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THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE

Matt. 9:35 to 10:15; 10:40 to 11:1.

GOLDEN TEXT:—He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Matt. 10:40.

The Asbury Journal

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From the Editor

On March 14, 2014 the Advanced Research Programs of Asbury Theological Seminary held their Advanced Research Interdisciplinary Colloquium entitled “The Vocation of Theological Teaching: Teaching as Formation.” In line with what has become traditional practice, *The Asbury Journal* is publishing the four papers presented by the doctoral students at this colloquium and focusing this issue of the *Journal* on the formational role of theological education. For our cover image, and for the complementary essay “From The Archives,” I have highlighted the collection of Sunday school cards from the special collections of the B. L. Fisher Library. Sometimes we forget that theological education begins with the spiritual formation of children, and understanding how such pedagogical tools operate is important for this task. The four colloquium papers also emphasize the importance of education in the formation of Christians of all ages. Joy Ames examines the role of Ephesians 4:11-16 as a model to guide teachers, even in mundane tasks such as grading. Applying Old Testament studies, Jordan Guy looks to the Garden of Eden to locate important pedagogical tools for spiritual formation. Jeremy Griffin presents a formational exploration of short-term missions, and Susan Murithi examines the importance of context for theological education in Africa.

In addition to these papers aimed directly at teaching as formation, there is a much wider application of theological education in the world today. Bill Arnold and Christopher Bounds each apply an in depth study of scripture and understanding of theology to current controversial issues within the United Methodist Church. Such material is the result of good theological education, but publishing such material is also formational by adding to the academic discourse on such issues as the theology of human sexuality and potential schism within the Body of Christ. Historical studies, such as Jody Fleming’s work on women in mission in the Pentecostal and Holiness Movement, and Christopher Momany’s work on the holiness theology of Asa Mahan, also help in the work of theological education and spiritual formation by allowing the past to actively engage people in the

present. Theological articles, such as Samuel Youngs exploration of *creatio ex nihilo*, promote ongoing spiritual formation and theological reflection for those further along in the process of theological education. Finally, but certainly not least, is the work of Moshe Reiss, who speaking and writing from the Jewish tradition explores the understanding of the Jacob and Esau narrative in ways most Christians have never considered. Reiss' work subtly reminds us that spiritual formation and theological education also occurs in the field of inter-religious dialog.

The journey of theological education may begin as a child in Sunday school, but it lasts our entire lives. And along the way it forms us and shapes us into the people God desires us to be. Theological education that fails to form us spiritually produces an intellectual form of religion devoid of life and so has ultimately failed in its task. Spiritual formation without sound theological education opens people up to dangerous pathways of heterodoxy, heresy, and/or syncretism. As an institution committed to preparing theologically educated students, Asbury Theological Seminary is also committed to continuing the work of spiritual formation in our students. In a very Wesleyan sense, the heart and mind work together. Spiritual formation feeds the heart and theological education feeds the mind, and both sides are necessary for balanced and healthy ministry.

Robert Danielson Ph.D.

Joy Ames

*Teaching as Formation: The Vision of Ephesians 4:11-16
and Pedagogical Implications for Routine Teaching Tasks*

Abstract

This paper seeks to incorporate the vision of teaching in Ephesians 4:11-16 into an understanding of theological education that involves the holistic formation of students. First, a brief exegetical study of Ephesians 4:11-16 is presented in order to accentuate its vision for teaching as formation. Secondly, the task of grading is viewed as a major opportunity for student formation. Thirdly, an emphasis is placed on hearing the voice of the text for today in the task of teaching the text-based exegetical course.

Keywords: Teaching, formation, ministry, grading, contextualization

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Introduction

The topic of formation within the vocation of theological education has come to the forefront of discussion time and time again as for the last several decades theological institutions have sought to understand how the formation of persons occurs. Specifically, Christian institutions often place a spotlight on teaching as a formative activity. This is due to that fact that as Christians we aim towards one paramount goal: to continually be formed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 4:11-16). As a result, it is my view that every conversation concerning the vocation of theological education and the theme of teaching as formation must ultimately point in this formational direction.

Upon the completion of my Master of Divinity in 2008, Ephesians 4:11-16 not only sparked my passion for teaching, but specifically served as the catalyst for the decision to embark upon a long track of serious preparation to participate in equipping students for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ. This pericope stands as a central part of my personal teaching philosophy and will also be the starting point for the study of teaching as formation here. The purpose of this discussion is to call teachers and students to a biblical understanding of holistic formation as presented in Ephesians 4:11-16. The insights gained from Ephesians 4:11-16 will be applied with a pedagogical focus so that we may explore how certain teaching tasks can be framed in light of this biblical vision for formative teaching. The two specific teaching tasks will be the task of grading and the task of teaching an exegetical course.

Biblical Foundations for Formative Teaching: A Brief Study of Ephesians 4:11-16

1. The *Purpose* of Teaching: Equipping the Saints for Service to the Body of Christ (4:11-12)

In one lengthy Greek sentence Paul names specific gifts including the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. He continues by outlining the expected outcome of their ministry within the church. While persons participating in all of these gifts will work together

towards the ministry which is outlined in this pericope, a specific focus is placed here on how teachers within a theological institution may participate in the ministry outlined in Ephesians 4:11-16.¹ John Stott (Stott 1979:164) observes that the five gifts named here all include in some shape or form an involvement with teaching. He states, “Nothing is more necessary for the building up of God’s church in every age than an ample supply of God-gifted teachers.” This study of Ephesians 4:11-16 particularly seeks to emphasize how teaching involves a holistic view of formation. While much commentary could be made on the nature of each specific phrase of Ephesians 4:11-12, I will focus on giving a brief interpretation of the text in order to be able to comment more specifically how these goals contribute to a holistic view of formation in the latter section.

First, Ephesians 4:11-12 explicates an answer to the why of teaching, which comes in the form of three prepositional phrases. The first two phrases, *πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας* (“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service”), denote the most central purpose of the gifts, namely, for the equipping of the saints for service. The third prepositional phrase *εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (“for the building up of the body of Christ”) gives further direction to the goal of equipping the saints. The purpose of equipping is to prepare saints for the work of service that aims to build up the body of Christ. Therefore, teachers in theological institutions have a specific calling to prepare servants for effective ministry in the Church.

