The picture of the end as presented by Qoheleth carries with it both the individual end of

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[14] Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 79.

[15] Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes: the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation* (The JPS Bible commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 76–77.

[16] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 182.

[17] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 76.

[18] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 372.

[19] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 76.

[20] But how this is not an allegorical interpretation of the meta-narrative Fox does not explain.

[21] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 76.

[22] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 76 (emphasis original).

[23] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 395.

the person and the eschatological end of all; it therefore cannot be read on only one level to the exclusion of the others. At a minimum, Qoheleth presents to his readers a double-entendre. Ecclesiastes 12:1–8 concludes with the words, "vapor of vapors, says Qoheleth, all is vapor" (הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר הַקֹּהֶלֶת הַכֹּל הָבֶל), thus ending life under the sun with the same judgment with which the book began. All is הבל; "everything—humanity and all that goes with it—is ultimately *hebel*: nothing lasts, nothing is within the grasp of humanity,"[24] nothing, that is, except what follows in the concluding verses: the "end of the matter" (סוֹף דָּבָר, 12:13a), namely, God's eschatological judgment upon "every secret thing" (עַל כָּל־נֶעְלָם, 12:14b).

Finding the hermeneutical key to Qoheleth's work at the very end is consistent with the structure and flow of the book of Ecclesiastes. And this hermeneutical key is that God will bring everything into judgment, including every supposed secret thing, whether it be good or bad. Nothing will escape this judgment. This life "under the sun," then, is lived with the expectation that following this life, man must give answer for what he is and for what he has done. God is the eschatological judge as well as the creator.[25]

IV. The Doctrine of Righteousness in 7:14–29

Working from the hypothesis that the logic of Qoheleth's argument flows from the structural elements of his poem-proverbs, we will next investigate the discussions of parts three and four (7:14–29 and 8:2–9:17) of Ecclesiastes, which contain Qoheleth's teaching on the righteousness of faith and justification. This section of the essay will treat 7:14–29, which lays the foundation for Qoheleth's teaching on righteousness. The proverbs of 7:1–13 are replete with better-than statements. As noted above, these better-than statements are judgments made about life under the sun. Nonetheless, Qoheleth's proverbs begin to move the reader's eyes from life constrained by temporality to higher things. One's day of death is better than the day of one's birth; the end of a thing (the eschatological viewpoint) is better than the beginning of a thing (the viewpoint from creation). Qoheleth's conclusion to these proverbs is that one should

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[24] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 382.

[25] Seow remarks: "It must be said that the perspective in vv. 13b–14 is not contradictory to the rest of the book. Nowhere does Qohelet, or the writers of Proverbs for that matter, deny the importance of obedience to the divine commandments. Nor is the possibility of an eschatological judgment explicitly rejected. Yet, the final remark in the epilogue does put a different spin on Qohelet's work by associating the fear of God with obedience to the commandments." *Ecclesiastes*, 395.

consider God's work. What God has bent, no man can straighten. Qoheleth then begins his commentary.

Qoheleth takes up the issue of the "under-the-sun" reality that often the man that is "righteous" suffers, while the man that does evil appears to get away with it and even to endure and to prosper. Surprisingly, Qoheleth does not use the word "vaporous" (הבל) in this section, other than in 7:15, where he calls his life a "life of vapor" (בִּימֵי הַבְלִי). That some are righteous and others are evil is to him a given. But what is the nature of this righteousness? Rather than complaining over the reality that temporal blessings do not always follow the righteous, Qoheleth counsels against excess. What is the nature of this excess? Is he suggesting that one should sin some, or is he rather describing the reality of fallen human existence? Lee writes:

> Wickedness and folly are known to destroy life (v. 17). But so, too, can zealous religiosity damage a person's vitality and well-being. Qoheleth therefore urges those who are prone to such over-righteousness to cease striving, and to allow mistakes in themselves and others as well (cf. vv. 21–22). Fear of God must be accompanied by an appropriate and realistic knowledge of the self if it is to be life-giving."[26]

This statement implies that the righteousness that is appropriate is not based upon fastidious adherence to the law. Luther's comments are along the same line:

> That is, forget about the highest law; measure yourself by your own foot and sing, "Know thyself." Then you will find in your own breast a lengthy catalog of vices, and you will say: "Look, I myself am still unrighteous, and yet I am tolerated by God and am not banished by people. Then why am I so carried away with fury that I harshly require of others what I do not achieve myself?" This is what it means to be overly righteous.[27]

The point of this section is summed up in the words of 7:20: "There is not a righteous man in the land who does good and does not sin." This failure of all people to be truly righteous teaches that life "under the sun" will, as Lohfink states, not be lived under "an eternal and unchangeable moral law but rather according to an ethic qualified by concrete relationships,"[28] by a realization that one's fellows are broken by original sin.

Does Qoheleth, then, give up on living a good and "righteous" life? Is he counseling his readers to commit sin, or, rather, is he simply urging

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[26] Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 102.

[27] *LW* 15:122.

[28] Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 98.

them to acknowledge that no one is perfectly righteous? "Do not be excessively righteous" sounds like an invitation to sin at least a little. Fox notes that this

> sounds as if Koheleth would allow a moderate degree of wickedness. The commentators try to avoid this impression in various ways. Ibn Ezra claims the rasha' (wicked) here refers to worldly matters. . . . However, rasha' always refers to real wickedness. Koheleth is not advocating it but accepting its inevitability: all humans are inescapably flawed (7:20), but they can at least avoid being very wicked.[29]

In this, Fox's comments agree substantially with Luther, whose position is that Qoheleth is not writing to instruct consciences before God, but rather about life in the world, even the political life.[30] Yet it must be remembered that for Luther, even the political life is life lived *coram deo.* Therefore, Luther can also say, "If this life were heavenly and angelic, nothing would happen unjustly; but our sinful nature cannot do anything but sin and be foolish."[31] Qoheleth establishes that the righteousness that counts before God is not that of human moral perfection; all people commit sin, even the righteous (7:20).

The righteousness of the man in 7:14, who perishes in his righteousness, is the civic, or political, righteousness of the kingdom of the left. This is not the righteousness that counts before God, but the declaration of righteousness bestowed upon one by one's fellows. Qoheleth's counsel against excessive righteousness is a warning against considering oneself to be more righteous than others, and a warning not to consider this to be the righteousness that truly matters outside this vaporous (הבל) world. The temptation to focus on one's civic righteousness and constantly to measure oneself against others is pervasive, as illustrated by the Pharisees in the Gospels of the New Testament. It is also an admonition to be realistic in one's expectations of others. Qoheleth is a realist, who would warn his hearers that they too have fallen short in the same ways as others. Seow sums this up well: "The inevitability of wickedness is the very opposite of the hubris that believes in the possibility of being so righteous that one can avert death."[32] The one who realizes his own failings will better be able to bear the shortcomings of others. Luther, whose teaching distinguishes between two kinds of

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[29] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 49.

[30] *LW* 15:133.

[31] *LW* 15:123.

[32] Choon-Leong Seow, "Theology When Everything Is Out of Control," *Interpretation* 55, no. 3 (2001): 246.

righteousness, one that avails before God and one that is for the neighbor's sake, states, "For just as it belongs to the righteousness of faith and spiritual righteousness to bear the weak in faith and to instruct them gently, so it belongs to political righteousness . . . to bear the defects of others, so that there is mutual toleration, by which we tolerate one another and wink at faults."[33]

So far Qoheleth has taught what kind of righteousness does not count before God. It is not this civic, or political, righteousness. Has Qoheleth anything positive to say? While a more explicit explanation will follow below, herein Qoheleth still teaches a different kind of righteousness. This righteousness is the righteousness of faith. In 7:18 he states: "The one who fears God will go forth with both of these." The God-fearer is the one who does not pretend to be what he is not; he does not feign perfection. Seow remarks: "The fearer of God is one who knows the place of humanity, both human potential and human limitations. For Qohelet in this passage the fear of God is the recognition of human limitations and the acceptance of divine will."[34] The one who fears God thus lives life *simul iustus et peccator*. The form of righteousness for Qoheleth is the same as for Paul the apostle; the form is faith. For Qoheleth, the fear of God "refers to mankind's living in knowledge of man's place in relation to deity."[35] Accepting one's place in relation to God is none other than accepting one's position, or rather suffering one's position, to be that of a creature and, therefore, as one that will rightly be subjected to the judgment of God. The person of faith acknowledges that he is not so righteous as to avoid the inevitable sentence of the unrighteous, namely, death. A creature is a receiver of life and of justification (or condemnation). The person of faith has received the judgment of imperfection (7:20) without argumentation. Rather than self-justification, "the fear of God, by contrast, embraces both the possibilities and the impossibilities of being human. It acknowledges that people are invariably *simul iustus et peccator*,"[36] as Lee has remarked. Thus Qoheleth's comment that "there is a [righteous man] perishing in his righteousness and there is an [evil man] enduring in his wickedness," while made in the midst of his vaporous (הבל) life, is not itself followed up by the verdict of being vaporous (הבל). It is God's eschatological sentence, and therefore is above all censure. "Both righteousness and wisdom are achieved through

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[33] *LW* 15:127.

[34] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 255.

[35] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 57.

[36] Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 103.

the fear of God,"[37] which means by faith. Qoheleth calls upon his hearers boldly to acknowledge their sinfulness, but to do so in utter trust in God.

V. The Meaning of "Fearing God" in Ecclesiastes

"The fear of the LORD," or as Qoheleth states it, "fearing God," is a recurring concept in the wisdom literature of the Bible. Qoheleth makes a strong statement about fearing God in 7:18. By fearing God, one will steer a proper course in life between hubris and wickedness. Seow remarks:

> Such is the reality of a world where righteousness and wisdom are ultimately beyond grasp, and Qoheleth dares to state the case theologically—in terms of the all-important category: the fear of God. The view of human inability to grasp righteousness and wisdom would later be developed more fully by the apostle Paul. . . . Indeed, Paul takes the argument of Qoheleth to a christological conclusion, but the seeds of the gospel, as it were, have already been sown in "the Preacher's" proclamation of humanity's place before the sovereign and mysterious God whose world is ungraspable by mortals.[38]

A world in which everything is הבל (gaseous, vapor, absurdity) might seem to be a prescription for despair. That God is in heaven and man is on earth and no one can find out what God has planned may appear to be a cause to lie down and die. Far from it! Rather, Qoheleth counsels joy, coupled with the fear of God. How is it that his observations do not end in desperation? Seow continues:

> The unrelenting emphasis on the world's ungraspability may lead one to despair, except when one ponders also the equally persistent insistence of the author that everything is in the hand of a sovereign and mysterious God. This is the God of the Torah and, one might add, the God of all scripture. The *deus absconditus* (hidden God) of the book is none other than the *deus revelatus* (revealed God). The epilogue makes explicit what has been only implicit in the book, namely, that there is a theological-ethical implication in all this talk of *hebel*: one is to live life before this God who is both *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus*.[39]

The proper posture of mankind is to live in the fear of God. This fear is, in actuality, suffering oneself to be in a recipient relationship to God, both to God as creator and the giver of life, and to God as judge, the one who will judge everyone's works. This fear of God is thus nothing other than faith.

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[37] Wayne A. Brindle, "Righteousness and Wickedness in Ecclesiastes 7:15–18," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23, no. 3 (1985): 257.

[38] Seow, "Theology When Everything Is Out of Control," 246.

[39] Seow, "Theology When Everything Is Out of Control," 248–49.

The one who is properly oriented toward God is the one who fears and trusts in him.

VI. The Doctrine of Justification in 8:2–9:10

We next investigate the second-to-last part of Ecclesiastes. The discussion of the text will be presented up to and including 9:10, even though, according to the structure proposed in this study, the section continues to 9:17, because the verses that follow do not impact the understanding of the key section of 9:7–10, but rather flow out from it. This second-to-last part of Ecclesiastes begins with the shortest of the poem-proverbs, in which Qoheleth appears to engage the questions, "Who is like the wise?" and "Who knows the meaning of anything?"[40] This is essentially the rendering of these words in NKJV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, and NIV. This is not, however, the only possible translation. Rendering דבר as "word" yields a different sense in the entire verse. The word דבר in this case is not a general statement. The דבר to which the question is directed is rather the following saying of the wise: חָכְמַת אָדָם תְּאִיר פָּנָיו וְעֹז פָּנָיו יְשֻׁנֶּא. Although tricky to translate, the sentence can be rendered: "The wisdom of a man makes his face to shine and changes the hardness of his face." This would make the entire verse read: "Who is like the wise and who knows the meaning of the saying: 'The wisdom of a man makes his face to shine and changes the hardness of his face.'" This is essentially the translation put forward in the NJPS: "Who is like the wise man, and who knows the meaning of the adage: 'A man's wisdom lights up his face, / So that his deep discontent is dissembled'?[41]"

In all cases, the question appears to be rhetorical. As Fox states, "The implicit answer is '*no one*'—no one is that wise!"[42] There appears to be universal agreement among the commentators on this. The deeper question is whether or not this is Qoheleth's own final verdict. Does he agree that no one knows the meaning of this adage, or is he going to make his readers wrestle through to the end and help them limp toward an answer? If the more common translation is followed, then one must simply treat this as a stand-alone proverb, and the issue is moot. But if the saying (דבר) is this proverb, then, consistent with his methodology, Qoheleth wants to engage his readers and pull them deeply into this mystery. His discussion of this proverb follows. How is it that a man's face is lighted up,

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[40] 8:1, מִי כְהֶחָכָם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דָּבָר, rendered, "Who [is] like the wise ones, and who knows the meaning (explanation, interpretation) of a thing (word, matter)?"

[41] As found in Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 53.

[42] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 54.

and, given all of Qoheleth's foregoing critique of wisdom, of what *genus* is this wisdom that does such a thing, that even changes the hardness of a man's face?[43]

Throughout Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth has been arguing against the kind of theology that seeks to find God and to understand his way on the basis of what can be seen and discerned from life "under the sun." The theology of Qoheleth becomes crystal clear in 8:2–9:10. Human sinfulness is confessed in no uncertain terms. No man is so mighty that he can hang on to his spirit when his day of death comes (8:8). Death for Qoheleth is the proof that man is powerless. Qoheleth also takes up the result of God's forbearance. While he does not go so far as to say that God forbears so that man may be given an opportunity to repent, he does inform us what God's longsuffering actually works within the person. "Because a sentence is not carried out speedily against an evil deed, therefore the heart of the sons of man is fully set to do evil." Torah is replete with such stories, such as God's forbearance with Israel in the wilderness, that illustrate Qoheleth's point.

An equally important aspect of Qoheleth's theology concerns human ignorance. In 8:17 he writes that he has seen all the things that God has done. In other words, he has attempted to discover what can be known about God and his ways from the world around him. All he has been able to find out is that man cannot know anything about the will and purposes of the *deus absconditus*. "No matter how much man toils in attempting, he will not find it out" (8:17). Man cannot know from the temporal experiences of life whether God loves him or hates him (9:2). The ultimate proof of this is that everyone completes his life with the same end (מקרה), namely, death. It would thus appear, although Qoheleth does not say this, that the only logical conclusion that could be made from the common end of all people is that God hates all people. Qoheleth draws neither this conclusion nor its opposite, that is, that God loves everybody, but he does use this end (מקרה) as evidence that "the heart of the sons of man is full of evil and foolishness," which could also be translated as "madness (or insanity) is in their hearts" (9:3).

Therefore, it is in some ways surprising to read Qoheleth's words about it going well (טוב) with those that fear God. Qoheleth's argument as to why it goes well with those that fear God is absolutely consistent with his doctrine of human sin, inability, and ignorance. It does not go well with the God-fearer because such a person obeys the law, or seeks wisdom, or

[43] Or, as Seow translates this: "one changes one's impudent look." *Ecclesiastes*, 276.

makes sacrifices, or any such works. Rather it is well with the God-fearer simply because this one fears before God (8:12). Conversely, it is not well (טוב) with the one who does not fear God, not because of some laundry list of sins and offenses, but simply because he does not fear before God. Qoheleth has to make such an argument to be consistent. All have sinned. Everyone's heart is full of evil. Therefore, all human merit is excluded. Qoheleth preaches grace alone, even before he gets to 9:7.

In 9:7 Qoheleth arrives at the theological foundation for the enjoyment imperatives. He has counseled enjoyment six times previously, most recently in 8:15, where he commended enjoyment. There he stated that rejoicing and enjoyment of food and drink is the only thing that is good (טוב) for man "under the sun." A few words are in order here concerning this statement. It might appear that Qoheleth is counseling a hedonistic lifestyle. Such a reading of the text is unnecessary. In fact, a close reading precludes such a conclusion. Qoheleth is no hedonist. The eating and drinking that he urges is coupled with the commendation of rejoicing. The word שמח (rejoice, make merry) is used in the sense of rejoicing in God and his works (e.g., Deut 16:4, Judg 9:19, 1 Sam 2:1, Ps 31:8).[44] Given the current context—the preceding speaking of the one who fears before God, the following speaking of the days of one's life as days given to man—this is a rejoicing that is informed not by the horrors of a life of toil, but by the fear of God. Only such an eating and drinking coupled with rejoicing can sustain a person, accompanying him in his toil throughout the days of his life. Qoheleth is concerned not so much with the temporal (or eternal) fruit of toil as with the toil itself. He counsels his readers to find enjoyment in the very midst of toil, not in the results that it may or may not bring to the laborer. In this sense, Qoheleth is recovering for his readers a perspective on work (vocation) that regains what was lost in Eden. This can only be accomplished if the cause of the curse, mankind's refusal to live rightly related to God, that is, in a position of fear and faith, is undone.

"Go, eat your bread with rejoicing and drink your wine with a good heart, for God has already accepted with pleasure your doings" (9:7). This is the theological grounds for all the Enjoyment Imperatives. The word רצה ("accepted with pleasure") in the *Qal* means "take pleasure in," "be favorable to," "be well disposed toward," "to accept with pleasure," and even "to become friends with."[45] In the Septuagint the word was translated by the Greek word "εὐδόκησεν," which also means "he has approved" or

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[44] See L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J.J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. M.E.J. Richardson (4 vols.; Leiden, 1994–1999), 1334.

[45] *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1281.

"he has delighted."[46] The word רצה occurs with "the accusative of a thing" in 9:7—with God as the subject of the sentence, the object being one's works.[47] The declaration of pleasure in the present context is thus directed specifically towards one's doings. The one to whom Qoheleth is speaking is the one who fears God. The one whose works are accepted with pleasure by God is the one who is righteous by grace through faith, living out his life of faith in the context of his vocation. Luther comments:

> This exhortation applies to the godly, to those who fear God, as though he were saying, "You who are godly, do what you can, because you know that God approves what you do." This is the height of spiritual wisdom, to know that one has a gracious God, who approves our works and actions. Thus Rom. 8:16 says, "It is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." For unless our heart immerses itself in the will and good pleasure of God, it can never sweeten its bitterness of heart; it will always remain bitter unless the heart is filled with the good pleasure of God. This passage ought to refute those who conclude from the mistranslation of the earlier words (v. 1), *whether it is love or hate man does not know,* that men should be uncertain about the will of God toward us.[48]

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[46] W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1979), 319.

[47] This same grammatical structure (רצה with the accusative of a thing) occurs in Deut 33:11, Prov 16:7, and 1 Chr 29:17. The first of these is the blessing of Moses upon the tribes of Israel, just prior to Moses' death and Israel's entry into Canaan. In Deut 33:11, it is the work of Levi's hands that Moses asks God to "accept." That work would be the sacrifices offered by the Levitical priests. The Proverbs reference says that when a man's ways are "pleasing to the Lord," God even makes his enemies to be at peace with him. The immediately prior verse speaks of atonement for iniquity. The context thus implies propitiation and acceptance (justification). The reference in 1 Chronicles is from David's prayer prior to his death. God tries the heart and "delights" in the upright. The verse also speaks of joy. When the word רצה is used with the accusative of a person, we find God accepting a man, that he may see God's face with joy (Job 33:26), God's acceptance of his people when they return to him (Ezek 20:40), and his acceptance of them after they offer sacrifices (Ezek 43:27). In the section in the book of Job, Elihu speaks of repentance, then states, "And he will pray to God, and he [God] will accept him (רצה) that he may see his face in joy and restore to man his righteousness." The context speaks of the restoration of righteousness, which is none other than justification by grace through faith. The passages in Ezekiel likewise speak of restoration, although the context is eschatological. God's רצה of his people's works, especially in this context in Ecclesiastes, does not imply God finding anything pleasing in his people, but rather taking pleasure in—delighting in—his people. God's רצה of his people and their works is an act of sheer grace.

[48] *LW* 15:148–149 (emphasis original).

Luther makes a very important point. The "height of spiritual wisdom" (recall the question of 8:1) is to know that one has a gracious God. How to know God's will is part of the problem with which Qoheleth has been forcing his readers to wrestle. Man cannot know God's will by probing into the *deus absconditus*, by reasoning out God's will through a process of evaluating the apparent fate or end of individual people. The common end of all precludes this. Rather, God's will, and God's will toward one, can only be determined by hearing the expression of that will from the *deus revelatus*. This *deus revelatus* has spoken, and his words are inscripturated. Thus, by returning his readers to the creation account of Genesis, which undergirds the entire book, Qoheleth points to that which is most certain and true. God has given work to mankind. He did so before the Fall, and he has commanded man to toil since the Fall. Thus it is through living by faith (the fear of God) within one's vocation that one knows the grace of God, the acceptance of one and one's works. The one who lives life in the revealed will of the God of the Torah knows God's grace and favor. Qoheleth is urging his readers to abandon a theology that seeks to understand God by probing the *deus absconditus* and to find God solely where he has willed to be found as *deus revelatus*. This understanding leads to the conclusion that the closing verses of Ecclesiastes are consistent with Qoheleth's theology and purpose.

It must be made clear that Qoheleth is not urging his readers to find the grace of God in the results of their works. He is not teaching what is called "works righteousness." Ecclesiastes reveals that one cannot know anything about God by seeking his acceptance in a system based on distributive righteousness. Qoheleth's complaint, if one wishes to call it a complaint, is that the system is broken.

> Whether it is love or hate, man does not know by what is before him—everything to everyone according to one end: to the righteous, to the wicked, to the good, to the clean, to the unclean, to the one who sacrifices, and to the one who does not sacrifice. As to the good, so also to the sinner, to the one who swears, as to the one who is frightened of an oath (Eccl 9:1b–2).

Thus no verdict that God takes pleasure in anyone can be ascertained by works of the law. All this falls under the *deus absconditus*, and from him no comfort ever comes. Therefore, this grace of God can only be found where God has revealed himself as the God of grace, and that is in his word—which is that to which Qoheleth points his readers, even if it might appear that he does so obliquely.

This life of faith is the basis for Qoheleth's imperative to his readers to "see life" (9:9). The word "see" (ראה) figures prominently throughout Ecclesiastes. It is also a recurring term in Genesis 1 and again appears in the following chapter with the need for the making of the woman. In Genesis 1, it is persistently linked with the word טוב. The first appearance of both of these words is in Genesis 1:4. God says, "Let there be light." And there was light. Then we read, "and God saw the light, that it was good" (וַיַּ֣רְא אֱלֹהִ֔ים אֶת־הָאֹ֖ור כִּי־טֹ֑וב). Claus Westermann comments:

> The first sentence of v. 4 has a structure peculiar in Hebrew which is difficult to translate adequately. W.F. Albright, "the Refrain 'And God Saw ki tôb' in Genesis," *Mélanges bibliques, en l'honneur de André Robert*, 1955, 22–26, translates: "And God saw, how good was" or in other places, "And God saw, that it was very good." The procedure in itself is quite clear: a craftsman has completed his work, he looks at it and finds it is a success or judges that it is good. The Hebrew sentence includes the "finding" or "judging" in the act of looking. He regards the work as good. The work was good "in the eyes of God," it exists as good in God's regard of acceptance.[49]

The act of seeing is a declarative or forensic act. It is the sentence of judgment. God declares his creation acceptable in his eyes. Westermann's comment that the work is good "in the eyes of God" recalls the words of Genesis 6:8, where Noah finds favor in the Lord's eyes (וְנֹ֖חַ מָצָ֣א חֵ֑ן בְּעֵינֵ֖י יְהוָֽה). Nahum Sarna also attests to the "seeing of creation as good" as an act of judgment by God, calling it "a formula of divine approbation."[50] Thus the act of "seeing good (טוב)" and רצה (accepting with pleasure) are in many ways parallel.[51] In 9:9 the reader is counseled to "see," that is, urged to make a judgment about life that is contrary to what the eyes and the "under the sun" reason might cause him to make. What God has justified, declared approved (רצה), see (ראה) as good and enjoy.

White garments and oil upon the head are fitting for the person who sees life rather than death. This life which Qoheleth urges his reader to enjoy in 9:9 is lived in companionship with the woman the reader loves, with his wife. Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler note that this is

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[49] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 113.

[50] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: the Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation* (The JPS Torah commentary; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 7.

[51] The word ראה occurs in the context of seven out of the eight Enjoyment Statements in Ecclesiastes (2:24; 3:13; 3:22; 5:17; 7:14; 9:9; 11:7).

"the only reference to a wife in the book"[52] of Ecclesiastes. While this reference may appear to be an unexpected intrusion, especially given the supposed misogynistic comments in 7:26–28, it is possible that this mention of the wife is another key for Qoheleth's readers to recall God's gift of a woman to the man in Genesis 2. Fox remarks, "In spite of his acrid comments about women in 7:24–29, Koheleth does not think it is good for a man to be alone."[53] Man is to live life with a female counterpart all the days of his life, for this is his portion in life and in his toil. That family life is part of God's command and gift to man is even to be found in the curse placed upon the woman (pain in childbirth). But also the "promise of the seed" is to be found there, as God promises that deliverance will come through the "seed of the woman." If this is the case, it adds weight to the thesis that Qoheleth is urging his readers to look to the *deus revelatus.*

Qoheleth's final causative phrase is found in 9:10. Man is to give himself fully, with all his might, to his work—to his vocation—because "there is no scheming or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going." Is this an unexpected turn for him? It should not be thought of in such a way. Qoheleth the realist will not let his readers lose sight of the fact that life "under the sun," which is precisely where his readers (whom he urges to fear and trust God) live, is lived under the curse of death. They live—yes, even people of faith live—in the absurdity of a world gone wrong.[54]

VII. Conclusion

Still, now is the time for life, with all its scheming, all its knowledge, and all its wisdom—which are all partial and flawed at best—and for vocation. Faith lives life knowing that life will end, and faith finds life as a gift from God to be enjoyed. Enjoyment is thus the proper, albeit paradoxical, expression of the faith of a believer living in a penultimate world. Qoheleth asks the question, "Who is like the wise and who knows the meaning of the saying: 'The wisdom of a man makes his face to shine and changes the hardness of his face'?" (8:1). His answer as to what it is that can make a man's face shine (with joy) and change his countenance is found in God's acceptance of one's doings, based upon, as Luther puts it, the discovery of a gracious God. The righteousness of faith is the answer.

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[52] Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers; Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 210.

[53] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 63.

[54] NIV's choice of the word "meaningless" here obscures the point. Life is not meaningless, but it is absurd.

CTQ 74 (2010): 243–259

Amos's Earthquake in the Book of the Twelve[1]

R. Reed Lessing

I. Introduction

Amos's ministry began with Yahweh's call (3:8; 7:15), followed by his five visions (7:1–3, 4–6, 7–9; 8:1–3; 9:1–4). There was his "High Noon at the O.K. Corral" confrontation with Amaziah (7:10–17), which was preceded by a blistering critique of Israel's movers and shakers (e.g., 2:6–16; 4:1–5; 6:1–7). The prophet was banished from the Northern Kingdom (7:12). Amos 1:1 then states that the prophet's ministry ended "two years before the earthquake (הרעש)."

The lexeme רעש, "to shake" or "shaking," appears forty-seven times in the Old Testament, thirty times as a verb and seventeen times as a noun.[2] Its semantic range includes earthquakes (Amos 1:1) and the sound of chariots (Jer 47:3), as well as the rattling of bones (Ezek 37:7). In both verbal and nominal forms, however, רעש appears primarily in theophanic texts.

Historically, earth tremors and shocks are common in the rift valley of the Jordan River-Dead Sea-Arabah axis, yet this particular earthquake (הרעש = "*the* earthquake") must have been stronger than normal, as is indicated by the use of the definite article, which implies that this tectonic shift stood out to the degree that one could simply refer to it as *the* earthquake, and everyone knew which one that was. Most scholars connect *the* earthquake to the one attested to at stratum VI of Hazor and dated to around 760 BC.[3]

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[1] This article first appeared as a paper presented on January 21, 2009, at Concordia Theological Seminary's twenty-fourth annual Symposium on Exegetical Theology entitled, "The Coherence of the Sacred Scriptures." Excerpts in this article are from Reed Lessing, *Amos* (Concordia Commentary Series; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009). Used with permission.

[2] Schmoldt, "רעש," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols., ed. G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. Fabry, trans. J.T. Willis, G.W. Bromiley, and D.E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006), 13:589.

[3] Cf. Yigal Yadin et. al., *Hazor II: An Account of the Second Season of Excavations, 1956* (Jerusalem, Hebrew University: Magnes Press, 1960), 24–26, 36–37. Yohanan Aharoni—an excavator of Beer-sheba—conjectures that the destruction of Stratum III of this city

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We also know from where Amos's seismic shock derived theologically. Earthquakes were initially understood to be a manifestation of Yahweh's saving presence. Judges 5 is one of the earliest poems in the Old Testament, and verse 4 describes Yahweh as he travels from Seir and Edom: the "earth shook" (ארץ רעשה) and "the heavens dripped with water." Even earlier than the period of the judges, however, the earth's shaking also signaled Yahweh's presence to deliver. Exodus 19 is Israel's paradigmatic theophanic text; verse 18 states, "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because Yahweh descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently." Understood in this way, Shalom Paul believes that Amos's earthquake was interpreted as a sign of Yahweh's presence, "and authenticated his being accepted as a true prophet."[4]

And we know from where Amos's earthquake derived literarily. Prior to "two years before the earthquake," seismic shocking was a major theme in many of his oracles. It is most prominent in the fifth vision (9:1–4), in which the lexeme רעש appears for its second and last time in the book. In verse 1, Yahweh's command makes the thresholds of the temple shake (וירעשו). An earthquake is also inferred in the following verses: 3:15, Yahweh commands the turning over (הפך) of Bethel and the royal houses; 4:11, part of Israel is turned over (הפך) like Sodom and Gomorrah; 6:11, Yahweh promises to smash (הכה) all of Israel's houses; 8:8 and 9:5, Yahweh pledges that the land will shake (רגז) to such an extent that the Nile River will move up and down. It is fitting, therefore, that Amos, whose oracles were literally earth-shaking, was vindicated by an earthquake.

II. Amos's Rhetorical Strategy

This study will demonstrate that Amos takes a motif that had earlier attested to Yahweh's presence *for* Israel (Exod 19 and Judg 5) and inverts it to attest to Yahweh's presence as judgment *against* Israel. The prophet develops this rhetorical strategy in order to gain a hearing from his listeners. That is to say, Israel's leadership had become deaf to its theological language.[5] They had allowed their texts, which at one point

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may have been triggered by the same earthquake (as noted by Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah – An Archeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 21; cf. 22 for an artistic rendering of the evidence of this earthquake at Hazor.

[4] Shalom Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 36.

[5] Isaiah indicates that in his day Israel also had ears but could not hear and eyes but could not see (cf. Isa 6:9–10). In Isa 42:9, the prophet quotes Yahweh as saying, "Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one

had been so surprising and remarkable and full of good news, to erode into old news. Unbelief dulled earlier promises into slogans that no longer had the vitality to do the best things that Yahweh's words do: forgive and recreate lives, form and regulate human relationships, serve as the glue that holds people together in community, and provide the sanctions that limit people's abuse of each other. In this vacuum, individual autonomy and selfishness emerged unchallenged, and Israel began to disintegrate. Oblivious to how their language had dulled their spiritual vitality, Israel's high rollers became intoxicated with violence, bloodshed, and economic exploitation. As long as the nation was up and running, sick as it was, its flow of meaningless words kept it going.

In this situation, Amos could not simply repeat words from earlier texts, but neither could he embark on a mission that completely jettisoned Israel's theological language. Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman describe the prophet's dilemma this way: "A judicious balance needs to be struck, one in which the prophet's role as conservator of ancient tradition is blended with that of radical critic of current behavior and intention."[6] Amos's challenge, therefore, was to use theological language itself to show the inadequacy of what the language had become, and to reconnect its parts in a way that would make it fresh and real and alive. Needing to accomplish this using the resources of the language itself, he employs the rhetorical strategy of inversion.

Amos scholars often note the prophet's sophisticated appropriation of forms and traditions, as well as his carefully crafted language.[7] For example, James Crenshaw argues that Amos uses liturgical texts and ideas throughout his book to make contact with his audience, only to turn the

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committed to me, blind like the servant of Yahweh?" (cf. 43:8; Matt 13:13; Mark 4:12). Yahweh describes the same problem in Ezekiel (e.g., Ezek 3:4–7; 33:30–33).

[6] Andersen and Freedman, *Amos* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 539.

[7] Among Amos commentators, there appears to be unanimous agreement on the prophet's literary skill. H.W. Wolff marvels that in the two-dozen short oracles one finds such a "wealth of rhetorical forms," *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 91. James L. Mays hails Amos as one who displays "remarkable skill at using all the devices of oral literature available in Israel's culture," *Amos: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 6. Andersen and Freedman note that Amos is one of the most "versatile verbal craftsmen" among the prophets, *Amos*, 144. Shalom Paul speaks of Amos's "distinctive literary style," as well as the way he uses literary traditions and conventions with "creative sophistication," *Commentary on the Book of Amos*, 7, 4. The lone dissent seems to come from John Hayes, who claims, "There is nothing especially creative in Amos's preaching," *Amos – The Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 38.

themes against the people.[8] It is almost universally agreed that Amos is a master at upending texts.[9]

Amos employs earlier motifs that simply cannot be contradicted and *contradicts* them! The prophet peppers the nation's leaders with challenging "in-your-face" questions. What if Israel is *just like* the other nations? (1:3–2:16). What if election means *judgment*? (3:2). What if worship is a *crime*? (4:4–5). What if the nation is not alive at all, but *dead*? (5:1-3). What if Passover happened again, but this time *Israel* became the first-born of Egypt? (5:17). What if the Day of Yahweh turns out to be the *night* of Yahweh? (5:18–20). What if Yahweh had accomplished an exodus for *other nations*? (9:7). And, for our purposes, what if the earthquake denotes not Yahweh's presence to *save* but his power to *destroy*? (1:1; 9:1–4).

III. An Absolute End?

Because the few islands of hope in Amos 1:2–9:10 (e.g., 5:4, 14, 15) are submerged in an earthquake of death, many doubt the authenticity of Amos 9:11–15. The consensus in critical scholarship is that Amos's earthquake signals the absolute end of all hope. Wellhausen's remark regarding Amos 9:11–15 is now classic: "*Rosen und Lavendel statt Blut und Eisen*" ("roses and lavender instead of blood and iron").[10]

The objection is that the promise of restoration in Amos 9:11–15 is unthinkable in the context of the prophet's repeated oracles that promise to shake, rattle, roll, raze, and ruin. The section also appears to be anticlimactic in light of earlier texts because it fails to mention the prominent words משפט וצדקה ("justice and righteousness"; cf. 5:7, 24; 6:12). It is additionally asserted that because there are other instances of supposedly "all's well that ends well" endings tacked onto other prophets,[11] the same likelihood exists here.

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[8] James Crenshaw, "Amos and the Theophanic Tradition," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 80 (1968): 203–15.

[9] Mays, for example, says that Amos consistently "take[s] up the themes of the theological tradition from his audience and use[s] them in a way that [is] completely 'unorthodox' and unexpected," *Amos*, 57. Wolff notes the prophet's use of language that has "shocking surprises," *Joel and Amos*, 211.

[10] Wellhausen, *Die Kleinen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1892), 96. Most scholars believe the majority of the sayings that comprise Amos are authentic, yet the following have been questioned: the title (1:1), the oracles against Tyre (1:9–10), Edom (1:11–12), and Judah (2:4–5), the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah (7:10–17), the hymnic sections (4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6), and the oracles of salvation (9:11–15). Wolff's discussion on 9:11–15 is representative (*Joel and Amos*, 352–353).

[11] E.g., Ezek 40–48; Zech 3:13–20; Joel 4 [English translations : Joel 3].

The underlying criterion embraced by those who argue that 9:11–15 is not original with the prophet is the assumption that prophetic texts had to be continually reinterpreted.[12] A prophetic book was made more relevant by later material. Therefore, critics hold, books like Amos grew over a lengthy period and were continually reformulated.[13] Amos is, therefore, seen as a collection of varied traditions and not the work of a single author.

This interpretation of 9:11–15 is dubious for several reasons. Already in 1902, Otto Procksch raised this issue concerning the text's authenticity: "Most of all one can hardly imagine that Amos should let Yahweh triumph over nothingness."[14] Is Yahweh's victory the complete and total end of Israel as well as of every Israelite?[15] Even more compelling evidence for a single author is the internal logic of the book itself. If Yahweh could change from law to gospel earlier (cf. Amos 7:3, 6 and the use of נחם, often translated "to relent"),[16] then even if he has issued an irreversible judgment (לא אשיבנו, "I will not reverse it"—eight times in chap. 1 and 2), the possibility is held out that he could relent and change from law to gospel *again*.[17] Because Yahweh is the God whose final word is always

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[12] Odil Steck writes: "Diachronic findings will show that prophetic books continually explain this aspect and present it anew in the transmission movement that these books include," *The Prophetic Books and Their Theological Witness*, trans. James Nogalski (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 58.

[13] Steck, *The Prophetic Books and Their Theological Witness*, 59.

[14] Otto Procksch, *Geschichtsbetrachtung und geschichtliche Überlieferung bei den vorexilischen Propheten* (Leipzig, 1902), 13, note 1. Erling Hammershaimb, moreover, points to Egyptian parallels in this regard. "The pattern of misfortune linked with good fortune has also been demonstrated in Egyptian oracles, e.g., in the prophecy of Neferrohu from c. 2000 BC. Here the transition from prophecy of judgment to promise is quite as abrupt as in Amos. This has persuaded several commentators to change their minds and allow the possible authenticity of the promises in the prophets of the Old Testament. More generally, the change from misfortune to good fortune is found in Oriental dramas, in which both parts belong together to create the correct balance in life. Men of antiquity could therefore contain these contradictions in themselves. In the most recent scholarly work the view has been taken that the prophets took over this pattern from the cult," *The Book of Amos* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 137–138. Hammershaimb supports the authenticity of Amos 9:11–15.

[15] Gerhard Hasel lists those scholars who believe that Amos 9:11–15 derives from the eighth century Amos, "The Alleged 'No' of Amos and Amos' Eschatology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29 (1991): 3–18, 15–16. Hasel cites twenty-four between 1912–1970 and ten since then.

[16] For a discussion on this important word, cf. Lessing, *Jonah* (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2007), 324–341.

[17] This is what 9:11–15 announces: the words "building" and "planting" in 9:14–15 restore the earlier judgment in 5:11; the agricultural bounty in 9:13–14 restores the

grace (cf. Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2), Israel's destiny will change. Yahweh will restore his people (9:14). The dead will rise again! The curse will be reversed! True enough, *the* earthquake and its effects throughout the book are intended to burn and bury the world of power politics and phony religion. Only after the killing message of the law is the gospel then announced in 9:11–15. Demolition is penultimate; salvation is *ultimate*.

This salvation includes the entire created order, not just Israel. The "remnant of Edom" (denoting a remnant from the nations judged in 1:3–2:3) will be restored (9:12), and the mountains and hills will drip with new wine (9:13).[18] The new order will not have the possibility of ever being shaken again. Guaranteeing this is v. 15, "they will *never again* be uprooted." This promise ends with Yahweh's "signature," as it were, guaranteeing the life to come: אמר יהוה אלהיך ("says Yahweh your God"). All along Amos connects creation, the nations, and Israel. Terrance Fretheim writes, "The world could be imaged as a giant spider-web. Every creature is in relationship with every other, such that any act reverberates out and affects the whole, shaking the entire web in varying degrees of intensity."[19] The human and nonhuman are so deeply interconnected that human sin has a devastating effect upon the rest of the world.

This is, finally, why there is a massive quake in the book of Amos. The earthly upheaval was brought on by Israel's lack of justice and righteousness.[20] Their exploitation of "Jacob who is so small" (Amos 7:2, 5) ripples out and adversely affects the entire created order. Creation is shaking and groaning throughout the book of Amos (cf. Rom 8:22), so the earth, along with a remnant of Israel and the nations, will be restored.

These concerns with creation explain Amos's three doxologies in his book: 4:13, 5:8–9 and 9:5–6.[21] The hymns are often labeled "creation

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plagues and drought in 1:2 and 4:6–11; and dwelling in the land in 9:15 restores the exilic threats in 5:5, 27; 7:11, 17.

[18] The interrelatedness between Israel and the world is seen in texts like Lev 26:32–43, Jer 4:23–28, and Hos 4:1–3.

[19] Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology Of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 173.

[20] Some examples of this interconnectedness include the ground bringing forth thorns and thistles after the Fall (Gen 3:17), the world being inundated by a flood as a result of rampant sin (Gen 6–8), Sodom and Gomorrah becoming an ecological disaster because of human wickedness (Gen 13:10–13; 19:24–28), and the Egyptian plagues being brought about by Pharaoh's genocidal policies (Exod 7–11).

[21] Amos's hymns have been subjected to multiple investigations. Questions abound: are they original with Amos or did he borrow them? Were they once one hymn that Amos subsequently divided into three sections? And what was their original *Sitz im*

hymns" because participles describing creation appear in all three sections: יצר ("to form," 4:13), ברא ("to create," 4:13), עשה ("to make," 5:8), בנה ("to build," 9:6), and יסד ("to establish," 9:6). Yahweh is not only Creator in these hymns, but he is also the De-Creator. Because Yahweh turns darkness into light (4:13, 5:8), he can also turn light into darkness (5:8, 18–19; 8:9). The one who formed order out of chaos is able to let chaos come back (cf. Jer 4:23). Yet the Creator turned De-Creator is also the Re-Creator. Yahweh's acts of judgment serve to usher in his salvation, and with it a new creation in 9:13–15. Amos's placement of creation hymns throughout the book highlights Yahweh's power to employ earthquakes when and where he pleases, as well as his ability to rebuild what has been torn down.

IV. The Book of the Twelve

Up to this point we have established that Amos employed the earlier gospel tradition of Yahweh's shaking presence *for* Israel to use it *against* Israel. The prophet did this to awaken his audience to Yahweh's living word. The convulsions continue throughout the book and are linked to the prophet's three hymns that announce Yahweh's role as Creator, De-Creator, and Re–Creator, who will finally usher in a new world envisioned in 9:11–15.

But the publication of the book of Amos brought about more than just a tectonic shift for Israel in the middle part of the eighth century BC; its repercussions are felt throughout Israel's prophetic literature. To be sure, Israel had previous prophets, some mighty fierce and daring prophets like Nathan, Micaiah ben Imlah, and, of course, the explosive Elijah. But no one had written a book. So the convergence of the earthquake's time, place, and magnitude with Amos's prediction of a divine shaking combined to make an indelible impression on Israel. Thus, with the book of Amos, there began a particular corpus of prophetic literature in the Old Testament, the Book of the Twelve.

In the order of the Latter Prophets, Amos does not appear first *canonically*—that would be Isaiah—yet it is a consensus in scholarship that Amos is first *chronologically*. This is an important distinction that forms the basis for much of what follows. Put another way, and summing up the

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Leben? Form-critical work has been done by James Crenshaw, *Hymnic Affirmation of Divine Justice,* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 24 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975); "The Influence of the Wise upon Amos," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79 (1967): 42–52; and "Amos and the Theophanic Traditions," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 80 (1968): 203–15. Cf. also Cullen Story, "Amos—Prophet of Praise," *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 67–80.

argument to this point, I am contending that Israel's *written* prophetic movement began with Amos's earthquake in 1:1. It was a massive shaking that rapidly expanded.

The expansion can be traced in the Book of the Twelve, specifically Joel, Nahum, Haggai, and Zechariah, who take up the lexeme רעש and adapt it, just like Amos did, to fit their times and their places. We will now trace Amos's seismic shocks canonically from Joel to Nahum to Haggai and finally to Zechariah, and we will see that just like Amos, all four prophets employ רעש as a precursor to Yahweh's act of a new creation. While neither Jews nor Christians have typically interpreted the Twelve as one book, there is a growing consensus that each book should be read and understood in the context of the other eleven.[22] It is now acceptable in scholarly circles to view these books as a literary unit.[23] We need, however,

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[22] We would be remiss, however, to suppose that investigating the Book of the Twelve is completely new. Sirach prayed, "May the bones of the Twelve Prophets send forth new life from where they lie" (49:10). And both the Qumran Library and Josephus count the Twelve as one book. These twelve prophets generally appear as the fourth book of the "Latter Prophets" in the Tanak (b. Baba Batra 14b), but the Talmud also stipulates that only three lines separate the individual books of the Twelve Prophets whereas four lines normally separate biblical books (b. Baba Batra 13b).

[23] For the discussion cf. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, eds., *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 325 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003). The foundational idea is that each of the Twelve is construed by final redactors in such a way that the message of each builds on its predecessors, picking up concepts, words, and text types from them. The redactors who combined the writings into one book wanted their readers to look for, discover, and appreciate how the different thematic threads generate a colorful tapestry that reflects Yahweh's self disclosure in this corpus. That the Twelve exhibits an overall theme, plot, and/or direction greater than that of the sum of its twelve parts has been challenged, especially by Ehud Ben Zvi in "Twelve Prophetic Books of 'The Twelve.' A Few Preliminary Considerations," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D.W. Watts*, ed. James W. Watts and Paul R. House, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 235 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 125–56. Ben Zvi's concerns are as follows. First, the Book of the Twelve does not have a comprehensive heading. Second, the argument that redactors used catchwords to form redactional links between different prophetic books seems to be doubtful, since the mere fact that one more or less unspecific word occurs in two different literary units can be accidental in many cases. Interpreting such cases as deliberate links is arbitrary. Third, there is the danger that an interpretation on the wider redactional level can conceal the original meaning of a certain book and may lead to misunderstanding. The best way to appropriate current scholarship on the Twelve is to utilize its synchronic approach in order to grasp certain elements of literary unity that divulge theological themes—a methodology that is similar to, though not identical with, Marvin Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), vol. 1. One must, however, insist on treating the separate books of the Twelve as important

a responsible methodology to follow properly Amos's seismic shock in the Book of the Twelve.

V. Intertextuality

My means of detecting the aftershocks of Amos's earthquake is called "intertextuality."[24] Julia Kristeva, who coined the term "intertextuality," states, "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."[25] Competing understandings of what intertextuality is and how it is to be practiced exist within both literary and biblical scholarship. Among the many articles and volumes written regarding biblical intertextuality, special significance is given to Michael Fishbane's *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*.[26] His work has been described as the "single most important contribution to the study of intertextuality in scripture."[27] Fishbane calls the phenomenon "inner biblical exegesis." Other scholars in intertextuality employ terms like "allusion," "imitation," "influence," and "echo."[28]

The assumption, then, is that the implied readers of Israel's texts were actually re-readers and so could pick up on the subtle nuances in their literature. Psalm 1:2 and Joshua 1:8 say as much with their employment of the verb הגה, understood within our circles as meaning to "read, mark, learn and *inwardly digest*" God's holy word. Ehud ben Zvi states,

> The concept of rereading is of major importance, because there are significant differences in the way people *reread* texts as opposed to their

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in and of themselves before asking questions about how they fit into a larger picture.

[24] I am indebted to Kevin Golden for many of the insights in this section. They appear in his 2010 Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, Ph.D. Dissertation entitled, "The Waves of the Deluge Breaking on Jonah: The Intertextual Use of the Noachic Narrative in Jonah."

[25] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66. Kristeva credits Mikhail Bakhtin as the person who introduced to her this literary theory.

[26] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). Fishbane borrows a phrase from Thomas Mann in order to describe the textuality of the Bible: "zitathaftes Leben," which literally means, "citationous life," or more loosely, "citation-filled life" (1). By this term Fishbane meant, "the dependence of the great religious-cultural formation on authoritative views which are studied, reinterpreted, and adapted to ongoing life" (1).

[27] Gail R. O'Day, "Jeremiah 9:22–23 and I Corinthians 1:26–31. A Study in Intertextuality," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 259–260.

[28] E.g., Helen R. Elam, "Intertextuality," in *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 620–22.

> *first* reading of the same text. . . . Texts that are suitable for continuous rereading show at least some degree of double meaning, ambiguity and literary sophistication.[29]

Timothy Beal asks, "But what determines which intertextual relationships are legitimate and which are not? And what determines how 'rightly' to negotiate those relationships once they are established? I suggest that the answer to these questions is: the reader's ideology."[30] Inasmuch as Beal places the reader's ideology in a magisterial position over the text, it is not surprising that he refers to "biblical interpretation as a *production* of meaning."[31] The text is thus described as being devoid of meaning apart from the reader's production and imposition of meaning upon the text. The scope of such reader-oriented intertextuality is not limited to a few works within biblical scholarship. In fact, there is a prevalence of reader-oriented intertextuality within the field.[32]

Though the presence of reader-oriented intertextuality within biblical studies is predominant, there is a growing symphony of voices raising concern about the exclusive authority of the reader within intertextual interpretation. Though such voices arose out of a concern that the value of the text was being ignored, they have cascaded into a full-blown argument in favor of the primacy of the text in the determination of meaning within the intertextual enterprise. One such voice is that of Brevard Childs, who writes:

> When the theory of intertextuality eliminates the privileged status of the canonical context and removes all hermeneutical value from any form of authorial intent, an interpretive style emerges that runs directly contrary

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[29] Ehud ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 9–10.

[30] Timothy K. Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 28.

[31] Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality," 28. Emphasis his.

[32] See, e.g., Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality," 27–39; Danna Nolan Fewell, "Introduction," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 11–20; Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms Through the Lens of Intertextuality*, Studies in Biblical Literature 26 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Sjef van Tilborg et al., "Introduction," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel*, ed. Sipke Draisma (Uitgeversmaatschappij: J.J. Kok-Kampen, 1989), 7; Willem Vorster, "Intertextuality and Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings*, 15–26.

> to the function of an authoritative canon which continues to serve a confessing community of faith and practice.[33]

Childs' dedication to canonical criticism necessitates his concerns. Yet, he is not alone. Susan Handelman describes the reader's interpretive work in terms of the text's revelation. She writes, "interpretation is not essentially separate from the text itself—an external act intruded upon it—but rather the extension of the text, the uncovering of the connective network of relations, a part of the continuous revelation of the text itself."[34]

Intertextual allusions, therefore, must be more than a product of the interpreter's own disposition. All such echoes need to be grounded upon the text itself. I will argue, then, that the lexeme רעש provides a valid way to follow Amos's impact in the Twelve and thus to witness the coherence of these Sacred Scriptures. Put another way, in Bethel, Amos dropped the bombshell of Yahweh's shaking judgment; then, due to the massive earthquake in 760 BC, his book was published. Later authors in the Twelve intentionally borrow the earthquake motif as a means to connect themselves to Amos and his bona-fide status in the community. Amos's earthquake is the "iron rod" later prophets employ to reinforce the "concrete" of their own messages. But in borrowing from Amos, these prophets do more than simply repeat the manner in which he employs earthquake theology; rather, they transform and build upon the borrowed text. A method of intertextuality that trusts the text and derives its meaning chiefly from that text will now assist us as we follow Amos's earthquake in the Book of the Twelve.

VI. Earthquakes in the Book of the Twelve

A reader of the Twelve first encounters the lexeme רעש in the book of Joel, who employs it within an eschatological framework. Unlike Amos's quake, Joel's is specifically connected to the coming Day of Yahweh. Joel 2:2 describes the day as "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness." And so we witness a significant move beyond Amos. A Yahweh-induced earthquake is now eschatologically a subset of *the* dominant theme in the Book of the Twelve, "The Day of Yahweh."[35]

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[33] Brevard S. Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretation," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 115 (2003): 177.

[34] Susan Handelman, quoted in Jacob Neusner, *Canon and Connection: Intertextuality in Judaism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), xi.

[35] See James D. Noglaski, "The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve," in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, Beihefte

The phrase יום יהוה ("the Day of Yahweh") makes its first appearance in the OT, *chronologically* speaking, in Amos 5:18–20.[36] This oracle assumes that there were those listening to Amos who could identify with the phrase. Both his rhetorical questions and the repetition of the contrast between "darkness and not light" suggest that the prophet was trying to refute a widely held view that "the Day of Yahweh" would usher in more of Yahweh's blessings.[37] Just as Amos turned the earthquake motif against Israel, he also stands "the Day of Yahweh" on its head. Gospel becomes law and the nation is undone.

The term יום יהוה appears twenty-nine times in the Old Testament, always in prophetic texts, e.g., Isaiah 13:6, 9; Jeremiah 46:1; Ezekiel 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11; Obadiah 15; Zechariah 1:7, 14; and Malachi 3:23.[38] This day is analogous to יום יזרעאל ("the Day of Jezreel," Hos 2:2), יום מדין ("the Day of Midian," Isa 9:3), יום מצרים ("the Day of Egypt," Ezek 30:9), and יום ירושלם ("the Day of Jerusalem," Ps 137:7). All of these refer to military action; hence "the Day of Yahweh" is another way to say, "the *battle* of Yahweh."

One of the central motifs of this day is the convulsion of the created order. Stars fall from heaven, the sun's light grows dim, the moon turns to blood, and, of course, the earth shakes! And so Joel goes on to envision the apocalyptic army described in 2:10 as follows: "Before them the earth

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zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 325 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 192–213.

[36] Perhaps the most compelling suggestion of the phrase's background comes from Gerhard von Rad, who maintained that the day was a "pure event of war which developed within the pre-prophetic institution of 'holy war'"; Von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," 103. Von Rad cites Isaiah 13 as providing the foundational text for the "Day of Yahweh" theme. With its threefold use of כל (vv. 5, 7, 15), Isaiah 13 describes a universal time of lamentation. The "Day of Yahweh" is a day of darkness (13:10; cf. Amos 5:18, 20). On this day (v. 6) Yahweh will come in person to fight, his enemies will lose heart, and their courage will fail (vv. 7–8; cf., e.g., Exod 15:14–16; Josh 2:9, 24). This day also exhibits cosmic changes: the stars will darken (v. 10) and the earth will shake (v. 13). The slaughter will be terrible (vv. 14–22). Those who will enact this judgment are called by Yahweh "my sanctified ones" (v. 3, מקדשי). They have undergone certain rites in order to prepare for this battle (cf., e.g., 1 Sam 21:5).

[37] Douglas Stuart writes: "Like the student who receives an 'F' for a paper he thought was brilliant, or the employee fired after doing what he thought was excellent work, or the person whose spouse suddenly announces that he or she wants a divorce when the marriage seemed to be going so well, the Israelites were undoubtedly stunned by such a reversal of their expectations," *Hosea–Jonah* (Waco: Word, 1987), 354.

[38] Expressions closely related to יום יהוה include יום נקם ("the day of vengeance"), יום אף־יהוה ("the day of Yahweh's anger"), יום חרון ("the day of rage"), and יום ליהוה ("the day belonging to Yahweh"), while ביום ההוא ("in that day") in some contexts denotes "the Day of Yahweh."

shakes, the heavens quake" (רעשו שמים), because "the day of Yahweh is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?" (v. 11). Joel 4:16 [Eng 3:16] adds more. In Amos-like rhetoric the prophet begins, "Yahweh roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem," but whereas Amos 1:2 continues, "the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers," Joel expands Yahweh's theophany to include the entire cosmos. He continues, "and the heavens and the earth will shake" ורעשו שמים וארץ. Not surprisingly, this is set in the context of verse 14, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of Yahweh is near." And like Amos 9:11–15, after this cosmic crumbling there is cosmic re-creation. Sounding again very much like Amos, Joel writes, "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of Yahweh's house" (4:18 [Eng 3:18]).

Those who read the Twelve sequentially read from Joel to Amos. *Chronologically* Joel comes *after* Amos, and so Joel was influenced by Amos. *Canonically*, however, Joel comes *before* Amos, which means that Amos's quake, as fulfilled in the neo-Assyrian conquest of Samaria in 721 BC, is also a portent of Yahweh's final quake that will shake the heavens and the earth. Understood in this way, Joel's place in the Twelve gives an eschatological perspective on subsequent quakes in not only Amos, but also Nahum, Haggai, and Zechariah.

After Joel and Amos, the next appearance of רעש comes in Nahum 1:5, a verse in the middle of a semi-acrostic theophanic text. It reads in part, "the mountains shake" (הרים רעשו) before Yahweh, while "the hills totter." Like Joel, Nahum transforms the earthquake motif for his unique purposes; this shaking will manifest itself in 612 BC and the Fall of Nineveh. Read in light of Joel's eschatological perspective, Nahum's quake against Nineveh foreshadows the day when all of Yahweh's enemies will fall. While Nahum, unlike Joel and Amos, offers no return to Edenic bliss after the quake, victory is still in the air in the last verse of the book as the prophet taunts the fallen Assyrian king: "Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?" (3:19b). Yahwistic shaking signifies that on his judgment day the king will fall and the ancient promise in Exodus 15:18 will once more ring true: "Yahweh will be King forever and ever!"

Our next stop on this tour of רעש in the Twelve is Haggai, who alludes to Amos's quake as a way to indicate that the Second Temple will not lack the glory and significance of Solomon's former structure. In Haggai 2:6–7 Yahweh guarantees that "in a little while I again am shaking (ואני מרעיש) the

heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake (והרעשתי) all nations, and the desired of all nations (חמדת כל־הגוים) will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says Yahweh." Reread in light of previous quakes in the Twelve, Haggai's shaking has cosmic implications for the temple's reconstruction, and the hiphil participle מרעיש indicates that the shaking is presently taking place. This comports well with Haggai's historical situation, as the Persian empire of his day was in upheaval because of its revolt against king Darius in his early years.

In all likelihood, the "desired of all nations" refers to the liturgical vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar from Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles 36:10 these are referred to as כלי חמדת בית־יהוה ("the precious vessels of Yahweh's house").[39] Following Joel, Amos, and Nahum, Haggai's shaking is the prelude to blessing; in this case, Yahweh's temple will be graced again with vessels, which foreshadows its functioning again as a means of grace.

Later in Haggai, in verse 2:21, Yahweh says to Zerubabbel, "I am shaking (אני מרעיש) the heavens and the earth." Again, shaking is a prelude to Yahweh's judgment. Through Haggai, Yahweh states in verse 22, "I will overturn (והפכתי) royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overturn (והפכתי) chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother." Verse 23 rounds out the prophecy and the book with the "Day of Yahweh" signifier ביום ההוא ("on that day"). Read in light of the Twelve, the restoration of liturgical worship in the Second Temple, Yahweh's plans for Zerubabbel (a Davidic heir), and the promises of victory over his enemies have implications for the entire cosmos!

With Zechariah 14 we come to the last appearance of רעש in the Twelve, and again, due to Joel's eschatological transformation, the Day of Yahweh theme is prominent. In fact, יום ("day") comes ten times in Zechariah 14. The prophet announces the coming of the perfect day, the last day, the day of judgment, and the day of salvation. More specifically,

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[39] The temple vessels were confiscated by the Babylonians in 587 (cf. 2 Kings 25:13–17). The return is chiefly a liturgical and spiritual return. Cyrus entrusted his treasurer, Mithredath, with the task of giving the vessels to "Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah" (Ezra 1:8). Ezra subsequently turns them over to twelve priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their relatives (Ezra 8:24). Daniel 5 narrates the Babylonian desecration of these vessels at Belshazzar's feast. In Jer 27:16–22, the prophet discourages the belief in a speedy return of the vessels that were seized in 597 and the deportation of King Jehoiachin. He does promise, however, that Yahweh will bring his vessels back on "the day I come for them" (v. 22).

Zechariah states in verse 14:5, "You will flee as you fled from the earthquake (מפני הרעש) in the days of Uzziah king of Judah." While Amos, Nahum, and Haggai use the motif in more historical ways that are then by their canonical placement eschatologically transformed, Joel and Zechariah initially place the shaking in an eschatological context.

Amos and Joel, being agriculturalists, envision the new creation as a return to Eden-like abundance. Nahum can only see the end of Assyrian oppression, while Haggai's love for the Second Temple prompts him to yearn for the re-establishment of liturgical rites with the proper vessels. Zechariah, for his part, is captivated by the priestly idea of קדש ("holiness"): "On that day, 'holy to Yahweh' (קדש ליהוה) will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in Yahweh's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to Yahweh (קדש ליהוה)" (Zech 14:20–21).[40] What are now profane horse bells and cooking pots will be completely transformed by Yahweh's holiness. For Zechariah, new creation means cosmic קדש.

Joel, Nahum, Haggai, and Zechariah all employ Amos's earthquake theology for their own purposes, yet there is remarkable coherence, for every appearance of רעש in the Twelve signifies that Yahweh's judgment will usher in the new day of salvation.

VII. Prophetic Hermeneutics

Not only does Amos's use of the Yahweh-quake influence later prophetic texts in the Twelve, he also provides a way for interpreting earlier texts. Just as Amos borrowed and adapted from Exodus 19 and Judges 5, our four in the Twelve borrow and adapt the earthquake motif from Amos. Joel, Nahum, Haggai, and Zechariah follow Amos when they take what is old and make it new again.

Gerhard von Rad defines this prophetic hermeneutic by means of the term *Vergegenwärtigung*, translated as "a fresh presentation," "updating," or "reactualization."[41] The opening sentence in von Rad's second volume

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[40] Only the turban of the high priest (Exod 28:36–38; 39:30–31), sacrifices offered or dedicated to Yahweh (Lev 23:20; 27:30, 32), vessels dedicated to the Temple (Ezra 8:28), and the spoils of war in Josh 6:19 are described as קדש ליהוה.

[41] Von Rad writes, "It is now, of course, apparent that when the prophets spoke of coming events, they did not do so directly, out of the blue, as it were; instead, they showed themselves bound to certain definite inherited traditions, and therefore even in their words about the future they use a dialectic method which keeps remarkably close to the pattern used by earlier exponents of Jahwism. It is this use of tradition which gives the prophets their legitimation. At the same time, they go beyond tradition—they

of *Old Testament Theology* is telling: "Remember not the former things nor consider the things of old. For behold, I purpose to do a new thing. (Isaiah xliii.18f)."[42] For von Rad the "former things" refers to earlier texts. The "new things" refers to the prophetic recasting and reshaping of these earlier writings. The new message was coherent with older texts, while at the same time being innovative. Older texts are adapted for new situations.

In their respective contexts it was important for Joel, Nahum, Haggai, and Zechariah to anchor themselves in the prophetic tradition. Not just anything could be said. New interpretations needed to be connected to the tradition and interpreted according to the community's exegetical norms. A judicious balance, therefore, needed to be struck, one in which the prophet's role as conservator of ancient tradition is blended with that of offering law and gospel in a new situation. Repeating earlier themes and texts would not adequately address new uncertainties. Yet neither was a completely new message likely to take root in the lives of people.

VIII. Conclusions

Amos's earthquake *had* to happen. He lived among people who did not seem to notice and did not seem to care. Israel's leaders had closed their eyes to human needs, economic inequities, and broken social systems. There remained only "horses and chariots" (Ps 20:7), unbridled greed, brutality, technology, and stinginess.

In this context, Amos could not have been effective by employing stereotyped language, because stereotyped language is a language of cliché. The immediate danger of cliché is the audience's passive response. If Amos sounded too much like the old word, he risked irrelevance, but if he was too dissimilar, he risked rejection. And the same can be said for Joel, Nahum, Haggai, and Zechariah. So these prophets stood between continuity and discontinuity, and in this way we see a coherent earthquake theology denoting Yahweh's presence to condemn as well as to recreate.

This coherence finds its way into the New Testament. Matthew provides his own echo of Amos's massive quake; in 27:51 he writes, "At

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fill it even to bursting-point with new content or at least broaden its basis for their own purposes"; *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, vol. 2 of *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 239.

[42] Von Rad, *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions,* 2:1. Brueggemann writes, "If it turns out that von Rad's entire program is an exposition of Isaiah 43:18–19, as seems likely, then *relinquishment* of what is old and treasured and *reception* of what is new and unwelcome is the work at hand"; *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 82; emphasis in the original.

that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook (καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσείσθη) and the rocks split." In every text from the Twelve that we have considered, the Septuagint translates רעש with the noun σεισμός or the verb σείω. But, just like his Old Testament predecessors, Matthew links cosmic crumbling and cosmic re-creation when, in 28:2, he writes, καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας ("and behold a great earthquake happened"). So just like Amos, our Lord's ministry was vindicated by an earthquake. But his resurrection σεισμός is the greatest earthquake this side of the Parousia.

This means that Amos's seismic shock will manifest itself one last time, again with destructive and recreating power. Hebrews 12:26–28 says as much. Quoting from Haggai 2, the author writes, "But now he has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' The words 'once more' indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." And that says it all!

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The Apostolic Councils of Galatians and Acts: How First-Century Christians Walked Together

Arthur A. Just Jr.

At first blush, it does not appear as if the situation in Acts, and particularly the apostolic council in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, has much bearing on the situation facing churches today. There were, however, some significant decisions that were made by the apostles and other church leaders in the first twenty years of the church's life that are instructive for us. This study will argue that the apostolic councils presented in Galatians[1] and Acts are watershed events in the life of the early church which provide the twenty-first-century church with a model for handling debate and disagreement, as well as forging consensus.

I. The Jerusalem Church

The apostolic council of Acts 15, while held in the midst of great strife and debate in the church, occurred during a time of relative peace in the empire. This secular peace, however, was unusual, for a series of persecutions characterized the first fifteen years of the post-Pentecost church, persecutions to which the church responded with faith and courage, even growing beyond its Jerusalem borders. It was the third persecution of Christians that had the most impact on the course of the apostolic council of Acts 15. This persecution came not from the religious establishment of Israel, but from Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great. It lasted from AD 41 to 44, during which time James, the son of Zebedee, was martyred (Acts 12:1–5). During this same persecution, Peter was imprisoned, miraculously escaping to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the very John Mark who would later accompany Barnabas on his missionary journeys and then author the second Gospel (Acts 12:6–19). At the end of this episode, the simplicity of Peter's statement belies its significance: "But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Tell these things to James and to the brothers.' Then he departed and went to another place" (Acts 12:17).

[1] Although the event recorded in Acts 15 is most widely known as the "Apostolic Council," it will be argued in this article that Galatians 2 testifies to a prior private council among these apostles. This understanding is reflected in the title of this article.

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Richard Bauckham, in a discussion of the place of James, the brother of Jesus, in the Jerusalem Church, remarks that "12:17 is a key verse in the development of the narrative of Acts."[2] This is the first time James is referred to in Acts, and in this same verse Peter is described as moving to an unknown location. Peter will be referred to again in Acts only at the apostolic council. The persecution of Herod Agrippa I seems to have prompted the shift in the leadership of the Jerusalem church from Peter and the apostles to James, the brother of Jesus, and the elders. This shift in leadership will have significant bearing on how we perceive the course of events at the apostolic council of Acts 15.[3]

II. Peter and the Twelve

During the first fourteen years of the church's life, Peter and the apostles were the clear leaders in the Jerusalem church, staying behind in the city when everyone else was scattered during the persecution of the Diasporan Jews led by Paul. The reconstitution of the Twelve in Acts 1, when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, indicates the symbolic significance of the Twelve as the representation of reconstituted Israel in the post-resurrection, post-Pentecost era. The pillars of the church would have been Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, the only members of the Twelve mentioned in Acts, with Peter and John persecuted and imprisoned for their preaching, and James being martyred during the persecution of Herod Agrippa I. Following Proverbs 9:1, "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars," Bauckham suggests that along with the three apostolic pillars, the other four pillars were the four brothers of Jesus, James, the eldest, and Joses, Jude, and Simon. The "pillars" of the church are significant in light of Paul's language in Galatians 2:9, in which he refers to "James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars." Throughout the New Testament, the description of the church as a building with Christ as the cornerstone and the apostles as the foundation is common language (1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:4, 6–7). For Bauckham, this expresses the belief that "the early Christian church . . . saw itself as the place of God's eschatological presence, destined to supersede the Jerusalem Temple."[4]

Another key figure in this early period of the Jerusalem church is Barnabas. Although he never assumes a position of leadership, he is

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[2] Richard Bauckham, *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 434.

[3] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 434–41.

[4] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 442–43.

introduced into Luke's narrative early on as a model member of the Jerusalem church, a Levite from Cyprus (a Diasporan Jew). He is called Barnabas because he was a "son of encouragement" who readily shared his wealth with the nascent church (Acts 4:36–37). Bauckham notes that "Barnabas acts as a key link between Jerusalem and developments in Antioch (Acts 11:22–24, 29; 12:25), as well as between the Twelve and Paul (9:27; 11:25, 29)."[5]

III. James and the Elders

With the persecution of Herod Agrippa I, James, the brother of Jesus, assumed leadership of the Jerusalem church with the so-called elders, who are first mentioned in 11:30 in connection with the sending of famine relief to Jerusalem through Barnabas and Saul. It appears that with the dispersion of many of the apostles, the pillars in the church now became "James and Cephas and John" (Gal 2:9). The original seven pillars were reduced to three, and the newly constituted body of elders replaced the apostles as the group to which Paul and Barnabas would give the famine relief. It is difficult to determine who the "elders" were, for Acts never gives us any definitive description of them.[6] With the Herodian persecution, the apostolic circle would no longer have exerted control over the Jerusalem church. We might speculate that the remaining apostles who stayed in Jerusalem, or who returned to Jerusalem after their missionary efforts, would have joined the company of elders. Also among the elders were perhaps the brothers of Jesus still in Jerusalem.

As the official leader of the Jerusalem church, James plays a significant role in Acts. If the apostles now represented the movement of the gospel from its center in Jerusalem into the outermost parts of the earth, that center would be held in place by James, who assumed the position of bishop of Jerusalem as the significant stabilizing Christian presence in the city. Bauckham refers to James's legendary status among later historians such as Hegesippus, a Palestinian Christian writing around AD 180, whose description of James was preserved by Eusebius, a fourth-century historian: "because of his excessive righteousness [James] was called 'the Righteous' (ὁ δίκαιος) and Oblias (Ὠβλίας) which is, in Greek, 'Rampart of the people' (περιοχὴ τοῦ λαοῦ), and 'Righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη), as the prophets show concerning him."[7] James's character was such that he was

[5] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 450.

[6] This is the first reference to "elders" as leaders of the Christian church in Jerusalem. Earlier references are to the Jewish leaders.

[7] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 448, citing Hegesippus in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.7.

remembered for his righteousness and his stalwart defense of the Christians in Jerusalem during the difficult days leading up to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Bauckham uses Isaiah 54:11–12 to give biblical support for such claims:

> A reference to James as "righteousness" was probably found in Isaiah 54:14, which would make James the means by which God builds the eschatological Zion, and/or Isaiah 28:17 (which continues the favorite early Christian text about Christ as the cornerstone of the messianic Temple), which would make James the plumbline which God uses to build the new temple . . .

Concerning James as "a rampart," Bauckham notes:

> The most important aspect of the use of this term for James may be that, of the various architectural features mentioned in Isaiah 54:11–12, [rampart] is the only one which occurs in the singular. It was therefore appropriate to describe the unique position James came to hold at the head of the mother-church in Jerusalem. As a singular feature of the new Temple, James as the rampart compares only with Peter as the rock. This claim for James does not compete with Peter's; it attributes to him a different but equally unique and distinctive role in the church. It seems probable that the use of this term for James does go back to his lifetime, and corresponds to the position which Acts 21:18 also implies that James had acquired. Later, in the light of the legendary developments which treated the fall of Jerusalem as consequent upon James' martyrdom (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.23.18–20) the term "Rampart of the People" was held to mean that, by praying for the forgiveness of the Jewish people (*Hist. Eccl.* 2.23.6), he protected the city, while he still lived, from impending disaster. But originally it will have referred to his role in relation to the eschatological people of God, the Christian community.[8]

As mentioned above, the elders appear to have been newly constituted after the persecution of Herod Agrippa I, and would have included those of the twelve who remained in Jerusalem. Of significance is the reference in Acts 15:6 at the beginning of the apostolic council, where Luke writes that "the apostles and elders were gathered together to consider this

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[8] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 449–450. Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 2.23) cites Josephus to support his claims that Jerusalem's siege was a result of James's death: "So extraordinary a man was James, so esteemed by all for righteousness that even the more intelligent of the Jews thought that this was why the siege of Jerusalem immediately followed his martyrdom. Indeed, Josephus did not hesitate to write: 'These things happened to the Jews as retribution for James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus who was called Christ, for the Jews killed him despite his great righteousness.'" See *Eusebius: The Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 83.

matter," as well as the address in the council's letter to the Gentiles, which begins, "The brothers, both the apostles and elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings" (Acts 15:23). At this climactic moment in church history, when the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch met in Jerusalem, Peter was in charge of the apostles, and James was in charge of the elders, with James leading the Jerusalem church. Bauckham states:

> The Twelve as such no longer existed as a constitutional group, but members of the Twelve could have belonged to the new body of elders. In connection with the Jerusalem council, Luke makes this explicit by specifying "the apostles" as well as "the elders," because it is important to him *to give the fullest possible authority to the council's decisions*, and also because he wants to indicate here the continuity between the mission of the Jerusalem church as he has described it in the early chapters of Acts and the Pauline mission to the Gentiles which is here endorsed by the Jerusalem council.[9]

What must be said of James and the elders is that as Jewish Christians they lived like Jews, keeping all the laws of faithful Jews, and yet they fully understood that living by the law was not a matter of salvation. As we shall see, Paul would have agreed wholeheartedly with this perspective, as he indicates in Galatians. The problem arises when keeping the law, particularly the rite of circumcision, becomes necessary for salvation. In this respect, as a faithful Jewish Christian who was now also the head of the apostolic mission, Peter would have followed James and the elders. Even Paul followed James when, according to Acts 21, he returned to Jerusalem and was confronted by James and those Jewish believers who were zealous for the law. The report in Jerusalem was that Paul was telling Jews to forsake the law of Moses and stop circumcising their children. Paul humbly submitted to James's authority, joining the four men who were taking the vow, purifying himself along with them before going into the temple for the presentation of his offering (Acts 21:17–26). At the time of the apostolic council, therefore, the leadership in the Christian mission consisted of Peter and the apostles, sent to the Jews, and Paul and Barnabas (along with the seventy from Luke 10), sent to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8-10).

The persecution of Herod Agrippa I ceased in AD 44, and the Christian church entered a seven-year respite from persecution under three Caesarean procurators: Cuspius Fadus, Tiberius Alexander, and Ventidius Cumanus. As Bo Reicke notes, "Extreme Jewish nationalism was

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[9] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 437 (emphasis mine).

somewhat subdued, and the Zealots had not yet achieved any dominant influence."[10] It was during this period that there was a famine in Jerusalem in AD 46 and Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem to give a gift to the elders.

IV. The First, Private Council and Conciliar Agreement (Gal 2:1–10)

During the famine visit, Paul and Barnabas laid before the apostles the gospel they had preached to the Gentiles. They felt compelled to meet with the three pillars of the church—James, Peter, and John—to share with them the results of their mission to the Gentiles and to receive their support, or as Paul puts it, "in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain" (Gal 2:2). Paul reports that fourteen years after his conversion, he went up to Jerusalem (Gal 2:1), bringing us to AD 46, the very year in which Paul and Barnabas began their first missionary journey, and three full years before the apostolic council of Acts 15. This would be Paul's second reported visit to Jerusalem, the first visit coming three years after his conversion, when he met privately with Peter and visited also with James (AD 35, Gal 1:18–24). After the famine visit, Paul and Barnabas made their first missionary journey, including Paul's first visit to Galatia, where he founded a Gentile church (AD 46–47, Acts 13:1–14:28).

In Galatians 2:1–10, Paul carefully outlines the major players at the private council in Jerusalem, and they are the same as those at the later public apostolic council: Paul, James, Peter, and John. Remarkably, most of the New Testament books were written by these four, and these men probably influenced some of those books that they did not personally write.[11] A remarkable group of men was present at this meeting, as well as at the later public apostolic council. Minor players at this private council included Titus, who as an uncircumcised Greek served as Paul's object lesson for the Gentile mission, and Barnabas, Paul's faithful traveling companion from his first missionary journey.

This private council was a meeting between two churches, Antioch and Jerusalem, and their respective leaders: Paul and Barnabas for Antioch, and James, Peter, and John, whom Paul calls pillars in the

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[10] Bo Reicke, *Re-examining Paul's Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence*, ed. David P. Moessner and Ingalisa Reicke (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 20–21. Reicke notes that this is reported by Josephus.

[11] Here is the list: Paul's thirteen epistles (with Luke as Paul's Gospel and Acts as his personal history), Peter's two epistles (with Mark as Peter's Gospel), John's Gospel and his three epistles (and possibly Revelation), and James's one epistle. The only New Testament books not represented are Matthew, Hebrews, and Jude.

Jerusalem church. As we observed above, the order of names—James, Peter, and John—indicates that James had taken a leadership position in the Jerusalem church. Paul notes that this visit was by revelation, an apocalyptic event in keeping with his motif in Galatians of the incarnation, his conversion, and his baptism (as well as the conversion and baptism of all who are in Christ) as invasive acts of God in which he breaks into our world and into our lives by his initiative.