2. Growing in Faith, Knowledge, Maturity and Christ-likeness: An Invitation to Holistic Formation for all (4:13)

Further, Ephesians 4:13 specifies three objectives in which teachers also participate. The first of four prepositional phrases, *μέχρι καταντήσωμεν οἱ πάντες* (“Until we all might come to”), introduces the following parallel prepositional phrases that state three specific outcomes. In this verse, Paul begins to realize how teaching is intended to be formational as he defines the content of what goals we are to attain. Before diving into these matters, it is essential to notice that Paul does not exclude himself as one also working towards the attainment of these three stated goals. Rather, he emphasizes that we all (*καταντήσωμεν οἱ πάντες*) as saints, whether in the position of teacher or student, are to be included as participants in coming to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, into a mature person and into the measure of Christ’s fullness.

First, we are to attain “the unity of faith.” Hoehner (Hoehner 2002:553) notes that the “unity of faith” can be interpreted as the “realization that we all have one faith in the one person, Jesus Christ.” Secondly, Paul adds that we should aim to attain “knowledge of the Son of God.” This phrase adds an emphasis specifically upon knowing the Son of God, Jesus Christ, in the “fullest sense.” J. Robinson (Robinson 1903:254) adds that the sense of ἐπίγνωσις includes the ability to perceive, discern, and recognize the object.

Thirdly, we are to grow into a “mature person.” The phrase ἄνδρα τέλειον has caused a number of interpreters to stumble, as especially Western thinkers tend to individualize their description of the “mature” or “perfect” person.³ The phrase ἄνδρα τέλειον is singular and the immediate context helps us to realize that Paul is referring to the body of Christ. However, even though the collective maturity of the body of Christ is at hand, the body is dependent upon the growth of each believer that makes up the whole. Further, the contrast given in v. 16 helps to bring clarity to the definition of maturity. The ἄνδρα τέλειον is contrasted with the νήπιοι (children) who are confused and tossed around by other teachings and are caught by the trickery of men who are involved in the craftiness of error. Therefore, in this context a part of growing in maturity ought to be seen as growing in the ability to discern the nature of various teachings.

Fourthly, we are to attain the goal of coming into the “maturity of the fullness of Christ.” This phrase elaborates upon the nature of the maturity as maturity is measured only by the standard that Christ has set. F.F. Bruce (Bruce 1984:350-351) remarks, “The glorified Christ provides the standard at which his people are to aim . . .” Verses 15-16 develop this concept by further illustrating Christ as the head of the body. Charles Talbert (Talbert 2007: 116) summarizes the significance of Christ as head in light of the common ancient metaphor of the head and body. He states, “When the auditors of Ephesians heard that the church’s goal was to grow up to the full stature of the ideal king, the Messiah, they would have understood it in terms of communities’ aspirations to reflect the character of their ideal kings.” A brief outline will help us to summarize the insights gained before discussing their application in the context of teaching as formation within a theological vocation:

I. The purpose:

- a. For the equipping of the saints for the work of service (12a)
- b. For the building up of the Body of Christ (12b)

II. The goals:

- a. To reach the goal of unity of faith in one person, Jesus Christ (13a)
- b. To reach the goal of having knowledge of the Son of God (13b)
- c. To reach the goal of becoming a mature body of believers (13c)
- d. To reach the goal of coming into “the maturity of the fullness of Christ”(13d)

III. The results:

- a. No longer children tossed about by winds of doctrine (14a), the trickery of men (14b).
- b. By speaking the truth in love we grow up into/ become like Christ, the head of the body (15-16).

Now, we must take a step further to see how this discussion of teaching as informed by Ephesians 4 casts a vision for formative teaching. In the field of education, formation has taken on a number of definitions. In many Christian institutions, “spiritual formation” has become the buzzword that heads most discussions. However, conversations of formation as only “spiritual formation” seemingly cause dissonance between the academic factor and spiritual factor of theological education or what some have also called the integration of faith and learning. A view of formation is needed that from inception avoids this pitfall.

To be concise, the topic of formation inherently asks one major question: into what are we formed? From this study of Ephesians 4:11-16, I conclude, that when considering teaching as formation, the goal ought to be the formation of persons and communities into a body of Christ that reflects the head, namely Christ. With this vision, the whole person is called to formation and into participation with a forming community. The text of Ephesians 4 undergirds this holistic vision as it exhorts the saints to grow in faith, knowledge, and maturity. This integrative approach to formation

involves a vision of teachers who are formative formers who embrace their own process of formation and also invite students to recognize that the formation of individuals must intentionally involve the whole person and also engage the community. In summary, holistic formation involves a whole person and involves the mind, body, and spirit. As a result, formative education must gear itself towards not just informing the mind but also shaping many facets of a person, even including dispositions, actions/ behaviors, beliefs, values, and priorities.

So far we have explored Ephesians 4:11-16 and uncovered why teachers are given as a gift from God to the Body of Christ. Now, we will attempt to move from the why of teaching and the what of formation to the how in order to address how certain everyday teaching tasks can be transformed into opportunities to holistically develop students as they embrace their journey of theological education as a calling to grow in knowledge and into the fullness of Christ. While many aspects of teaching could be addressed in the following section, I will specifically focus on two aspects of teaching related to the New Testament discipline that I propose can be seen more overtly as opportunities for formation.

Transforming Routine Educational Tasks into Opportunities for Formation

1. Grading as a Valuable Ministry Tool for Formation

As grading often seems like an endless task, many teachers might have viewed grading, at least at one time or another, as the “necessary evil” of the vocation of teaching. Recently, Richard Ramsey (Ramsey 2012:408) has asked teachers to put on a new set of lenses when sitting down to work through the piles of papers that gather on top of the desk. He states, “While the teacher in Christian higher education understands the necessity of grading, the sheer amount of it . . . may tempt the teacher to respond with the word ‘misery’ rather than ‘ministry.’” But, for Ramsey (2012: 408), grading ought to be seen as “one of the teacher’s most strategic ministries.” This door to this ministry opens only when a vital connection is kept between the academic and spiritual in the learning process. The goal is not to learn truth simply for the sake of knowledge but for appropriation into one’s own life and ministry. Further, the view of grading as ministry does not need to contrast the evaluative purpose of grading. In fact, it must

support William Yount's (Yount 1999:193-220) philosophy of grading as a matter of justice by use of "honest scales" and attempt to build upon it. In other words, grading is not only an appropriate assessment tool but also may be seen as a prospective and intentionally formative activity. This view of grading reinforces the integration of the academic and spiritual and does not fall into the trap of interpreting grading in too humanistic of a way, or what Ramsey (2012:417) refers to as a "soft exercise." In summary, grading as ministry aims to be both evaluative and formative in order to inform the student of their current location in the process of learning and formation and also ways to move forward.