Paul went to Jerusalem for this visit "to set before them the gospel I proclaim among the Gentiles" (Gal 2:2), that is, the gospel he and Barnabas had preached on their first missionary journey. As J. Louis Martyn indicates, the gospel happens for Paul apocalyptically as a preached event in which the end-time mystery of Christ is unveiled (1:12, 16). For Paul, the gospel is Christ (Gal 1:16), and it is for all people, including Gentiles (Gal 1:16; 2:2).[12] What Paul sought was recognition from Jerusalem of the two missions: Paul to the uncircumcised Gentiles and Peter to the circumcised Jews (Gal 2:8; here Paul acknowledges Peter as apostle and implies that he himself is an apostle like Peter). Paul received from the pillars in Jerusalem the right hand of fellowship concerning the two missions, reiterating once again that Paul and Barnabas would go to the Gentiles, and the Jerusalem church, led by Peter, would continue to go to the Jews.

For our purposes, it is important to note that there were two points of view represented here. Paul represented the Gentile point of view, what Martyn calls the circumcision-free Gentile mission.[13] The doctrinal issue for Paul was to proclaim salvation by grace in contrast to works of the law, particularly circumcision, such as the false brothers were teaching in Antioch after secretly slipping into that city "to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery" (Gal 2:4). James, Peter, and John represented the Jerusalem/Jewish Christian point of view, that of the law-observant mission. Obeying the law was not a

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[12] On Paul's apocalyptic theology in Galatians, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A, New York: Doubleday, 1997), 97–105. See also Moisés Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 171–172, who affirms this apocalyptic perspective: "At the outset Paul highlights two important elements in the teaching of the epistle: (a) Christ's work, since it can be described as an act of rescue, leads to freedom; and (b) that from which Christ frees us is *the present evil world*—a phrase that, as is generally recognized, reflects an eschatological mode of thought. And as Schlier (H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater;* Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar uber das Neue Testament 7, 14th ed. [Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1971], 34) correctly infers, the work of Christ must signify the dawning of the new age" (emphasis original).

[13] Martyn, *Galatians,* 206.

matter of salvation for them, but was a custom that all Jewish Christians were invited to keep as part of their cultural heritage as Jews. As we shall see when we unpack the issues dealt with at the public apostolic council, the doctrinal issue for the Jewish mission centered in Jerusalem was idolatry, that is, they were deeply concerned about Jews becoming involved in any Gentile religious practices associated with idol worship.

This agreement between Antioch and Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1–10 was a private decision which turned out to be exactly the same as the decision reached at the public council of Acts 15. The decision was simply this: there were two missions, one to Gentiles and one to Jews, and Gentiles did not have to become Jews by means of circumcision in order to be members of the church. One may wonder why this decision was not reported by Luke in Acts, but it would be unnecessary to do so since the public decision of the Jerusalem council superseded this private decision. Paul, of course, does not refer to the public council because it had not yet happened. The Jerusalem council would be a public decision by the whole church, apostles and elders, which through the apostolic decree and the letter to the churches would add precision and public authority to the decision of this private meeting.

Following this momentous private meeting between the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem, the Jerusalem church must have engaged in a contentious debate about the law and the need for circumcision. This may have prompted the "men from Judea" to come to Antioch, causing Peter and Barnabas to be swayed by their arguments. The infiltration into Galatia of a similar group, or of the same group, caused the same problems there as in Antioch, which was the reason for Paul's letter.

V. The Antioch Incident (Gal 2:11–14)

Immediately following Paul's report of his private meeting with James, Peter, and John in Jerusalem, Paul also reports on the sad incident in Antioch that was one of the precipitating events for the Jerusalem council (Gal 2:11–14). We will assume that this is the same event reported by Luke in Acts 15:1, though, as we will see below, the issues were not exactly the same.[14] Luke writes that "Some men came down from Judea and were

[14] See Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 469–470: "Probably, then, the Antioch incident (Gal. 2:11–14) belongs to the events which led immediately to the Jerusalem council, which Luke describes in Acts 15:1–2a. Galatians would have been written in the heat of this debate at Antioch, shortly before the Jerusalem council. This explains Paul's failure to refer to the events of Acts 15:2b–33 in Galatians. That Luke makes no reference to the consultation and decision described in Galatians 2:1–10

teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1).

The major players in the Antioch incident were Peter and Barnabas, as well as "certain men from James" (Gal 2:12), an indefinite reference that may indicate the false brothers or the circumcision party. Whatever the case, these were men from Jerusalem claiming to be representatives of James. Whether their claim was true or not is impossible to determine, but from the portrayal of James in Acts, it is unlikely that James would have gone so quickly against the decision he had made with Paul and Barnabas in the private council with Peter and John. Whether or not Paul was in Antioch when the incident occurred is unclear, but Paul did confront Peter and Barnabas in Antioch afterward.

Table Fellowship with Gentiles

The issue here was not circumcision but table fellowship with Gentiles—eucharistic table fellowship—which is clear from the language that Paul uses in reporting the event: "For before certain men came from James, he [Peter] was eating with (συνήσθιεν) the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back (ὑπέστελλεν) and separated himself (ἀφώριζεν)" (Gal 2:12). To eat with someone is a common expression in Luke-Acts and has eucharistic overtones.[15] This is confirmed by the language Paul uses to

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(which on this hypothesis took place at the time of the visit of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem described in Acts 11:30) is not at all surprising. This decision proved (shortly after the writing of Galatians) to have been a short-lived arrangement, very soon superseded by a fuller and more authoritative decision, which then remained permanently in force. None would have had cause to remember the earlier agreement once the Jerusalem council had promulgated the apostolic decree. For the continuing history of the Gentile mission, which Luke narrates, the agreement of Galatians 2:1–10 was of little significance, while the Jerusalem council of Acts 15 was epoch-making."

[15] Besides this reference, this expression occurs four other times in the New Testament, three of them in Luke-Acts. In Luke 15:2, Luke reports on the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes concerning Jesus' eating with sinners. In light of the eucharistic overtones in the parable of the prodigal son, this is part of Luke's table-fellowship matrix, of which the Eucharist is its climax; see my excursus on "Jesus' Table Fellowship" in *Luke 1:1–9:51* (Concordia Commentary on Scripture; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 231–241. In Acts 10:41, Peter's sermon to Cornelius reports that the eyewitnesses of the resurrection "ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." This may be a reference to eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper. In Acts 11:3, when Peter reports on the Cornelius affair in Jerusalem, he is accused by the circumcision party of eating with the uncircumcised. One cannot quite imagine this not including the Eucharist, for after preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his household and baptizing them, they likely celebrated the Lord's Supper together. Finally, in 1 Cor 5:11, Paul warns against eating with someone who calls himself a brother but also

describe what happened when table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles occurred in Antioch. Martyn is persuasive in his description of what the act of "drawing back" and "separating" meant to the Antioch church:

> The first verb, "drew back," sometimes describes a military or political maneuver designed to bring one into a sheltered position of safety. The second refers here to cultic separation. Since the eucharist was part of the common meal, Peter's withdrawal from the latter brought with it his withdrawal from the former. He has now separated himself from the Gentile members as they eat the Lord's Supper.[16]

The Gentiles were known to have more delectable foods and sumptuous banquets than the Jews. It was common for Gentiles to partake of the meat that came from the sacrifices to idols. Food was a fundamental part of pagan worship, and the pagan temple functioned as one of the best restaurants in town, serving the fine meats that came from the ritual sacrifices. The worst-case scenario for Christians occurred when they ate these meats in the pagan temple itself. This Paul would not allow. But eating meat sold in the markets at one's home or the home of another Christian or even a Gentile was another matter. The association with idolatry would have been lost, and therefore it was possible to partake of these meats unless they were identified by someone at the table as meat sacrificed to an idol, in which case the Christian was to refrain for the sake of the weaker brethren.[17] Any involvement in pagan worship—whether by eating meat sacrificed to idols or participating in meals where pagan prayers were offered—was strictly forbidden. But table fellowship with Gentiles was more than simply eating food sacrificed to idols, for "prayers to the pagan deities were normal parts of Gentile meal customs."[18] The situation in Corinth confronted by the apostle Paul (1 Cor 10:14–11:1) was typical of the problems facing both Jewish and Gentile Christians:

> The idol temple seems to have served both as a butcher shop and as a place for sharing a cultic meal. For the most part, meat was either eaten at the temple or sold at the market after a pagan festival, and the association with the pagan gods, which was idolatry to the Christian, was obvious. . . . Recent Gentile converts to Christianity would have found it difficult to

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engages in sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry and reviles, becomes drunk, or swindles others. In the context of 1 Cor, Paul is likely talking about fellowship at the Lord's table and not the common meals taken together.

[16] Martyn, *Galatians,* 233.

[17] Philip W. Comfort, "Idolatry," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters,* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 425.

[18] Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 160.

> consider the issue of meat offered to idols independent of its ritual setting; they would eat with a guilty conscience (1 Cor 8:7). The invitation to dine in the home of an unbeliever could present a dilemma (1 Cor 10:27-30); while the invitation to dine at a temple would only sharpen the issue (1 Cor 8:10).[19]

To complicate matters, the sacrificial cult of the pagan temples also involved temple prostitution.[20] Temple food and temple prostitutes were the "sacraments" of pagan worship, that is, the means by which the god communicated benefits to the pagan worshiper. This combination of temple foods and temple prostitutes as central to pagan worship is affirmed by St. John's words to the church at Pergamum, whose members were flirting with the Nicolaitans, a cult that John warns against: "But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality" (Rev 2:14). The connection between idolatry and sexual immorality is made by Paul when he links them together in his catalogue of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9), as well as his opening words to the church in Rome (Rom 1:18–32).

The attraction of pagan worship to both Christians and Jews in the first century is obvious. Today we wring our hands over the entertainment worship of many churches, not to mention the enormous appeal of other religions. Imagine if they were offering the finest foods along with sexual favors. Early Christian sensitivity to any association with idol worship simply continued the concern of the Old Testament with the fertility cults that combined this magnetic appeal of food and sex. In fact, the entire Old Testament is a history of Israel's inability to resist the temptations of pagan worship and pagan gods. Gregory Lockwood, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 10, shows the significance of this for both the Old Testament and the Corinthians:

> Anyone familiar with the OT sacrificial practices knew that those who ate the sacrifices were partners of the altar. When priests, Levites, and other Israelites consumed their allotted portions of the sacrificial animals, they entered into a close relationship with the altar and all it represented. The altar was the focal point for communion between God and people, and for the reception of divine gifts. In Mt 23:16–22 Jesus argues for the inseparable connection between the sanctified gifts on the altar, the altar

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[19] Bradley B. Blue, "Food Offered to Idols and Jewish Food Laws," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 309.

[20] For more on the significance of temple prostitution, see Brian S. Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," *Novum Testamentum* 40 (1998): 336–351.

> itself, the temple, the throne of God, and the One seated on the throne. The vertical dimension is paramount. That the Corinthians' relationship to the supernatural—to demons and to God—is Paul's chief concern is spelled out by the succeeding verses (1 Cor 10:20–21). Above all, the Corinthians are not to tempt the Lord (10:22; cf. 10:9).[21]

These issues concerning Gentile table fellowship are introduced here because they have a bearing on the apostolic decrees of Acts 15. To partake of the food of idols and engage in other practices of the pagan temple was to confuse the identity of the true God of Israel and the new Israel with the false gods of the pagan cults.

Peter's Withdrawal from Gentile Table Fellowship

Although there is no indication that the table fellowship in Antioch that precipitated the incident between Peter and Paul included meat sacrificed to idols, Jews were suspicious of any table fellowship with Gentiles because their strict dietary laws were a means for preserving their identity as the people of God.[22] These laws were so ingrained in Jewish, and Jewish Christian, identity that the very idea of eating with Gentiles was abhorrent. Within this context, it required a vision from God to the effect that it is permissible to eat with the Gentile Cornelius for Peter to break through the barriers between Jews and Gentiles at the table (Acts 10 and 11). The Gentile mission began as a result of this invasive act by God to bring Peter to understand that table fellowship with Gentiles is part of his plan to extend the gospel to all nations and peoples.

We have no way of knowing what the "men from James" said to Peter and Barnabas, but we can theorize as to what might have caused Peter and Barnabas to withdraw from table fellowship with Gentiles. "Peter," they may have said, "as a Jewish Christian you have failed in your obligation to obey the law. You have compromised your obedience to the food laws of your fathers by eating with Gentiles. As the head of the Jewish mission originating in Jerusalem, you are failing to act as our leader."

Of course, Gentile Christians were not forced by Peter or anyone in Antioch to observe certain food laws when eating with Jewish Christians as a matter of their salvation. In fact, Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentiles does not mean that he or Barnabas were teaching the Gentiles that they had to keep the food laws or be circumcised to

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[21] Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (Concordia Commentary on Scripture; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 343.

[22] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 97.

become members of the Christian church, nor were they confessing such a thing. They were not teaching or confessing that Gentiles must keep the law in order to be saved. Peter did not withdraw as a matter of confession, but because he had been chastised by the "men from James" as being unfaithful in his leadership of the Jewish mission. Unfortunately, his act of withdrawal included his withdrawal from the Lord's Supper, a cataclysmic break in the fellowship of believers in Antioch.

Paul's rebuke of Peter was also a criticism of him as a leader. What Paul condemned was not Peter's confession but Peter's action as a leader of the Jewish mission, for his withdrawal as a leader encouraged other Jewish Christians to withdraw as well, including Barnabas, who as a Levite and Jew must have followed Peter in feeling it necessary to be true to his Jerusalem roots. Both Peter and Barnabas were returning to their Jewish identity. The "men from James," Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, were using their withdrawal to force the issue: Gentiles must keep the whole law, including not only the dietary laws but also circumcision.

Paul condemned Peter's actions because they lent plausibility to the circumcision party from Jerusalem. For Paul, this was an act of hypocrisy (Gal 2:13), and as Paul so clearly indicates, hypocrisy arises from fear of confessing the true faith,[23] in this case, fear of the circumcision party from Jerusalem, against whom Peter was afraid to stand because of their criticism of his table fellowship with Gentiles. What Peter was afraid of was persecution, the kind of persecution from Jewish zealots that would later cause some Jewish Christians to apostatize after the public council in Jerusalem. As Reicke notes:

> During this time [the decade of the fifties], the Zealots grew in power and influence and began a reign of terror over the Jewish people that lasted until the end of the Roman-Jewish war around AD 70. Anyone who had anything to do with the Greeks or Romans was subjected to ghastly persecution. Isolated rebellions of the Jewish people had already occurred under the procurator Ventidius Cumanus (AD 48–52), but it was not until the rule of Antonius Felix (52–60) that the chauvinistic terror became relentless, only to increase to unbelievable proportions during succeeding procuratorships. Among other things, Josephus and Tacitus relate that during the time of Felix the chauvinists, or "bandits," ratcheted up their violence and appeared as *sicarii* ("dagger-carriers") or would hire such assassins to eliminate all suspected "collaborators." This zealotism was also at home in the Diaspora. According to Acts 21:38, it was an Egyptian

[23] This is the way Jesus understands hypocrisy in his controversy with the Pharisees in Luke 12, where fear, hypocrisy, persecution, and possessions are related in Jesus' teaching of what it means to confess the true faith.

> Jew who led the four thousand *sicarii* (assassins); Acts 21:27 mentions Jews from the province of Asia who violently threatened Paul for entering the Temple. On the whole, it was Jews in Greece and Asia Minor who repeatedly used violent means to thwart Paul's Gentile mission.[24]

For Paul, Peter's actions were a matter of not walking straight according to the truth of the gospel (2:14). For Paul, the truth was the gospel,[25] so that what was at stake was the very essence of the church's belief and confession. Peter's actions in living like a Jew had caused other Jews to force Gentiles to live like Jews as a matter of their salvation. Paul rebuked him publicly because this was a public sin that had caused an entire church to compromise the truth of the gospel. Peter's public act did not fall under the injunctions of Jesus' teaching found in Matthew 18 because it was public, whereas Matthew 18 is for individuals whose sin has not yet caused an offense to the congregation. Here Paul immediately told it to the church because it was not a private sin against Paul but a sin against the entire Antioch church.

Paul's description of the incident at Antioch becomes the occasion for his preaching of the gospel in Galatians. For Paul, this is a matter of doctrine. This is the first place where Paul uses the language of justification, or declaration of righteousness (δικαιόω), as well as the first place where faith versus works occurs in his writings. The question facing Paul, the Galatians, the church in Antioch, and his opponents is this: does God make sinners righteous through our works of the law? Paul writes this letter to the Galatians to reject such a notion of justification. Paul's opponents insist that we are and remain righteous before God through our observance of the law. Paul counters by his passionate proclamation that justification comes through Christ's faithful death on our behalf and our faith in him. Here human action is contrasted with divine initiative. Our human observance of the law is set against Christ's action in which he "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4). Here "objective justification" takes center stage. Christ's faithful death on our behalf, viewed as atonement for sin that brings about God's end-time invasion and rescue, is contrasted with the observance of the law as the means through which God justifies sinners. [26] The accent, then, is on God's objective act in Christ on the cross and in his resurrection for the life of the world.

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[24] Reicke, *Re-examining Paul's Letters,* 21–22.

[25] I am taking this expression—τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου—as an epexegetical genitive.

[26] Martyn, *Galatians,* 97–105.

The death of Christ is the eschatological event for Paul in which humanity is freed from powers of the old lord in the old aeon and put under the subjection of a new Lord in a new aeon. The death of Christ is the pivotal event that separates these two aeons and brings about the change that is constituted by death to the law and life to God. But these two aeons overlap in the sense that the "present evil age" is the time when the old and new aeons are engaged in battle. The boundaries of the map of this embattled world in which Paul and the Galatians now live have been redrawn. It is no longer through the law that one distinguishes holy from profane, that is, where God is making right what has gone wrong, but rather it is through Christ, and particularly his death, that one now maps the world of God's holiness, the space of the new creation.[27]

VI. Paul's Letter to the Galatians

The occasion for Paul's letter to the Galatians is the infiltration into this Gentile church of a group of Jewish Christians similar to those who caused disruptions in the Antioch church. These infiltrators, like the ones in Antioch, were compromising the truth of the gospel by compelling Gentile Christians to become like Jews through the rite of circumcision. Traditional commentaries have called them Judaizers, but more recent commentators have corrected that misnomer by describing them as "teachers"[28] or "missionaries."[29] These two designations indicate that Paul's opponents are attempting to do more than simply make Gentile Christians live like Jews, even though that is surely part of their program. Like Paul, they are evangelists for a universal and cosmic message, teachers of a gospel that includes the law, missionaries for their brand of Jewish Christianity. They are at home in the Diaspora among Gentiles, and though they have close ties with the circumcision party of Jerusalem, their mission is to show that unlike Paul's gospel, which requires no observance of the law, they proclaim Christ plus circumcision and other legal observances. Paul considers them not only his opponents, but opponents of God and of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, "who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4).

This infiltration of troublemakers into Paul's Galatian mission was the occasion for the writing of the letter. Martyn suggests that Paul's letter is "an argumentative sermon preached in the context of a service of

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[27] Martyn, *Galatians*, 250, uses the language of "God's making right what has gone wrong" as a paraphrase of what δικαιόω means in Galatians.

[28] Martyn, *Galatians*, 14, 117–126.

[29] Richard B. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 184–186.

worship—and thus in the acknowledged presence of God."[30] Martyn goes on to say, "Paul is concerned in letter form to *repreach* the gospel in place of its counterfeit."[31] Paul writes with passion about the gospel of Jesus Christ because it is threatened in the Galatian congregations. Paul's opponents preach another gospel, the gospel plus something, and that something is the law, particularly circumcision. With equal passion, Paul writes to the Galatians as a pastor about how they must understand the radical change that has taken place in them since the Spirit's entry into their hearts at Baptism and their cry of "Abba, Father." By helping the Galatians to understand the relationship between Christ and the law, Paul provides them with "a map of the world in which they actually live."[32] Paul's letter to the Galatians is as much a pastoral homily as it is a fiery defense of the gospel, for his defense of the gospel is the foundation of his pastoral concerns. To interpret Paul's Galatian letter, we must read it through the apocalyptic events of Christ's incarnation, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, events that have forever changed the cosmos.

VII. The Apostolic Council in Acts 15

The public apostolic council of Acts 15 was the watershed event in the early Christian church, the most significant decision in the church's history up to that point. After this council, circumcision was no longer an issue in the church. Joseph Fitzmyer notes that in the book of Acts, the council appears at the midpoint: the first fourteen chapters contain 12,385 words, and the final fourteen chapters contain 12,502 words.[33] More importantly, this is the last time we hear of Peter in the book of Acts, and James also drops out of the picture except for a brief appearance in Acts 21, when Paul returns to Jerusalem and is arrested. If the first half of Acts was Peter's story, the second half is all about Paul and his mission to the Gentiles. Our analysis of the public apostolic council begins with a summary of the three points of view represented at the council and the decision made by the council in light of these three perspectives. We will then proceed to an overview of the structure of Luke's account in Acts 15:1–35, focusing on the issues that arise from the speeches of Peter and James as well as the letter from the apostolic council to the Gentile churches. We conclude by offering suggestions on how the apostolic council might serve as a map for consensus in the church today.

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[30] Martyn, *Galatians,* 21.

[31] Martyn, *Galatians,* 23 (emphasis mine).

[32] Martyn, *Galatians,* 482 n. 41.

[33] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31, New York: Doubleday, 1998), 538.

Three Points of View at the Council

In evaluating the council's decisions, it is important to begin by recognizing the three points of view represented at the council. First, the Pharisaic Christian point of view corresponds to the theology of the troublemakers in Antioch and Galatia. This group of Jewish Christians within the Jerusalem church is called the party of the Pharisees. They insist upon the necessity of circumcision. Their doctrinal concern is that Gentiles need to observe the Mosaic law (15:1, 5). The implication for them is that, if Gentiles are not compelled to be circumcised and keep the law, their very salvation is at stake and their Jewish identity will be destroyed.

Second, the Petrine/Pauline/Gentile point of view corresponds with the theology of Paul in his letter to the Galatians, which Peter also came to understand in the Cornelius episode after a vision from God. Peter takes the initiative in representing this position at the council. This position calls for a circumcision-free mission. The doctrinal concern of this group is to assert against those representing the Pharisaic Christian point of view that salvation is not by works of the law but "through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:11). The implication for this Gentile point of view is that Gentiles need not become like Jews in order to be Christians; that is, initiation into the Christian church is by Baptism, not by circumcision.

Third, the James/Jerusalem/Jewish point of view corresponds to the position of James at the council as it is represented in the apostolic decrees issued in the letter to all the churches. Like the previous position, it too calls for a circumcision-free mission and wholeheartedly embraces the doctrinal concern that salvation is not by works of the law but by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the adherents of this position have another doctrinal concern besides the preaching of the gospel plus the law. They are concerned with practices associated with idolatry, namely, partaking of food sacrificed to idols and committing adultery, particularly through cultic prostitution. These concerns apply to all Christians, Jewish and Gentile alike. Recall that the Jerusalem point of view is held by people who, like James, keep the Jewish laws as part of their cultural heritage, but in no way see this as contributing to salvation. The implication for this Jerusalem perspective is that eucharistic table fellowship is possible between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The apostolic council, with representatives of these three different perspectives, addresses this issue with the decisive answer: Gentiles do not have to become like Jews through the rite of circumcision in order to become Christians.[34]

[34] Cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles,* 541.

The Decision of the Apostolic Council

The apostolic council affirmed that salvation is by grace through faith without works of the law by demonstrating from the Old Testament (Amos 9:11–12) that the Gentile, circumcision-free mission was part of God's plan of salvation. For all intents and purposes, circumcision ceased to be an issue in early Christian communities after this summit in Jerusalem. The council also issued what are know as the "apostolic decrees," which also demonstrated from the Old Testament (Lev 17–18) that there are for all Christians legal restrictions associated with the issue of idolatry. These restrictions are particularly acute for Gentile Christians living among Jewish Christians.

The decision of the council concerning circumcision made official in a public meeting what was decided privately by James, Peter, and Paul (Gal 2:1–10). It also affirmed what God had shown through Peter's vision: it was acceptable to have table fellowship with Gentiles. As Luke Johnson writes, "the human Church now catches up with the divine initiative, and formally declares itself on the side of God's plan to save all humanity."[35] In Luke's narrative, the mission to the Jews now gave way to the mission to the Gentiles, with Paul taking center stage in the story of the church in Acts. At the same time, the apostolic decrees of James made clear that the identity of the Christian community had to be centered in an affirmation of the true God apart from the false gods of the pagan temples, for idol-worship or association with idols would destroy the church's identity.

Peter, James, Paul, Barnabas, and the entire church came to an agreement between two churches—Antioch and Jerusalem—and two missions—the Gentile mission and the Jewish mission. The Gentile and Jewish points of view were maintained without compromising the confession of the church. The Pharisaic Christian point of view was emphatically rejected. This was a remarkable agreement in which two out of the three points of view were maintained without compromising the integrity of the church's faith.

The Structure of Acts 15:1–35

The literary framework of the time, place, and persons of the Apostolic Council is crucial to its interpretation. Although it is impossible to determine the exact date of the council, common consensus places it in AD 49 with the following events leading up to the council:

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[35] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series vol. 5, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 268.

AD 46	Famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30)
AD 46–47	First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1–14:28)
AD 46–47	Paul and Barnabas meet with James, Peter, and John in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1–10)
AD 46–47	False brothers, the circumcision party, slip into Antioch, causing great disruption by compromising the truth of the gospel in compelling Gentile circumcision (Gal 2:4–5)
AD 48	Antioch Incident (Gal 2:11–14; Acts 15:1–2)
AD 48	False brothers, the circumcision party, head to Galatia, causing great disruption by compromising the truth of the gospel in compelling Gentile circumcision
AD 48–49	Galatians written by Paul
AD 49	**Apostolic Council** (Acts 15)

The council took place in Jerusalem, but it is important to note that there was movement from Antioch to Jerusalem and then from Jerusalem to Antioch. Jerusalem still played a central role in Luke's geographical framework, but at the same time the movement of the church was out from Jerusalem into the Gentile world, demonstrating how the actions taken at the apostolic council resulted in a Gentile mission that overshadowed Jerusalem and the mission to the Jews.

The players at the council included the party of Pharisees, representing the Pharisaic Christian point of view. They objected to the report of the conversion of the Gentiles without circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses (Acts 15:5). Paul and Barnabas represented the Antioch church as ambassadors to the apostolic council (Acts 15:2). They represented the Gentile point of view, although they would have only a small role in the proceedings. Peter also represented the Gentile point of view, although he would be associated with the Jerusalem church first and the Gentile mission second. His role in the council was crucial but not primary (Acts 15:6–11). James, as bishop of the church in Jerusalem, represented the Jerusalem point of view and would be the most important player at the council. His speech before the assembly and accompanying letter indicate his leadership at the council (Acts 15:12–29). The only other players were the apostles and elders (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22), as well as the whole church, which included all believers in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:4, 22). As we discussed above, it is impossible to know who was represented among the apostles and elders, but within these two groups were represented those of the Twelve who remained, the leaders in the church of Jerusalem, and other missionaries with Jerusalem roots. These two groups of apostles and

elders, together with James, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, gave to the council the "fullest possible authority" of the extant church.[36]

An outline of the content of the Jerusalem council and its results is as follows: [37]

Jerusalem Council
15:6–21 Debate in the Council
- 6–7a Apostles and elders consider the matter
- 7b–11 Peter's speech
- 12 Barnabas and Paul describe mission to Gentiles
- 13–21 James's speech

15:22–29 Resolution in the Council
- 22–23a The decision of the council
- 23b–29 The letter to the churches

Results of the Jerusalem Council
15:30–35 Reconciliation within the church
- 30–34 Churches rejoice over encouragement in letter
- 35 Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch

Issues that Arise from Peter's Speech (Acts 15:7b–11)

The church's debate over the challenge brought by the party of the Pharisees is interrupted by Peter's speech. Instead of having Paul represent the point of view of the Gentile mission, Peter represents the Gentile/Pauline point of view on his behalf. This is a remarkable act of courage in light of Peter's position in the Jerusalem church and the outcome of the Antioch incident, in which Paul writes that Peter stood condemned. It is also an act of great kindness to Paul by Peter, who knows that Paul would not be received as well by the Jerusalem church as Peter would be. By speaking on behalf of Paul and the Gentile mission, Peter "repents" of his actions in Antioch and provides a bold witness to the Jerusalem church from one of their own. Any concern within the Jerusalem church that Peter and Paul were not of one mind concerning the Gentile mission would be dispelled by Peter's bold witness to the council in representing the position of the apostle Paul.

In Peter's speech, he refers to God's apocalyptic action that has revealed to him that table fellowship with Gentiles is acceptable to God (Acts 10–11). Peter's subsequent actions with Cornelius make him the

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[36] See Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 437.

[37] This outline is adapted from Earl Richard, "The Divine Purpose: The Jews and the Gentile Mission (Acts 15)," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 190.

father of the Gentile mission. He is therefore the appropriate person to bear witness to the truth of the gospel as it is manifesting itself in the Gentile mission. He reaffirms what he and others have experienced with Cornelius in Caesarea—that the Holy Spirit has been given to the Gentiles just as to the Jews. There is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile, for salvation is the same for both groups of Christians: both Jews and Gentiles are "saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:11). Jesus' faithfulness unto death and his vindicating resurrection are the foundation for faith in Jesus. Pharisaic Christians are putting God to the test by placing the yoke of the law on the Gentiles as a means of salvation.

Peter offers nothing new here, but supports the previous decision from Galatians 2:1–10 and serves as spokesman for Paul/Barnabas and for the Antioch church. Paul and Barnabas affirm Peter's speech by relating the signs and wonders God has done through them among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12). What is remarkable about the witness of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas is that the appeal is first to God's miraculous intervention with Peter and Cornelius, and second to the signs and wonders that accompanied the Gentile mission of Paul and Barnabas.

Issues that Arise from James's Speech

As we developed above, James would have been recognized by the assembly in Jerusalem as its leader, and his words would have assumed an authority that would have superseded Peter's, which is why he follows Peter and initiates the actions that disseminate this decision throughout the church. James affirms Peter's witness to God's visiting of the Gentiles first through Peter and Cornelius and now through the mission of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles. Unlike Peter, however, James provides exegetical proof for the Gentile mission by citing a text from the Old Testament to support Peter's claims. This is an entirely different approach than that of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas and is in keeping with what the Jerusalem assembly expected. Richard Bauckham not only describes the difference between the approaches, but summarizes the essence of James's argument from the Scriptures:

> Peter argues that the miraculous charismatic phenomena which accompanied the conversion of the first Gentile converts constituted a declaration by God that Gentiles are acceptable to him as Gentiles (15:8–9; cf. 11:12), and Paul and Barnabas support this argument by referring to the miraculous signs which attended their own Gentile mission (15:12). However, this line of argument cannot, for an assembly of Jewish Christians, be the finally decisive one: the issue is a matter of *halakah,* which can only be decided from Scripture (*cf. B. B. Mes.* 59b). The

> clinching argument, provided by James, is therefore a scriptural one. He argues that the prophets, when they predicted that Gentiles would join the eschatological people of God, also made it clear that they will do so as Gentiles (15:15–19). Gentile Christians are therefore not obligated to the Law of Moses as a whole, but four specific commandments are binding on them (15:19–20). These are the terms of the so-called apostolic decree (15:28–29; *cf.* 21:25). As we shall see, James' argument really means that the Torah itself requires Gentile members of the eschatological people of God to keep these, but only these four commandments. Summarized in James' brief speech is a very precise exegetical argument as to the relationship of Gentile Christians to the Law of Moses.[38]

James's choice of Amos 9:11–12 is startling. He is making a claim about the Scriptures that calls us to affirm that "God's action dictates how we should understand the text of Scripture" and not vice versa.[39] What is stunning about James's choice of Amos is the relevance of his interpretation for the very context of the apostolic council. The referent of the rebuilding of the tent of David is, of course, the Christian church, which will now accommodate "all the Gentiles who are called by my name" (Acts 15:17).[40] This phrase is a claim by God on Israel as his chosen nation. Amos notes that when this messianic temple is restored, it will be accompanied by the conversion of the Gentiles, who will be included under "all the nations over whom my name has been invoked" (Acts 15:17). James knows that Jesus is the new temple (John 2:18–22) and that the church is also this new temple because it is the locale of Jesus' bodily presence in word and sacrament. As Bauckham concludes, "Thus whereas Gentiles could not enter God's presence in the old Temple without becoming Jews, in the new Temple of the messianic age, the Christian

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[38] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 452.

[39] Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles,* 271. Johnson places this citation of Amos in what he calls the early church's "process of discernment of God's activity." He describes this as a "new understanding of Torah," a "component of decision-making as an articulation of faith [that] is the reinterpretation of the Scripture." Johnson notes, "What is striking about James' citation of Amos 9:11–12 is . . . the way in which James puts the case. He says that 'the prophets agree with *this*' rather than that 'this agrees with *the prophets*' (15:15). In other words, it is the experience of God revealed through narrative which is given priority in this hermeneutical process: the text of Scripture does not dictate how God should act. Rather, God's action dictates how we should understand the text of Scripture."

[40] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 456–457, notes that there are "two crucial points of interpretation. . . . The first is that the messianic Temple (τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ) will have been understood to be the Christian community. . . . The second point of interpretation concerns the phrase: 'all the nations over whom my name has been invoked.'"

community, they could do so as Gentiles. Probably no other scriptural text could have been used to make this point so clearly."[41] The first part of James's speech is clear: the gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles.

It is the second part of his speech that has caused commentators more difficulty, because it has to do with the law, that is, with what parts of the law apply to both Jews and Gentiles. James cites the Scriptures for the second time to support his position that there are certain laws which are universal, that is, which both Jews and Gentiles must keep. These four prohibitions are derived from Leviticus 17–18. Most scholars acknowledge that these prohibitions from Leviticus are regulations for both Jews and Gentiles. According to Moses, those obliged to keep the law are, first, Israelites/Jews, and second, "The alien who sojourns in your midst" (Lev 17:10), that is, Gentiles. The key to understanding this passage is to note that it applies to "the alien who sojourns in your midst."

What is surprising here is that James also appeals to an exegetical argument to show that, even though Gentiles who have joined the Christian community are not obliged to be circumcised or keep the law of Moses, there are some universal laws that apply to all people. The law of Moses in Leviticus 17–18 contains four commandments which apply to Gentiles because of their relationship to idolatry. These prohibitions are as follows:

1. Abstain from the things polluted by idols;
2. Abstain from sexual immorality;
3. Abstain from what has been strangled;
4. Abstain from blood. (Acts 15:20)

Of these four prohibitions, the first two are clearly related to temple sacrifices and temple prostitution. These are the things of idolatry, in which both Jewish and Gentile Christians are not to be participants. The other two prohibitions are less clearly related to the ritual practices of idolatrous worship, although it could be argued that both meats strangled and meats with blood in them could refer to foods associated with pagan temple sacrifices. This may be confirmed when these prohibitions are referred to by James in the letter that is sent to the churches (15:29) and when Paul returns to the temple and purifies himself by placing himself under a vow (21:25). The same prohibitions are spoken, but in a different order, showing that the three food prohibitions together are related to idol worship. Even the final prohibition concerning sexual immorality is

[41] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 458.

related to idol worship if it refers to the ritual acts of cultic prostitution in the pagan temples:[42]

1. Abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols;
2. Abstain from blood;
3. Abstain from what has been strangled;
4. Abstain from sexual immorality. (Acts 15:29; 21:25)

It cannot be emphasized enough that this so-called "apostolic decree" has to do with idolatry. C.K. Barrett affirms this:

> The fundamental requirement of the Gentile convert was that he should abandon the religion that he had previously practised; that is, he must abandon the gods he had worshipped, turning his back on idolatry. He must abstain from the spiritual defilement that comes from idolatry. Verse 20 [Acts 15] states this in absolute terms; v. 29 and 21.25 make the assumption that to eat εἰδωλόθυτα is to commit idolatry and is probably for most Gentile Christians the way in which they would be most likely to commit it. Jews had long known that the temptation to idolatry came most often through the butcher's shop and the brothel. Hence, what is in effect the command to use only Jewish butchers, where one could be confident that no εἰδωλόθυτα, πνικτά, or αἷμα would be sold, and the prohibition of πορνεία. It should be noted that such commands, especially the prohibition of idolatry, would be necessary for salvation, and not merely in order to facilitate fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.[43]

There may be no fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians if the latter associate with idolatrous practices. This includes, as we have

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[42] There is no universal agreement that this refers exclusively to cultic prostitution, which may in fact be overstating the case. Certainly it refers to all forms of sexual immorality, including cultic prostitution. If, however, this apostolic decree is concerned primarily with idolatry, then perhaps the reference to sexual immorality is primarily a reference to cultic prostitution. See Brian S. Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20," *Novum Testamentum* 40:4 (October 1998), 336–351, whose case for reading 1 Cor as referring to temple prostitution (1 Cor 6:8–10) extends to other passages in the New Testament, including Acts 15. But cf. Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 459–460: "'Sexual immorality' (πορνεία) refers to Leviticus 18:26, where all the forms of sexual relations specified in Leviticus 18:6–23 (relations within the prohibited degrees, intercourse with a menstruating woman, adultery, homosexual intercourse, bestiality) are prohibited to 'the alien who sojourns in your midst.' The general term πορνεία covers all these." See also Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 557–558, who sees this as referring to the Jewish restrictions on certain degrees of marriage.

[43] C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles. Vol. 2, Introduction and Commentary on Acts XV–XXVIII* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 733–734.

seen, temple meats and other foods sacrificed to idols, as well as temple prostitution. For the Gentiles these prohibitions come as no surprise:

> The prohibitions are neither new to the Gentile converts or a burden to them. This implies that they would have learned of the prohibitions through their association with the synagogue, and would already be observing them. Looked at in this light, the prohibitions themselves clearly seem to fit within the sort of requirements for "proselytes and sojourners" already spelled out in Leviticus 17–18, and elaborated in the rabbinic discussions of the so called "Noachian precepts." These were the commandments given to the sons of Noah for observance, and include (among others) the prohibitions listed here by Luke (see *bT Sanh. 56b*).[44]

There is some disagreement among the commentators as to whether these four prohibitions are part of the Noachian precepts, although there are persuasive reasons to believe that this is exactly what James is referring to.[45] There is agreement, however, that these prohibitions are for Gentiles who engage in table fellowship with Jews. But if they are in fact related to idol worship, then even within an exclusively Gentile context, these prohibitions would apply.[46] They are primordial commands known to all nations, to those already frequenting the synagogue and those who, like the Galatians, are entirely Gentile in origin. To abide by these prohibitions is the basis for table fellowship and full communion between Jew and Gentile. Luke Johnson asks the right question as to why James would insist on these commandments, and then gives a convincing answer:

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[44] Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles,* 273.

[45] See, for example, Robert H. Stein, "Jerusalem," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters,* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 470–471, who persuasively argues in his description of the Noachian precepts that the prohibitions listed by James fit in this category: "These restrictions are best understood as based on Noachian laws: minimal laws which Jews believed were enjoined by the Scriptures on all people, reaching back to the period prior to Abraham (Gen 9:1–17). There were seven of them: the prohibition of idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, sexual immorality, theft, eating from a living animal (i.e. eating the blood of an animal) and, on the positive side, the need to establish a legal system of justice. In Acts the non-controversial Noachian laws (blasphemy, murder, robbery, establishment of justice) are omitted. The first three mentioned in Acts refer to food restrictions: things devoted to idols, or food dedicated to idols (cf. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25 with 1 Cor 8:1–13; 10:14–33), and the meat which was non-kosher, that is meat obtained from animals killed by strangling and from which the blood was not properly drained (Lev 7:26–27; 17:10–14). The fourth requirement was ethical in nature and dealt with sexual immorality." See, however, Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles,* 734, and Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 557, both of whom make a case that these are not part of the Noachian precepts.

[46] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 464.

> But why insist even on these? The point would seem to be to provide the basis for table-fellowship and full communion between Jew and Gentile Messianists. The commandments in Leviticus in particular give as their motivation the avoidance of "defiling the land" and "defiling the people," and the consequence of breaking the commandments is "being cut off from the people" (Lev 17:7, 9, 10, 14; 18:21, 24–25, 28–30). But according to the protocol of table-fellowship in the ancient world, one would eat only with someone who shared the same values. Table-fellowship symbolized spiritual fellowship (see 1 Cor 10:14–22). How could *Jews* eat with those whose practices fundamentally defiled themselves and the land and the people? These requirements of the Gentiles therefore enabled Jews to remain in communion with them, since the Gentiles would not be engaging in practices in radical disharmony with the Jewish *ethos,* and the Gentiles would be "keeping the Torah" as it was spelled out for "proselytes and sojourners in the land."[47]

The Letter from the Apostolic Council to the Gentile Churches

The letter sent by the Jerusalem church was a response to the Pharisaic Christians who had troubled and unsettled the Gentile churches. It was the result of what "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," indicating that the council perceived its decision as Spirit-directed. The letter detailed the decision of the council and was sent along with Paul and Barnabas, Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas. The churches that received these emissaries of the council received the letter with rejoicing because of its encouragement. That this was a God-pleasing, Spirit-inspired decision may be seen in the results of the letter among the Gentile churches, which sent Judas and Silas off in peace. Luke indicates that the church came out of the council unified around the council's decision because the clear word of the Scriptures had spoken through the authoritative representatives of the church. In keeping with other decisions in Acts, this decision was accomplished through collegial debate. It was a decision of the whole church guided by the Spirit with strong apostolic leadership from Peter and James. What is most striking is the use of the Scriptures in providing the church with the foundation for its decision.

VIII. Conclusion: A Model for Walking Together as the Church Today

How can the councils of Galatians 2 and Acts 15 examined above serve as a model for the twenty-first-century church walking together in confessing the Christian faith? First, these councils testify to the importance of meeting together to debate doctrinal issues that confront the church. Luke Johnson, in his commentary on Acts 15, asks an important

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[47] Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles,* 273.

question about the application of this text to the life of the church: are we able to see conflict and debate as legitimate and even necessary elements in the process of walking together?[48] Johnson answers in the affirmative. So should we. As Johnson also points out, doctrinal discussions go to the heart of our identity as the church in this postmodern world. As we walk together as church in a life together in Christ, our pastors—especially those in leadership positions—need the courage to confront situations in the church with the word of the Scriptures, desiring to hear it speak no matter how uncomfortable it might be for our ears to hear.

Second, these councils also teach us that when the church engages in a doctrinal dispute or disagreement, it is crucial that the various points of view be identified clearly and fully addressed. By identifying the points of view in this early dispute, we see how all of them were addressed by the decision of the apostolic council. Furthermore, the three points of view reflected in Acts 15 are often representative of the points of view in many doctrinal disputes since that time. The church must always affirm salvation by grace through faith and reject salvation by works of the law and any association with idolatry. Salvation by works of law is the fundamental belief for all religions except Christianity. Even within Christian denominations, however, works righteousness is alive and well. Works righteousness is a great threat to every Christian congregation, as is reflected in Acts 15 in the point of view represented by the Pharisaic Christians who caused the trouble in Antioch and Galatia, and who precipitated the public apostolic council. All Christians must be constantly aware of the temptation to come to believe that they are able to save themselves by their own efforts or by cooperating with God in some way in their salvation. The scriptural teaching that our Reformation fathers fought for—that a sinner is justified by grace for the sake of Christ through faith—must be upheld in this day and age, no matter what pressure we may receive from our culture to do otherwise and despite the persecution we may encounter even within the church. Moreover, the temptation to compromise with false religions or to accommodate ourselves to situations within our culture, no matter how noble the motives, continues to confront us every day. As with the earliest church, it is vital that we not cloud our witness to the true God with language or actions that affirm such idolatry.

Third and foremost, these councils testify to the word of God as the source of authority in addressing the issues confronting the church. Although Peter, Paul, and Barnabas testified about the truth of the gospel

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[48] Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 270–271.

as it was being expressed in the Gentile mission through either an apocalyptic vision from God or the signs and wonders accompanying the mission, it was the clear word of the Scriptures as presented by James that carried the day. Fraternal and collegial consensus was reached after hearing an authoritative figure like James unfold the Old Testament Scriptures as they related to the issues they were facing. James's authority came from his leadership in interpreting the Scriptures and showing how God's actions were helping the church see the true meaning of the Scriptures. The church today also must be very careful not to solve doctrinal disputes through means that do not reflect the clear testimony of Scripture. Even though we have constitutions and bylaws to govern us, the decisions reached on the basis of these human traditions must be subjected to the scrutiny of the Scriptures. This is not unlike the situation in Acts, in which the Pharisaic Christians applied their oral traditions to the Gentile mission only to be rejected by the clear testimony of Amos and Leviticus through the authoritative interpretation of James. The reason that various parties gave "the fullest possible authority to the council's decisions"[49] is, undoubtedly, due to the council's use of the authoritative Scriptures in coming to a consensus.

Fifth, we can learn from these early councils that consensus on the basis of the word of God does not mean that every viewpoint is going to be affirmed. Sometimes there are gray areas where mutual understanding between two groups leads to a compromise that upholds the Scriptures and affirms the position of both groups. At other times, there are clear matters of right and wrong, with one group clearly being shown to be in conflict with the word of God. The goal of such debate is not to affirm every viewpoint, but to "come to one accord" on the basis of the word of God (Acts 15:25).

Finally, it is also important that pastors demonstrate, through their public actions, that the gospel is not to be compromised. Mistakes, however, will be made by faithful pastors, including church leaders. Like Peter, we must all have the courage to repent of our mistakes when our public actions lead people astray and cloud our confession of the only true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like Paul, we must be ready to be reconciled with the brother who repents and work together with him in reconciled love for the unity of the church and the reaching of the lost.

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[49] Bauckham, *Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 437 (cited above, 267 n. 9, 282 n. 36).

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Philemon in the Context of Paul's Travels

John G. Nordling

"And at the same time also, prepare for me a guest room [ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν]; for I expect that through your prayers [ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν] I will be graciously given to you [χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν]" (Philemon 22).[1]

Here Paul expresses a confidence in Philemon and in those Christians who comprised Philemon's family and home congregation. He *expects* (ἐλπίζω) that through their repeated prayers at worship he will be graciously restored to them all as a *gift* (χαρισθήσομαι).[2] The passage presumes both that Paul would go to where Philemon and his congregation were located (Colossae, in southwest Asia Minor), and that Philemon and the congregation that assembled in his "house" (οἶκον, 2b) would provide for the travelling apostle suitable "hospitality" (ξενία; Lat. *hospitium*)—a word that could mean a "guest room" in Philemon's house,[3]

[1] As translated by John G. Nordling in *Philemon* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 148, 281. An earlier version of this article was read at the Michigan District North and East Pastors' Conference (Bad Axe, Michigan, May 8, 2007). The article depends in large measure on ideas presented originally in Nordling, *Philemon*, 20–25, 36–38.

[2] Nordling, *Philemon*, 285–286: "In the NT χαρίζομαι usually means 'to give freely as a favor, *give graciously*' [F.W. Danker, W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1078; henceforth BDAG]. The form here is the first person future passive. Its nuance here has been the topic of much debate. BDAG [1078] cites Acts 3:14, which refers to Barabbas being set free (χαρισθῆναι) and explains, 'the one who is "given" escapes death or further imprisonment by being handed over to those who wish him freed.' The *Testament of Joseph* [1:6] has a similar verb, χαριτόω: 'I was in prison, and the Savior *acted graciously* in my behalf [ἐχαρίτωσέ με]. I was in bonds, and he loosed me' [as translated by H.C. Kee in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Vol. 1, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 819]. Thus Paul expects that in answer to the prayers of Philemon's congregation, God will grant that 'I will be graciously given to you.' The apostle had called himself a δέσμιος, 'prisoner,' in verses 1 and 9. Now he anticipates that he will be released from prison and thus free to visit Philemon and his household in Colossae."

[3] G. Stählin, "ξένος κτλ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 15 vols., ed. G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. Fabry, trans. J.T. Willis, G.W. Bromiley, and D.E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006), 5:19, nn. 135–37, supposed the following terms

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or the more general "hospitable reception" shown to a traveler.[4] Either way, the passage stands as a perfect illustration of the ubiquity of Paul's travel in general,[5] and of the pertinence of the Pauline travel itinerary for better understanding Paul's letter to Philemon in particular.

In this article I shall first consider the likely location of Philemon's house-church in Colossae; second, I shall attempt to answer the question of how the gospel first reached Philemon and his congregation through the efforts of both Epaphras and Philemon; and third, I shall attempt to establish a more secure context for the letter by probing social relations Paul maintained between himself and Christians in the interior of Asia Minor, the precise numbers of whom cannot now be accurately determined. The likely scenario suggests that Paul's shortest letter was more than just a communiqué urging reconciliation between two feuding individuals—that is, between Philemon and Onesimus—as is all-too-often assumed by well-meaning interpreters of the letter who stress the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus, which is certainly an important emphasis of the letter.[6] Nevertheless, there must have been an acknowledged "communal purpose" to the letter, besides the purely personal or theological purpose of "fixing up a broken relationship between an injured master and his slave."[7] It bears stressing that Paul

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were virtually equivalent to ξενία in Philemon 22a: "inn" (πανδοχεῖον, Luke 10:34); "inn" or "lodging" (κατάλυμα, Luke 2:7); "guest-room" (κατάλυμα, Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11).

[4] Cf. "hospitality" (φιλοξενία, Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2 ESV). Stählin himself preferred "guest chamber" as an adequate rendering of ξενία in Philemon 22a in English ("ξένος κτλ," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 5:20).

[5] Based on likely travel itineraries put forward by Luke in the book of Acts alone, Ronald F. Hock estimated that Paul traveled nearly ten thousand miles during his reported career, which put him on roads swarming with "government officials, traders, pilgrims, the sick, letter-carriers, sightseers, runaway slaves, fugitives, prisoners, athletes, artisans, teachers, and students"; Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry. Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 27. For ancient travel in general cf. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT; London, UK: Yale University Press, 1983), 16–23; also cf. Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Reprint; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 128–37.

[6] Cf., e.g., Nordling, *Philemon*, 1–2, 300–301, 345–46, etc. Also cf. John G. Nordling, "The Gospel in Philemon," *CTQ* 71 (2007): 71–83, especially 77, 78, 80, 81–82.

[7] John G. Nordling, "Some Matters Favouring the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon," *Neotestamentica* 44.1 (2010): 114. Others who have stressed the communal, as opposed to the merely personal, nature of the letter are Sara C. Winter, "Methodological Observations on a New Interpretation of Paul's Letter to Philemon," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 39 (1984): 206; Norman R. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the*

would have been passionately concerned for the vitality of the larger congregation of which Philemon and Onesimus were a part, and doubtlessly also for the good of Christians still further removed from those assumed by the letter—that is, of Christians known to have existed in the Lycus river valley (where Colossae was located), and probably of Christians who were located in Galatia still further east. Thus, some awareness of ancient travel, the geographical location of Colossae in relation to other cities in Roman Asia, and social networks extending far beyond the leading *dramatis personae* of the letter do much to shed light on the quite complicated reasons for which Paul wrote to Philemon and the congregation in the first place.

I. The Location of Philemon's House-Church

Where would Philemon's house-church have been located? The answer to this question is provided not so much in Philemon itself as in the letter to which Philemon has most often been connected—that is, Colossians. Many suspect a close connection between Paul's letters to Philemon and the Colossians[8] for reasons to which we cannot do full justice here;[9] let us at least consider, however, one powerful proof for the close connection of the two letters. It happens that the epistolary conclusions of Philemon and Colossians share five of six names listed in the final greeting. So Philemon 23–24 records the final greetings of Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke; likewise, Colossians 4:10–14 records the final greetings of Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus "who is called Justus" (ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰοῦστος, Col 4:11a), Epaphras, Luke, and Demas.[10] Despite the absence of "Jesus who is called Justus," the final greeting in Philemon shares five out of the six names listed in Colossians, a remarkable correspondence between the two letters. The shared names must indicate that the five individuals in the two epistolary conclusions were the same people, for there could not easily have been separate Epaphrases, Marks, Aristarchuses, Demases, and Lukes *in both letters*. Thus, the five identical names, together with still other names that connect

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Sociology of Paul's Narrative World (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 65–78; Larry J. Kreitzer, *Philemon* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 13.

[8] In addition to most commentaries, cf. John Knox, "Philemon and the Authenticity of Colossians," *Journal of Religion* 18 (1938): 144–160; and John Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul. A New View of its Place and Importance*, Rev. ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 34–55.

[9] But cf. Nordling, *Philemon*, 324–328.

[10] Cf. fig. 11 in Nordling, *Philemon*, 320 ("A Comparison of Philemon 23–24 and Colossians 4:10–14").

the two letters,[11] forge an "inseparable connection" between Philemon and Colossians, the evidence of which "cannot lightly be swept aside."[12]

Paul apparently had not yet been to Colossae when he wrote that Philemon should "prepare a guest room [ξενίαν]" for him in Philemon's house (Phlm 22a). That Paul had not yet been to Colossae is supported by two considerations. First, when Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians, he stated that certain Christians at Colossae and Laodicea had not yet "seen my [Paul's] face in the flesh [οὐχ ἑόρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί]" (Col 2:1b). This small detail indicates to many[13] that while Paul was certainly *known* to the saints at Colossae and Laodicea, a majority of Christians there had not actually *seen* Paul in the flesh, since the notion of seeing someone's "face" (τὸ πρόσωπον, Col 2:1) in the Pauline corpus expresses the immediacy of a personal encounter (cf. 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 10:1, 7; Gal 1:22; 2:11; 1 Thess 2:17; 3:10).[14] Such instances may go back to the biblical idiom of seeing someone "face-to-face," such as occurs, e.g., in Genesis 46:30: "Israel said to Joseph, 'Now let me die, since I have *seen your face* and know that you are still alive'" (ESV, emphasis added).[15]

Second, although Acts records that Paul had passed through other regions of Asia Minor on previous occasions,[16] there is no evidence to suggest that he had passed through Colossae itself before writing the letter to Philemon. In Acts 16:6 Paul and his entourage were hindered by divine impulse from preaching the Word in Asia (i.e., in Ephesus), so Paul could not have passed through Colossae at that time. In Acts 19:1 Paul did indeed reach Ephesus, yet he did so by way of the so-called "upper regions" (τὰ ἀνωτερικὰ μέρη), a phrase that probably refers to a route farther north that skirted Colossae by about twenty-five miles.[17] Perhaps fatigue compelled Paul to traverse this northern route "over the hills"[18]

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[11] E.g., Timothy (Phlm 1; Col 1:1); Archippus (Phlm 2; Col 4:17); Onesimus (Phlm 10; Col 4:9).

[12] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), 554.

[13] See the list of twelve scholars in Nordling, *Philemon*, 20 n. 2.

[14] So James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 129, on the basis of the passages provided in the parenthesis.

[15] So Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 164.

[16] Cf. Acts 13:13–14, 51; 14:20–21, 24–25; 15:41; 16:1, 4, 7-8; 18:23.

[17] So F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 353.

[18] So A. Souter, "Roads and Travel," in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, ed. James Hastings, John A. Selbie, and John C. Lambert (New York: Scribner, 1918), 2:396–397; cf.

and thus avoid the more heavily congested road through Colossae farther south.

Nevertheless, it seems quite possible that Philemon could have seen Paul "in the flesh" on some prior occasion (or occasions), even if the apostle had not yet passed through the exact part of Asia Minor where Philemon lived. Even if Paul had not seen Philemon in Colossae on an earlier occasion, Philemon could plausibly have seen Paul in the place where that apostle lived and taught for more than two years (Acts 19:10; cf. 19:8)—namely, *in Ephesus*, the great metropolis of Roman Asia. Acts 19:10 does not mention Philemon by name but does state that during Paul's lengthy sojourn in Ephesus "*all* [πάντας] the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord [ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου], both Jews and Greeks" (ESV; emphasis added). By his use of the word "all" here Luke may perhaps be engaging in overstatement,[19] but his words need mean no more than that people from throughout the entire province of Roman Asia—and perhaps beyond—heard the gospel at Ephesus during the public lectures Paul himself delivered in the hall of Tyrannus (διαλεγόμενος ἐν τῇ σχολῇ Τυράννου, Acts 19:9). As the seat of the provincial governor, Ephesus attracted visitors on business "from throughout the province and beyond."[20]

Hence it seems only natural to suppose that Philemon, possibly visiting Ephesus on business, may have been among the "all" who heard one or more of Paul's lectures, either among the Jews at the synagogue for three months (μῆνας τρεῖς διαλεγόμενος, Acts 19:8) or among "the disciples" at the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years (τοῦτο . . . ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο, Acts 19:10).[21] From Ephesus Paul would undoubtedly have

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F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 14.

[19] For the possibility that Luke engaged in hyperbole in Acts 19:10 cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 648.

[20] Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 2:37, n. 215.

[21] The "three years [τριετίαν]" of Acts 20:31 may be an instance of inclusive time reckoning; P. Trebilco, "Asia," in David W.J. Gill and Conrad H. Gempf, eds. *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting* (The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting, vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 310 n. 79. Alternatively, Paul may have rounded up the time of his Ephesian ministry to an even "three years." To consider the various possibilities, cf. Bruce, *Acts*, 356; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 559; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 163; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 648.

supervised ongoing evangelization to other parts of Roman Asia also,[22] kept in touch with congregations founded earlier in his ministry,[23] and adhered to a rigorous schedule of missionary preaching and self-support designed to draw travelers to Ephesus in order to hear the gospel at the public lectures:

> St. Luke . . . ascribes this dissemination of the Gospel, not to journeys undertaken by the Apostle [Paul], but to his preaching at Ephesus itself [cf. Acts 19:8–10]. Thither, as to the metropolis of Western Asia, would flock crowds from all the towns and villages far and near. Thence they would carry away, each to his own neighbourhood, the spiritual treasure which they had so unexpectedly found.[24]

The Western text (D) of Acts 19:9 preserves the interesting addition that Paul's lectures occurred "from the fifth hour [ἀπὸ ὥρας πέμπτης] until the tenth [ἕως δεκάτης]—that is, from 11:00 AM until 4:00 PM.[25] These hours are supposed by some to have constituted siesta time in ancient Ephesus, so the textual addition attempts to explain why Paul (or his financial backers) might have been able to rent Tyrannus's hall for a reasonable price during off-hours. Quite possibly there were more people asleep at one o'clock *in the afternoon* than at one o'clock *in the morning*![26] Colossae (where Philemon lived) was only a hundred miles or so from Ephesus.[27] It seems possible, then—indeed, *likely*—that Philemon visited Paul during the time of his Ephesian ministry and came to faith through the gospel Paul disseminated at the public lectures convened in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus. Philemon may then have allowed an associate of

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[22] This evangelization would especially have included the Lycus Valley, in which Colossae was situated. Bruce, *Acts*, 356; *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 15, n. 64, supposed that the "seven churches of Asia" (Rev 1:4) were planted at this time, and possibly still other Asian congregations.

[23] These congregations would have included those in Corinth and Macedonia. Paul probably wrote at least the first of his epistles to Corinth from Ephesus during the third journey; so Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 15, n. 86, with further testimonies there. According to Acts 19:22, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus from Ephesus to Macedonia.

[24] Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1879), 31.

[25] Bruce Metzger was inclined to accept this addition as an "accurate piece of information." Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 417.

[26] So, e.g., F.J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds. *The Beginnings of Christianity*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920–1933), 4:239.

[27] See the testimony in Nordling, *Philemon*, 22, n. 14.

Paul to visit him in Colossae and establish there a congregation in his own *house* (οἶκον, Phlm 2).

II. How the Gospel Reached Colossae: Epaphras and Philemon

If Philemon's congregation was located in Colossae, and if Philemon had met Paul for the first time and indeed had become a Christian as a result of Paul's public lectures in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9; Phlm 19b), then how did there come to be a congregation in Philemon's house—especially if Paul had not yet been to Colossae? Several scholars suppose that Philemon himself established the congregation there, as though he were a "preacher" who brought Christianity home to Colossae.[28] Dunn even speculated that "Philemon was a fine preacher."[29] The latter opinion, while theoretically possible,[30] in fact has several attending problems, which will be considered below.

Might then another seasoned Christian have brought the gospel to Philemon's house—one of Paul's many missionary associates, perhaps? Presumably Philemon might have permitted such a person onto the premises to teach his household the Christian faith and to fill what was essentially the pastoral office by preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. If that possibility was indeed the case, then Epaphras—not Philemon—becomes an attractive candidate for having actually brought the gospel to Philemon's home, located in Colossae. Epaphras was a native of Colossae (Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, Col 4:12), and from him the Colossian Christians had "learned" (ἐμάθετε, Col 1:7) the "grace of God in truth [τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ]" (Col 1:6). Such details may indicate that Epaphras—not Philemon—had been the original missionary to Colossae and possibly to the entire Lycus Valley (Col 4:13; cf. 4:15–16). Bruce opined that Epaphras actually evangelized the cities of the Lycus Valley in Phrygia under Paul's direction during the latter's Ephesian ministry, and founded the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea.[31] Later, so the

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[28] Thus Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, trans. W.R. Poehlmann and R.J. Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 190; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary 44; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 273; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 138; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 34C; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 87.

[29] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 321.

[30] There is a later tradition (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7:46) that Philemon became bishop at Colossae.

[31] F.F. Bruce, "Epaphras," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas and N. Hillyer, 3d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 326.

reconstruction goes,[32] Epaphras visited Paul during his Roman captivity, and apparently Epaphras's report (ὁ . . . δηλώσας ἡμῖν, Col 1:8) of conditions in the churches of the Lycus Valley moved Paul to write canonical Colossians.[33] As we have already seen, Epaphras was almost certainly with Paul when he wrote Philemon (Phlm 23), and the apostle stated that Epaphras "had much toil" (ἔχει πολὺν πόνον, Col 4:13) for the Christians (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν) on whose behalf Paul was writing Colossians. Lohse speculates that controversy associated with the hostile "philosophy" (Col 2:8) back home had forced Epaphras to withdraw from Colossae and return to Paul (imprisoned in Rome) for support and encouragement.[34] Indeed, Epaphras's so-called "toil" (πόνος Paul calls it, Col 4:13) might have consisted of his *agonizing* over the Christians of the Lycus Valley in his prayers (ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς) that they might *stand forth perfect* (ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλειοι)—that is, withstand the corrosive heresy back home[35]—and be "brought to fullness [πεπληροφορημένοι] in all the will of God" (Col 4:12).[36] Both the intensity of Epaphras's prayer and his evident proximity to Paul suggest that Epaphras was more than

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[32] The following scholars, among others, affirm Bruce's reconstruction (see previous note): Theodore G. Soares, "Paul's Missionary Methods," *Biblical World* 34 (1909): 328; Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 440; and, especially, Michael Trainor, *Epaphras: Paul's Educator at Colossae* (Paul's Social Network, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 79–95 passim.

[33] Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 3. Trainor, *Epaphras*, 3 and 55, abides by the critical notion that Paul could not have written Colossians (it is, in his opinion, deutero-Pauline), though I am not persuaded by his reasoning (see my review of Trainor's *Epaphras* in a forthcoming issue of *CTQ*).

[34] Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 174.

[35] On the so-called "Colossian heresy," see Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 73–113; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 546–50; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 17–26; and Deterding, *Colossians*, 7–12.

[36] The rare word πεπληροφορημένοι (perf. mid./pass. ptc. of πληροφορέω) is part of the vocabulary in Colossians that suggests that so-called "fullness" (τὸ πλήρωμα) was at the heart of the controversy at Colossae. Indeed, Paul effects several plays upon that word in the course of the letter (Col 1:19; 2:9; cf. πληροφορία, Col 2:2; πληρόω, Col 1:9, 25; 2:10; 4:17), including the snatch of Epaphras's prayer that Paul reports in Col 4:12. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 173, explains: "[One] does not attain entry to the 'fulness' (πλήρωμα) through speculative knowledge about cosmic relationships, secret initiation rites and worship of the elements of the universe. Rather by adhering to Christ as head over the powers and principalities, the believers have 'their fullness in him' (ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, [Col] 2:9f) and know what God's will is ([Col] 1:9f). Consequently, they can stand firmly as 'perfect' (τέλειοι) [Col 4:12] only if they have been entirely and completely filled 'with everything that is God's will' (ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ)."

just a founder of a Christian congregation at Colossae.[37] Paul had probably commissioned Epaphras originally to bring the gospel to the entire Lycus Valley[38] and then, during the time of controversy, Epaphras had represented the orthodox position in Colossae as "the plenipotentiary representative of the Apostle."[39] The terminology used to describe Epaphras in Paul's letter to the Colossians mirrors the apostle's own self-description,[40] so Paul probably intended that the literary image of Epaphras's life and ministry might conform to the impress of his own.

Philemon would also have supported the mission efforts in Colossae, of course, but in what one imagines was essentially a lay capacity. Paul addresses Philemon first (Phlm 1), ahead of Apphia and Archippus (v. 2), and that fact—together with other subtle textual indications[41]—suggests that Philemon was a person of considerable importance at Colossae, both in Paul's estimation of him and in view of the congregation that worshiped in his house (οἶκος, v. 2). Philemon was probably the owner of the house, and so he would have been a wealthy man as well as a slave owner,[42] a successful businessman,[43] and the *paterfamilias*—a legal term that signifies "*the master of a house* in respect to ownership, *the proprietor of an estate,* [the] *head of a family*."[44] Most households in Roman antiquity simply adhered to the religious allegiance and practice of the *paterfamilias*:

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[37] Contrary to Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 134, who refers to Epaphras as a "local leader." Trainor supposes, however, that Epaphras was "foremost in Paul's retinue" (*Epaphras*, 41) and of a "quasi-apostolic status" (*Epaphras*, 53).

[38] So Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 31–33; Soares, "Paul's Missionary Methods," 328; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 14; Deterding, *Colossians*, 14 n. 93, 30–31, 187; Trainor, *Epaphras*, 85–89.

[39] Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 174.

[40] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 280, relates the Pauline self-description to Epaphras as follows: "He [Epaphras] 'always' (πάντοτε; [Col] 1:3) 'wrestles' (ἀγωνιζόμενος; see on [Col] 1:29; cf. Phil 1:30) 'on your behalf in prayer' (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς; [Col] 1:3, 9) 'that you might stand mature' (τέλειοι; see on [Col] 1:28) 'and fully assured' (καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι; see on [Col] 2:2) 'in all God's will' (ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ; see on [Col] 1:9)."

[41] See "The Epistolary Recipients: Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and 'the Church throughout Your House'" in Nordling, *Philemon*, 160–176.

[42] Paul twice refers to Onesimus as a "slave" (cf. αὐτόν . . . ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον) in v. 16.

[43] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 301.

[44] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879), 723 (italics original). Here is the passage that the dictionary uses to provide a working definition for the term *paterfamilias*: "*paterfamilias appellatur, qui in domo dominium habet, recteque hoc nomine appellatur, quamvis filium non habeat; non enim solam personam eius, sed et jus demonstramus. Denique et pupillum patremfamilias*

> It was the normal practice for households to conform to the religious affiliations and practices of the householder, *paterfamilias* or οἰκοδεσπότης. When the *paterfamilias* underwent conversion or change of allegiance, it would have been entirely normative for other members of the household to transfer their loyalties accordingly.[45]

We should consider, therefore, that there could have been no congregation at all in Philemon's house had Philemon not cooperated fully with Paul from the beginning, received such emissaries as Paul would have sent (see discussion of Epaphras above), and supported the Christian mission in Colossae in any number of ways (e.g., providing for the catechesis and baptism of the dependents in his household). Paul's opening address ("to Philemon our beloved and fellow-worker [Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν]," v.1) resembles other passages where Paul refers to trusted collaborators as "fellow-workers [συνεργοί]," for example, Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3; cf. Acts 18:2–3), Urbanus (Rom 16:9), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), and the mysterious "rest of my [Paul's] fellow-workers [τῶν λοιπῶν συνεργῶν μου]" (Phil 4:3). The aforementioned Christians might well have been literal workers—craftsmen, artisans, handworkers, weavers, and the like—because so much of the Pauline paraenesis was intended for Christians who were working.[46] There are yet other passages, however, where the term "fellow-worker" (συνεργός; cf. συνεργέω) seems to refer more specifically to men known from supporting passages to have been pastors and evangelists, who—together with Paul—were engaged in what we might refer to as the apostolic ministry. Thus, Timothy was a "fellow-worker" of Paul

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appellamus" = "he is called *paterfamilias* who holds lordship in the house, and he is correctly called by this name even if he does not have a son; for we refer not only to his person but also to his right. Indeed, we call even a little boy the *paterfamilias*," Justinian *Digest* 50.16.195 (my translation).

[45] N.H. Taylor, "Onesimus: A Case Study of Slave Conversion in Early Christianity," *Religion and Theology* 3 (1996): 262. Taylor adds (ibid.): "This [conversion to the master's religion] would not have been a voluntary act but rather involuntary conformity, willing or unwilling, with the decision and action of the *paterfamilias*."

[46] So Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 64–65, on the basis of 1 Thess 4:11–12. For the work-related vocations of the first Christians in general cf. Todd D. Still, "Did Paul Loathe Manual Labor? Revisiting the Work of Ronald F. Hock on the Apostle's Tentmaking and Social Class," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 781–95; John G. Nordling, "Slavery and Vocation," *Lutheran Forum* 42 (Summer 2008); and John G. Nordling, "A More Positive View of Slavery: Establishing Servile Identity in the Christian Assemblies," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 (2009): 63–84, especially 80–84. Still other passages that suggest that literal work was important to Paul and to his epistolary audiences are Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:9; and 2 Thess 3:6–13.

(Τιμόθεος ὁ συνεργός μου, Rom 16:21);[47] Paul and Apollos were "fellow-workers" of God (θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, 1 Cor 3:9); Silvanus, Timothy, and Paul were "fellow-workers" of the Corinthians' joy (συνεργοί ἐσμεν τῆς χαρᾶς ὑμῶν, 2 Cor 1:24); Titus was a "partner" of Paul and a "fellow-worker" of the Corinthians (Τίτου, κοινωνὸς ἐμὸς καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς συνεργός, 2 Cor 8:23), and so on.[48]

As the letter stands, however, there is no reason to suppose that Philemon was a pastor or a "preacher,"[49] since Epaphras, not Philemon, seems to have occupied that role at Colossae (see the discussion on Epaphras above). Paul probably referred to Philemon as "our beloved fellow-worker" (Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν, Phlm 1b) to form an affectionate bond with him and so link Philemon's artisan service—whatever it was—to his own unique office as an apostle and preacher of the word. The use of the term "fellow-worker" as an identity-building device between the apostle Paul, the co-sender Timothy, and indiscriminate Christians at Corinth, comparatively few of whom occupied pastoral office, occurs, e.g., in 2 Corinthians 6:1, where Paul writes, "as God's fellow-workers [συνεργοῦντες] we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain" (NIV). In Paul's letter to Philemon, therefore, the term "fellow-worker" (συνεργός, v. 1) most likely indicates an affectionate epithet used by Paul to elevate Philemon's past services to Paul and to Paul's emissaries, to the Colossian Christians (referred to as "saints" in vv. 5, 7), and ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ himself:

> Paul calls him [Philemon] our "fellow-worker," thus affectionately linking Philemon's work with his own. The term "fellow-worker" is by no means confined to full-time servants of the Gospel like the men who in v. 24 join in greeting Philemon. All who toil for the furtherance of Christ's work, however glamorous or unglamorous their work, have a share in one great common work for eternity. Philemon must thrill with pride to have the

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[47] Cf. 1 Thess 3:2, where Paul refers to Timothy as "our brother and fellow-worker of God [Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ]."

[48] For other passages of this type cf. οὗτοι μόνοι συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ("these ones alone were *fellow-workers* in the kingdom of God," Col 4:11 [refers to Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus who is called Justus]); οἱ συνεργοί μου ("my *fellow-workers*," Phlm 24 [refers to Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, and possibly Epaphras in Phlm 23]). For the highly suggestive phrase παντὶ τῷ συνεργοῦντι καὶ κοπιῶντι ("to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it," 1 Cor 16:16b, NIV), which probably refers to someone engaged in the ministry of word and sacrament, cf. E.E. Ellis, "Paul and His Co-workers," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1971): 441.

[49] Contrary to Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 321, and others.

Lord's great servant Paul reach down his hand to him and say: "My fellow-worker."[50]

III. Did Philemon's Home Congregation Link Paul to Christians in Galatia?

We have now established a backdrop against which to probe Paul's letter to Philemon still more deeply. If the issue behind the letter was an incident that involved a runaway slave,[51] Philemon's immediate congregation would of course have been considerably affected and, one supposes, so would many other congregations, both nearby and far away. Distinct groups of Christians are mentioned in the Lycus Valley not only in Colossae itself (Col 1:2), but also in Laodicea (Col 4:13; cf. 4:15–16), Hierapolis (Col 4:13), Nympha's house (Col 4:15), and Philemon's house (Phlm 2b). None of these congregations were more than fifteen miles removed from one of the others, and each congregation probably had been founded by Epaphras during Paul's lengthy residence in Ephesus.[52] There could only have been a considerable amount of give and take between the local Christians under such circumstances, so something really catastrophic (like the flight of a trusted slave in Philemon's household) would almost certainly have affected the Christians throughout the length and breadth of the Lycus Valley and far beyond. Nor does it seem too extreme to suppose that a kind of "pipeline" existed between Paul (wherever he was when he wrote Philemon), the Christians of the Lycus Valley discussed above, and possibly Christians still further removed that had been brought to faith in Christ as early as the first missionary journey conducted by Paul and Barnabas (cf. Acts 14:21; 16:1; 18:23).[53] Indeed, Paul could have founded congregations in Cilicia (southeast Asia Minor) not

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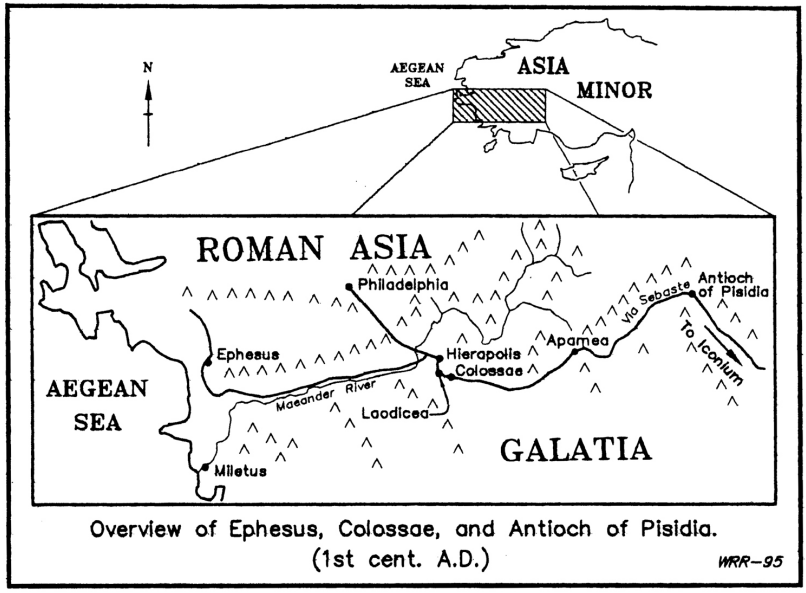
[50] H. Armin Moellering and Victor A. Bartling, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 249.

[51] Cf. Nordling, "Author, Time, Place, and Purpose of Writing," in *Philemon*, 5–19; Nordling, "Some Matters."

[52] For approximate distances between the three cities, cf. C.E. Arnold, "Colossae," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D.N. Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1089; and F.F. Bruce, "Laodicea," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4:229. On Epaphras as the founder of the congregations in the Lycus Valley, see Part II above and, additionally, J.M. Norris, "Epaphras," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, 5 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962, 1976), 2:107; F.F. Bruce, "Epaphras," *New Bible Dictionary*, 326.

[53] For the supposed "pipeline," cf. Nordling, "Some Matters," 113 n. 105. For more on the Christians of the Lycus Valley, cf. A. Kirkland, "The Beginnings of Christianity in the Lycus Valley: An Exercise in Historical Reconstruction," *Neotestamentica* 29 (1995): 109–124.

long after his conversion, in the 30s AD;[54] Wilson argues convincingly that the founding of Cilician churches during Paul's "silent years" influenced the itinerary of Paul's first journey and also his entire subsequent itinerant ministry.[55]



Consider how the harmful effects of Onesimus's theft and flight may well have been felt much farther from Colossae, among congregations linked to Philemon's house by the efficient road systems of Asia Minor.[56] During Paul's first missionary journey (ca. AD 46–48) congregations had been established in Galatia, and these would have consisted of the Christians mentioned at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13–52), Iconium (Acts

[54] So Mark Wilson, "Cilicia: The First Christian Churches in Anatolia," *Tyndale Bulletin* 54 (2003): 17–18, on the basis of Acts 9:30. Wilson opines that Paul's "so-called 'silent years' were busy and not at all a passive spiritual retreat in Tarsus" (18).

[55] Wilson, "Cilicia," 29–30.

[56] Cf. "Roads, Travel, and Networking in Asia Minor," in Nordling, *Philemon*, 31–36. For a fascinating study likening the intricate system of Roman roads and shipping lanes to the modern "information superhighway," cf. Michael B. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in *The Gospels for all Christian: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 49–70.