In reference to the forward-looking aspect of grading, Ramsey (2012:414) approaches the task of grading as a "ministry of discernment." He offers three specific ministries of discernment including: 1) discernment of the truth, 2) discernment of the student's maturity, and 3) discernment of God's calling. In this paper, I will specifically focus upon the first two and consider how teachers may participate in this ministry of discernment.

Our study of Ephesians 4:13-14 specifically affirms the concept of grading as a ministry of discernment for the purpose of empowering the student to grow in maturity. Because of the Internet, our students today have a plethora of information available instantaneously. In fact, many students are more adept in navigating through this massive amount of information than their professors. But, many are novices when attempting to sift through the never-ending seashores of information for truths that can accurately be supported by scripture. As a result, this discernment process involves both the evaluation of sources in an academic sense, as well as the ability to establish criteria for spiritual truth. Ramsey (2012:414) accentuates that in the grading process the teacher attempts "to lead one to find a hidden treasure through a dense jungle." Furthermore, as a teacher transparently models the process of discernment by evaluating the student's work, the student gains the opportunity to learn from the process and to grow in his or her own process of evaluating information. More specifically, students have the opportunity to see the teacher's model for discernment when the teacher provides detailed written feedback that expresses how one's grade has been deciphered. The process of grading is also beneficial for the teacher as the teacher is exposed to a diversity of students who offer valuable insights that the teacher may not have the opportunity to learn elsewhere.

As the professor hears and dialogues the student's unique voice, the maturity level of the student also needs to be considered. For many teachers it may be tempting to wax eloquent and fill out the content (knowledge) that a student is missing in the assignment. A formative approach to assessment rather seeks to invite students to the process of learning the information and provide feedback that guides the student into future learning opportunities. In this manner, I propose that formative grading is a conversation between the teacher and student that must occur more than one time throughout the semester in order to measure what progress the student has made. M.A. Defeyter and P.L. McPartlin (Defeyter and McPartlin 2007:23) remind us that students often remain unresponsive to feedback when it is only received near the end of the course. Therefore, feedback must be provided as early on in the course and as often as possible if grading is to be seen as a formational opportunity. This engagement allows students to be invited to active engagement in their process of formation and learning. Defeyter and McParlin (2007:23) support this perspective by stating, "If students are active construers and mediators of meaning rather than passive recipients of information, then they have to engage with feedback in a meaningful way so that it can be used to improve performance in future assignments." This approach to grading does not just invite students to be active in their own learning process, but also active in the process of their own formation. When students understand what is needed for improvement, they are more likely to have the motivation to take the steps to make changes on future assignments.

Relating back to Ramsey's concept of considering each student's maturity level, this type of dialogue between teacher and student allows the teacher to learn the strengths and weaknesses of each student early on in the course. This permits the teacher to continually engage the student with individual feedback on each assignment that reaches the student where they are and encourages them to move forward in their journey of formation. Again, formative grading involves feedback that addresses more than the student's knowledge of the subject matter. For example, a teacher might consider how they can encourage a student to apply what they have learned in order to grow in a lifestyle of holiness and Christian character. Or, how might what has been learned contribute to a student's ability to clarify their call to ministry? Adding one further note, even though space deters from the elaboration upon this matter, peer evaluation must also be considered as a part of this process. By allowing work to be assessed in community,

an invitation is made for additional voices to be heard and relationships to be built along the journey of formation. Also, by inviting other voices the teacher is released from being the only voice invited into the student's process of formation. Further, if one's philosophy of teaching supports the formation of both teachers and students, teachers will also invite feedback concerning their approach to the course and be open to making changes that might enhance the learning environment.

In summary, the task of grading in theological institutions has the potential to serve as more than a retrospective assessment tool. This paper invites theological educators to reframe the task of grading by approaching grading as both a means for assessment and a means for formation. As a result, teachers who are willing to provide detailed feedback on assignments several times throughout each course invite relationship and dialogue, which are two essential elements in the process of formation. In other words, when one sits down to begin the assessment process, more ought to be considered than just the final grade, but how to best form and equip each unique student for their future ministry goals for the building up of the body of Christ. Below, I suggest some ideas for formative grading based upon Bloom's Taxonomy. We often use this taxonomy to write objectives, but it is also helpful in the grading process. When working towards providing formative feedback, we must avoid simplistic comments. For example, it is not enough to inform a student that their work lacks analysis or synthesis. Formative feedback attempts to provide students with encouragement and ways to take the next step forward.

Examples of Types of Feedback Based on Bloom's Taxonomy

Level of Bloom's Taxonomy	Possibilities for Formative Feedback
Evaluation	Encourage students to draw conclusions supported by evidence. Also, encourage students to perform self-evaluations (Ex.- evaluating beliefs, behaviors).
Synthesis	Recommend students form a new hypothesis and build a supported argument.
Analysis	Suggest ways to analyze information/concepts/arguments (ex. Outline the argument and notate strengths and weaknesses).
Application	Encourage students to apply the material in various contexts (How does what is learned apply to one's views about faith, family, society).
Comprehension	Suggest ways to succinctly illustrate/paraphrase one's understanding of the information (chart, graph, drawing)
Knowledge	Suggest sources for further study or other helpful learning tools.

Summary of Results of Grading as Ministry Tool for Formation

Teacher	Student
Teacher models the discernment process by providing detailed feedback that describes the evaluation process.	Student observes and begins to establish criteria for the evaluation of information.
Teacher expands his/her worldview and knowledge by hearing many unique student voices.	Student has the opportunity to be heard and express ideas.
Teacher dialogues with student work by providing detailed feedback that is both evaluative and formative.	Student understands the grade and is invited into further dialogue for future learning opportunities.
Teacher considers the uniqueness of each student and intentionally aims to equip the student for service.	Student is equipped and confirmed in his/her ministry calling.

2. Hearing the Voice of the Biblical Text in the Journey of Formation

Now that we have discussed how grading can contribute to the formation process of both teacher and student as the learning community dialogues with one another, I would like to invite one more voice into this conversation, namely, the voice of our biblical text. By inviting this voice, I suggest that we also invite the voice of the Holy Spirit to inspire and illumine our understanding of this text. Those who teach within the field of biblical studies have a unique opportunity to invite students to hear the voice of the biblical text and understand it as exegesis courses are already centralized upon one's ability to master tools for interpretation, including biblical languages and exegetical methods. However, hearing the voice of the text must involve more than a mastery of content knowledge. The text we study has a voice of its own that aims to guide the process of the formation of persons into Christ's image. The question I wish to consider is how to develop a framework for exegetical courses that takes seriously textual mastery as well as invites the voice of the text into the process of the holistic formation of teachers and students.