14:1–5), Lystra (Acts 14:6–20), and Derbe (Acts 14:20–21).[57] Pisidian Antioch, the first city Paul visited, was particularly important as the "new Rome" of the Greek east,[58] and quite possibly Paul hastened to that city for the express purpose of winning "converts of substance" there,[59] the most prominent of whom was Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:7).[60] Hence it seems likely that Paul deliberately bypassed Perga and other promising communities of Pamphylia (Acts 13:13) to take the gospel directly to the Roman elites of Pisidian Antioch who had been attracted to Jewish worship as "God-fearers" (cf. οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν, Acts 13:16). Mitchell all but proves that this same Sergius Paulus became, later in life, the earliest senator from the eastern provinces to attain to the consulship at Rome (as a suffect, in AD 70).[61]

At any rate, it seems scarcely credible that Paul, during his years in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:10; 20:31), would have allowed himself to be out of contact for any length of time with the congregation at Pisidian Antioch—to say nothing about undoubtedly large numbers of Christians still farther east in Galatia, whom he had visited on earlier occasions.[62] In Acts 14:21, Luke mentions that Paul and Barnabas "discipled many" (μαθητεύσαντες ἱκανούς) in Derbe during the first journey, indicating that "a large congregation" had been founded there.[63] Likewise, the same two apostles (Acts 14:14) appointed elders for the Asian Christians "in every church"

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[57] By "Galatia" I mean the four cities of south central Asia Minor just mentioned, as well as their surrounding regions: "It was as natural to refer to the churches of [Pisidian] Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe as churches of Galatia, as it was to call that of Corinth a church of Achaea [cf. 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 1:7]" (Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:4). I admit that there are highly-regarded traditional scholars who hold that Paul first evangelized the northern part of the Roman province—Ankyra, Tavium, and Pessinus (instead of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe)—although it seems impossible to prefer the latter interpretation to the former. For two traditional scholars who hold to the so-called "north-Galatian theory," cf. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 15–17; and Bo Reicke, *Re-examining Paul's Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence*, ed. David P. Moessner and Ingalisa Reicke (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 46.

[58] So Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:8; cf. Stephen Mitchell and Marc Waelkens, *Pisidian Antioch: The Site and its Monuments* (London: Duckworth, 1998), 11–12.

[59] Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:6.

[60] For inscriptions linking Sergius Paulus's family to Rome and Pisidian Antioch, cf. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 1:151–152, nn. 68–77; 2:6–7, nn. 39–43.

[61] So Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 1:152; 2:6 n. 40.

[62] Acts 14:21 refers to Lystra, Iconium, and (Pisidian) Antioch, while Acts 16:1 names Derbe and Lystra. Further movements through these regions may be referred to in Acts 16:6 and 18:23, where "Phrygia" and "Galatia" are mentioned.

[63] Haenchen, *Acts*, 435.

(χειροτονήσαντες . . . κατ᾽ ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους, Acts 14:23), indicating that already from the first journey and thereafter provision had been made for men to fill the office of the ministry in congregations of Asia and beyond.[64] Indeed, the advancement of the gospel into south central Asia Minor had momentous implications for the destiny of Christianity itself: "If it did not mean that there were now more Gentile Christians in the world than Jewish Christians, it suggested that the time was not far distant when this would be so."[65]

IV. Conclusion

It would seem likely, then, that Philemon represented a stable Christian contact for Paul located in the Lycus Valley and a man upon whom many itinerant Christians depended while traversing the rugged climes of Asia Minor.[66] We can assume that Paul's lectures in Ephesus were more or less public events[67] and that "all" manner of persons were drawn to Paul from far and wide, including Philemon himself, who was converted by Paul to Jesus Christ, as Paul indicates in Philemon 19b: "though I say nothing to you that even your very self you owe to me." After his conversion, Philemon apparently placed himself, his house, and all that was his at the disposal of Paul in service to Christ and to his fellow Christians. The apostle may then have sent Epaphras as his emissary to Colossae to minister and establish congregations there that met for the proclamation of the word, the instruction of catechumens, and the reception of the sacrament.

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[64] Cf. Bruce, *Acts*, 286: "The πρεσβύτεροι were appointed on the model of those in the Jerusalem church (cf. [Acts] xi.30). . . . The 'elders' of a church are also called ἐπίσκοποι ('overseers'), as at Ephesus ([Acts] xx.28, cf. xx.17) and Philippi (Phil i.1), προιστάμενοι ('leaders'), as at Rome (Rom xii.8) and Thessalonica (1 Th[ess] v.12), ἡγούμενοι ('guides'), as in Heb xiii.17."

[65] F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 279. That at least the formidable New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce favored the so-called "south-Galatian theory" is demonstrated by the following quote: "The church of Antioch [on the Orontes River, in Syria] had now become a mother-church with a large number of daughter-churches, not only in the dual province of Syria-Cilicia but possibly in Cyprus and certainly in South Galatia," *New Testament History*, 278.

[66] For a physical description of the region, cf. William M. Ramsay, *The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1895), 1–6. Ramsay himself traversed the area in October 1881, apparently by pack mule.

[67] The word "all" (πάντας) in Acts 19:10 apparently means that *anyone*, "Jew or Greek," could have attended Paul's lectures over the two-year period (τοῦτο . . . ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο).

It is tempting to suppose that this connection between Paul and his co-workers, among whom he counted Philemon, consisted of a kind of "pipeline" by which Paul would have been able to maintain close contacts between himself and large numbers of Christians still farther east, such as those who had been brought to faith in Christ during the first journey (AD 46–48). It would have required a wealthy, dedicated, and strategically positioned Christian to maintain a linkage between Paul (at first in Ephesus, then later in Rome) and a place like Pisidian Antioch, which was connected by the highway system to still other Asian centers across the upland plains and mountain passes (see map above). Paul's reliance upon Philemon and his congregation must be the reason why the apostle called Philemon a "beloved fellow-worker" (τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ, 1b) and a "partner" (κοινωνόν, 17a), titles indicating a high level of shared experience, trust, and collegiality among Pauline associates in general.[68] These considerations suggest, at any rate, that Paul was not so much interested in mending the breach that had happened between Philemon and Onesimus in the one congregation, as he was in trying to head off a massive disruption in communications between himself and countless numbers of congregations and Christians still farther east. In the common understanding of the New Testament, we should take it that Philemon, members of Philemon's house congregation, Lycus Valley Christians, Galatian Christians, and ultimately all the Christians of all the congregations in all the missionary theaters were related to Paul, to one another, and to us within in the bond of peace (ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης, Eph 4:3).[69] Of course, Paul was concerned about the forgiveness of sins that he hoped ultimately would reunite Philemon to Onesimus, and the Christians of Philemon's house congregation—whether named or unnamed—to all the other Christians who would ever live, and so still hear

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[68] Paul's description of Philemon resembles that of Titus, who was Paul's "partner and fellow-worker" (κοινωνὸς ἐμὸς καὶ . . . συνεργός) in service to the Corinthians (2 Cor 8:23). Indeed, Philemon must have been a highly regarded Christian in the Lycus Valley, especially when compared to the scarcely known Nympha (Col 4:15, no epithet) and to other unnamed Christians at Colossae. References to such unnamed Christians include "to the saints in Colossae" (τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἁγίοις, Col 1:2a); "on behalf of you" (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, Col 4:13); "on behalf of . . . those in Laodicea" (ὑπὲρ . . . τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ, Col 4:13a; cf. παρ᾽ ὑμῖν, 4:16a); and "on behalf of . . . those in Hierapolis" (ὑπὲρ . . . τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει, Col 4:13b).

[69] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 280: "[A]s the readers heed the apostolic injunction to bend every effort so as to maintain their oneness in the local congregation(s) as well as in their wider relationships with other believers, the peace which Christ has won and which binds Jews and Gentiles together into the one people of God will be increasingly evident in their lives."

the concluding blessing of grace at the Divine Service: "The grace [Ἡ χάρις] of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit!" (25):

> Philemon, Onesimus, and the congregation gathered in Philemon's house faced obvious challenges—and opportunities—in Christ as they pondered their future together. But so did all the other Christians to whom Paul ever wrote, appending as he did his distinctive blessing of grace (ἡ χάρις) to each letter.[70] Paul never attempted to cast different, more "relevant" or "utilitarian" blessings to his diverse epistolary audiences. Instead, the relatively static form of his final blessing trusts that the words themselves, which God the Holy Spirit had inspired through the apostle Paul, convey "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ". . . to those who first heard, or all who would ever hear, the blessing.[71]

Even so—and for all his theological astuteness—Paul was a pragmatist who did not want the one crisis to undo all the work of his earlier missions. He therefore looked beyond the "ruckus" that had enveloped the one congregation, and realized the really catastrophic effect that the falling-out between Philemon and Onesimus could have upon Christians in the immediate area, and far beyond the immediate area.[72] I submit, then, that it was out of a concern *for the wider church in Asia Minor*—and *for the future of the entire Christian mission*—that Paul undertook to write Philemon, both the man and the letter.

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[70] Obviously related forms of the greeting appear at Rom 16:20b; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Phil 4:23; Col 4:18b; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 1 Tim 6:21b; 2 Tim 4:22b; Titus 3:15b; Phlm 25.

[71] Nordling, *Philemon*, 343.

[72] Nordling, "Some Matters," 112: "A similar scenario between Onesimus and Philemon transpired, then, causing such a ruckus in Philemon's household that Paul, writing for Christians of a 'high-context' society, would hardly have had to drop the sort of details many assume must accompany crises of this type." Trainor maintains that the letters to Philemon and the Colossians presume information well-known to their audiences: "This presumption indicates that the letters were written in a 'high-context' society. High-context societies produce sketchy and impressionistic texts, leaving much to the reader's or hearer's imagination," Trainor, *Epaphras*, 5.

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The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Cyprian of Carthage

Robert J.H. Mayes

In the early centuries of the church, theology was confessed and hammered out in the fire of conflict. Doctrinal controversy led Christians deeper into God's word to apply it to their situations. These Christians confessed the gospel despite the consequences, and clarified the articles of the faith that were muddled by false teaching. Cyprian of Carthage (ca. 200–258) was such a voice.

This study examines Cyprian's confession of the Lord's Supper and what he can teach modern Lutherans. First, the historical context and Cyprian's overall theological thought will be discussed. Second, Cyprian's views on the essence of the Supper will be presented. Third, Cyprian's understanding of the Old Testament witness to the Supper will be examined. Fourth, Cyprian's view of Communion fellowship and excommunication will be presented. Finally, the connections that Cyprian draws between the Supper and martyrdom will be explored.

I. The Historical Context

Born to wealthy pagan parents in North Africa, Thascius Cyprianus converted to Christianity around AD 246. He probably taught rhetoric before converting. Soon after his baptism, Cyprian was ordained a presbyter, then made bishop of Carthage a few years later (late 248 or 249).

As bishop, Cyprian faced two main theological issues. The first concerned mortal sin and repentance after baptism. In 249 or 250, the Roman emperor Decius began a major persecution of Christians throughout the empire that lasted about a year. This was the first empire-wide persecution against Christianity. A difficult pastoral situation arose. Many Christians kept the faith during persecution and were called "confessors," but others "lapsed" and sacrificed under duress to the Roman gods. There were three kinds of "lapsed." The *apostates* entirely abandoned Christianity, both during the persecution and after. The *sacrificati* (or *thurificati*) offered the pagan sacrifices. The *libellatici* did not sacrifice to the Roman gods, yet obtained certificates (*libelli*) which said

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that they "passed" the religious tests required by Decius.[1] The *libellatici* may have obtained these certificates by dishonest means.[2]

After the persecution ended in 251, what was to be done with the "lapsed" Christians who had sacrificed but now wanted to return to Christ? Were those who had committed gross idolatry to be allowed back into Communion fellowship with the church? If so, how and under what circumstances? One answer was given by a certain Novatian (d. 258) and his followers, who refused ever to accept the lapsed back into Communion fellowship or recognize the possibility of their returning to faith at all. The Novatianists (also called *katharoi*) were strict, claiming that any Christian who fell into blatant, gross sin, such as idolatry, could not return to the faith. Not only this, but Novatian insisted that the church cannot make an efficacious absolution in the case of certain post-baptismal sins, including idolatry. Novatian's followers applied this rigorous approach to adultery and murder as well.

Cyprian and the orthodox pastors, on the other hand, insisted that mortal sin after baptism could be forgiven, though there were debates as to how and under what circumstances Christians could be re-admitted to absolution and Communion fellowship.[3] Some early councils determined

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[1] Robin Lane Fox gives an example of such a certificate: "To those appointed to see to the sacrifices: from Aurelia Charis of the Egyptian village of Theadelphia. I have always continued to sacrifice and show piety to the gods and now, in your presence, I have poured a libation and sacrificed and eaten some of the sacrificial meat. I request you to certify this for me below." This was followed by official signatures. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 455.

[2] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 455. Fox suggests that some Christians obtained these certificates by bribery or forgery, which can explain why the early Christian councils that dealt with the problem of the lapsed made a distinction between those who merely had certificates by dishonest means, and those who actually sacrificed.

[3] Glen Zweck, citing Marianka Fousek, gives four stages for the system of formal penance which was in place by the mid-third century: "1. Contrition (that is, sorrow for sins), 2. Confession of the sin to the bishop as the shepherd of the flock, 3. The rendering of satisfactions – a. Private satisfactions: prayer, fasting, gifts to the poor, abstinence from luxuries and pleasures; – b. Public satisfactions: exclusion from communion, self-humiliation from the brothers, standing at the back of the congregation (even in the vestibule, or behind the doors), 4. Absolution: a formal and solemn reconciliation, with prayer and the laying on of hands, in a public service." Zweck, "Why Did the Issue of Indulgences Trigger the Reformation?" in *Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay: Essays in Honor of Ronald Feuerhahn on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 70.

that the *libellatici* should be restored after long periods of repentance.[4] Those who sacrificed, however, would be required to show the fruits of repentance for the rest of their lives, and could receive Holy Communion only on their deathbeds. This was seen by some as being too strict. In the summer of 252, another council decided that all who showed the fruits of repentance should be restored to Communion fellowship so that the Lord's Supper might strengthen them in their trial. This was the final decision made by the orthodox.

The second issue for Cyprian was the doctrine of the unity of the church. Does schism in the outward fellowship of the church on earth also create schism in the fellowship in Christ? Can the word and sacraments be efficacious in religious schisms? After Fabian, bishop of Rome, was martyred in 250, two claims were made to the Roman seat in 251, the first by a certain Cornelius, and the second, a few days later, by Novatian. Cornelius became bishop, but Novatian did not concede the election. He and his rigorous followers established rival churches in every province. They claimed to be the only true church, which the orthodox adversaries strongly opposed. So when people who were baptized by Novatianists wanted to transfer to orthodox churches, a controversy erupted. Does the baptism from Novatianist fonts count as the same baptism given at orthodox fonts?

The outspoken Cyprian argued that because the Holy Spirit is not divided against himself, he cannot be at competing altars, pulpits, and fonts simultaneously. William Weinrich summarizes, "For Cyprian, just as there is no 'outside' of the unity of the Triune God, so too there is no 'outside' to the place of His salvific activity, that is, there is no 'outside' to the church except that which establishes itself against God and is contrary to his will. Outside God and outside the church there is only sin, not the forgiveness of sin nor the holiness of the Holy Spirit."[5] For Cyprian, Novatian's schism in the outward fellowship of the church was also a schism from Christ![6]

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[4] John Chapman, "St. Cyprian of Carthage," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04583b.htm.

[5] William C. Weinrich, "Cyprian, Donatism, Augustine, and Augustana VIII: Remarks on the Church and the Validity of Sacraments," *CTQ* 55 (1991): 277.

[6] It must be observed, however, that Cyprian distinguished between the schism that occurs, say, in a troubled family and ends in separation, and the religious schism created by Novatian and others. Cyprian had the pastoral sense to realize that some division in the outward fellowship would occur due to the pervasive influence of sin.

This also affected Cyprian's view of Baptism. Since for Cyprian the Spirit cannot be divided against himself, any religious split in the church also compromises the efficacy of the word and sacraments. Why is this? It is not because Cyprian doubted the word, or wanted to deny that God's word could be trusted with absolutely certainty. Rather, Cyprian came to see that no pastor can give what he has not been given to give. Cyprian held that if Novatian made a religious schism from the church created by the Spirit of truth and unity, then this would also be a separation from the Spirit who created that church. And since this was the case, Novatian and those pastors in fellowship with him could not give the Spirit or any of His gifts.

Hence, even if their baptisms were performed "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," nevertheless, because the Novatianists' schism constituted a separation from the church of the Spirit's blessing, their baptisms were also considered to be outside the Spirit's blessing. Thus, Cyprian taught that Novatian could not truly offer the Christian sacrament of Baptism. This is shocking, especially considering the fact that Novatian's teaching of the Trinity and the incarnation was in many ways like Cyprian's, and the liturgical formulas did not change. But, as Weinrich summarizes Cyprian's thought, "the false and unlawful bishops of the schismatics and the heretics are not in the church, do not possess the Holy Spirit, and therefore cannot give the Spirit in their baptisms."[7]

II. The Essence of the Supper

Historians remember Cyprian chiefly for his engagement of the issues discussed above. Like all faithful pastors, however, Cyprian also confessed the other articles of the faith, including the Lord's Supper. In a fairly recent book, Ernest Bartels claims that Cyprian had only a symbolic view of the Lord's Supper.[8] Nothing could be further from the truth. Cyprian

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This is likely why he writes that one can remain in the same faith and tradition even in certain cases of schism: "A schism must not be made, even although he who withdraws should remain in one faith, and in the same tradition," *Ad Quirinum testimonia adversus Judaeos*, Treatise 12.3.86, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 5:553 [henceforth *ANF*].

[7] Weinrich, "Cyprian," 275.

[8] Ernest Bartels, *Take Eat, Take Drink: The Lord's Supper through the Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 80. Referring to Phillip Schaff's church history, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958–1960), Bartels claims that "Cyprian called the wine an allegory of Christ's blood." It seems, however, that this quote from Cyprian is taken out of context: it refers to Cyprian's

recognized the union between the sacramental elements and Jesus' body and blood.[9] This union is due to the consecration, or in Cyprian's terms, to its "sanctifying."[10] As for the blood of Jesus in union with the wine, according to Cyprian, "When Christ says, 'I am the true vine,' the blood of Christ is assuredly not water, but wine; neither can His blood by which we are redeemed and quickened appear to be in the cup, when in the cup there is no wine whereby the blood of Christ is shown forth, which is declared by the sacrament and testimony of all the scriptures."[11] Cyprian comments on Genesis 49:11: "'He shall wash His garment in wine, and His clothing in the blood of the grape.' But when the blood of the grape is mentioned, what else is set forth than the wine of the cup of the blood of the Lord?"[12] For Cyprian, there was no separation of Christ's blood and consecrated wine. The wine is the blood of Jesus and vice versa.

The body of Jesus was likewise united with the consecrated bread so as to be inseparable. Cyprian comments on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer:

> So also we call it "our bread," because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body. And we ask that this bread should be given to us daily, that we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, may not, by the interposition of some heinous sin, by

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comments on symbols of the Lord's Supper found in the Old Testament. The Old Testament as well as the New speaks to the reality of Christ's Supper. Yet because this reality was not yet instituted when the Old Testament was written, the Old Testament should not be read as if the Lord's Supper was actually occurring at that time. The words of the Old Testament can only be suggestive of the theology and presence of the Sacrament. This is what Cyprian means when he refers to the wine as an "allegory" of Jesus' blood. It is an allegory because it is not the consecrated wine of the New Testament, in which Christ's blood is present, but an Old Testament example of wine that Cyprian saw as an allegorical reference to the Lord's Supper.

[9] The writings cited by Cyprian in this paper are those that are agreed as genuinely authored by Cyprian, such as his letters and treatises. In the Reformation period, a work on the Lord's Supper called *De Coena Domini* was falsely attributed to Cyprian by the Lutheran Reformers and the Roman Catholics. Modern scholarship, however, has identified this writing as a chapter from a larger work by medieval writer Ernaldus Bonaevallis (1156) entitled *Liber de cardinalibus operibus Christi*. See Nicholas Thompson, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and Patristic Tradition in the Theology of Martin Bucer 1534–1546* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 76, n. 14.

[10] Cyprian, Epistle 62.1 (Ep. 63 in the Oxford series), *ANF* 5:359. All numbering in this paper is that found in *ANF* unless otherwise noted.

[11] Ep. 62.2, *ANF* 5:359.

[12] Ep. 62.6, *ANF* 5:360.

> being prevented, as withheld and not communicating, from partaking of the heavenly bread, be separated from Christ's body.[13]

If the bread is "heavenly," as Cyprian says in this passage, it cannot be a mere symbol of Jesus' body. In warning that if one is prevented from partaking of the consecrated bread, one is also separated from Christ's body, Cyprian assumes a bodily presence of Christ in that bread. Finally, Cyprian draws a connection between several theological topics: Christology, salvation, the mystical union, repentance, the church, and the Supper. The Supper, because it is the "food of salvation," belongs in the area of salvation.[14]

What constitutes a true celebration of the Sacrament? Cyprian insists that the Lord's Supper is celebrated only if the elements used are those Jesus used: "We must not at all depart from the evangelical precepts, and… disciples ought also to observe and do the same things which the Master both taught and did."[15] "It appears that the blood of Christ is not offered if there be no wine in the cup, nor the Lord's sacrifice celebrated with a legitimate consecration unless our oblation and sacrifice correspond to His passion."[16] That is, unless the elements are what Jesus used at the institution of the Sacrament, it is not a "legitimate consecration." Cyprian saw that Jesus alone has authority to determine what elements are to be used in his Supper, and Jesus has demonstrated his decision by his institution. Jesus could turn water into wine, but a pastor who decides to consecrate only water does not truly distribute the blood of the Lord, even if he speaks the words of institution.

What does the Lord's Supper do? Cyprian not only referred to it as the "food of salvation," but also taught that Christ's body and blood, when eaten by the mouth, cleanse the believer's body and nourish his soul. That is, the Sacrament is not a reminder of spiritual healing, but an actual healing even for the body by means of the oral eating of the body and blood of Jesus. By partaking of it, a faithful Christian is brought into communion with God's healing grace.

The Lord's Supper contains the power of God, which is shown by the forgiveness received. Cyprian says:

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[13] *De dominica oratione*, Treatise 4.18, *ANF* 5:452.

[14] Incidentally, this passage also shows that the Lord's Supper was celebrated daily in Cyprian's time (250's).

[15] Ep. 62.10, *ANF* 5:361.

[16] Ep. 62.9, *ANF* 5:361.

> The Lord's cup . . . restores their minds to spiritual wisdom; that each one recovers from that flavour of the world to the understanding of God; and in the same way, that by that common wine the mind is dissolved, and the soul relaxed, and all sadness is laid aside, so, when the blood of the Lord and the cup of salvation have been drunk, the memory of the old man is laid aside, and there arises an oblivion of the former worldly conversation, and the sorrowful and sad breast which before was oppressed by tormenting sins is eased by the joy of the divine mercy.[17]

Cyprian rightly sees that the Lord's Supper gives the mercy of forgiveness, which eases the troubled but faithful heart. It is as if even the memory of sin which harassed the Christian is no longer an issue; the Sacrament has given freedom even from this. Therefore, Cyprian confessed the bodily presence of Christ, since an empty symbol cannot forgive or, for that matter, do anything substantial.

III. The Lord's Supper: Is It a Sacrifice?

As has been observed by modern scholars, the language of sacrifice permeates Cyprian's words on the Lord's Supper.[18] It almost appears as if Cyprian were a Roman Catholic in the high middle ages, with his depiction of the Supper as a sacrifice offered by priests at the altar. Catholic scholar Raymond Johanny is particularly vocal about this: "Cyprian knew that Christ accomplished his sacrifice fully in the Supper and the cross taken together as two parts of a single totality."[19] Yet Cyprian is not suggesting the "bloodless sacrifice" of the late-medieval scholastics. Though Cyprian sees a connection between New Testament pastors and the Levitical priesthood, his understanding of the Lord's Supper as "sacrifice" is more complex than modern Roman Catholic scholars admit. Cyprian believes, teaches, and confesses that the consecrated elements are the crucified body and blood of Jesus. So when Cyprian refers to the Supper as a sacrifice, he is speaking about the body of Jesus on the cross, which was a sacrifice and is now united with the bread.

According to Cyprian, the Eucharist is not the sacrifice of the priest or of the congregation, but is rather "the sacrifice of God the Father and of

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[17] Ep. 62.11, *ANF* 5:361.

[18] Raymond Johanny, "Cyprian of Carthage," in *The Eucharist of the Early Christians*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), 165–166; John D. Laurance, *"Priest" as Type of Christ: The Leader of the Eucharist in Salvation History according to Cyprian of Carthage* (American University Studies 7.5; New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 1984), 195–202.

[19] Johanny, "Cyprian," 167.

Christ."[20] In another letter, Cyprian describes it as "the Lord's sacrifices."[21] The plural "sacrifices" is used because Cyprian as a bishop had oversight over many congregations where the Sacrament was celebrated, as opposed to just one "sacrifice" at one altar. The Father sacrificed his Son on the cross, and now, with the Holy Spirit, he sanctifies the common elements by uniting them sacramentally to that sacrifice of Jesus. Cyprian therefore understood "sacrifice" as the consecrated elements themselves bound to Jesus' passion, as opposed to the action performed by the pastor in the rite.

This understanding is suggested by Cyprian's description of the Lord's Supper as "the very sacrament of our Lord's passion and our own redemption."[22] It is further suggested by Cyprian's language of "offering."[23] When Cyprian speaks of offering the bread or the cup, he does not mean that the bishop has an infused power that causes a transubstantial change in the elements. Instead, "offering" corresponds more to the unconsecrated elements themselves. The pastor offers up the unconsecrated elements to God, since the pastor in his person cannot bring about the presence of the body and blood of Jesus. Only the divine will does this, which is carried out by the words of institution spoken from the holy office.

This is how Cyprian normally understands offering and sacrifice, though he does make some comments troubling to Lutherans:

> For if Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, is Himself the chief priest of God the Father, and has first offered Himself a sacrifice to the Father, certainly that priest truly discharges the office of Christ, who imitates that which Christ did; and he then offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father, when he proceeds to offer it according to what he sees Christ Himself to have offered.[24]

Perhaps the best way to explain this is to highlight Cyprian's attempt to connect the theologies of the Old and New Testaments. Cyprian saw that the "priest" offers the body of Jesus to God in the church service. Yet this

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[20] Ep. 62.9, *ANF* 5:361.

[21] Ep. 75.6, *ANF* 5:398.

[22] Ep. 62.14, *ANF* 5:362. Johanny confirms this, but does not realize the implications of his words: "Cyprian certainly thinks of the eucharist as a true sacrifice; it contains the sacrifice of Christ, and from this sacrifice it derives its efficacy" (Johanny, "Cyprian," 165).

[23] See, e.g., Ep. 62.2, *ANF* 5:359, "Know then that I have been admonished that, in offering the cup, the tradition of the Lord must be observed, and that nothing must be done by us but what the Lord first did on our behalf, as that the cup which is offered in remembrance of Him should be offered mingled with wine."

[24] Ep. 62.14, *ANF* 5:362.

does not seem to be the high-medieval concept of a "bloodless sacrifice," that is, a second way of atoning for the sins of the people. It may simply mean that Cyprian offered the consecrated elements first to God as a request that God would use it celebrated at that specific time as a blessing for all, and not as a curse. Cyprian understood "that in the passion . . . of the cross is all virtue and power."[25] In the context of this quote, Cyprian understands the power in the cross as a victory over all enemies, particularly sin, death, and the devil. Thus, Jesus' death has all power over sin and does not require a second sacrifice in the Lord's Supper to pay the price for sins.

Like other early fathers, Cyprian sees many Old Testament types and figures of the Sacrament, not just those involving "sacrifice." Cyprian also mentions Noah, who drank wine and modeled Christ's passion in his drunkenness, Melchizedek, who gave bread and wine to Abraham, and Jacob's blessing of Judah, which includes a reference to garments washed in wine and cleansed in the blood of grapes. Cyprian also sees a eucharistic reference in Isaiah 63:1–6, where the Lord reveals that he has trampled the winepress in his anger and the wine has soaked his clothes.[26]

These examples, along with his understanding of sacrifice, show how Cyprian coordinated Old Testament typology with New Testament reality. While he calls the Lord's Supper a "sacrifice," this is chiefly intended to mean that the sacrificed body and blood of Jesus are sacramentally united with the consecrated bread and wine. Cyprian's understanding is different than that of the later Middle Ages, when it was said that priests offered up a bloodless sacrifice in the Supper to atone for sins.

IV. The "Sacrament of Unity"

For Cyprian, the Lord's Supper is "the sacrament of unity."[27] In this sacrament, Christians are united to the Lord's body, which reinforces their prior unity with him by faith.[28] Cyprian states:

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[25] *Test.*, Treatise 12.2.21, *ANF* 5:524.

[26] Ep. 62:3–7, *ANF* 5:359–360.

[27] Ep. 75.6, *ANF* 5:398.

[28] Cyprian also knew of the practice of infant communion and does not speak against it. In his treatise *De lapsis*, "On the Lapsed" (Treatise 3.25, *ANF* 5:444), Cyprian relates the story of an infant which was separated from its parents and later taken by the wet nurse to the town magistrates. The magistrates brought the baby to a pagan feast and fed it with bread and wine sacrificed to the idols. After this, the parents were reunited with the child. When they came to take the Lord's Supper, the infant was overtaken by dramatic resistant emotions, refusing the cup from the deacon. The deacon forced her to receive some of the Sacrament, and the result was that "in a profane body

> When the Lord calls bread, which is combined by the union of many grains, His body, He indicates our people whom He bore as being united; and when He calls the wine, which is pressed from many grapes and clusters and collected together, His blood, He also signifies our flock linked together by the mingling of a united multitude.[29]

As Johanny observes,

> For Cyprian, then, the eucharist is sign, call for, source, and fruit of unity. The eucharist effects the one Church that is in communion with Christ. But at the same time the Church effects the eucharist in communion with the one shepherd and under his guidance. The unity of all looks always to Christ as to the source and goal of all true unity, for Christ contains us all. Consequently, the eucharist is the *sacramentum unitatis*, the sign and manifestation of the reality it contains and continuously effects, so that there is a ceaseless reciprocal action between Christ, the Church, and the eucharist.[30]

Still, Cyprian did not teach that Holy Communion was to be given to all professed Christians. While he saw the Lord's Supper as a life-giving food, this food would also harm those who were unrepentant or who were outside the unity of the Spirit in the church. Therefore, as Werner Elert has observed, the bishop of Carthage regularly informed other bishops of those who had been excommunicated, and also received such information from them.[31] This was no doubt practiced because of the desire to remain faithful to the scriptural teaching on fellowship. "The Sacrament of unity" could not create unity among believers where division existed.

As stated earlier, Cyprian said, "And we ask . . . that we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, may not,

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and mouth the Eucharist could not remain; the draught sanctified in the blood of the Lord burst forth from the polluted stomach. So great is the Lord's power, so great is His majesty." Bartels, "Take, Eat," 77, confirms this practice in Cyprian, looking also at Schaff and at a sermon by Johann Gerhard, "Whether the Eucharist Should Be Given to Infants," trans. Ronald B. Bagnall, *Lutheran Forum* 30 (1996): 4.

[29] Ep. 75.6, *ANF* 5:398.

[30] Johanny, "Cyprian," 173.

[31] Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. Norman E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 128, 130, 150. Examples of such writings by Cyprian include: Ep. 10.4, where the bishop requests that the clergy list by name those who are accepted to the altar (*ANF* 5:291); Ep. 27.3, where Cyprian states that any pastor who gives communion to "the lapsed" should also be expelled from the Communion fellowship of those who did not (*ANF* 5:306); Ep. 37, which announces the excommunication of a certain Felicissimus (*ANF* 5:315); and Ep. 61.4, which says that certain women should be excommunicated if found to be promiscuous (*ANF* 5:358).

by the interposition of some heinous sin . . . be separated from Christ's body."[32] Cyprian does not mean here that communicants are perfect in themselves and are without original sin, nor that they have no need of daily repentance and faith. The "sin" that separates a Christian from Christ's body is a grievous offense that clearly indicates the offender cannot be walking in the Spirit. In modern language, Cyprian prays that believers may not fall into unrepentant sin and faithlessness and, thus, be separated from Jesus. This also implies being separated from the altar, where Jesus communed with his people in his body and blood.

In his treatise *De lapsis* ("On the Lapsed"), Cyprian laments the lax Communion policies of certain pastors, who receive the unrepentant *sacrificati* to the Lord's Supper.[33] He writes,

> Moreover, beloved brethren, a new kind of devastation has appeared; and, as if the storm of persecution had raged too little, there has been added to the heap, under the title of mercy, a deceiving mischief and a fair-seeming calamity. Contrary to the vigour of the Gospel, contrary to the law of the Lord and God, by the temerity of some, communion is relaxed to heedless persons—a vain and false peace, dangerous to those who grant it, and likely to avail nothing to those who receive it. They do not seek for the patience necessary to health, nor the true medicine derived from atonement.[34]

Notice that the lax and irresponsible practice of communing the *sacrificati* not only harmed the unworthy, but, for Cyprian, was "dangerous to those who grant it" as well as "likely to avail nothing to those who receive it." This means that pastors who communed the *sacrificati* in the fellowship of the Spirit in the church were in spiritual danger as well.

> Why do they call an injury a kindness? Why do they call impiety by the name of piety? Why do they hinder those who ought to weep continually and to entreat their Lord, from the sorrowing of repentance, and pretend to receive them to communion? . . . Such a facility [of irresponsible Communion practice] does not grant peace, but takes it away; nor does it give communion, but it hinders from salvation."[35]

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[32] *Dom. or.*, Treatise 4.18, *ANF* 5:452.

[33] The *sacrificati* were those in the church who capitulated under persecution, offering pagan sacrifices and eating food sacrificed to Roman gods; see "The Historical Context" above.

[34] *Laps.*, Treatise 3.16, *ANF* 5:441.

[35] *Laps.*, Treatise 3.16, *ANF* 5:441.

Cyprian also quotes Leviticus 7:20 and 1 Corinthians 10:21 and 11:27 against allowing the openly unrepentant to the altar.[36] Pastors that administered the Sacrament to the *sacrificati,* who had left the fellowship of the Spirit by eating meat sacrificed to Roman gods, joined in their separation against the Holy Spirit. Thus, for Cyprian, a lax Communion practice is dangerous both to the unrepentant communicant who receives the body and blood and to the pastor who gives them.

The *sacrificati* were not the only ones to be singled out for the charge of impenitence: those lacking the fruits of faith would not be blessed by the Sacrament either. As Cyprian writes, "It is of small account to be baptized and to receive the Eucharist, unless one profits by it both in deeds and works."[37] For Cyprian, even if a baptized Christian receives the Lord's Supper, if he leads a consistently unrepentant and sinful life, participation will not bless him. Cyprian's warning against communing the unworthy was not heeded by all pastors. According to Bartels, not only did the unworthy participate in the Supper in some congregations, but also some North African Christians, as Cyprian was aware, observed the practice of taking the bread of the Lord's Supper home to eat it there with their families. There were apparently instances in which family members who were unworthy also ate of the consecrated bread that had been brought home.[38]

Cyprian withheld the Supper not only from the publicly unrepentant, but also from pagans and even from schismatics. Novatian and his schismatic followers were considered unworthy communicants, just as the heretical Marcionites or Sabellians. Why was this? Novatian's theology on the Trinity and the person of Christ was orthodox and similar to Cyprian's,[39] but the Novatianists were banned from orthodox altars

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[36] *Laps.*, Treatise 3.15, *ANF* 5:441.

[37] *Test.*, Treatise 12.3.26, *ANF* 5:529.

[38] "Some communicants also took consecrated bread home to be eaten at a later time. Tertullian and Cyprian both report that the Eucharist was given to women to carry home. Christians in North Africa did so in order that they might celebrate the Lord's Supper every day with their families. . . . In a sermon Cyprian spoke of 'lapsed' Communion with the cup being offered to those present at the service, and from which they drank at the time. The bread, however, was given into their hands so that they could eat it at once, or take it home and eat it there. . . . This practice was abrogated and prohibited at the First Council of Toledo in A.D. 390," Bartels, "Take, Eat," 73–74.

[39] See "A Treatise of Novatian Concerning the Trinity," *ANF* 5:611–644. Here Novatian argues for the scriptural attributes and Persons of God, the unity of God's substance, the division of Persons, the two natures in Jesus Christ, and the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Novatian specifically condemns the Sabellians by name (chap. 18), but also argues against the teaching of polytheists, Jews, and Gnostics.

because they rejected the church and hence the Spirit who created it, and set up their own bishops in place of the divinely ordained bishops. Cyprian, who considered Novatian heretical and not just schismatic, writes,

> When we say, "Dost thou believe in eternal life and remission of sins through the holy Church?" we mean that remission of sins is not granted except in the Church, and that among heretics, where there is no Church, sins cannot be put away. . . . But he cannot sanctify the creature . . . , who has neither an altar nor a church; whence also there can be no spiritual anointing among heretics, since it is manifest that . . . the Eucharist [cannot be] celebrated at all among them.[40]

It is in this sense that Cyprian reads Paul's words on the church's unity from Ephesians 4:4–6. Cyprian writes, "There is one God, and Christ is one, and there is one Church, and one chair founded upon the rock by the word of the Lord."[41] But he does not stop there. "Another altar cannot be constituted nor a new priesthood be made, except the one altar and the one priesthood."[42] Not only is there one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism, but for Cyprian, there is also one altar that has been given neither to schismatics nor to heretics. They may still have a similar piece of liturgical furniture in their meeting place (an altar), and they may speak the same words and perform the same actions over it as the orthodox, but since they have separated from the Spirit by separating from the church he created, Cyprian confesses that the schismatics do not have the altar of the Lord. The Lord has not given his altar and his presence to people who strive against his Spirit and create their own church. Thus, Cyprian could not allow for the Lord's Supper to exist outside of the church created by the Spirit of undivided truth and unity. This also means that Cyprian did not see the real presence of Christ's body and blood existing among schismatics, even if the same liturgical formulas were used.

Cyprian writes, "If Novatian is united to this bread of the Lord, if he also is mingled with this cup of Christ, he may also seem to be able to have the grace of the one baptism of the Church, if it be manifest that he holds the unity of the Church."[43] That wish, however, remained hypothetical. Because Novatian separated from the church, it would be deceitful for the orthodox to commune with him and his followers. John D. Zizioulas explains,

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[40] Ep. 69.2, *ANF* 5:376.
[41] Ep. 39.5, *ANF* 5:318.
[42] Ep. 39.5, *ANF* 5:318.
[43] Ep. 75.6, *ANF* 5:399.

> For Cyprian, who broadens the concept of the catholicity of the Church by making a synthesis of all the elements he had inherited from previous generations, that unity in the one Divine Eucharist and the one Bishop forms the criterion for the catholicity of the Church. A second Eucharist and a second Bishop in the same geographical area constitute a situation "outside the Catholic Church" [i.e., outside the church created by the Spirit of truth and unity].[44]

Thus, for Cyprian, excommunication meant that salvation itself was in jeopardy as long as the unworthy remained in his theological error. This error could be a mortal sin, such as that of the *apostates* who put up little resistance to the emperor's demands of idolatry, heresy (e.g., Sabellianism), or religious schism (e.g., Novatianism).