To state this goal also requires that we pause to recognize what has been the problem in many academic institutions. Specifically, Jane Kanarek and Marjorie Lehman (Kanarek and Lehman 2013:19) have recognized that most seminary professors are not trained to build an integrative curriculum. They point out that "The goal of a doctoral education is not integration; doctoral students focus on a specific academic area. . . . As such, for an academic who trains clergy in a seminary, the contrast between the two worlds of the academy and the seminary can be sharp." Therefore, part of the solution begins with helping professors to build a teaching philosophy that recognizes that the purpose of textual mastery is not for the formation of the mind alone. The knowledge of the text provides the essential foundation for a person's ability to apply, live out, and teach the message of the text to others. As a result much potential rests in well-trained students, as they are suited with tools to evaluate what might be accurate exegesis and contextualization of the text for unique situations. Ernst Käsemann (Käsemann 1980:viii) is famous for stating, "The impatient, who are concerned only about results or practical application, should leave their hands off of exegesis. They are of no value for it, nor, when rightly done, is exegesis of any value for them." Specifically, even though Käsemann's statement might seem to discourage one from application, Käsemann realistically validates the need for detailed engagement with the text before

attempting to apply its message. As a result, much potential rests in those who are given tools to engage the text for interpretation. They too ought to be invited to contribute to the discussion.

Asbury Seminary students will be familiar with the statement, “A text without a context is just a pretext for what we want it to mean” (Witherington 2009:41) as this idea remains a quintessential element in the process of biblical interpretation. The point here is not to diminish the value of assignments that engage with the historical context or exegetical methods, but to invite one to build on this foundation and engage the current context as well. Joel B. Green helps to define the implications of this approach by stating,

A theological hermeneutics of Christian Scripture concerns the role of Scripture in the faith and formation of persons and ecclesial communities. Theological interpretation emphasizes the potentially mutual influence of Scripture and doctrine in theological discourse and, then, the role of Scripture in the self-understanding of the church and in critical reflection on the church’s practices. This is biblical interpretation that takes the Bible not only as a historical or literary document but as a source of divine revelation and an essential partner in the task of theological education. To push further, theological interpretation is concerned with encountering the God who stands behind and is mediated in Scripture (Green 2011: 4-5).

With these words in mind, Green adds that we ought to be prompted to recall our confession that often follows the reading of the scriptures, “The Word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God.” As a result, it is my view that faith-based study must not be ejected from the academy, but find a central place in the academy as scholars with unique skills are invited to not only engage the text with their mind, but also encounter the living God that inspires the text. As faith-based scholars we must not only question if we are not academic enough, but also wrestle with whether or not we are holistic enough in our approach to integrative theological education. Do we let the text not only form our minds, but also our hearts and our hands? This means that biblical scholars must no longer shift this responsibility of contextualization to the practical theology department, spiritual formation department or the missions department, but must join these voices in discerning how the biblical text speaks to us today.

Therefore, as we invite the voice of the text to speak, it is essential that we not only invite the voice of the text that spoke in past history, but also the voice that speaks into the formational process of each student

today. As a result, it becomes essential to create space in exegetical courses to aid students in moving from knowledge to action or from information to formation. This supports the vision of Ephesians 4 for equipping leaders in the body of Christ, and also reminds us of the call to holiness found within the same chapter. Ephesians 4:22-24 (NRSV) states, “You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Further, I would like to offer a few insights concerning how this vision for theological education might find roots within the classroom. Firstly, the sentiment of theological education as formation must be placed as a central value by the theological institution and by each faculty member. Secondly, if value is placed upon this vision, it becomes the role and responsibility of the biblical studies professor to invite students to the process of engaging the text’s voice within its historical context as well as considering what the voice of the text says to the people of God today. Thirdly, intentional opportunities must be provided in the classroom to help students hear the voice of the text and discuss how it may be put into action. Specifically, we might ask what the text means for faith, family, and society. In summary, if one is to have a view of teaching as an invitation to the participation in the process of the formation of the whole person, the application of the text deserves a place within the academic setting and specifically within the text-based exegetical course.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ministry of teaching at times may seem like a demanding one filled with stacks of papers to grade, hours of lectures to prepare, and a litany of problems to solve. But, two major aspects of teaching, including the task of grading viewed as ministry and the task of teaching the text-based course that involves the application of the text, are filled with opportunity to open the door for dialogue that may contribute to the formation of all who are involved. By framing these two aspects of teaching as opportunities for formation, we take a step back from the trees and are able to see again the forest, namely a passion for teaching that aims to equip Christ-like leaders who will in turn participate in hearing the voice of the text for today and proclaim its message loudly to all.

Endnotes

¹ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 543. As only one article is used to add pastors and teachers to the list (τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους) many have argued whether the reference is to one or two gifted persons. Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 284 suggests that the construction indicates that ποιμένας are a subset of διδασκάλους, which allows for a distinction, but not a total distinction. As a result, Wallace concludes, “all pastors are to be teachers, though not all teachers are to be pastors.” Another option is to take the article as an explicative: “and some pastors, namely, teachers.” Space allows only for recognition of the debate here. I only emphasize that both are included in the vision for equipping the Body of Christ, but limit the application of the discussion to the role of teachers within the theological vocation.

² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 552 states that μέχρι functions three times in the NT as a conjunction (Mark 13:30; Gal 4:19; Eph 4:13). Each instance involves the use of the aorist subjunctive absent of ἄν which indicates the indefinite future.

³ Parker Palmer, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2010), 7 recalls the twelfth century European schools which aimed to create the “the good and perfect man” by emphasizing that his parts “were so refined and in harmony with one another that he could make the spiritual journey to God.”

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Jordan Guy

Eden University—Nurturing Life for the Real World

Abstract

Teachers are responsible for equipping students with wisdom for survival in the “real world.” One method for fulfilling this task is to transport three essential elements from the Garden of Eden into the classroom environment. This means: 1) exposing students to every “tree” in the garden, 2) inviting “the serpent” into the classroom in order to make every decision tempting, and 3) reflecting together on the benefits/consequences of every decision. Students and teachers who explore, wrestle with, and reflect on real world problems first in a nurturing community are better equipped to survive and even thrive in the “real world.”

Key Words: Eden, transformation, teaching, education, growth

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Introduction

One of the primary roles of the teacher is to prepare students for the “real world.” Society is a shrewd place with demanding occupations, complex dilemmas, and limited resources. Children are born naïve, so unless experienced guides train them for the task ahead, the chances of their success are minimal. In addition to the home, the classroom may function as a nurturing community in which teachers and students may be encouraged to experiment with “real world” decision-making without facing “real world” consequences. Students are free to consider competing choices, resulting outcomes, and behavior modification in order to determine the best philosophy, theology, and action-plan for their own lives. Such a simulation throughout the students’ and teachers’ educational careers cannot but facilitate holistic transformation. As a result, students and teachers can exit the classroom equipped not only to survive but also to thrive in the “real world.”