In no way could those excommunicated from the orthodox North Africans join the Novatianists and receive the Spirit's gifts there. Likewise, a member under church discipline in Carthage could not go to the church up the road in the same fellowship and still receive the Spirit's gifts. Any willful resistance against a church that confesses the biblical teaching is also a willful resistance against the Spirit who gathers that church. If a person resists the Spirit's work in one place, he most certainly cannot find it in another, because he rejects the same Giver. Cyprian's theology of the church held that none of the Lord's gifts could be given in that circumstance. "Neither the oblation can be consecrated where the Holy Spirit is not."[45] Outside the church, there could be no Supper, just as there could be no Baptism or salvation, since the Spirit is not divided against himself. The church, as the Spirit's creation and dwelling, enjoys benefits and gifts that are not present within the sect that rejects him and creates itself.

Thus, excommunication is not a bureaucratic matter of church discipline, nor is it a mere theological tradition. In Cyprian's thought, excommunication shows the prior separation of the heart of the excommunicated from the body of Christ, either by impenitence or by a devilish confession. This is why excommunication was, for Cyprian, a heavy and important, though frequent, matter. Cyprian did not see the Lord's Supper as an unnecessary addition to the gospel. Rather, it is the fullest gospel. It is a Christian's participation in Jesus' redemption on the cross. If a Christian has the true faith, he is welcome to commune. For

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[44] John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, 2d ed., trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 145.

[45] Ep. 63.4, *ANF* 5:365.

Cyprian, this meant that those who were excluded from the altar did not have the true faith.

At the same time, however, it must also be remembered that the Lord's Supper is an act of the gospel. It was not a new law with which to burden consciences, including the conscience of the pastor administering it. Likewise, for Cyprian, it was the gospel, that precious gift of forgiveness and life that God has given to his church. It was therefore a necessary gift to be received with joy and thanksgiving in the unity of the church. And by receiving the sacrament of unity, the faithful were strengthened in the unity that they already shared.

V. The Lord's Supper and Martyrdom

Finally, Cyprian saw a unique connection between the Lord's Supper and martyrdom. Partaking of Jesus' sacrificed body and blood granted the would-be martyr the foundation for his own death. United to the body of Jesus, who sacrificed himself, the martyr is then given to do the same. This is because the martyr's body is to be conformed to Christ as a fruit of the Sacrament. Cyprian asks, "How do we make them fit for the cup of martyrdom, if we do not first admit them to drink, in the Church, the cup of the Lord by the right of communion?"[46] In the same epistle, Cyprian states, "He cannot be fitted for martyrdom who is not armed for the contest by the Church; and his spirit is deficient which the Eucharist received does not raise and stimulate."[47] For Cyprian, the Lord's Supper gives the basis, context, and significance for the martyr's death.

These comments reflect Cyprian's belief that the Lord's Supper is truly a bodily participation in the sacrificed body of Christ. Cyprian's view of sacramental martyrdom gives insight into Paul's words from Philippians 3:8–10:

> Yet indeed I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ *and be found in Him*, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, *being conformed to His death* [emphasis added].

For Cyprian, the Lord's Supper is the fullest expression and reality of being found in Christ, which leads to fully knowing Christ, the power of

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[46] Ep. 53.3, *ANF* 5:337.
[47] Ep. 53.4, *ANF* 5:337.

his resurrection, and conformity to his death. Hence, a worthy communicant is prepared to become a faithful martyr.

In connection with martyrdom, Cyprian's understanding of Old Testament types can once again be examined. John D. Laurance summarizes Cyprian's thought:

> Just as Abel was found worthy to "bear the image of Christ" in his death because of his pious offering at the altar, so also are the martyrs made into types of Christ by their liturgical union with him. Those who lead the Eucharist in the Church are thus preparing Christians by ritual to be sacrificial victims with Christ in the fullest degree.[48]

VI. What Can Lutherans Learn from Cyprian?

How does Cyprian's theology of the Lord's Supper relate to Lutheranism? It is important that the Confessions think of Cyprian as an orthodox teacher, referring to him ten times for historical support, including for the doctrines of justification (Ap IV, 322) as well as church and ministry (SA II, IV, 1; Tr 14–15; 26–27). The Confessions also refer to Cyprian four times for support on the Lord's Supper.[49] Likewise, AC XII, 9 condemns the Novatians for not absolving those who sinned after baptism yet repented.

Cyprian's sacramental theology can teach modern Lutherans several things. First, Cyprian teaches that only those elements which Jesus used at the Supper's institution should be used in celebrations of the Supper. Though he never had to face the issue of grape juice, Cyprian did deal with those who consecrated only water. In this, Lutherans can learn from Cyprian to use only bread and only wine in the celebration of the Sacrament, and not to introduce or make excuses for a different practice.

Second, Cyprian teaches the salvific significance of Holy Communion. It is not an addition to the gospel, but the Christian's participation in Jesus' death. Cyprian would likely be perplexed at modern congregations and

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[48] Laurance, "Priest," 186.

[49] With regard to the Supper, the Confessions cite Cyprian to help resolve sixteenth-century difficulties. Thus Cyprian is mentioned to show that the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper was the orthodox view (FC Ep VII, 15); that the personal union of Jesus is an analogy for the sacramental presence (FC SD VII, 37); and that lay people were also given the chalice (AC XXII, 5 and Ap XXII, 4). The Torgau Book, which served as a resource for developing the Formula of Concord, also cited Cyprian's *De Lapsis* (XVI, XXII) to show that the bodily presence of Jesus in the Sacrament is received orally, as mentioned in FC SD VII, 66, n. 4, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 581.

pastors that resist having the Lord's Supper frequently. After all, the Lord's Supper strengthens those who confess the faith, unites them to Christ, and prepares them to be more fully conformed to Jesus' body. For Cyprian, the Lord's Supper is a treasure that God has only given to his unified church, created by the Holy Spirit. Why would any congregation gathered by the Spirit stubbornly refuse what the Spirit does and gives?

Also helpful for an understanding of the significance of Holy Communion is Cyprian's emphasis on the connection between this sacrament and martyrdom. While American Lutherans do not face the persecution that the Roman Empire faced under Decius, there are many embattled pastors and people in Lutheran churches today. Since the Lord's Supper unites the faithful with the crucified body and blood of Jesus, it also gives Christians the strength to suffer in a godly way. In other words, receiving the Supper worthily not only provides the necessary and God-given comfort of the gospel, but also provides the communicant with God's grace to suffer even more as he is joined to the body and blood of the Suffering Servant. As the Lord's Supper prepared martyrs in the third century, so today it prepares the faithful for the satanic opposition they face from inside and outside the congregation.

Third, Cyprian's use of the Old Testament enriches Lutheran hermeneutics. Not everyone will agree with Cyprian when it comes to Old Testament exegesis. Still, his concern for incorporating Old Testament typology with New Testament reality should be appreciated. Rather than ignoring such concepts as sacrifice, Cyprian attempts to answer how Old Testament theology is connected to the incarnation and the life of the church. Lutherans would do well to consider such hermeneutical issues.

Fourth, Cyprian challenges all who practice open Communion. He issues a necessary warning against admitting any self-identified Christian who comes to the altar but may be unworthy. Regarding the Lord's Supper as "the Sacrament of unity" may prove helpful. Sacramental theology is connected to ecclesiology. Where there is not unity in confession, the Lord's Supper cannot but harm. It harms not only those who receive it in an unworthy manner, but also those who administer it without regard to the worthiness of the communicant. Because schism can be as dangerous as heresy, Cyprian believed that Communion with schismatics is separation from God.

The same danger applies to the communing of the openly unrepentant. It is true that great pastoral care needs to be exercised in distinguishing willful impenitence from simple ignorance or discomfort over pastoral

practice. It is also true that a pastor should be gentle and peaceable in his approach rather than handling every disagreement and crisis with the threat of the "lesser ban" (refusal of Holy Communion) or excommunication. When a member's continued impenitence is clear and publicly known, however, the pastor may need to take the hard step and ask the member to refrain from the altar so that he will not be spiritually harmed by the Sacrament.

At the same time, the "Sacrament of unity" is a wonderful blessing of God's church, where the faithful are fed and strengthened in the unity they already share. The Lord's Supper is the very lifeblood of the church, by which Jesus unites his body and blood to his people. Here he gives spiritual cleansing for the body and spiritual nourishment for the soul. The heart struggling under the cross finds pure joy in the food of salvation.

VII. Conclusion

In summary, the Lord's Supper is a highly revered sacrament for Cyprian of Carthage. This third-century bishop saw in the "celebration of Christ's sacrifice" a blessed work of God and not a human action. The bishop offers the unconsecrated elements to the divine will that works in the words of institution, then offers the sacrificed body and blood of Jesus to the people. Cyprian found references to the Lord's Supper throughout the Bible, including the Old Testament. For him, it is the Sacrament of true unity, and so those who have divided themselves from the confession of the gospel in its fullness must be excluded from the altar, both for their own sakes and for the sake of the faithful. Finally, those who take it are also conformed to Christ, which is evident especially in the martyrs who selflessly sacrifice their bodies for the faith, as Christ did. The unity that the communing church has with Christ in the Lord's Supper thus provides the foundation, context, and significance for martyrdom.

Though modern Lutherans will not agree with everything this bishop writes, there is much in Cyprian from which Lutheran churches can learn. Cyprian of Carthage centered on Jesus, the Spirit, and the church, and so confessed the related sacramental teaching. He appreciated the fact that Jesus' body and blood as the life of the church were not to be far from his bride. According to Cyprian, the faithful eating and drinking of this sacred meal granted the believers participation in Christ's saving passion. May Cyprian's theology of the Lord's Supper be a blessing to us in our own confession of the mystery of Christ's body and blood, and of the church that partakes of this heavenly treasure.

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The Authoritative Status of the Smalcald Articles

David J. Zehnder

Martin Luther's Smalcald Articles (SA) are probably the least known and studied part of the Book of Concord, which contains the normative documents for Lutheran churches. The SA raise a perplexing question: how did this little-known document beat a vast array of sixteenth-century theological writings to find a position of confessional authority? The neglect of the SA has impelled one scholar, William Russell, to emphasize this problem repeatedly in an attempt to place them in the limelight.[1] Russell's argument, though important in its own right, is significantly different from my own. Beginning in his 1989 dissertation, Russell framed the SA as "a window into the life and theology of Martin Luther,"[2] a theme that he carried on in various writings, most expressly in a book that further develops his graduate thesis.[3] Russell's general thinking is that because Luther composed the SA during a time when he felt that death was imminent, the old reformer was able to see clearly and record the most important themes of his thought in this concise document. Thus, Russell sees the importance of the SA as a hermeneutical device for Luther studies.

There are limitations to this view, the first being its assumption that there is such a thing as the one "key" to Luther. Certainly the SA represent some pivotal issues on Luther's mind in the mid-1530s, especially his opinion concerning what he saw as the futility of reconciling Protestant and Roman Catholic positions. Luther's thought, however, was dynamic and constantly evolving: pivotal themes would better emerge from surveying many works and making a more inductive survey, lest some of the most important ideas in his *Small Catechism*, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *Lectures on Galatians*, or *The Bondage of the Will*, for instance, be neglected.

Aside from the questionable nature of identifying a single document as the key to Luther, Russell's work deals almost completely with the history

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[1] See William R. Russell, "A Neglected Key to the Theology of Martin Luther: *The Schmalkald Articles*," *Word & World* 16 (1996): 84–90.

[2] William R. Russell, "*The Smalcald Articles" as a Confessional Document in the Context of Martin Luther's Life and Theology* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International [publisher], 1989), 1.

[3] William R. Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament: The Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

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of the SA from their first publication in 1538 back to Luther, thus overlooking the development and reception of the text(s). Admittedly, the resources for this task are sparse, leaving many questions unanswered or unaddressed, yet the study of this history may help to spring the SA from historical obscurity and demonstrate their relevance to Lutheran identity, past and present. Asking how this odd little document found its way into the Book of Concord and what that means for the nature of confessions is important for today's church and a worthy complement to Luther studies.

In view of these concerns, this essay combines three tasks. It traces the history of the SA's inception from 1536, the editions and textual issues involved, and the reception of the SA, in order to show the document's ascension to symbolical authority. Although the literature on the reception of the SA is scant, I hope to demonstrate that they gained formal authority from their content as Luther's clear testimony, making them a versatile resource for defending the faith. Though their origin from Luther's pen gave them weight early on, they eventually came to derive their authority as an interpretation of the Augsburg Confession, and ultimately of Scripture itself. Their use as a doctrinal standard by important individuals, institutions, and collections of doctrine becomes understandable only in light of the historical struggle for Lutheran orthodoxy. Although the SA never enjoyed a grand authorization quite like that of the Augsburg Confession, their content provided a pure witness to Lutheranism and thus facilitated the shaping of its identity. If Russell is correct in his claim that the SA are pure Luther, this perhaps explains why they influenced the formation of pure Lutheranism against many dissenters.

I. A Lutheran Statement of Faith

In the emergence of the SA, the first impetus in the chain of historical causes was the effort of Pope Paul III's papal league of 1535. With his favorable attitude toward a church council, Paul III represented a change from his predecessor Clement VII, who had shunned such a prospect. Paul III sent Paul Vergerio to Germany to assess the theological climate, visiting Luther in Wittenberg and John Frederick the Magnanimous in Vienna. The pope's motives for calling a council at that time are not certain. At the very least, he desired to quell the Reformation's spread and more tightly enforce the Roman Church's decrees through her bishops. Five years earlier at Augsburg, many Lutherans, most notably Philip Melanchthon, believed that some reasonable compromise between Protestant and Roman Catholic groups might still be possible, but the situation had since changed drastically so as to preclude any later rapprochement. Luther himself had long resigned any hope for compromise. As Scott Hendrix writes,

> The years following 1522 confirmed what Luther's memory would not let him forget: the papacy did not wish to reform itself or the church at large. . . . This conviction prevented Luther from taking seriously the evidence for papal reform that was initiated by Pope Paul III (1534–1549).[4]

Despite the hardening of Lutherans against the papacy, Vergerio's visit at least enabled Paul III to see some advantage in calling a council, with the result that on June 2, 1536, he requested a Lutheran statement of faith to be heard eighteen months later in Mantua (May 3, 1537). The council did not actually take place until 1545, partly because the Italians and Germans were suspicious of meeting on each other's soil, but the pope's early efforts did inspire Elector John Frederick of Saxony, by December 11 of 1536, to call for Luther's statement of faith.[5] Given Luther's attitude toward Protestant reconciliation with the papacy, his work on the elector's task falls much within the category of "confessing the faith," standing for religious convictions in the face of opposition. Not only Luther's previous attitude toward Rome but also the extreme anti-Rome polemic within the SA demonstrates that he saw no turning from his course.[6] Curiously, Luther added a Latin inscription that appears on the cover sheet of his draft and nowhere else:

> This is sufficient doctrine for eternal life. As to the political and economic affairs, there are enough laws to trouble us, so that there is no need of inventing further troubles much more burdensome. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.[7]

Clearly Luther viewed this document's contents as a matter of eternal consequence that Rome had long compromised.

Luther set to work and completed sixteen pages by December 18, writing in his own hand. Having come under one of his many kidney stone attacks, however, he had to dictate the rest to Caspar Cruciger and

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[4] Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 148–49.

[5] In the 1950s, two German scholars, Hans Volz and Ernst Bizer, debated the nature of the Smalcald Articles. Volz viewed them more as Luther's own personal confession, and Bizer believed them to be more of a corporate confession for the impending council. Apparently the debate resolved itself by both opinions being shown to be compatible. See Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament*, 38–39.

[6] See Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 301–10. SA II contains Luther's trenchant remarks about many Roman Catholic abuses.

[7] F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau, *Concordia Triglotta: Die Symbolischen Bücher Der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Deutsch-Lateinisch-Englisch* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 59; Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 297.

others who assisted in the completion of the O text,[8] his original draft, which today rests in the library of Heidelberg University.[9] The O text has forty-two pages, minus the cover sheet, although nine pages are not filled completely. Of the forty-two, nine show significant editing and marginal notes while the other thirty-three are quite clean. One significant editing stroke appears in the first article, where the original draft first read, "both sides believe and (*glauben und*) confess them [viz., articles based on the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds]." Luther crossed out "believe and," indicating his suspicions concerning the Roman Catholics' belief in even these undisputed tenets. Another significant change is where he crossed out "under the bread and wine," referring to Christ's body in the Lord's Supper, thus strengthening the force of his testimony to the real presence.[10]

By December 15, Luther had invited several theologians to meet at Wittenberg's Black Cloister on the twenty-eighth to discuss the articles. John Agricola, George Spalatin, and Nikolaus von Amsdorf all arrived to meet Luther, with Melanchthon, John Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, and Caspar Cruciger being already present. After discussing the O draft, Luther held firm with what he had written, and the articles remained essentially unchanged except for a short addition condemning prayers to the saints.[11] During this time, Spalatin was able to produce a clean copy of O,[12] the Sp text, to which he later added this section on prayers to the saints, and had it signed by all eight theologians present.[13]

Completed and signed, Luther forwarded the Sp text to Elector John Frederick on January 3. Having received it only three days later, Frederick wrote back already on January 7 with strong approbation, only qualifying that they seemed somewhat hastily composed. He flatly rejected the proviso Melanchthon attached to his signature stating that he would permit the civil authority of Roman bishops provided they allow the gospel. Given Elector Frederick's positive attitude toward these

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[8] The denominations for SA texts O, Sp, A, D, and J are taken from *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 11th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1992), 406 [henceforth *BSLK*]. For a summary of the interrelations between texts and a key to the denominations, see the Appendix to this article, 342.

[9] Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament*, 96. Cruciger began writing for Luther at SA III, 4.

[10] This information is available through a facsimile of Luther's O draft in *Die Schmalkaldischen Artikel vom Jahre 1537* (Heidelberg, Germany: Carl Winter, 1886).

[11] SA II, 2, 25–28; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 305–306.

[12] Why Spalatin? Judging from his signature, my theory is that his handwriting was among the clearest, so he was responsible for producing quality copies.

[13] *BSLK*, xxv. Sp resides in the Thuringian Archives in Weimar.

vituperative articles and his rejection of Melanchthon's suggestion, the Smalcald Articles evince their identity in their earliest recipients' view as a firm confession against Rome at a time when negotiation was impossible. Little is known about what Elector Frederick did with the Sp copy before the Smalcaldic League met, but he did want to start getting signatures and soon had Gabriel Didymus of Torgau sign.[14] It is difficult to say why he only collected one subscription except that his plan for winning adherents was to find them at Schmalkalden about a month later.

The Smalcaldic League met in Hesse on February 10. Although Frederick promoted the Sp text at this meeting, he was unable to get this document on the agenda for several reasons. The most basic reason was simply that many delegates, including Philip of Hesse, were unfamiliar with the SA, and introducing them to these delegates would require inconvenient effort and persuasion. Also, Luther was still suffering from illness, and his normal authority and charisma were temporarily enervated. In addition, Melanchthon pitched the Augsburg Confession and the Wittenberg Concord to Count Philip because he thought these documents better suited to the fostering of agreement than the SA.[15] Some commentators detect malice or at least selfishness on Philip's part: "Melanchthon plotted against [Elector Frederick] and Luther" by refusing to discuss the SA.[16] But this detection of putative foul play seems under-appreciative of Melanchthon's good intentions. Additionally, Russell argues that the SA were not really suited for the politically oriented Smalcaldic League because they were purely theological. Finally, because the document really was not written for a council of various Lutherans seeking unity but as a confession against Rome, their failure to appear on the docket was a natural matter of course.[17]

During the meeting, Count Philip of Hesse informed Strassburg delegate Jacob Sturm, Augsburg's Dr. Hel, and Ulm's George Besserer of Melanchthon's advice not to discuss the SA. Hessian chancellor Feige had also received a copy of the SA and questioned a number of them. Among other causes for reluctance, these authorities at Schmalkalden generally foresaw discrepancies on the Lord's Supper, which is readily believable. Luther states that "the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ. . . . They are not only offered to and received by

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[14] Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament*, 37.

[15] F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books*, in *Concordia Triglotta* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 55.

[16] *BSLK*, xxv. Bente's attitude is similar.

[17] See Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament*, 47.

upright Christians but also by evil ones."[18] This strong statement could be mistaken for transubstantiation, except that Luther condemns transubstantiation only two paragraphs later. If any of those present entertained the slightest of Reformed leanings, they would surely have disagreed with Luther's phrasing.

Regardless of how historians regard Melanchthon, it seems that if political alliance was the central goal at Schmalkalden, he was right not to discuss the SA there, because several delegates refused to espouse them. Strassburg's Bucer and Fegius, Württemberg's Blaurer, Augsburg's Boniface Wolfhart, and Hesse's Fontanus did not sign, and Hesse's Melander signed with a proviso on the Lord's Supper.[19] In this case, the SA would not have been capable of establishing the unity that the league needed. Even so, on February 24, John Bugenhagen got as many signatures as he could, totaling twenty-five, and the Sp text received its third signing; but these signatures designate personal convictions and not the seal of an official confessional document.[20] The final signing took place with the same unofficial tenor on March 4. Luther's company stopped at Erfurt on their way back from Schmalkalden, finding ten more people willing to commit themselves to the SA. The signings were complete at forty-four.

II. The Road to Confessional Status

The SA's rise to formal authority was a gradual process, requiring much more time and actual use to become official than a document such as the Augsburg Confession, which derived its formal authority from a state-sanctioned official signing. The present section is an attempt to trace the SA's sporadic appearances from their first printing to their canonization in the Book of Concord. The real story of the SA's authority begins here, precisely where most historical accounts come to a close. This general picture will become clear: the SA's pure witness to Luther's late-in-life convictions became in turn a pure witness to Lutheranism, as their use by

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[18] SA III, 6, 1.

[19] See Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 327. In Luther's preface to his first edition of the SA, he writes about the Smalcaldic League: "They were also accepted and unanimously confessed by us," a claim that is obviously not historically accurate. Luther, beleaguered by illness, was not fully conscious of all of the affairs there taking place, and additionally, the detail that some delegates refrained from signing might have slipped his mind a year later.

[20] J.T. Müller, "Historical Introduction," in Ambrose Henkel, Socrates Henkel, and Johann Tobias Müller, *The Christian Book of Concord, or Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Newmarket, VA: Solomon D. Henkel and bros., 1851), 61. These signings were personal commitments that at the time did little other than hold the individual subscribers to be faithful to teach them and not contradict them.

individual movers and shakers, councils, and doctrinal collections demonstrates. Documents whose material authority arises from their agreement with Scripture gain subsequent formal authority in various ways. The SA, as is the case with Luther's catechisms, became formally authoritative in a manner different from the Formula of Concord. The reception of the SA demonstrates that their normative status is the result of their particular way of applying Luther's scriptural doctrine to many of his followers' pressing concerns.

If any document lacking royal sanction is to have influence, it must be published and made widely available for use. Even the most gripping prose will affect no one if it is not proliferated among those who will read it and sense its importance. Such is true of Luther's SA, though in originally publishing them, he hoped simply to ensure their availability for the supposed council with the papacy. He indicates as much in his preface to the first edition:

> Therefore I still wanted to publicize these articles through the public press, in case (as I fully expect and hope) I should die before a council could take place. (For the scoundrels, who flee from the light and avoid the day, are taking such great pains to postpone and hinder the council).[21]

The SA enjoyed a future that Luther himself could not have predicted: they never stood in stark opposition to Roman ecclesial forces, but they did strengthen the theology of Luther's supporters in a variety of milieus. This influence began with the first printing.

In June of 1538, Luther edited his original draft and published the *editio princeps* in quarto under Hans Luft. This printing is the A text, a further development of the Sp signed copy. To A Luther added his preface and expanded four sections.[22] In the preface he calls these articles his "testimony and confession to present" and explains the need for a statement of evangelical doctrine such as the SA for resisting Rome at a council and preserving the Christian piety possible only after the papacy's ecclesial abuses are overthrown. Luther made about fifty stylistic and material changes to form A, managing to sharpen his caustic tone even more than in the Sp copy. In five cases he added "without God's Word,"[23]

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[21] Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 298.

[22] See Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, where the added sections are italicized within the text: II, 2, 5; II, 2, 13–15; III, 3, 42–45; III, 8, 3–13.

[23] E.g., "Such people also do not know what they are doing, because they are following a false human notion and innovation without the sanction of God's Word," SA II, 2, 8; "the Mass is a dangerous thing, fabricated and invented without God's Word and will," SA II, 2, 5.

and he called relics "the bones of dogs and horses," and the pope "the accursed Judas," implying his betrayal of Christ.[24]

The four expansions within A itself serve several purposes. The first contributes to Luther's general argument in SA II, stating that the Mass is an impediment to salvation whose unscriptural origin proves that it should be dropped in its entirety. In the second expansion, Luther anticipates a Roman objection to his denunciation of purgatory. Some of his opponents would like to cite Augustine in support of this doctrine, but Luther clarifies that Augustine leaves undecided the question whether or not purgatory exists. Even if Augustine were willing to permit such a teaching, Luther contends that it would be of little consequence unless the Scriptures could be cited in support, and Augustine cites no verses indicating that purgatory is a biblical teaching.

The third and fourth expansions are notable because Luther turns his polemical guns on opponents other than Rome, thus broadening the SA's scope. That auspicious move partly explains why his followers could later use the document to answer a variety of opponents. The third addition is directed against antinomians (though Luther does not use this word), as well as those who do not think that the Spirit can be lost once apprehended by faith and who believe that post-conversion sins will do no harm to the believing person. Luther counters them with 1 John 3:9 and John 1:8. The fourth expansion is the longest, this time with the enthusiasts falling under his crosshairs. Luther condemns teachings such as those he attributes to Thomas Müntzer, as well as anyone claiming that the Spirit can be present in a person apart from the word and sacraments.[25]

The A text served as the basis for many subsequent printings and editions of the SA. In 1541, only three years after the first printing, a Latin translation by the Dane Petrus Generanus appeared with a preface by Veit Amerbach. Generanus's translation is titled *Articuli a Reverendo D. Doctore Martino Luthero scripto, Anno 1538*, published twice in Wittenberg, first in 1541 and again with more refinement in 1542.[26] Because this translation is

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[24] See *BSLK*, xxvii.

[25] Roman Catholicism, however, remained the greatest target in the SA. Some Roman Catholic scholars, most importantly John Cochlaeus, as well as George Wicel and John Hoffmeister, wrote responses to the SA.

[26] T. Kolde, "Schmalkald Articles," in Samuel Macauley Jackson and Lefferts Augustine Loetscher, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology, and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 13 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949–50), 10:249.

very good, it is unfortunate that the text fell into disrepute once Generanus evinced Roman Catholic leanings.[27] The A text's first printing and translation must have proved unable to meet demand in Saxony, because in 1543 Elector John Frederick ordered a reprint.[28] That year the Peter Seiz octavo edition, the D text, appeared under the title *Von der rechten und falschen Kirche*. The D text has little significance apart from disseminating A once again; its variation is quite minor, only omitting the first paragraph of the preface referring to the council that was soon to take place.[29]

With these printings, the SA were beginning to win their normative status in Saxony, and the continued printings prove that demand for them remained strong. Overall, the 1538 A and 1543 D editions saw twenty-seven printings in the sixteenth century. None differed drastically from the first A text, but minor corrections and improvements were common. The last reprint that Luther likely oversaw himself appeared in 1545.[30] Most likely this octavo edition of the A text was produced in Wittenberg.[31] Beyond the A text, the most important reprint was J (1553), printed in Magdeburg by Weimar court preachers John Stoltz and John Aurifaber.[32]

The SA began gaining formal authority through content and usage rather than royal decree, and the continued printings facilitated their availability to theologians who strove to follow Luther's teachings. Still, it was not far into the 1540s before the SA gained official status. Elector John Frederick's order for a reprint (1543) was a kind of official sanction. By 1544, they began to be accepted in Hesse as confessions of authority comparable to the Augsburg Confession. Eventually, the elector's son John Frederick II (*der Mittlere*) took over Ducal Saxony in 1547, and he held the SA, along with other earlier Lutheran confessions, as a norm for all pastors there.[33] Duke John Frederick, although a minor figure in Reformation history, deserves credit for propagating Lutheranism through the SA, as he was their most significant advocate from the late 1540s until the mid-1560s.

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[27] H.E. Jacobs, *The Book of Concord*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1888), 44.

[28] See James L. Schaaf, "The Smalcald Articles and Their Significance," in *Interpreting Luther's Legacy: Essays in Honor of Edward C. Fendt*, ed. Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 80.

[29] See Hans Volz, *Luthers Schmalkaldische Artikel und Melanchthons Tractatus de potestate papae* (Gotha: Leopold Klotz Verlag, 1931), 33.

[30] Jacobs, *The Book of Concord*, vol. 2, 44.

[31] Mueller, "Historical Introduction," 62.

[32] *BSLK*, xxvii.

[33] Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 296; cf. Schaaf, "The Smalcald Articles and Their Significance," 80.

Under Duke John Frederick, John Stoltz nominated Nikolaus von Amsdorf as chief visitor in charge of leading the Duke's effort to purify doctrine in his lands. At that time, evangelical territories such as Saxony and Hesse began meetings in Naumburg to negotiate religious peace. Whatever the benefits of political alliance, however, Amsdorf refused to compromise the gospel as he understood it. As visitor, he employed a new ordination formula in which "the candidate pledged to teach the gospel according to Luther's Smalcald Articles and to reject Zwinglian, Anabaptist, and 'Anti-Christian-Roman' teaching."[34] Amsdorf's exaltation of the SA against such diverse opponents seems to show his esteem for the document as a testimony of pure Lutheranism that cannot easily be distorted and used against the tradition's true torch-bearers. As the efforts begun at Naumburg in 1554 continued into January of 1556, Duke Christoph of Württemberg and Elector John Frederick of the Palatinate tried to reach a consensus at Weimar but achieved no further success than they had at Naumburg. To Amsdorf, they were needlessly complicating their own efforts: the recipe for evangelical unity was not difficult to him, as he responded two months later. He laid down his view of the SA as a non-negotiable part of the evangelicals' faith: "his condition for Evangelical unity was single and simple: all Evangelicals should accept Luther's Smalcald Articles in every detail."[35]

The 1561 Diet of Naumburg eventually came as the culmination of the meetings that had begun in 1554, and this time Duke John Frederick himself had to stand by the SA under pressures similar to what Amsdorf had faced as visitor. Bente writes:

> When Elector John Frederick of the Palatinate and the Crypto-Calvinists endeavored to undermine the authority of Luther, Duke John Frederick of Saxony declared that he would abide by the original Augustana and its 'true declaration and norm,' the Smalcald Articles.[36]

In this case the SA reinforced Duke John Frederick's commitment to the early Augsburg Confession so that he could influence the Diet of Naumburg to reaffirm the 1531 Latin (octavo) and German (quarto) editions rather than Melanchthon's *Variata*, which leaned closer to Reformed doctrine.[37]

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[34] Robert Kolb, *Nikolaus von Amsdorf (1483–1565): Popular Polemics in the Preservation of Luther's Legacy* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. DeGraaf, 1978), 139.

[35] Kolb, *Nikolaus von Amsdorf*, 183.

[36] Bente, *Historical Introductions*, 59.

[37] James W. Richard, *The Confessional History of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), 296.

Aside from the official status the SA achieved through Duke John Frederick's campaign, there are also several other facts that Bente lists to demonstrate their rise to normative status, though he gives little detail or elucidation. In 1557 the Convention of Coswig "declared them to be 'the norm by which controversies are to be decided, *norma decidendi controversias*,'" and the 1559 Synod of Mölln did the same. In 1560 the ministerium of Lübeck and the Senate of Hamburg accepted the SA as a confessional norm, as did the Convention of Lüneburg in 1561 and the theologians of Schleswig-Holstein in 1570.[38] Additionally, the University of Jena, founded in 1548 by Gnesio ("pure") Lutherans while John Frederick the Magnanimous was still elector, began requiring all professors and students to adhere to the SA after the school's status as university was officially established in 1558 during the reign of Emperor Ferdinand I.[39]

Even though the SA's inception was characterized by no single decisive moment, they eventually received a kind of official status as Luther originally intended. This fact is nearly inexplicable apart from the efforts of conservative Gnesio-Lutherans such as Amsdorf, who began using the SA throughout the 1550s to preserve the content of their faith against Melanchthon's followers (Philippists), Roman Catholics, Osiander, and others. The most important Gnesio-Lutherans for this study are John Stoltz and John Aurifaber, the Weimar court preachers in Magdeburg, who compiled the most significant edition of the SA, the J text, and published it through Michael Lotther in 1553. J is unique in a number of ways, all explicable from the historical reasons for this printing. At this time, in 1553, the Gnesio-Lutherans in Magdeburg were in conflict with Andreas Osiander's followers,[40] who denied the forensic nature of Christ's atonement. Stoltz and Aurifaber learned that Osiander himself had signed the SA back at Schmalkalden in 1537, and they felt this information would be incredibly useful in combating his followers. For negations, the SA contained heavy condemnations of any medieval suggestions of free will and the ability to merit grace or to become justified incrementally rather than by a single divine decree of exoneration.[41] For affirmations, the SA furnished Luther's classic statement on salvation by grace through faith.[42] These aspects of the SA carried weight independently, but Stoltz and Aurifaber had an ace to play on top of that. They dusted off the Sp copy

[38] Bente, *Historical Introductions*, 59.

[39] Schaaf, "The Smalcald Articles and Their Significance," 80.

[40] Osiander died on October 17, 1552, but his followers carried on his dissident views.

[41] SA III, 1.

[42] SA III, 13.

that had been in the Weimar archives for probably fifteen years so that they could reproduce the signatures that served a general and a specific purpose. Because the SA were signed by a number of the top authorities on Germany's theological scene, the addition of signatures simply increased the authority of the SA in general. More specifically, if the Gnesio-Lutherans could prove that Osiander had once espoused Luther's statement of faith, they could prove his later theology to be inconsistent and divergent not only from the true, catholic faith, but also from his own, thus discrediting him.[43] Their degree of success is not clear, but it did serve to bring the signatures into a printed edition of the SA for the first time. In the process of editing J, Stoltz and Aurifaber also endeavored to mark the four places where Luther had made his additions in the 1538 first edition A.[44] Even so, their commitment to unearthing the original text proved not to overpower their polemical impulses. Among minor changes, Stoltz and Aurifaber also pluralized some of Luther's language, making "I" into "we" to emphasize the more corporate aspect of the confession and to uphold the normative character they attributed to the SA.[45]

Beyond the Osiander controversy, these Gnesio-Lutherans also used the SA against their classic enemy, the Philippists. The Augsburg Confession and its Apology could quickly be used by either side against the other, and in this case it did not help the opponents of Melanchthon's followers to use these more neutral documents written by Melanchthon. The Gnesio-Lutherans needed Luther to uphold Luther's doctrine. Hence they found an indispensable resource in his SA, which expressed no equivocation on the Lord's Supper or justification as Luther understood them. Against the Philippists, the SA would eventually find their way into compilations of doctrine (*corpora doctrinae*).

Even such worthy opponents as the Philippists could not exhaust the Gnesio-Lutherans' list of adversaries. Charles V had defeated the Smalcaldic League throughout 1546–47, and despite the Lutheran reprieve in the 1552 Truce of Passau, Stoltz still felt the Roman threat. This insecurity led him in 1554 to reprint J with a new preface explaining the SA's usefulness for combating Roman Catholic doctrine.[46] This enterprise

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[43] Robert Kolb, "Luther's Smalcald Articles: Agenda for Testimony and Confession," *Concordia Journal* 14 (1988): 118.

[44] These marks disappear in the J text's incorporation into the 1580 Dresden Book of Concord.

[45] Volz, *Luthers Schmalkaldische Artikel*, 35–36.

[46] Kolb, "Luther's Smalcald Articles," 118.

was perhaps the closest the SA ever came to fulfilling their original purpose as a polemical document against the papacy.

The versatility of the SA against sundry opponents made them an important resource for the Gnesio-Lutherans of the 1550s, with the result that J was printed at least three times. The final time was likely in 1555, when J was reprinted through Christian Rödinger in Jena. That was three years before the University of Jena held them as a standard for its students and faculty, again showing that the SA built their formal authority from the ground up as a faithful testimony to the gospel as Luther knew it. Only later did they function as an institutional standard.

By the 1560s, the Gnesio-Lutheran fight for identity had not diminished but had only strengthened as polemical battles with the Philippists continued. The SA's small but significant contribution to Lutheran identity in the last twenty-plus years won them a place in some collections of doctrine that, as the Gnesio-Lutheran versus Philippist debate evolved, began appearing on both sides as ways of differentiating and condemning each other's confessions of faith. Thus Kolb:

> The Gnesio-Lutherans needed to introduce a counter-balance to Melanchthon within the *corpora doctrinae* which their princes were developing. Luther's Smalcald Articles seemed a perfect pick, both because of its sharply and clearly worded teaching and because it had been subscribed by a number of Evangelical theologians at Schmalkalden in 1537.[47]

The first *corpus doctrinae* in which the SA appear is the 1563 Brunswick edition, *Corpus Brunsvicense*, which Martin Chemnitz edited.[48] Chemnitz was not as extreme a polemicist as the true Gnesio-Lutherans, but he had no less a passion for pure doctrine leading back to Luther's own precedent, which is why the SA were a logical choice for inclusion when compiling a body of doctrine. Again Kolb:

> He argued for the inclusion of [the SA] because it treated several topics that the Augsburg Confession had omitted—"the papacy, the power of the bishops, Zwinglianism, transubstantiation, and sins which drive away the Holy Spirit."[49]

This use by Chemnitz is the crucial step in the process that led to the establishment of the SA's normative status. Because Chemnitz was

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[47] Kolb, "Luther's Smalcald Articles," 118.

[48] Jacobs, *Book of Concord*, vol. 2, 44.

[49] Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 119.

important as a compiler of the Book of Concord's first edition, this *Corpus Brunsvicense* foreshadowed the SA's inclusion there.[50]

The exact number of *corpora doctrinae* featuring the SA is not clearly established, but there are at least two additional solid examples. In 1571 the *Corpus Doctrinae Thuringien* was published in Jena by Güntherum Hüttich, who included the SA with its preface and signatures, meaning that this text is a reproduction of J. It is associated with Johan Wilhelm Hertzog in Thuringia and evinces Lutheran conservatism by including expressly the "old (*alten*) Augsburg Confession," to which the Jena Gnesio-Lutherans would have held firmly. In context, the *Corpus Doctrinae Thuringien* arose as a direct response to the *Corpus Philippicum* held by the Philippists.[51] There is also a similar text from 1576: the *Corpus Doctrinae* printed in Heinrichstadt by the Vestung Wolfenbüttel-Braunschweig through Conrad Horn contains the SA with preface and signatures, also a J text. Among other documents, this *corpus doctrinae* also contains the 1530 Augsburg Confession, allowing it to function much like the 1571 text before it. These bodies of doctrine, if nothing more, demonstrate that the SA were being continually recognized as a tool for protecting pure doctrine and also as a ruling standard over Luther's legatees. The SA's eventual inclusion in the ultimate Lutheran statement of faith, the Book of Concord, was therefore quite natural.