The Garden of Eden—Humanity’s First Dysfunctional Classroom

Using Genesis 2-3 as our compass, it is possible to gain some unique insights into the nature of theological education as preparation for the “real world.”¹ At least since Irenaeus (2nd cent. B.C.), Christians have read the Garden of Eden narrative as a story about pre-mature human moral development (Barr 1992:1-73; Bechtel 1993:77-117; Brueggemann 1982:40-44). Although readers have always affirmed that Adam and Eve gravely sinned in transgressing the word of the Lord by claiming a knowledge for themselves that at the moment was prohibited, many have correctly focused their attention on the improper timing and means by which the first couple attained this knowledge, rather than the less certain improper content of the knowledge itself. In other words, many believe that God always intended for his humanity to receive discerning knowledge between good and evil (a preferred interpretation over against a “knowledge of everything”)² to survive in the broader world; but the act of claiming this knowledge for themselves prematurely constituted an act of rebellion, which resulted in an early expulsion from the Garden (Goldingay 2003:132; Walton 2001:166-201). To Irenaeus, Adam and Eve were like naïve children who needed to experiment with natural knowledge and its consequences before they were able to appreciate divinely granted knowledge:

For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.... For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil. (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4:38.1, 4; cf. 3:22.3; 4:38.2-3)

Irenaeus' understanding of Adam and Eve as "infants" who required guidance to reach spiritual maturation is further supported by the fact that God intentionally placed the original naïve humans into a sheltered community to learn how to exercise the divine image before advancing into the broader world. According to Genesis, God planted a Garden near his own dwelling place in Eden and "put" the first mortal in that Garden to "dress it and keep it" (2:8, 15). In addition to cultivating the earth, humanity also learned how to relate to animals, plants, and other humans, how to reason, struggle with desire, and reflect on previously made decisions. Those skills would prepare humanity for advancing God's rule in the larger world (Gen 1:26-28). The fact that "Adam" was created from the ground outside of the Garden (2:8, 15; 3:23), points to his future purpose and destiny beyond the Garden of Eden (Dumbrell 2002:20-22). For just as the river from God's dwelling place in Eden flowed into and nourished the Garden (2:10), even so the Garden's four rivers flowed out into and nourished the rest of the world (cf. 2:10-14). Thus, God's plan was to train his naïve humanity to exercise his image in the rest of the world by first having them practice diligent labor, relational care, and spiritual discernment in a safe, nurturing environment.

The modern classroom can similarly function as a nurturing community to train naïve children for divine mission in the "real world." Adam and Eve dropped out of Eden University, but the next generation of students can graduate magna cum laude. Graduation does not require passing every test but it does involve appreciating all that the Garden has to offer, discerning its most life-giving fruit, and reflecting on and growing from these experiences. These three learning outcomes are borrowed from the divine teacher manual in order that students and teachers alike might

experience holistic transformation. In order to reproduce this classroom, teachers should expose their students to every tree in the Garden, make every tree appealing by sending in the serpent, and facilitate a period of self-reflection and spiritual growth.

1. At Least Two Trees with Instructions, Please!

Could you imagine what would happen if a first-grade teacher was caught storing poisonous fruit in their classroom? Even if no child was exposed to the hazardous items, the mere potential for harm could be enough to warrant suspension, termination, or even prosecution. Yet God, according to Genesis 2-3, intentionally planted a poisonous tree smack-dab in the middle of his infant-inhabited paradise. What was God thinking?! I certainly failed to appreciate the Lord's strategy until I had children of my own. Friends shared horror stories about their infants eating soap, sticking fingers into electrical sockets, running into coffee tables, and accidentally slipping on bathroom floors. After hearing this, I told my wife that we were selling all of our furniture and raising our children in a wooden box. Taylor, however, had the wisdom to share with me a different perspective on danger from Michael and Debi Pearl's book *To Train Up a Child*. These wise parents offer a reasonable argument for why God, when he became a parent, insisted on planting a poisonous tree in his front yard. According to the Pearls, a parent has two choices: 1) shelter their children from danger forever, or 2) intentionally expose their children to danger in a nurturing environment. Of these options, God chose the latter. God lead his infants directly toward the forbidden tree, warned them of its fatal effects, and then allowed them to make their own decisions. After realizing the wisdom of this approach, my wife and I decided to test it out on our two-year old daughter, Abby-Brooke. We led her to every electrical socket in the house and warned her one-by-one, "Do not touch this! If you do, you will get hurt." To our surprise, by the third socket, she turned toward us and exclaimed, "Mommy and Daddy, do not touch these 'lexical' sockets! If you do, they will hurt you." I had never been so proud to hear my daughter tell me what to do; she was beginning to learn the difference between good and evil.

There is wisdom in exposing students to every tree in the Garden, even those that may appear unfruitful, unpleasant, or even poisonous. Proverbs 18:13 says, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly

and shame.”³ How can a student make an informed decision without all of the evidence? Therefore, at the proper time and in the proper way, students need to be exposed to the history of interpretation, controversial issues, unpopular positions, and even dangerous views. I audited several courses with a professor who never recounted the history of his discipline. To an untrained eye, it would appear as though he was uninformed, unprepared, or pedagogically misguided. However, after a little research, I discovered that he presupposed that students only needed to learn what was “correct” in order to avoid what was “incorrect.” Aside from the fact that he was upholding a flawed positivism, the professor’s arrogance stemmed from his under-appreciation of the larger guild. On a different occasion, I asked a seasoned professor if he had ever lowered a student’s grade on a term paper for disagreeing with his own point of view. He replied with a grin, “I would never punish a student for disagreeing with me; however, I have often lowered students’ grades for improperly following the evidence to its natural conclusion.” This instructor never provided a bibliography in his syllabi, since, to him, no other trees but his own existed in the garden.

Practical Methods for Finding Good Fruit on Good Trees

In order for students to be fairly exposed to every tree in the Garden, the professors themselves must first appreciate its beautiful and vast landscape. A president from a successful university says he reads a new book every day, and once a week he reads one that he really does not want to read (Jones 2004). He goes on to say that the value of learning from his colleagues has transformed him into a better author, researcher, and teacher. What would it look like if every professor made it his or her mission to find and adopt at least one virtuous quality from every fellow guide? This might include observing and integrating a fellow scholar’s unique insight, rhetorical style, benevolent attitude, or social grace. Students can do the same in emulating one noteworthy characteristic from every classmate and mentor. This practice facilitates transformation in students and teachers, as well as increases mutual respect among peers.

Raising a child takes a village. Similarly, educating a child takes an entire guild. The Divine Teacher may be able to work alone, but we are not God. Education requires a variety of instructors with unique passions, skill

sets, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds. The closest incarnation of the Divine Teacher in the world today is the union of parents, professors, preachers, mentors, and Sunday school teachers working together for the common purpose of educating humanity. When professors appreciate and introduce their students to every tree in the garden, they earn the respect of their students and colleagues, lay the foundation for critical thinking, and prepare their students for encountering unfamiliar trees in the “real world.” If teachers have not explored the entire garden for themselves, they could be in danger of leading their students to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil while proclaiming, “Behold, the Tree of Life!”

2. Send in the Serpent to Make Every Tree Tempting!

John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* has offered the world one of its most popular portraits of the Garden of Eden. For Milton, Eden was heaven on earth, humanity’s intended permanent rest, without limitation or defect:

Immortal amarant, a flower which once
 In paradise, fast by the tree of life,
 Began to bloom; but soon for man’s offence
 To heaven removed, where first it grew, there grows,
 And flowers aloft, shading the fount of life,
 And where the river of bliss through midst of heaven
 Rolls o’er elysian flowers her amber stream:
 With these that never fade the spirits elect
 Bind their resplendent locks. (Milton 1867:129)

Although Milton correctly highlights the splendor, protection, and unique environment of Eden, his idyllic portrait fails to take into account the less than perfect elements of Eden that heaven itself will not contain, namely: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, carnal desire, and the cunning serpent (Rev. 20-22). The first section of this essay offered a reasonable justification for the presence of the unique trees in the Garden, elsewhere it would be possible to argue that choice requires the presence of carnal desire, but, in the interest of time, let us now turn our attention to the purpose of inviting a serpent into paradise.

Remember the elementary school activity “show-and-tell”? Imagine if one of your friends had brought a poisonous snake to class! Okay, maybe one of your friends did; but what if that snake had gotten loose, or worse, was intentionally released into that classroom full of innocent children? That could have been a recipe for disaster. Nevertheless, this is precisely what God did in the Garden of Eden. Although God knew that his children were naïve and gullible, God allowed the most conniving creature of the field into his nurturing environment (Gen 3:1). God permitted the serpent to offer his children tempting alternatives, primarily to eat from the forbidden tree.

Although the serpent is identified as the Devil in Revelation 20:2, many generations of interpreters before John had to struggle with understanding the serpent’s purpose in the Garden. Even with John’s interpretation, Christians still have to justify why God would allow the adversary into paradise. One possible explanation is that God realized genuine temptation grants life-breath to free choice. For example, before the serpent arrived, the Tree of Knowledge was unappealing and thus not really an option to be considered. However, after the serpent uttered his persuasive speech, the forbidden tree came to life, as did Adam and Eve’s first opportunity for genuine choice.

As teachers expose their students to every tree in the Garden, they must also make sure that every tree seems appealing (at least for a moment). This invites the serpent into the classroom and creates genuine choice. In some classrooms, adversarial positions are portrayed as irrational, unbelievable, and ultimately unconvincing (if they are mentioned at all). *Ad hominem* arguments are sometimes used to demonize alternative views (and their representatives) in order to reduce the potential that students will adopt these positions. Nevertheless, the serpent in the Garden of Eden is portrayed as very rational, believable, and ultimately convincing. God did not call his adversary names or short-circuit the struggling process. Instead, the Lord allowed his little ones to hear the serpent’s best and complete argument, and even make up their mind concerning the validity of his words, before he condemned the lie and its perpetrator. Any serpent that will be encountered in the real world should first be encountered in a nurturing environment.

Practical and Safe Methods for Welcoming the Serpent into the Classroom

One way to invite the serpent into the classroom is to facilitate a passionate discussion among students concerning their diverse interpretations of a particular text or topic. Robert Oglesby offers a wonderful guide for facilitating this type of discussion in his book *Group Dynamics in the Bible Class*. The facilitator (Oglesby's preferred term for the "teacher") selects a pericope from the Bible, church fathers, a commentary, or another foundational text for the students to study and come prepared to discuss in class on the following day. At that time, the text is projected onto the wall for everyone to see. To begin the discussion, the facilitator calls on a less outspoken student to offer their interpretation first (realizing that more outspoken students will join in later). A second student is then asked to volunteer a dissenting or nuanced interpretation of the first position (thereby introducing a second tree and the serpent into the classroom). The facilitator should then return to the first student for a response to the second interpretation, followed by a rebuttal from the second student. At this point, the rest of the class should be invited to join the discussion by offering additional interpretations, nuances, or support for previously mentioned perspectives. Significant perspectives unmentioned by the class are added to the board by the facilitator. Finally, the facilitator guides the class to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of every "tree" and to select one interpretation as the most reasonable option.

This first exercise is perfect for discussing texts and topics about which students might naturally disagree. But how does a teacher invite the serpent into a classroom when students might share a common perspective on a given text or topic, such as the topic of hell? In this case, a good game to play is "devil's advocate." For this exercise, the facilitator divides the students into four equal groups, giving each group a sheet of paper with one popular perspective on the nature of hell. Each group has thirty minutes to research from selected resources and compose a convincing justification for their assigned interpretation of the nature of hell. When time is up, the groups take turns sharing their position and its justification. Students are not allowed at this time to respond to alternative views. After all the groups have presented their most persuasive appeals, the facilitator guides the students to discuss the weaknesses of each position. As homework,

each student should write a one-page summary of his or her view of the nature of hell in light of the day's discussion.

These two exercises successfully invite the serpent into the classroom by making every "tree," even those that were initially unknown or unconvincing, seem tempting. The key is incarnating adversarial perspectives in believable, reasonable, trustworthy, and friendly bodies. In the first exercise, students are compelled to listen to the serpent whose presence is incarnated in the views of their classmates. In the second exercise, students are encouraged to make the serpent's views their own (the fourfold division creates a 75% chance that students will be assigned a view other than their own). Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to be facilitators of self-discovery rather than mere transmitters of information. By asking pointed questions, redirecting the burden of proof to students, and fostering healthy conflict between peers, the facilitator invites the serpent into the classroom for God to accomplish God's formative work.