In the historical battle for orthodoxy, the SA played a somewhat different role than what William Russell contends for today. Russell treats them as a clear path into the theology of Luther the man, which is a valid suggestion, but the document was not viewed in exactly this way by Lutherans of the later sixteenth century. We must ask why the SA, at least for some Gnesio-Lutherans, "became a *sine qua non* for defining Lutheran doctrine."[52] The answer surfaces along with the very notion of "confession" as it was held by these theologians, who took the SA to be a true interpretation of the Augsburg Confession, from which it derives its formal authority for all Lutherans.[53] This use is evident, for example, in the Zerbster Theologian Convention of September 4, 1570, where Jacob Andreae, one of the formulators of the Book of Concord, presented his

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[50] Additionally, Chemnitz refers to the SA at least eight times in his *Loci Theologici*, which shows his use of them to interpret Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*. He does not, however, reference the SA in his examination of the Council of Trent, his treatise on the two natures in Christ, or his enchiridion on ministry, word, and sacraments.

[51] Richard, *The Confessional History of the Lutheran Church*, 218.

[52] Kolb, *Confessing the Faith*, 119.

[53] Recall that Duke John Frederick already recognized this use in 1554, as stated above.

Bericht von christlicher Einigkeit der Theologen und Prädikanten (*Report on the Christian Unity of Theologians and Pastors*). At that time, Elector August of Saxony was said to favor the Philippists and their interpretation of the Augsburg Confession, so Andreae drew heavily on the SA as a means of interpreting the foundational Augsburg Confession.[54]

The contrast to Russell's view of the articles as key to Luther is apparent. By the 1570s, Luther's opinions were not the final authority of Lutheranism; authority came from true doctrine itself, which Andreae and his colleagues saw as those teachings testable by the Augsburg Confession rightly interpreted. Even that authority was only penultimate. Whatever Luther himself wrote, or whatever the reformers established at Augsburg, no doctrine, whatever pragmatic or political convenience it might afford, could function without a basis in Scripture. Thus, the SA were viewed as a true interpretation of the Bible's teachings, and in turn a true apprehension of the gospel itself. The Jena Gnesio-Lutheran Johannes Wigand offers a brief example with his book *Bekenntnis von der Rechtfertigung für Gott und von guten Wercken*[55] (*Confession of Justification before God and of Good Works*). The pure gospel is that which correctly upholds Christ's supremacy and justification before his Father. Here Wigand used the SA as a prime source for preserving this view (in its particularly Lutheran understanding) against the Philippists, who continually modified this teaching by exaggerating the role of the human will in salvation.[56]

The SA's function in the Lutheran churches was determinative for their inclusion in the Dresden Book of Concord of 1580: they were used for ordination under Duke John Frederick and von Amsdorf, they served as a regulating norm at many councils and at Jena's University, they were incorporated into several bodies of doctrine, they were used by certain Gnesio-Lutherans against the Philippists (and others), and they were important to Chemnitz, Andreae, and Nikolaus Selnecker (all compilers of the Book of Concord). Not all of these factors contributed equally or even

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[54] See Volz, *Luthers Schmalkaldische Artikel*, 38–39. Volz says of this report: "*die Schmalkaldischen Artikel eine erhebliche Rolle spielten*." That is, these articles played a considerable roll in Andreae's need to establish confessional authority. Also cf. the Formula of Concord, which treats the SA similarly; Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 528.7, 529.11–13.

[55] Jena: Christian Rödinger, 1569.

[56] Kolb, *Confessing the Faith*, 104. Kolb writes: "So Wigand began his treatise *On the Confession of Divine Teaching and Necessary Actions* [translation of the Latin title]. He composed it in 1569, at a critical juncture in the course of the disputes between Wigand's Gnesio-Lutheran colleagues and their Philippist opponents."

in harmony with each other, but they all played a role in making the SA known and authoritative.

In the scholarly literature, there is some dispute about which edition was included in the 1580 Book of Concord. Bente and Russell both say that the A text was included.[57] Yet *Bekenntnisschriften*, J.T. Mueller, and Volz contend that J was actually included after being edited by A.[58] The confusion, at least in Bente, arises from the Formula of Concord's confusion of the details. It states: "[The SA] were approved and accepted [at Smalcald], as they were first composed and printed."[59] This statement seems to indicate that Luther's A text (first edition) was included, but that is impossible for at least two reasons. First, the A text did not exist until a year after the Smalcaldic League met; and second, the Dresden Book of Concord contains the signatures that never appeared in print until 1553. It was actually J that found its way into the Dresden Book of Concord, including all of the signatures, although the text was corrected by A, and the original marks distinguishing Luther's 1538 additions were left out. There is little information about how A corrected J. At least the "I" language of Luther was brought back where Stoltz and Aurifaber had changed it to "we," and the SA received the title "Articles of Christian Doctrine." Bente and Russell's statements about the A text being included at Dresden are still approximately correct because both A and the Dresden "Articles of Christian Doctrine" are nearly identical in wording. Dresden received a text that was only possible through Stoltz and Aurifaber's efforts back in 1553 at Magdeburg.

The Latin *Concordia* of Leipzig received the SA through a translation of Nikolaus Selnecker, who added many words that are bracketed in the *Concordia Triglotta*'s English column. Among his interpolations, Selnecker added "ever-virgin" to Luther's mention of Mary, which is uncharacteristic of the other Lutheran confessions. Selnecker did not know of the 1541/2 Latin translation by Petrus Generanus; otherwise that edition might have been included, being regarded as generally superior.[60] Selnecker's translation was later refined for the official Latin Book of Concord of 1584, thus gaining the formal authority intrinsic to that edition.

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[57] See Bente, *Concordia Triglotta*, 59; Russell, "A Neglected Key to the Theology of Martin Luther," 89.

[58] See especially Müller, "Historical Introduction," 61; Volz, "*Luthers Schmalkaldische Artikel*," 41.

[59] Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 528.7.

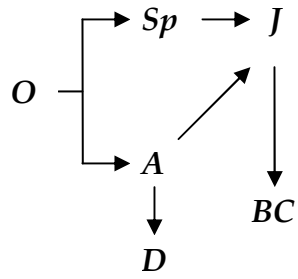
[60] Müller doubts that Selnecker actually did the translating, but he was at least the editor.

Selecting one version of the SA as the authoritative text for today would require a set of standards to test authority. There are three basic options. If one values the original text foremost (in this case the original copy that was signed by many important individuals), then Sp is the most authoritative, and Luther's later expansions and increased polemic should be held diffidently. If one values a lively text, the one that functioned within a body of believers, protecting and forming that body's faith, the A text is probably the best candidate, since Sp was never really used. If one values the official quality of the Book of Concord above all else, then the SA contained therein will reign. This study honors the authority of the A text because the important confession is that which is lived out in its practical consequences, and A was lived out in so many contexts during Lutheranism's formative years that it became more influential than the original copy. What authority the SA gained from Dresden would never have been possible had they not already won their prominence through those contexts; yet they needed Dresden for their authority to be confirmed in an unsurpassable way. As stated above, there are different ways a text can become authoritative, but a text such as the SA with no initial official ratification is left only with its content and usage until its authority is made formal. It had to rise from the bottom up, and that it did.

In an essay of this focus, it is easy to make too much of the SA, which served a relatively minor role in the history of the Lutheran Reformation. Their role, however, was significant to the extent demonstrated above. Based on the SA's use as a versatile resource for defending and preserving the Lutheran faith in the crucial decades of the Reformation, it is clear that the reformers of the late sixteenth century benefited from them. The SA derived their authority from their content as Luther's testimony to the teaching of the Scriptures, which in turn offered a clear lens for viewing the Augsburg Confession and ultimately the Bible itself. By the 1570s, the inherent material authority of the SA was established on several fronts: among institutions, individual theologians, and political authorities. Their inclusion in the Book of Concord was therefore a formalization of this norm that had been in place for over a quarter century. With that we can follow Müller in stating, "With great justice then do they receive a place in the *Corpora Doctrinae*, and in the Book of Concord."[61]

[61] Müller, "Historical Introduction," 63.

Appendix: Major Editions



O is the basis for Sp and A, which received the preface and four expansions. A is the basis for D (with a slightly modified preface) and J, which uses Sp to reproduce the signatures and mark the four expansions. J, corrected by A, is the basis for the Book of Concord; some language is changed back to Luther's original wording, and the marks denoting the expansions drop out. For the Latin version, Generanus had to have translated A because that was the only text available in 1541, and Selnecker translated J, as he included the signatures.[62]

O = Original draft (*Luthers Niederschrift*)
Sp = Spalatin's copy (*Spalatins Abschrift*)
A = 1539 Wittenberg edition (*Artikel*)
D = 1543 Wittenberg edition (*Die Heubtartikel*)
J = 1553 Magdeburg edition
BC = 1580 edition as contained in the Dresden Book of Concord

[62] Volz, *Luthers Schmalkaldische Artikel*, 40, n. 1.

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The Ordination of Women and Ecclesial Endorsement of Homosexuality: Are They Related?[1]

John T. Pless

The August 2009 issue of *The Lutheran*, the official magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), carried two news items side by side. First was a column under the heading "Rite Sought for Gays," reporting on requests from Episcopal bishops in six American states where same-sex marriages are now legal for permission to adapt their church's prayer book for use at these weddings. Next was a report that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, at its General Synod meeting last June, voted by a wide margin to ordain women.[2] Are the two matters related—the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the ordination of women?

Over a decade ago, in 1996, Wolfhart Pannenberg shocked mainline churches in Europe and North America when he declared,

> If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.[3]

In the years after Pannenberg's pronouncement, Lutheran churches in North America and Europe have steadily moved toward providing liturgical formularies for the blessing of same sex-unions and the ordination of men and women who identify themselves as gay or lesbian.

In North America, the ELCA, at their national assembly meeting in 2009, endorsed proposals that allow for both the ordination of homosexuals living in committed, monogamous relationships and

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[1] The following article is a slight revision of a paper originally presented at the Lutheran Theological Conference of South Africa in August, 2009.

[2] *The Lutheran* 22 (August 2009): 16.

[3] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Revelation and Homosexual Experience," *Christianity Today* 40 (November 1996): 37.

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churchly blessings of such unions. The Church of Sweden has already had a woman, Eva Brunne, who has identified herself as a lesbian, elected as bishop of Stockholm on May 26, 2009. Furthermore, on October 22, 2009, the Church of Sweden voted to allow its priests to perform weddings for homosexual couples, who now enjoy marriage equal to heterosexual couples.[4]

Opponents see these moves as a clear and certain denial of biblical authority and an overturning of foundational moral truth, while champions of these changes see them as necessary steps for the sake of the church's mission. What is recognized by all is that change threatens the unity of the church. Those promoting change often argue that changes in church order to allow for the inclusion of homosexual men and women in the church's ministry are on the same level as previous decisions to ordain women. For example, Herbert Chilstrom, the immediate past presiding bishop of the ELCA, circulated "An Open Letter Response to the CORE Open Letter" in the summer of 2009, chiding several prominent theologians and church leaders for their inconsistency in affirming women's ordination but not the full inclusion of homosexuals in the ministry of the church. Significant voices, however, raised in support of the historic Christian teaching on sexuality insist that making provision for homosexual clergy and acceptance of same-sex unions is quite distinct from the question of women's ordination. For example, the ELCA New Testament scholar Craig Koester argues that to draw an analogy between endorsement of homosexual practice and women's ordination is flawed since the Scriptures are said to be inconsistent in their testimony to leadership by women but consistent in the rejection of homosexual behavior.[5] A similar case is made by R.T. France[6] and Robert Gagnon.[7] This issue will be examined here demonstrating nine parallels in theological method and argumentation used to defend both practices.

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[4] "Sweden's Lutheran church to celebrate gay weddings," *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), October 22, 2009.

[5] Craig R. Koester, "The Bible and Sexual Boundaries," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1993): 388.

[6] R.T. France, "From Romans to the Real World: Biblical Principles and Cultural Change in Relation to Homosexuality and the Ministry of Women," in *Romans and the People of God,* ed. S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 234–253.

[7] Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 441–443.

I. Parallels in Theological Argumentation

1. The advocacy for women's ordination and for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions is put forth in the churches as a matter of social justice.

Church office and sexual fulfillment are seen as matters of entitlement. Just as barriers to women and homosexuals have been removed in other areas of civic life and the workplace, the same demand is made on the church. This is especially true in church bodies where social justice is seen not as a work of God in the government of the left hand but as a part, perhaps even the most important part, of the church's mission to the world. Here it is argued that the church must enact social justice in its own midst by removing barriers to equality. In fact, Krister Stendahl argues, "It seems to me almost impossible to assent—be it reluctantly or gladly—to the political emancipation of women while arguing on biblical grounds against the ordination of women."[8]

This was in large part the argument of Gustaf Wingren over against Anders Nygren in the Church of Sweden. Nygren argued against the move to ordain women in Sweden in 1958. After the decision was made to allow for the ordination of women, Nygren and others still protested. In 1974, Wingren resigned the pastoral office in protest of what he saw as a social justice issue in the resistance to female clergy.[9]

2. Churchly acceptance of women's ordination, the ordination of homosexuals, and the blessing of same-sex unions has been fueled by powerful liberationist movements within the culture rather than by biblical understanding.

Feminism had its roots in nineteenth-century egalitarian impulses that promoted social change. Many of the first women who would be seen as matriarchs of what might be more specifically identified as "feminist theology" were shaped by nineteenth-century American revivalism.[10] While feminist theologies exist in great variety,[11] they share a common,

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[8] *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics,* trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 39.

[9] See Carl Axel Aurelius, "Wingren, Gustaf (1910–2000)," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band 36 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 110. Also see Mary Elizabeth Anderson, "Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (Summer 2009): 198–217.

[10] See Melanie May, "Feminist Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 305.

[11] For a helpful survey, see Hans Schwarz, *Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 487–500, and Roland F. Ziegler, "Liberation Theology in the Leading Ladies of Feminist Theology," in *Women Pastors?*

strong theme that women are oppressed by patriarchal structures and need to be emancipated from these restrictive, ideological paradigms and freed for access to all aspects of church life, including the pastoral office. While various gay liberationist movements are historically much more recent than feminism, they tend to have similar goals. For example, "Lutherans Concerned," a North American group, works for full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered persons in the life of the church, that is, ordination and the blessing of those who live in committed same-sex relationships. Both feminist and gay liberation movements insist on a revisionist understanding of biblical texts that were previously held to be prohibitive and see the gospel primarily as a means of empowerment and change.

3. In the case of both the ordination of women and the ordination of homosexuals, Galatians 3:28 is used in such a way as to sever redemption from creation.

A short monograph that would become foundational in making a biblical case for the ordination of women, first published in 1958 and then in the USA after being translated into English by Emilie Sander in 1966, was Krister Stendahl's *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics.* Stendahl maintained that Paul achieved an "evangelical breakthrough" in Galatians as the distinction between male and female was rendered obsolete. Stendahl writes, "But in Christ the dichotomy *is* overcome; through baptism a new unity is created, and that is not only a matter discerned by the eyes of faith but one that manifests itself in the social dimensions of the church."[12] The new reality of redemption transcends and replaces the old order of creation. Paul's defense of the old order in 1 Corinthians is seen as a necessary and eschatologically limited corrective for a chaotic situation in which the gospel was not yet fully apprehended. It is a penultimate and provisional concession.

Edward Schroeder[13] extends Stendahl's basic hermeneutic to the question of the church's response to homosexuality. For Schroeder, the questions of blessings for same-sex unions and the ordination of homosexuals are answered in the affirmative on the basis of his application

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The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective, ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 137–152.

[12] Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 33.

[13] For a more detailed treatment of Schroeder's position, see John T. Pless, "Using and Misusing Luther in Contemporary Debates on Homosexuality: A Look at Two Theologians," *Lutheran Forum* 39 (Summer 2005): 50–57.

of a law/promise hermeneutic that he claims comes from Luther. According to Schroeder's construal of this hermeneutic, Luther's approach to the Scriptures is to see Christ at the heart and center of the Bible. Scripture itself consists of two words from God, one of law and another of promise. As Schroeder puts it,

> Scripture's law serves as God's diagnostic agent—diagnosis of our malady, not prescription for our healing. God's Law is X-ray, not ethics. The healing for patients diagnosed by the Law is God's promise, the Christ-quotient of both OT and NT. The law's purpose (Paul said it first—after he received his "new" hermeneutics beginning at Damascus) is to "push sinners to Christ."[14]

Once sinners are in Christ, according to Schroeder, they are no longer under the law but under grace.

> Once Christ-connected they come into the force-field of his "new commandment," and it really is new, not a refurbished "old" commandment, not "Moses rehabilitated." Christ supersedes Moses—not only for salvation, but also for ethics. In Paul's language the touchstone for this new commandment is the "mind of Christ" and "being led by, walking by, his Holy Spirit." More than once Paul makes it "perfectly clear" that this is a new "law-free" way of life.[15]

Schroeder then goes on to ask and answer the question of what we are to do with all the commands and imperatives in the Bible in light of this new way of life, free of the law. He concludes, "First of all, this new hermeneutic relativizes them."[16] Here Schroeder sees himself in company with Luther, especially Luther's treatise of 1525, "How Christians Should Regard Moses,"[17] to which we shall return later. Arguing that the law applies only to the old creation while the promise constitutes life in the new creation, Schroeder asserts that human sexuality is clearly a component of the old creation, and hence is under the governance of the law.

There are things in Luther and the Lutheran confessional writings that seem to give credence to Schroeder's argument. In 1522, Luther wrote in his "The Estate of Marriage" that marriage is a bodily and outward thing:

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[14] Edward Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 159" (January 28, 2001), available at http://www.crossings.org/thursday/2001/thur0628.shtml.

[15] Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 159."

[16] Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 159."

[17] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 35:155–174 [henceforth *LW*].

"Know therefore that marriage is an outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking."[18] Thus Luther recognizes the place of civil authority in regulating matters of sexuality and marriage.[19]

Does Luther's assessment of marriage as an outward thing, an artifact of the old creation, make questions of sexual ethics a matter of relativity, as Schroeder contends, and therefore lead to a definition of marriage elastic enough to include same-sex unions? Certainly not. There are several difficulties with Schroeder's approach. The first has to do with his understanding of the place of creation in Luther's thinking.

In contrasting the old creation with the new creation, Schroeder is concerned to show that the law is operative in creation both to deliver justice (recompense, as he puts it) and to preserve the fallen world from plunging into total chaos. Of course, these are themes that are readily found in Luther. Schroeder, however, makes an interpretative move that Luther does not make. While Luther surely sees that neither the laws of Moses nor civil laws, which vary from place to place and from one historical epoch to another, work salvifically, he does not view the law as being merely set aside by the gospel. To use the language of the Formula of

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[18] *LW* 45:25.

[19] Luther sees marriage as grounded in creation. It is not a sacrament that bestows forgiveness, but there is no higher social calling where faith is exercised than that of the family. Marriage is the arena for faith and love. In 1519, Luther still regarded marriage as a sacrament. The change is evident in "The Babylonian Captivity" of 1520. In divesting marriage of its sacramental status, Luther actually elevates marriage as he makes it equal or superior to celibacy. See Scott Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (Autumn 2000): 355; James Nestingen, "Luther on Marriage, Vocation, and the Cross," *Word & World* 23 (Winter 2003): 31–39; William Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960); and Carter Lindberg, "The Future of a Tradition: Luther and the Family," in *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer,* ed. Dean Wenthe et al. (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 133–151. For a picture of Luther's contribution to the place of marriage in Western culture, see John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 42–73. Lindberg aptly summarizes Luther's impact on marriage: "Luther's application of evangelical theology to marriage and family desacramentalized marriage; desacralized the clergy and resacralized the life of the laity; opposed the maze of canonical impediments to marriage; strove to unravel the skein of canon law, imperial law, and German customs; and joyfully affirmed God's good creation, including sexual relations" (133). Also see the insightful treatments by Oswald Bayer in "The Protestant Understanding of Marriage," "Luther's View of Marriage," and "Law and Freedom in Marriage," in *Freedom in Response – Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeffrey Crayzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156–205.

Concord, "The distinction between law and gospel is a particularly glorious light,"[20] but it is not a light that blinds us to the normative character of Holy Scripture. To reduce the distinction to an ideology abstracted from the actual content of the biblical texts blurs both God's judgment and his grace. Schroeder's law/promise hermeneutic ends up with a divorce between creation and redemption, a schism between faith and life that is foreign to Luther.[21]

Luther understands creation as the arena for God's work. When Schroeder makes the claim that homosexuals are simply "wired differently"[22] than heterosexuals, he introduces into creation a relativism and subjectivism that is not in Luther. Luther, in fact, sees human identity as male and female as a creational reality. To use the words of William Lazareth, God's ordering of creation is heterosexual.[23] This can be seen in Luther's exposition of the Sixth Commandment in the Large Catechism: "He has established it (marriage) before all others as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God."[24] This is also expressed in a letter Luther wrote to Wolfgang Reissenbusch in March, 1527. After counseling Reissenbusch that he is free to renounce his vow of celibacy without committing sin, Luther observes, "Our bodies are in great part the flesh of women, for by them we were conceived, developed, borne, suckled, and nourished. And it is quite impossible to keep entirely

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[20] FC SD V, 1; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 581 [Henceforth Kolb and Wengert].

[21] Contra this divorce, see Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Luther's Moral Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther,* ed. D. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120–135; William Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); Reinhard Huetter, "The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, ed. K. Bloomquist and John Stumme (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 31–54. Schroeder asserts that "Huetter's conclusion really is 'the end' of the promise of Lutheran ethics"; "Thursday Theology 26" (November 12, 1998), http://www.crossings.org/thursday/1998/thur1112.shtml.

[22] Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 34" (January 28, 1999), http://www.crossings.org/thursday/1999/thur0128.shtml.

[23] William Lazareth, "ELCA Lutherans and Luther on Heterosexual Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 8 (Autumn 1994): 235–268. Lazareth writes, "Clearly, same-sex 'unions' do not qualify as marriages to be blessed for Christians who have been baptized as saints into the body of Christ. The Lutheran church should not condone the sinful acts (conduct) of an intrinsic disorder (orientation) in God's heterosexual ordering of creation" (236).

[24] LC I, 207; Kolb and Wengert, 414.

apart from them. This is in accord with the Word of God. He has caused it to be so and wishes it so."[25]

In his "The Estate of Marriage" (1522), after noting God's design and purpose in creating humanity as male and female, Luther speaks of this ordinance or institution as "inflexible,"[26] beyond alteration. What Luther sees as a given, biological reality, Schroeder now moves into the realm of the subjective with an appeal to the explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism. Luther's doxological confession that "God has created me together with all that exists" and that "God has given and still preserves my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses" is now used by Schroeder to make God the author of homosexuality. As Schroeder writes,

> Luther doesn't mention sexuality in that gift-list, but today God puts it on the lists we have. If "hetero-" is one of the creator's ordainings, then wouldn't "homo-" also be on the gift-list for those so ordained? Isn't it "most certainly true" for both that they "thank, praise, serve and obey God" as the sexual persons they have been ordained to be? Both homosexuals and heterosexuals have a common calling to care for creation, carrying out the double agenda in God's secular world—the law of preservation and the law of recompense. If the gifts are different, the pattern of care will be different. What examples are already available within the ELCA of Christians—gay and straight—doing just that—preservation and recompense—with the sexual gift that God has ordained? Despite the current conflict, is it true about sexuality too that "what God ordains is always good?"[27]

Luther's rejection of required clerical celibacy is seen by Schroeder as a precedent for relaxing requirements for individuals who understand themselves to be homosexual. Schroeder writes:

> For outsiders to "require" celibacy of them as a prerequisite for the validity of their Christ-confession is parallel to the Roman church's "requirement" of celibacy for the clergy. Concerning that requirement the Lutheran Reformers said: God created the sexual "pressure" that surfaces at puberty. To "require" celibacy of the clergy—or anybody—is blatantly contradicting God. For those whom God "wired differently" as a student once described himself—regardless of how that different wiring came to

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[25] Theodore Tappert, ed., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Press, 1995), 273.

[26] *LW* 45:18.

[27] Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 51" (May 27, 1999), http://www.crossings.org/thursday/1999/thur0527.shtml.

> pass—requiring celibacy for him sounds like the same thing to me. It is God, not the gay guy, who is being contradicted.[28]

Here Schroeder reveals a basic premise that is not shared by Luther, namely, that homosexuality is ordained by God. Luther does not speak of a generic sexual drive or instinct but of the desire of man for woman, and woman for man: "This is the Word of God, through whose power procreative seed is planted in man's body and a natural, ardent desire for woman is kindled and kept alive. This cannot be restrained either by vows or laws."[29] Luther seldom mentions homosexual behavior, but when he does, his evaluation is always negative. For example, Luther identifies the sin of Sodom with homosexuality. Commenting on Genesis 19:4–5, Luther writes,

> I for my part do not enjoy dealing with this passage, because so far the ears of the Germans are innocent of and uncontaminated by this monstrous depravity; for even though disgrace, like other sins, has crept in through an ungodly soldier and a lewd merchant, still the rest of the people are unaware of what is being done in secret. The Carthusian monks deserve to be hated because they were the first to bring this terrible pollution into Germany from the monasteries of Italy.[30]

In the same section of the Genesis lecturers, Luther refers to "the heinous conduct of the people of Sodom" as

> extraordinary, inasmuch as they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which is implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature.[31]

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[28] Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 159." Similar arguments are advanced by Christian Batalden Scharen, *Married in the Sight of God* (Landham, MD: University of America Press, 2000), although Scharen finally must admit that "an ethic for same-sex relationships goes nowhere with the 'letter' of Luther's views" (128). Likewise, Martha Ellen Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in *Faithful Conversations: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*, ed. James M. Childs Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 64–66.

[29] Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 273. For similar statements in Luther see *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook,* ed. Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 137–170.

[30] *LW* 3:251–252.

[31] *LW* 3:255; also note Luther's comment in "On War Against the Turk" (1529): "Both the pope and the Turk are so blind and senseless that they commit the dumb sins shamelessly, as an honorable and praiseworthy thing. Since they think so lightly of

Luther's rejection of homosexual activity is not merely a matter of aesthetic preference but rather a theological judgment rooted in the reality of the way the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness that will not acknowledge God to be the Creator and Lord that he is. For Luther, homosexuality is a form of idolatry, of false worship, as we see in his lectures on Romans.[32] In attributing homosexuality to the creative will of God for certain human beings, Schroeder strangely overlooks the teaching of his mentor, Werner Elert, who maintains that creation places humanity in an ordered world of nomological existence.[33]

4. Opponents of women's ordination and those who resist the acceptance of homosexuality as a moral equivalent to heterosexuality are both labeled as fundamentalists and legalists.

Taking "the interpretation closest to hand" as that one "which allows the text to say what it says most simply," to use the language of Hermann Sasse,[34] is equated with fundamentalism. The labeling then becomes a weapon of defense from listening to what is said in the text. A simple reading of the text that yields an undesired result is dismissed (i.e., that

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marriage, it serves them right that there are dog-marriages (and would to God that they were dog-marriages), indeed, also 'Italian marriages' and 'Florentine brides' among them; and they think these things good. I hear one horrible thing after another about what an open and glorious Sodom Turkey is, and everybody who has looked around a little in Rome or Italy knows very well how God revenges and punishes the forbidden marriage, so that Sodom and Gommorah, which God overwhelmed in days of old with fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24), must seem a mere jest and prelude compared with these abominations," *LW* 46:198.

[32] Luther, in his exposition of Romans 1, links homosexual behavior with idolatry: "For this reason, namely: idolatry, God gave, not only to the above-mentioned disgrace, them, some of them, up to dishonorable passions, to shameful feelings and desires, before God, although even they, like Sodom, called this sin. . . . And the men likewise, with an overpowering drive of lust, gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion, which overpowered the judgment of their reason, for another, men with men, and thus they deal with each other in mutual disgrace, committing shameless acts and consequently, receiving the penalty, punishment, due for their error, fitting and just for so great a sin, the sin of idolatry, in their own persons, according to the teaching and arrangement of God," *LW* 25:12–13.

[33] See Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl J. Schneider (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957). Elert writes, "Creation places man into the world, *nomos* binds him to the world. In the first place, nomological under law means only that we, like all other creatures, are subject to the orderly rule of God and that we do not live in a world of chaos and arbitrariness" (51).

[34] Hermann Sasse, "Did God Really Say . . . ? A Reply to Dr. Helmut Thielicke's Article 'Thoughtless, Doctrinaire, Loveless,'" in *The Lonely Way*, vol. 2, ed. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 318.

women cannot be pastors or that homosexual acts lie outside of the realm of God's design).

Lutherans are rightly allergic to the charge of legalism. Arguments were made for the ordination of women on the basis of the freedom of the gospel, as we have noted in Krister Stendahl. In a clever statement issued by revisionist clergy and laity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and aimed polemically at supporters of the church catholic's traditional position on sexuality[35] under the title, "We Believe in the Gospel," advocates of a revised sexual ethic accuse those holding to scriptural teaching as those who have revised and abandoned the gospel by "turning it into law."[36]

> *5. In making the case for women's ordination and for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions, biblical texts once taken as clear are argued to be unclear or dismissed as culturally conditioned and time bound.*

Some assert that the contested texts relative to women in the pastoral office (1 Cor 14:33–38 and 1 Tim 2:11–14) and on homosexuality (Lev 18:22, 24; 20:13; Rom 1:24–27; 1 Cor 6:9–10; 1 Tim 1:9–10) clearly reflect the theological worldview of the biblical writers, but that these teachings are culturally conditioned and hence open to reassessment. Typical are the arguments that the Bible represents a patriarchal and/or heterosexualist structure that may be abandoned without doing violence to the essential message of the Holy Scriptures.[37] Others argue that the disputed texts are unclear and therefore incapable of providing a sure foundation for church practice.[38] In his 2006 book *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism,*

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[35] For the defense of the traditional position by Canadian Lutherans, see "The Banff Commission Declaration on the Malaise That Affects the Church of our Days," in *The Banff Commission,* ed. K. Glen Johnson (New Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2008), 9–26.

[36] "We Believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ," accessed on July 26, 2009 from http://www.webelieveinthegospel.org/2652.html.

[37] This presupposition in regard to women's ordination is critiqued by numerous essays in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective,* ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), and in regard to homosexuality by Armin Wenz, *The Contemporary Debate on Homosexual Clergy,* trans. Holger Sonntag (St. Louis: LCMS World Relief and Human Care, 2006), 3–24; also Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.

[38] See, for example, an early attempt by Ruth Bretscher Ressmeyer, *Neither Male or Female* (East Northport, NY: Commission on Women of the Atlantic District LCMS, 1997). Ressmeyer draws heavily on Stendahl.

Wayne Grudem has demonstrated how both approaches have been adopted by some neo-Evangelical theologians.[39]

6. Ordination of women and ordination of homosexuals is seen as a matter of necessity for the sake of the gospel and mission.

The case is made that a church that excludes women from the pastoral office (which is often equated with "positions of leadership") or renders a negative moral judgment on homosexual practice will not be attractive to a world that does not discriminate on the basis of gender or sexual orientation.[40] Furthermore, it is also asserted that all Christians need to be actively involved in missionary outreach.[41] Teachings that would exclude some Christians on the basis of gender or sexual identity from full participation in the mission of the church are seen as detrimental to effective missionary outreach and as stumbling blocks to the proclamation of the gospel, which is meant for all people.

7. Arguments for both the ordination of women and the ordination of homosexuals along with churchly blessing of same-sex unions are often made on the basis of what Alasdair MacIntyre has identified as an "ethic of emotivism."[42]

The case is made for women's ordination and an ethic affirming of homosexuality on the basis of emotional appeal.[43] The pain of exclusion, for example, is used by advocates to urge the church to respond with sympathy rather than restriction. With an "ethic of emotivism," claims to biblical authority or creedal teaching are trumped by an appeal to the emotional wellbeing of those who are denied access either to the pastoral office or to marriage.

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[39] Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism (*Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006).

[40] See, e.g., Karl Wyneken, "Let's Include Women," in *A Daystar Reader*, ed. Matthew L. Becker (np: Daystar.net, 2010), 152.

[41] See, e.g., Craig Nessan, *Many Members Yet One Body: Committed Same-Gender Relationships and the Mission of the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 53. According to Nessan, ethical issues such as homosexual marriage have only "penultimate" significance, while the justification-centered mission of the church possesses "ultimate" significance and must not be compromised by issues of only penultimate concern.

[42] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[43] See Scharen, *Married in the Sight of God*, 149–152; also note the emotionally charged letter of the former presiding bishop of the ELCA, Herbert W. Chilstrom, entitled "My View: Questions for Those Leaving the ELCA," *Mankato Free Press*, August 26, 2010.

8. Women's ordination and the ordination of homosexuals are urged on the church for the sake of unity and inclusiveness yet both practices fracture genuine ecumenicity.

Martha Ellen Stortz contributed an article, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," to the volume *Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*. She proposes a discussion of sexuality that begins with Baptism, thus avoiding the reality of humanity created as male and female. Her conclusions are predictable. Baptismal identity overrides sexual identity.[44] Thus sexual differentiation, distinctions between male and female, straight or gay are overcome by unity in the body of Christ. Christians may indeed entertain a variety of opinions regarding men and women in the life of the church, sexual preference, and ethics, but these differences are said not to be church divisive. Working with something akin to a paradigm of "reconciled diversity,"[45] these differences are to be lived with and even celebrated. In actuality, however, such an approach will finally exclude from unity those who hold a traditional position on these matters. When truth is sacrificed for unity, unity will finally demand the exclusion of those who insist on truth.

In reality, both women's ordination and an accommodation of a permissive ethic in regard to homosexuality have fractured churches. First of all, churches that have compromised on these issues have separated themselves from continuity with the catholic past. In that sense such communions may be said to have deserted "vertical ecumenism." They have become chronologically sectarian, introducing novelties unknown to apostolic and most of post-apostolic Christianity. Such a church can no longer confess the words of the prophets and the apostles to be the words of the living God. Second, these communions put themselves in a position that makes "horizontal ecumenism," conversation with Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, even more difficult. Simply put, communions which determine theology and practice by majority vote and embrace religious pluralism lack credibility in ecumenical dialogue with Rome or the East.

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[44] Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in *Faithful Conversation*, 59–79.

[45] Here see Reinhard Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus:* The Unity of the Church in the Truth and Society's Pluralism," *Logia* 13 (Holy Trinity 2004): 21–39. Slenczka observes that "*magnus consensus*" is reduced to "reconciled diversity as an external mark of the church at the expense of truth; the question of truth is circumvented by pointing to the diversity in scriptural interpretations" (25).

9. Ordination of women, ordination of homosexuals, and ecclesiastical recognition of same-sex unions are at first proposed as a matter of compromise or as a local option, but they will finally demand universal acceptance.

When ordination of women was introduced in Sweden, a "conscience clause" was included.[46] Incrementally the provisions of this protective measure were lessened and finally removed. Candidates for ordination must demonstrate their acceptance of the legitimacy of female clergy prior to ordination.[47] The Recommendations of the Sexuality Task Force in the ELCA propose something of a local option: individual synods and congregations may opt not to have homosexual clergy or to provide rituals for blessing same-sex couples. Such a compromise, however, will hardly satisfy either activists for change or those who believe that the scriptural ethic precludes the placing in office of those who practice homosexuality. To paraphrase Richard John Neuhaus, where orthodoxy is made optional, orthodoxy will finally be proscribed.[48]

10. It is argued that by refusing to ordain women and homosexuals to the pastoral office the church is deprived of the particular spiritual gifts they possess and that these individuals are unjustly denied the opportunity for spiritual self-expression.[49]

This argument relies on an understanding of the ministry that sees the ministry as an avenue for the expression of personal *charismata* rather than an office established by Christ and filled according to his mandates. Spiritual giftedness is confused with personal expression. Creativity and freedom to express oneself without boundary or restraint are celebrated in the name of autonomy. Given the spiritual climate of the postmodern context this becomes attractive as "gifts of the Spirit" are placed in contrast to a biblical/confessional understanding of office. Expressive individualism takes precedence over an understanding of an office instituted by Christ to serve his church with word and sacrament.

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[46] Dag Sandahl, interview by William J. Tighe, "Swedish Dissent: Life as an Orthodox Churchman in the Church of Sweden," *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 13 (July/August 2000): 36–37.

[47] Dag Sandahl, "Swedish Dissent," 36.

[48] Richard John Neuhuas, "The Unhappy Fate of Optional Orthodoxy," *First Things* 69 (January 1997): 57.

[49] See Scharen, 127–147; also note Patricia Jung and Ralph Smith, *Heterosexism: An Ethical Challenge* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1993), 170.

II. Conclusion

Reviewing arguments made for the ordination of women in Lutheran churches in the middle years of the twentieth century, it is hard not to conclude that variants of these arguments are currently being used to advocate the ordination of homosexuals and to provide for an ecclesiastical recognition of same-sex unions through an elastic definition of marriage that ignores both "nature and institution."[50] Creation is left behind in pursuit of purely spiritual categories and relational qualities. One Lutheran ethicist, Paul Jersild, is worried that some Christians have adopted an "excessively physicalist approach to homosexuality."[51] Creation is seen as secondary, if not irrelevant. But without creation, there is no incarnation. Without creation, the new creation is reduced to a spiritualistic construct of one's own imagination.

After women's ordination was permitted in the Church of Sweden, Bishop Anders Nygren perhaps spoke prophetically when he said, "This current decision not only means a determination of the specific issue concerning female pastors, but I am convinced that our church has now shifted onto a previously unknown track heading in the direction of Gnosticism and the *Schwaermerei*."[52] In a tentative and somewhat ambivalent way, Helmut Thielicke would take cautious but nevertheless perceptible steps down this path when he affirmed that the writers of Holy Scripture were opposed to women's ordination and homosexual practice but that these biblical prohibitions are not absolutely binding on us as the church acquires a new and deeper knowledge.[53]

In the current move to sanction same-sex unions and provide access to the pastoral office, the Gnosticism and enthusiasm that were magnetic for

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[50] Here see Oswald Bayer, "Nature and Institution: Luther's Doctrine of the Three Estates," in *Freedom in Response*, 90–118. Also note Knut Alfsvåg, "Christians in Society: Luther's Teaching on the Two Kingdoms and the Three Estates Today," *Logia* 14 (Reformation 2005): 15–20.