In order to produce spiritual maturation, the serpent is not only welcome in the classroom but also necessary. Discernment cannot be taught unless there are multiple choices; and choices are mere illusions without genuine temptation. As a caution, however, an unskilled or ungodly gardener could do more harm than good. Additionally, teachers who avoid inviting the serpent into their classrooms are merely delaying his inevitable approach and granting him the element of surprise. What students need are knowledgeable and godly gardeners who know when to introduce the serpent (e.g. not in the first class session) and *how* to illicit his productive effects while minimizing his harms (e.g. assisting them throughout the critical thinking process). As an apprentice to the gardener, students will learn how to see through the serpent's deception and choose divine wisdom in the "real world."

3. Let Failure Foster Self-reflection & Growth

In order to graduate, Bible majors at my *Alma Mater* were required to engage in a mock debate with one of our distinguished professors of theology. I am convinced that this requirement was a contributing factor to the decline in Bible major enrollment that year. Horrible rumors spread regarding the stress, amount of preparation, and feeling of inadequacy that resulted from this initiatory tradition. On the bright side, this experience

changed my life forever; especially in light of what transpired after I concluded the debate. My professor called me into his office for a “debriefing session.” He asked me to reflect on my performance during the debate. I replied, “I performed horribly! It was a disaster!” (In hindsight, I may have been too honest). Realizing I had failed to appreciate the purpose of this exercise, my professor rephrased his question, “If given the chance, what would you do differently?” It was at that moment that I finally realized the purpose of this graduation requirement. We were not being graded on how many arguments we won, but how we adapted to arguments we were losing. Anyone can advance from victory, but only the wise know how to proceed from defeat.

Those expecting to find in Genesis three the origin of all cosmic evil have been sorely disappointed. Certainly some modern expressions of evil can be attributed to the first sin, including: subjugation of the serpent, increased pain in childbearing for women, and increased agricultural labors for humanity (Gen 3:14-19); nevertheless, other hardships, such as ecological disaster, premature death, and violent crime, are not given their origin in the “fall” of Genesis three. Walter Brueggemann correctly observes that the Bible is less concerned about explaining the origin of evil and more concerned about providing instructions for “faithful responses [to] and effective coping” with evil (Brueggemann 1982:41). In fact, Adam may be commended for his faithful response to the self-inflicted evil of God’s judgment. Adam pronounced hope into the world rather than despair: “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all *living*” (Gen 3:20). Furthermore, the Lord granted the couple an opportunity to confront their mistakes and grow from the experience:

The Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Gen 3:9-13).

What is quite interesting about this exchange is that God, an omniscient deity, is portrayed as having limited knowledge or at least using rhetorical flair—asking questions and waiting for answers—in order to prompt his children to take responsibility for their own actions and, through self-reflection, grow from their failures. However, like naïve children, Adam and Eve justify their evil behavior and fail, at least initially, to mature from their mistakes.

Practical Methods for Fostering Self-Reflection and Growth in the Classroom

In order to avoid future mistakes, one must be willing and able to reflect on their past and present actions. One exercise that fosters self-reflection is mapping out one's spiritual life journey. J. Robert Clinton offers helpful instructions for this exercise in his book *The Making of a Leader*. First, students and teachers should identify and list their mentors, gifts, spheres of influence, and significant life experiences. Second, each of these items should be located within the period of the spiritual life journey to which they correspond. Clinton suggests the following five periods: “sovereign foundations” (early years and calling), “inner-life growth” (a period of testing), “ministry-maturing” (a period of vocational training), “life-maturing” (full-time employment), and “convergence” (discovering the perfect match of gifting and vocation). Third, students and teachers should consider how these life experiences and their timings have uniquely shaped them for vocation. For example, Moses's departure from Egypt, occupation as a shepherd, and burning bush experience shaped him for leadership in the Exodus. The goal of this exercise is not to determine *the cause* of each life experience, but its *formative result*; that is who have you become because of your life experiences and *for what purpose?*

A second exercise that encourages self-reflection and growth is called “Note to Self.” Students and teachers write letters to themselves in the name of someone else for the purpose of self-improvement. For example, a student may decide to write a letter to himself or herself in the name of a teacher with whom they struggle to understand. The letter might read, “Students, I am sorry you cannot understand me. I am a new teacher. Please sit close to the front, ask questions often, and talk with me afterward if you have trouble keeping up.” By empathizing with the teacher and creating an

action plan for the student, the note could help improve the student's performance in class. Similarly, a new teacher might write a letter to himself or herself in the name of a struggling student. The applications are limitless—parents writing letters from the perspectives of their children, Christians writing letters to themselves from the Lord, and even individuals writing letters to themselves from their future selves. The process of self-reflection often ignites the creativity necessary to formulate solutions to life's problems and the discernment required never to make the same mistake twice.

Ultimately, self-reflection could transform a moment of crisis, judgment, and calamity into an opportunity for growth. All formation is a gift from God, who is uniquely shaping each human for a vocation uniquely their own. Processing life's experiences, whether they have resulted from mistakes or factors outside one's control, can reveal how and for what purpose God is shaping one for the future. The Lord ministers *through* individuals as he works in them; therefore, it matters who we become (Clinton: 1922:33).

Conclusion

The story of Adam and Eve does not conclude with death in the Garden, but with life in the real world (Gen 4:1). Furthermore, the real world closely resembles Eden—with ground to till, “trees” to discern, “serpents” to tame, desires to suppress, judgments to reflect upon, and God's image to expand (Gen-Rev). In fact, Adam and Eve's descendents are expected to engage in the same battles as their parents, yet without the benefits of the original sheltering community of Eden. Fortunately, God created additional nurturing communities, such as the home, the church, and the academy, to accomplish this same end. As long as teachers follow the divine teacher manual by: 1) exposing their students to every tree in the garden, even those that appear fruitless or poisonous, 2) inviting the serpent into the classroom at the proper time and in the proper manner to make every tree tempting, and 3) reflect together as a community on the benefits and consequences of every decision, both students and teachers will graduate from Eden University holistically transformed and prepared to thrive not only in the real world but also in *this* world.

End Notes

¹ Fewer texts have had more written about them with less consensus than Gen 2-3. The purpose of this paper is primarily pedagogical and philosophical, assessing theological teaching as Christian formation; therefore, the exegesis of the text is secondary and used primarily as an illustration of the philosophical and pedagogical principles herein. For an understanding of my more exhaustive exegesis of these texts, await future articles.

² The Hebrew *הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע* is considered by John Goldingay and John Walton to be a merism describing the knowledge to discern between good and bad choices as in 2 Sam 14:17 and Deut 1:39.

³ All Translations of the Bible are from the English Standard Version.