[51] Paul Jersild, *Spirit Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 139. Also see Bernd Wannenwetsch's critique of the "docetic" turn taken by advocates of homosexual unions in his "Old Docetism—New Moralism? Questioning a New Direction in the Homosexuality Debate," *Modern Theology* 16 (July 2000): 353–364.

[52] Quoted from *Kyrkometets protokoll,* nr. 4, 158, p. 154, in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective,* ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 9.

[53] See Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 221–22; *The Ethics of Sex,* trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 269–292. Also note Sasse's sharp rebuke in "Did God Really Say . . . ?," 317–322.

a departure from the New Testament mandates regarding man and woman in the church have seductively drawn Lutheran churches further away from their apostolic foundations. Those who celebrate these changes rightly see that they have created something new. Else Marie Pedersen, from the University of Denmark, argues that the ordination of women has humanized the church, yielding a new understanding of the church "so that ministry will be about the pastor's authenticity, rather than about who, on the surface is a normal male. Authenticity and honesty as well as a solid education ought to be more important than whatever sex or sexuality a pastor has, given that the gospel is proclaimed in Word and Sacrament."[54] This vision of the church with a ministry grounded in the "authenticity" of the pastor presents quite a different picture from the one given in the New Testament. Nygren's fears are confirmed, and we are left to ponder the weight of Hermann Sasse's observation that "there are some questions raised by the devil to destroy the Church of Christ. To achieve this he may use as his mouth piece not only ambitious professors of theology, his favorite tools, but also simple pious souls. Why women cannot be ordained is one of these questions."[55]

The situation of world Lutheranism does not invite an arrogant and carnal security on the part of confessional churches that have not yet succumbed to the temptation to worldly compromise. Rather it is given to us to heed the apostolic admonitions to "keep a close watch on yourself and your teaching" (1 Tim 4:16) and "let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

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[54] Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, "Women's Ordination in Denmark: The Humanization of the Ordained Ministry," *Dialog* 48 (Spring 2009): 5–6.

[55] Hermann Sasse, "Ordination of Women," in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective,* ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 263–264. One may read Reinhard Slenczka's "When the Church Ceases to be the Church" as something of an extension of Sasse's point but now in relationship to ecclesiastical acceptance of homosexuality. His essay is published in *The Banff Commission* (New Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2008), 37–50.

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Holy Cross Day

"Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show by what death he was to die. (John 12:31–33)

The durability of an institution depends on its traditions. Our seminary's tradition was disrupted by moving from Springfield to Fort Wayne in 1976. To stay connected with the past, the Luther statue was brought from Springfield to its pedestal at the campus entrance. A less obvious relic was the former Kramer Hall bell hanging in the shorter of the two towers outside the chancel of the chapel, and so the tradition of graduating students ringing the bell after taking their last exam could continue. A third relic, a less than artistically compelling crucifix from the Springfield chapel, appeared unheralded on the altar. The high-peaked ceiling of this chapel was intended by the architect to point the worshipers' attention to God's transcendent glory, but the mystery of Christianity is that God's glory is found not in heaven but in the cross. Even the huge cross on the chancel wall was an afterthought. In Springfield the crucifix corresponded with a seminary set in a section of town where petty crimes often escalated into felonies. Students lived in a world defined by a theology of the cross. The Fort Wayne campus reflected the Missouri Synod's glory days when in the 1950's it seemed that two new congregations were opened each week. All this was reinforced by the massive mosaics of Christ reigning in glory in the south classroom building and the library. The campus lawns were of golf-course quality. Visiting German clergy called this place "the Missouri Synod Country Club."

All this stood in contrast to what Paul said: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Gal 6:14). And so the diminutive crucifix taken from Springfield redirected the gaze of the worshipers from the celestial heights of the chapel to the agony of the cross. It is an antidote to finding God in heaven and compels us to find God in the cross. Like a hot knife cutting through butter, the figure of the crucified Christ disembowels any theology of glory. "In Christ dwells the fullness of God bodily" (Col 2:9). Some years later another theophany occurred. A vividly colored crucifix was attached to this pulpit. Like the true cross discovered by St. Helen in Jerusalem, its precise provenance is unknown—perhaps a classroom or a cellar in Springfield. But still there was more to come. A graduating class made a gift of the processional cross with an equally vivid depiction of the crucified Christ. Some said that crosses were customary, bland crucifixes were acceptable, but the vivid depictions of Christ's death were best left to Roman Catholics. That kind of crucifix has all the marks of a Mel Gibson production—a bit too gory. With three crucifixes in place in this chapel, the

preachers in this pulpit could hardly avoid saying with Paul that they were determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Another graduating class had crucifixes placed in every classroom. Step by step, trench upon trench, through the incursion of one crucifix after another, the royal banners were going forth in this chapel and Satan was in retreat. The blood flowing from the side of the crucified one was the blood of the Holy Communion, and the water was the water of Baptism whereby Christ incorporated drowned sinners into his body.

Things divine do not look divine to us. For the world the cross is an instrument of torture, but for God it was the moment of glory. "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:31–32). A sweater turned inside out looks different. So what appears to us as the abyss of hell turned inside out becomes the moment of judgment whereby God justifies all men to himself and condemns those who refuse to find him in the agony of the cross. In ordinary history the crucifixion is one event among others, but for God it is the only moment that has meaning, it is the moment without beginning or end, a moment in which the creator sacrifices himself for his creatures to become their redeemer.

No one knows if St. Helen found the wood of the cross. Probably not. Crosses were stakes in the ground recycled for the next waiting victims. Her son, the Emperor Constantine, by making the cross a legally recognized symbol, emptied the cross of its shame, and a cross without shame is no cross. All this is a parable of our lives. Paul found the cross in his own sufferings for the sake of the gospel. We can do no better.

David P. Scaer

This sermon was preached at Concordia Theological Seminary on Holy Cross Day, September 14, 2010, in Kramer Chapel. The Editors

CTQ 74 (2010): 361–375

Book Reviews

***Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*. By Dale C. Allison. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. 588 Pages. Hardcover. $54.99.**

Some New Testament books buoy the spirit, while others rile us up, alerting us to man the ramparts. Allison does neither. *Constructing Jesus* is his fourth, and Allison claims final, book in search of the historical Jesus. Yet, Allison's particular quest is marked less by adventure than ambivalence, leaving the picture of a scholar caught in the doldrums. He frankly observes shortcomings of skeptics like Crossan, yet cannot bring himself to defend the historicity of the Gospels in the way of Bauckham. As such, his work evokes the story of Paul and Agrippa, with Allison playing both parts. Like Paul, Allison is so evidently a man of great learning. Yet, like Agrippa, he is almost, but not quite, persuaded. What Allison leaves behind is the legacy of an honest man who sees others make the leap of faith, but who himself remains immobilized and "haunted by what we now know about the frequent failings of human memory" (22).

What does Allison fear are the failings of human memory? Why have not the Evangelists recorded reliable history? Perhaps betraying his age, Allison notes: "To recollect is not to play back a tape" (2). He goes on to note that later events influence the way we think and that we tend to project our present circumstances into the past. Memories become less distinct with time, and even become displaced, so that we lose track of temporal sequence. Again, memories are collected and then used to serve a collective agenda. Yet, while many of us would proceed with caution, considering these caveats as speed bumps, Allison sees insurmountable hurdles. Memories fail and can be altered, Allison concludes, and that fact "cannot have found its exception among the early Christians" (30). What is strange, though, is how Allison has seemingly brought a very vague notion of memory into the conversation. Allison's thoughts all verge towards the personal and the psychological aspects of memory. He spends no real time taking into account other possibilities. That is to say, Allison neither goes into any kind of real reflection on the power of memorization in an oral society, nor does he take into account that apostles, playing the role of disciples, would have served not only as auditors but also as scribes. Witnesses to Jesus' actions were taking notes, and those notes were not simply mental. Rather than deal with a community that prized precision, Allison imagines early Christians caught in a type of fog. Here again the cliché rings true that a scholar creates a Christ in his own image.

This is not to say that Allison is not worth reading. His chapter on Jesus as "More than a Sage: The Eschatology of Jesus" is fascinating, and debunks any notion of Jesus as being simply adept at the aphorism. He was a teacher who preached of the coming kingdom in powerful sermons. Even better is his next

chapter, "More than a Prophet: The Christology of Jesus." Deconstructing the fantasies of Crossan and Richard Horsley, Allison lays out the evidence that Jesus had some type of Messianic self-understanding. Belief that Jesus came as Messiah and King is due to the fact that Jesus himself encouraged such belief. Now, for most of us, this is a given, but in the scholarly world, such pronouncements are rare and therefore welcome. As Allison elegantly ends this chapter, "We should hold a funeral for the view that Jesus entertained no exalted thoughts about himself" (304).

As for the historicity of the New Testament, Allison offers this insight: as much as modern-day scholars wish to turn the New Testament miracle stories into parables and symbolism, the Evangelists and their audiences believed these stories to be true. Allison writes, "Our Synoptic writers thought they were reconfiguring memories of Jesus, not inventing theological tales" (459). Likewise, Allison agrees that simply because a story is told for theological reasons does not mean that the story is therefore not historically factual. For Christians interested in the story of Jesus as history, these are excellent points, and we should be grateful that Allison has made them.

In the end, though, Allison remains in history's half-way house, neither a skeptic nor a believer. Helpfully, he doubts the doubters, but he cannot go all the way. Thus, he ends his work with this melancholy note: "If my deathbed finds me alert and not overly racked with pain, I will then be preoccupied with how I have witnessed and embodied faith, hope, and charity. I will not be fretting over the historicity of this or that part of the Bible" (462). One would hope instead that on his deathbed, Allison thinks not of his own life, but that of Christ, as told by the Evangelists. Maybe his next book will do the trick.

Peter J. Scaer

***A History of Lutheranism*. Second Edition. By Eric W. Gritsch. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. 352 pages. Paperback. $35.00.**

Eric Gritsch, Emeritus Professor of Church History of the Lutheran Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, first published *A History of Lutheranism* in 2002. This updated edition generally follows the form of the first, though some important changes have been made.

Periodization is one of the historian's great challenges. When did a movement start? Are there specifically identifiable moments in a movement's history when it shifts from movement to institution, when its position solidifies or changes in important ways? These kinds of questions sometimes seem to have obvious answers—who can argue with October 31, 1517, as the beginning of the Lutheran movement? (Of course, some do!) Still, periodizing movements can at times defy simple articulation.

Gritsch's second edition shows that he has been thinking about and working at these questions in basic ways. For example, the first edition's first chapter was entitled "The Birth of a Movement" and dated 1517–1521. A good argument can be made for this arrangement. Now, however, Gritsch has re-titled chapter one as "A Reform Movement" and extended it to 1522. Chapter two was entitled "Growth and Consolidation" (1521–1555); now it is "Institutionalization" (1523–1555). Within the chapters the sections on "The Melanchthon Factor" and "The Territorial Imperative" both appear earlier in the narrative and make much more sense in their new positions. Other portions of the text remain largely intact, the chapters on Pietism and Orthodoxy being examples. Small changes, perhaps; yet making the interpretive historical claim that nuanced readings of the development of movements may lead interpreters to different conclusions—even in contrast to their own earlier-held convictions!

Historical interpretation is one thing; theological interpretation is another—the big question being where does one end and the other begin? Gritsch, longtime professor at Gettysburg, is consistent with his ecclesiastical tradition (ELCA). This, of course, means that at times he sees certain movements and events from a different perspective than this reviewer would. His interaction with Lutheran Orthodoxy and the ecumenical movement are modest examples. His reading of "The Missouri Way" is more problematic. Overstatements such as the claim that the founders of the Missouri Synod "wanted to preserve Lutheranism from Americanization" (197) are difficult to sustain when one recalls that ELCA predecessor bodies like the Iowa and Buffalo Synods were utterly convinced that Missouri was overly Americanized (which, incidentally, is noted on 198). The question, of course, is what one means by "Americanization," and whether that is the most useful way of organizing the story of Lutheranism in the United States. Further, while it is a small error within the scope of a book this large, I am compelled to point out an error repeated from the first edition; namely, Gritsch claims that Concordia Theological Seminary was established in Springfield, Illinois. It was not. Although CTS enjoyed a century of fruitful labor in Springfield (1875–1976), formally speaking the seminary was established in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1846 (it also resided in Saint Louis from 1861 to 1875).

Nonetheless, *A History of Lutheranism* is a useful and useable introduction to the Lutheran tradition overall. Indeed, one of its most helpful aspects is the global thrust of the chapter "New Challenges" (1917–). Gritsch's prose is straightforward and clear. While pastors might find much of it too basic if they have been through a full course of historical studies at seminary, this text would be within the easy reach of college students (a clear target audience) and informed lay people.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

***Christian Ethics According to Schleiermacher: Collected Essays and Reviews*. By Hermann Peiter. Edited by Terrence N. Tice. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010. 772 pages. Paperback. $80.00.**

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the Reformed theologian whose career charts the path for modern and, at least to some degree, postmodern theology, continues to evoke a great deal of sympathetic scholarly engagement on both sides of the Atlantic. The last decade has witnessed several significant studies of his ethics, including works by John Park, Frederick Beiser, Eilert Herms, and Brent Sockness, to name a few. The present volume is more akin to a sourcebook of essays and reviews spanning the career of an East German pastor/scholar, Hermann Peiter, whose careful textual work is combined with the conviction that Schleiermacher continues to be of abiding value for pastoral ministry and Christian witness and life today.

Peiter's German essays are included along with English translations and summaries by Terrence Tice, who has distinguished himself as a leading North American translator and interpreter of Schleiermacher. The entries in *Christian Ethics According to Schleiermacher* are arranged under three general headings: (1) the descriptive character of Schleiermacher's Christian ethics; (2) the Protestant heritage; and (3) review articles of secondary literature. The title of the volume is somewhat deceptive, as the essays cover a range of topics beyond the realm of ethics. For example, there are chapters on Schleiermacher's view of adult Christian education, examinations of various editions of Schleiermacher's works, his understanding of faith, and his lectures on "theological encyclopedia."

Christian Ethics According to Schleiermacher is not organized in such a way as to offer an accessible introduction and orientation to Schleiermacher's ethical thinking. Several of the essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, edited by Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge, 2005), or John Park's *Theological Ethics of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Mellen, 2001), are better suited to that task. Nevertheless, *Christian Ethics According to Schleiermacher* provides numerous interesting essays, taking up Schleiermacher's engagement with recurring issues in Luther studies and Lutheran theology such as law and gospel in Luther and Schleiermacher, Schleiermacher on antinomianism, and Schleiermacher's use of Luther's understanding of Christ as *sacramentum et exemplum*. Also included is a treatment of the essential place of the "priesthood of all believers" in Schleiermacher's theology and his understanding of the participatory nature of the Christian in the life of the church held together by covenants of love between the members so as to make effective the presence of Christ in the world. Schleiermacher's political theory is examined in its early-nineteenth-century context.

While Peiter succeeds neither in rehabilitating Schleiermacher as a theologian of the Reformation nor in convincing this reviewer of

Schleiermacher's apologetic relevance for contemporary church life, Peiter's work does provide much insight into the relationship of philosophy to theology in Schleiermacher's construal of ethics as the presentation of life grounded in the consciousness of the divine.

John T. Pless

World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age. **By C. Kavin Rowe. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 300 Pages. Hardcover, $65.00. Paperback, $24.95.**

For the past three centuries, many interpreters have read the Book of Acts with the understanding that one of its central purposes is the presentation of the harmonious existence between the Roman Empire and those who came to be known as Christians. This position has become an axiom in Luke-Acts scholarship primarily due to the work of Heumann, Cadbury, Haenchen, Conzelmann, Tajra, Sterling, Heusler, and Meiser. Dissenting voices have been few and faint. C. Kavin Rowe, an Assistant Professor at Duke University Divinity School, seeks to turn this harmonious world of scholarship upside down by proposing that Acts is neither presenting Christianity as harmless to Rome nor advocating political liberation, but "aims at nothing less than the construction of an alternative total way of life—a comprehensive pattern of being—one that runs counter to the life-patterns of the Graeco-Roman world" (4). In short, Rowe argues that Acts presents Christianity as a culture-transforming movement rather than as one that is a comfortable bedfellow with the pagan culture, or pattern of living, in the Roman Empire.

The introductory chapter outlines Rowe's interdisciplinary approach: a close reading of the text that features "significant interaction with scholarship on the New Testament and on Graeco-Roman antiquity as well as interaction with contemporary work in political theory, narrative criticism, and constructive theology" (7). His work in interpreting Acts in the context of contemporary Graeco-Roman literature is a real strength of this volume. Unfortunately, much of the interaction with scholarship is buried in the almost one hundred pages of endnotes that one must flip to find. Rowe also issues an introductory warning—spoken to himself as well as others—concerning the ever-present danger of saying more about the interpreters of a text than the text itself. His animated writing style is engaging and his exegesis is thorough, fresh, bold, and says more about the text itself than its interpreters.

Rowe tackles his thesis in three primary chapters. Chapter two focuses on the testimony from Acts concerning what occurred as the exclusive claims of the God confessed by the apostles were proclaimed in the context of pagan religion. Rowe argues that the result was a "collision" between two very different ways of life rather than a harmonious coexistence. He documents this

"collision" by examining four representative accounts of Christian mission from Acts: Lystra (14:8–19); Philippi (16:16–24); Athens (17:16–34); and Ephesus (19:18–40). Rowe demonstrates from each of these examples how the Christian mission process of revelation (or "apocalypse") through the proclamation of the gospel and the resulting formation of a new community inherently destabilizes the beliefs and practices of Graeco-Roman culture and religion. For example, regarding Paul's speech in Athens, Rowe writes: "To agree with the logic of the Areopagus speech in the end, therefore, is not to see the truth of the gospel in pagan philosophical terms (translation) but to abandon the old interpretive framework for the new. It is, plainly said, to become Christian" (41).

Chapter three addresses the possible charge that a movement which destabilizes and transforms a culture could be construed as treason or sedition. To counter such a charge, Rowe argues that Luke intentionally narrates events when these charges were brought against Paul, as the representative of Christians, and how Roman jurisprudence consistently found him to be δίκαιος (i.e., "righteous" in the sense of "innocent"). Here he focuses on the accounts of Paul being brought before Roman officials: Gallio (18:12–17); Claudius Lysias (22:24–23:30); Felix (24:1–27); and Festus (25:1–27). Through examining each of these defenses, Rowe demonstrates that Christians neither were out for political liberation nor did they stand in direct opposition to the Roman government. Although there was a collision of cultures, this was no attempted coup of Roman rule. Instead, the Christian mission brought light, forgiveness of sins, and the way of peace.

Chapter four focuses on Luke's reconstructive counterpart to the deconstruction caused by a collision of cultures. Rowe focuses on "three mutually interdependent ecclesial practices that ground and thus generate Luke's overall vision as it is depicted in Acts: the confession of Jesus as Lord of all, the universal mission of light, and the formation of Christian communities as the tangible presence of a people set apart" (92). He notes that the results of conversion that Luke narrates are not merely an ideational shift in religious thinking, but "a lived way of knowing, a kind of 'thick' knowledge indissolubly tied to a set of practices that are instantiations of a world turned right side up" (6). Luke shows how conversion led not only to changes in thinking (i.e., doctrine) but also practices of daily life, especially the formation of and participation in Christian communities (i.e., churches). To put it another way: "Acts narrates the life of the Christian mission as the embodied pattern of Jesus' own life . . . . [Its] ecclesiology is public Christology" (173). One will appreciate the discussions of κύριος and εἰρήνη in light of the Graeco-Roman context. More attention, however, could have been paid to the role Luke gives to Baptism in relation to the three core practices that Rowe highlights.

The final chapter, entitled "The Apocalypse of Acts and the Life of Truth," is the most unexpected, especially in a book published by Oxford University Press. Rowe chooses not to read Acts at arm's length with supposed scholarly objectivity that refuses to let the text make its claim on the life of the reader. Instead, he argues that to reject this comprehensive vision of Acts is to offer a counter-reading of what Luke has given us. It will be interesting to see the reactions within the NT guild to the contemporary relevance of Acts that he sets forth!

Kavin Rowe is a newcomer to Luke-Acts scholarship. His revised dissertation and first book, *Early Narrative Christology*, has rightly received widespread acclaim; see, for example, the review in *CTQ* 74 (2010): 188–190. Although *World Upside Down* is only his second book, it is a contribution that solidifies him as a voice in Luke-Acts scholarship to which we should turn our ears. You will hear of a bold witness to the crucified and risen Christ that turned a significant portion of the ancient world right side up by transforming lives, and still has the power to turn our contemporary pagan world right side up, too.

Charles A. Gieschen

C. Kavin Rowe is the keynote speaker at the Symposium on Exegetical Theology in Fort Wayne on January 18, 2011. The Editors

***Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God.* By Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001. 527 pages. Paperback. $30.00.**

As the world becomes increasingly urban, workers in the church desire resources to assist them in proclaiming Christ in urban contexts. *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God* by Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, recently reprinted in paperback, is one such resource that is useful for navigating and wrestling with the complexities of the city.

Structured sequentially as a holistic masterpiece but readily accessible by individual and potentially self-standing chapters, this textbook has six parts. Part One presents an historical view of cities past and present. Part Two offers a biblical-historical perspective on cities and God's concern for them. Part Three expounds an understanding of cities sociologically. Part Four is about developing urban church-growth eyes with the social sciences (ethnography and demography). Part Five is a discussion of promoting kingdom signs in the city for reaching people (especially the poor) and working for social transformation in the midst of spiritual warfare. Part Six deals with leadership development for the urban church, including curriculum development for mentoring and training clergy and laypeople.

Geared for work in the United States of America, Conn and Ortiz casually yet cleverly employ a global perspective by documenting developments in cities around the world. By providing an extensive theological treatment of God's ongoing relationship with people in cities, Conn and Ortiz display their expertise in both exegetical and practical theology. Complementing their scholarly and specific yet masterfully succinct and readable presentation is the extensive 36-page works cited section that is an invaluable and unparalleled collection of references for future study.

Urban Ministry would be a primary text for a university or seminary course on ministry in urban contexts. The treatment of the Lutheran understanding of the two realms, however, would be a welcomed theological addition to the rich exegetical treasures examined. Also, a more sacramental understanding of God's work and the church's work in the world would also provide an incarnational and theological foundation that has not been adequately explored. Informing observations with a hermeneutic of the two kinds of righteousness and the relationship between law and gospel would make this enormously useful text even better. As a refreshingly exhaustive, provocative, relevant, and practical opus, though, *Urban Ministry* will serve many current and future urban church workers quite well as both a textbook and a reference book for grappling with the various complexities of and ripe opportunities for ministry in twenty-first-century urban contexts.

Dien Ashley Taylor
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***Who Do I Say That You Are? Anthropology and the Theology of* Theosis *in the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa*. By William W. Schumacher. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010. 203 pages. Paperback. $24.00.**

This book by our Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, colleague in historical theology renders a distinctive service on two levels. First, Schumacher makes a vigorous case for a more attentive and nuanced discussion of theological anthropology amongst confessional Lutherans. Second, he offers a concise and helpful overview of the main tenets of the new Luther research emanating from Helsinki over twenty-five years, examining this scholarship in its ecumenical setting and critically engaging it on the basis of the data in Luther's writings. Both of these factors make this volume worthy of reading and study.

Noting that the last two centuries have witnessed ideological shifts resulting in a fragmented anthropology, Schumacher points to the close relationship between what we say of Christ and what we say about humanity. We cannot know ourselves as creatures without a right knowledge of our creator, which is given only in Christ. Drawing on Luther and supplemented

with insights from Pannenberg, Thielicke, Ebeling, and Bayer, Schumacher urges a more profound, dogmatic treatment of the *locus de homine* in the context of creation over against various contemporary assertions of autonomy. The connection between anthropology and Christology becomes the starting point for Schumacher's investigation of the work of the Finnish School.

Enthusiastically endorsed by Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten, the work of Tuomo Mannermaa and his associates at the University of Helsinki has been hailed as an "ecumenical breakthrough." The major contention of the Finns is that Luther's understanding of salvation is *theosis* as a "real-ontic" union with Christ. Here the Finns seem to approximate the position of Andreas Osiander (1498–1552), who taught that the justifying word is not so much a forensic proclamation as it is a descriptive word which presupposes a prior transformation in the believer whereby he participates in the divine life by the indwelling of Christ's essential righteousness. Schumacher rightly observes that for the Finns, this is not so much a single doctrine as "an entire frame of reference for thinking about salvation" (14). Three major deficiencies of the Finns' theology of *theosis* are identified and critiqued: (1) neglect of the doctrine of creation; (2) failure to grasp Luther's theology of the word; and (3) an inadequate appreciation for Christ's human nature in justification.

There are a number of features of Schumacher's critique that should be of interest to confessional Lutherans. He faults the Finns for pitting Luther against the Formula of Concord, as they seem to bypass the fact that the Formula itself cites some key words of Luther as at least "quasi-confessional" (142). He rightly worries that the Finns, and their American counterparts Braaten and Jenson, are attempting to remodel Luther for their ecumenical agenda. Recall that it was Robert Jenson who said that the Lutheranism that constantly appeals to "Luther (as filtered through the lens of the Formula) has been an ecumenical disaster. With Luther according to the Finns, on the other hand, there can be much systematically and ecumenically fruitful conversation" (Robert Jenson, "Response to Tuomo Mannermaa," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther,* 21).

Methodologically, Schumacher is critical of the Finns' failure to attend adequately to the historical nature of Luther's own theological development. They neglect changes that are evident between the younger Luther (1514 Christmas sermon) and the mature Luther (1535 Galatians Commentary). Mannermaa also gives the impression that Luther's thought was directly shaped by exposure to Irenaeus and Athanasius, overlooking the influence of the later western fathers on Luther's thought.

This is an important and engaging contribution both for Luther studies and for systematic theology.

John T. Pless

***Mark*. By Robert H. Stein. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. 823 pages. Hardcover. $54.99.**

Simply put, Stein writes well, and knows a lot, and because he does, the reader will come away knowing more as well. Among recent Markan commentators, Stein stands out. While not as boldly original as Joel Marcus (Anchor, 2009), Robert Stein's work outshines R.T. France (Eerdmans, 2002) for helpful insight and fair-mindedness. Stein writes in a way that is magisterial without being off-putting, and is a genuine pleasure to read.

Stein approaches the second Gospel from within the Evangelical tradition and takes an essentially conservative stance towards the text. Not surprisingly, he begins the commentary with an argument for traditional Markan authorship. To support this position, he cites Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius, and Jerome. For someone offering a Bible study, this kind of attention to detail is pure gold. Whether or not you agree with Stein on any given pericope is hardly relevant. What matters as you write your sermon is that you now have a conversation partner, and someone who can point you quickly to cross references and note parallels, both from the Old Testament and from the larger Greco-Roman world.

At times, though, Stein is strangely timid. For instance, his overall discussion of Jesus' baptism is a treasure trove, with cross references to all parts of the Bible. Yet, he then spends a very long paragraph asserting that there is no meaning or symbolic value for the Holy Spirit coming in the form of a dove. Stein's explanation borders on the bizarre. To those who suggest that the dove visualizes the coming of the Holy Spirit, Stein answers, "Such an explanation might be useful to explain the 'event' for Jesus, but for Mark and his audience, this would have been unnecessary. The Old Testament does not require such a visible sign for its readers to understand the coming of the Spirit upon individuals, for the texts explain this sufficiently without such imagery" (57). One wonders whether Stein suffers from a lack of imagination, or simply wants the Spirit to come without means. (How would he deal with the Spirit coming bodily in Luke 3:22?)

Again, Stein shows odd restraint when commenting on the Feeding of the Five Thousand. He strangely remarks that when it comes to the twelve baskets of leftover bread, it "is best not to see any symbolic significance" (314). He later adds emphatically, "The twelve baskets do not have any direct symbolic value" (317). To see the baskets as corresponding to the New Israel established by the twelve apostles is hardly a stretch or a flight into allegory. At times, Stein appears afraid or unable to see what is plainly before his face. On the other hand, Stein does note other helpful details, including the fact that the five thousand reclined as in a banquet, and that the loaves, as well as Jesus' actions, "would later bring to mind the Lord's Supper" (315). In short, Stein is good on

some matters, and not so much on others. Given the world of biblical scholarship, I judge a half loaf better than none at all.

Indeed, as one reads, be prepared to be surprised. For those who have grown weary of the New Perspective and its concomitant denial of the atonement, Stein speaks forcefully of Jesus' death as a true ransom. He writes, "The forgiveness of sins, according to the OT, involves the death of a sacrificial victim and the shedding of innocent blood" (666). Such a formerly pedestrian assertion is welcome indeed. Less surprisingly, Stein here and there makes negative statements about infant baptism, without really making an argument (461–462). This sort of thing is hardly worth noting, except to say that his anti-sacramental bias then tends to blind him elsewhere.

Finally, I enjoyed Stein's description of the Last Supper, and, here as elsewhere, I learned quite a bit. His comparisons between the Supper and the Passover are illuminating, and good fodder for Bible study. When it comes to the real presence, however, Stein has predictably little to say, and nothing positive. Yet, he does offer a bit of liturgical commentary: "All drank from a single cup. Although there are hygienic reasons for the use of individual cups in the present celebration of the Lord's Supper, that the disciples drank from a common cup emphasized the oneness of the church as the body of Christ in a powerful way that is lacking in drinking from small individual cups" (651). Somehow, though, I doubt his liturgical admonition will inspire many of us as a call to arms. I too promote the common cup, but would rather drink the small, individual cups with my fellow Lutherans than Stein's big cup that is essentially empty.

Peter J. Scaer

***The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. By Douglas J. Moo. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2008. 471 + xvi pages. Hardcover. $44.00.**

Authors of the Pillar New Testament Commentary series, of which Moo's *Colossians and Philemon* is the tenth volume, treat contemporary scholarship "without getting mired in undue technical detail" (so series editor, D.A. Carson, viii). Series authors assume that the best response to Scripture is "with reverence, a certain fear, a holy joy, [and] a questing obedience" (vii). In keeping with this intent, Moo structures his "Introduction to Colossians" around the following questions: 1) to whom was the letter written?; 2) who wrote it?; 3) when and where was it written?; 4) why was it written?; 5) what is the letter about?; and 6) how is it organized? To cut to the chase: Moo believes that Paul wrote canonical Colossians from Rome in about AD 60–61 to confront a syncretistic "false teaching" at Colossae that denigrated Christ (25–71, especially 46). So, in opposition to the assumptions of most scholars

influenced by historical criticism, Moo believes Colossians is neither pseudepigraphal nor deutero-Pauline: "There is no shred of evidence that the Pauline authorship of the whole or any part of this epistle was ever disputed until the nineteenth century" (30, favorably citing D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* [4th ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990], 576). My summary does scant justice to the care with which Moo discusses the different questions involved and arrives at conclusions that will be most welcome to many Lutherans. While demonstrating an impressive command of the scholarship on both Colossians (3–24) and Philemon (357–60), Moo decides most issues exegetically, grounding conclusions on insights contained in his verse-by-verse exposition of the two letters. Naturally, I am most interested in Moo's treatment of Philemon (Introduction, 361–78; commentary, 379–442). Like most commentators, Moo has difficulty determining what Philemon is about: while not slavery, he thinks "fellowship" (378; cf. Phlm 6a, 17a). His arguments, however, are based on sparse evidence (one brief paragraph, 378). Could we "go Lutheran" and maintain that Philemon really is about the gospel (cf. "The Gospel in Philemon," *CTQ* 71 [2007]: 71–83, based on Phlm 18–19a)? While Moo would not agree, his overall treatment of Philemon has much to commend it.

John G. Nordling

***The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*. Edited by Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 321 pages. Hardcover, $84.99. Paperback, $30.99.**

In the schism of the eleventh century, something new revealed itself. The ancient catholicity in which bishops recognized their fundamental need for one another was tragically lost. Eastern and Western churches would now develop theological trajectories not only in isolation from one another, but perhaps even in opposition to one another. East and West no longer saw themselves as branches rooted in a single vine; now they were separate species whose branches grew ever narrower, acquiring a brittle character. If such a schism is to be healed, then eastern and western churches must engage one another, not merely ecumenically, but theologically. Toward this end, the new collection of essays under the title *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* is a worthy beginning.

The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology offers a rich collection of essays from a variety of authors who share the Eastern Orthodox perspective. Eastern Orthodoxy's devotion to the patristic tradition is well known. This book, however, makes a conscious effort to move beyond a mere repristination of the patristic tradition. The collection of essays is divided into two parts. The first ten essays focus on the doctrinal roots of Eastern Orthodox churches. In this first part, essays cover doctrinal topics familiar to the Western

dogmatic tradition, such as Scripture and tradition, the Trinity, Christology, and eschatology. The Eastern perspective, however, makes itself known in the strong anthropological dimension that permeates these essays. The conviction that the theological description of God entails the spiritual description of humanity makes these doctrinal essays rich ground for theological reflection.

The final eight essays are devoted to contemporary developments in Eastern Orthodoxy. These essays describe the neo-patristic revival that originated in the last century and continues to bear fruit in today's context. The authors of these essays want the reader to view the story of the church's return to its sources as a return to an ancient theological conversation. Thus, this collection of essays strikes an optimistic tone, hopeful that through theological engagement Eastern and Western churches can rediscover a common root and realize a true catholicity.

For this volume, catholicity is the ultimate expression of divine love. This love is located in Christ crucified, through whom God has embraced a need for humanity. By subsisting in this love, therefore, one must see the other—even one's enemy—as a necessity for one's own wholeness. While the reader may not embrace everything that is offered in these essays, an engagement with this collection is nevertheless sure to inspire a return to the sources; and in this return, it is hoped that catholicity may triumph over ideology and that churches, in spite of their divisions, may begin to recognize their fundamental need for one another.

James G. Bushur

***Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*. By James L. Resseguie. Grand Rapids: Baker Press, 2005. 288 Pages. Paperback. $28.00.**

Very few books start so poorly and end so well. Resseguie's work on narrative criticism begins unpromisingly. The author compares new interpretative disciplines to unwelcome guests, interlopers who arrive late to the party and then shake up the old order. It all sounds so new and exciting. But then Resseguie bows to all the familiar gods, crossing off the checklist of politically correct opinions. He praises feminist criticism, which "turns a corrective eye" to the evils of "patriarchal readings of the New Testament" (1). He then pays homage to "Postcolonial biblical criticism," which exposes "imperial domination" and "Eurocentric perspectives that cloud the understanding of the New Testament" (2). Finally, Resseguie seeks to establish his credentials as a hipster, praising deconstructive criticism, which supposedly upsets the "stodgy traditionalists" (2). At this point, this reader was ready to give up on the book. This is the kind of movie I have seen before.

Surprisingly, the book got better—much better. In fact, this is the kind of text that would have been helpful during my seminary formation. For those raised on individual Bible verses taken out of context—for those taught a kind of parody of the *sensus literalis unus*, for those who are trained to see the trees but are blinded to the forest—Resseguie's work is an eye-opener. He encourages us not only to read the Bible more closely, but also to see it more broadly. Having used the microscope of dictionaries and grammar, we are invited to consider the whole, to recognize that the biblical books are more than individual words and verses strung together. Rather, they form a unified whole, a narrative unity.

Resseguie uses much of the book to describe the exegetical role of narrative criticism, beginning with the discipline of rhetoric. For instance, he notes how authors play with verbal repetition to link narratives together, as, for example, in the Gospel of John, when Peter, having denied Jesus three times, warms himself by a charcoal fire (John 18:18). At his resurrection, Jesus invites his disciples to a meal of bread and fish, cooked on a charcoal fire (John 21:9). The meal by the charcoal fire then leads to Peter's threefold declaration of love. In the New Testament, these are the only two instances of the word (*anthrakia*). Viewed with the microscope, there is nothing meaningful about a charcoal fire. Yet, from a narrative point of view, the message is clear. As Resseguie notes, "The verbal thread of the 'charcoal fire' ties the two antithetical events together: Peter's professed love for Jesus reverses his desertion. The verbal repetition clarifies for the reader that denial is not the end of the story" (43). Thus, the evangelist John skillfully weaves together Peter's threefold denial with his threefold restitution. Another example of this phenomenon can be found in the Gospel of Mark, where the "tearing" of the skies (Mark 1:10) links Jesus' baptism to the "tearing" of the temple curtain (Mark 15:38) and therefore to Jesus' death (44). Again, we see how Jesus' admonition "you of little faith" links the stories of the stilling of the storm (Matthew 8:23–27) and Peter's walking on water (Matthew 14:22–33). Other examples of verbal repetition abound.

Expanding upon this idea, Resseguie notes how the New Testament authors make use of themes. A good example of this can be found in Mark 6–8. Within these three chapters, Mark records the two bread miracles (feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand); tells us of a Syrophoenician woman who, when rebuffed in her request for bread, then asks for crumbs; and records an awkward discussion of the disciples who have brought with them only "one loaf" of bread. Again, the microscope of grammar and the dictionary are not enough. Resseguie writes,

> By reiterating the key words "bread," "loaves," or "crumbs" in these narratives in Mark 6–8, the evangelist suggests that the "one loaf" sufficient for their needs is Jesus himself. The Gentile woman recognized

> that Jesus could supply her needs; the disciples apparently needed more time to come to this conclusion. Although Mark lacks John's "I am the bread of life" discourse after the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:35–51), he does not need that lengthy discourse. Instead he has tied together separate narratives with the key word "bread" to form a theme similar to that of the Fourth Gospel: Jesus is sufficient for every need. (48)

This kind of exegesis opens up the New Testament and leads us further down the path of understanding. Extend Resseguie's narrative analysis to the Lord's Supper and we have arrived home. Jesus is the bread, the one loaf, who remains present with us in the Eucharist.

Resseguie then moves to "type-scenes." He writes, "Just as we recognize Westerns or detective novels by their fixed constellation of patterns, type-scenes in ancient literature have a fixed pattern of events" (52). As an example, he offers up the story of Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4), comparing it to the betrothal-type scenes of Abraham's servant and Rebekah (Gen 24), Jacob's encounter with Rachel (Gen 29), as well as Moses and Zipporah (Exod 2). When Jesus meets the woman at the well, we are watching a type of betrothal, as the Jewish Savior comes to embrace the Gentile woman, becoming a bridegroom for the church throughout the world.

Some readers may be nervous about this type of reading, but there is no need to fret. To say that the Gospels are narratives does not mean that they are fiction. They are fully fact, a true history of what actually happened. Yet, the evangelists were also skillful writers, weaving together theological themes throughout their narratives, which come to a climax in the crucifixion. To recognize this fact is to lift up our eyes and to see that the evangelists' history is also the story of our salvation. The evangelists are seers who recognize that God's hand has written the novel of our salvation.

Perhaps a good class in literature or poetry would be helpful for anyone wanting to study the Bible. Doing so would remind us that reading is an art as well as a science. In the meantime, I would urge readers to sit back and enjoy the book. Ignore the opening credits, but then stay and watch until the end.

Peter J. Scaer

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Articles, Research Notes (RN), and Theological Observers (TO)

Book Reviews