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Jeremy B. Griffin

Teaching Through Guided Reflection on Short-Term Missions

Abstract

This paper was presented at Asbury Theological Seminary on March 14, 2014, at the Interdisciplinary Colloquium. This work examines the three sections of a short-term missions trip: pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip. These sections have unique opportunities for teaching, and each must be navigated with different types of teaching and guided reflection.

Keywords: disorientation, reflection, short-term missions, teaching, transformation

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Introduction

Many churches engage in short-term missions (STM) and probably have good intentions when they start.¹ Good intentions, however, do not always cause positive long-lasting effects. As Proverbs 19:2 says, “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.” It is not good for a heart surgeon to have zeal and to have skipped classes in medical school. It is not good for construction workers to be hasty in constructing a building and ignore the advising engineers. It is not good for people to proceed on STM with passion and excitement and ignore the different cultural context to which they are going. This verse suggests to STM around the world that respectable intentions are not enough. There must be formational teaching and guiding aspects to STM (Powell and Griffin 2009). This paper applies the pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip model of understanding STM, with guided reflection, disorientation, and teaching being the significant aspects of transformation.

Pre-Trip

People attending short-term mission trips need training through teaching and experience before the trip. Many of them will be at different levels of spiritual maturity and of knowledge and adaptability in cross-cultural settings. Three main aspects of pre-trip training are needed: (1) experiences together for the team to bond, (2) group Bible studies on certain topics, and (3) sessions on cultural studies.

The first aspect needed in pre-trip training is for the team to get to know each other and bond with each other before their trip. Sometimes the team is constructed of people that have never met each other, and expecting the team to completely succeed together without knowing each other before the trip is too high of an expectation. The second aspect needed in the pre-training of the short-term missionaries is Bible study sessions on select topics. Many topics could be covered, but surveyed here are two topics: being sent and serving. The first Bible study session is on the topic of God being a sending God. Throughout the scriptures, God continually sends people. God called and sent Abraham by asking him to leave his home and travel to a distant land. Then, at the fullness of time, God sent forth the Son to the world. God sends prophets, the Son, and the

Spirit into the world. Short-term missionaries should realize that they are sent to participate in God's mission of seeing the salvation of God come to all people.

The second biblical topic to be covered is serving. Many references or biblical characters exemplifying service could be examined, but one only is covered here. Epaphroditus is a person in the New Testament that receives little attention, but is an excellent example of someone participating in short-term service (Philippians 2:25-30). The three descriptive terms Paul uses for Epaphroditus are important in relation to service in STM (Daniels 2008: 21-24). First, Paul calls him "my brother." Paul had difficult times in Rome, and Epaphroditus assisted him in this period of adversity. Daniels mentions how Christian brothers and sisters on STM can encourage long-term missionaries. He says, "Nothing quite hits the spot like a short visit from a truly like-minded Christian" (2008: 22). Second, Paul states he is his "fellow worker," and "fellow worker" applied to STM could mean that the short-term missionaries should not expect a vacation trip, but a trip of hard work with their fellow missionary. Short-term mission workers on service trips should realize it takes great effort to make pathways into new cultures (Daniels 2008: 23). Third, Paul calls him a "fellow soldier." Epaphroditus almost died in his service to Jesus Christ and endured the hardship he faced while serving Paul in his work. This could imply that the short-term missionary must be disciplined, tough, and able to withstand hardships.

The third and essential aspect of teaching to be completed before the trip is for everyone on the team to read *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, taking the values test in the book (Lingenfelter and Mayers 2003: 27-35). After the test is taken, the team leaders should teach three sessions on cultural values, with each week covering two sets of different values. The first cultural session is on time- and event-oriented cultures (37-50) and on the differences between dichotomistic and holistic thinking (51-64). The second session covers crisis and non-crisis orientation (65-76) as well as the distinction between task and person orientation (77-89). The last session looks at status and achievement focus (91-99), and then the concealment of and willingness to expose vulnerability (101-112).

During the Trip

On the trip the short-term missionaries will have many experiences, and they need to reflect on those experiences. Some experiences will not make sense to them, and most days on the trip will be different from their own culture. When people are in a cross-cultural setting in which their present life does not match their own culture, they can enter a state of disorientation. When they are mentally, emotionally, and physically disconnected from what is happening around them, they experience cognitive dissonance. They search for meaning to make sense of reality, and what was previously thought of as normal is no longer normal.

Short-term missionaries enter this state of disorientation and are making meaning out of the experiences they have in the new culture. Short-term missionaries will strongly bond with the meanings they create to make sense of their reality. If they are left to themselves to create meaning out of the confusion, they project their own value system onto their experiences instead of understanding the value system of the different culture. For instance, the short-term missionary sees locals smiling, looking or staring at them and the short-termer sometimes concludes, "These people are smiling at me; therefore, they are happy in their poverty." This interpretation of the symbol of a smile is based on their projection on the smile, while the locals may have another meaning attached to the symbol of a smile. Are the locals smiling to be nice? Does a smile in this culture mean that the locals feel awkward as an outsider stares at them? The short-term missionary, in this case, also projects the idea of poverty onto the local people, when the locals may not, in their own minds, think that they are poor.

Many experiences create a sense of disorientation on the trip: eating different foods, going to a local market, being in the minority, hearing people speak different languages, and not being able to communicate with some of the local people. All of these disorienting experiences need reflection. The team reflects together on their daily experiences and the leader asks, "What happened today that felt awkward? What happened today that seemed out of place to you or did not make sense? Was there a time when you felt overwhelmed?" Some of the short-term missionaries will create their meanings out of these events, while some may not be able to process all of their experiences. It is a pertinent teaching opportunity as they process their disorienting and complicated experiences. The leaders on

the STM and the hosts help the short-term missionaries make sense out of their experiences.

Leaders on the trip should discuss relevant Bible passages with the group about the disorienting experiences of the day. Vital verses to be discussed are 1 Corinthians 13:9-12. Verse twelve says that, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” These verses can show to the short-termers that everything they see, they only see it partially. They see but they do not fully see and they see through a glass darkly. This is a critical realist epistemology

In my experience, it is usually the STM leaders who help the group with the reflection process, but if the hosts can assist in this process, it places the hosts as teachers to the team. The hosts can explain to the team about the hosts’ culture and help them process the cultural differences. On the STM I went on to Jamaica, we had a time of reflection each evening. The group would come together and talk about the events of the day. Most of the team would write in their journal, processing their experiences that day. Some of them struggled to eat the Jamaican food and a few of the events we experienced were overwhelming for them. However, this reflection process slowed the team down, got us praying together, and talking about what happened that day.

Short-term missionaries depend on the hosts to guide them through daily activities and they come to understand the hosts, their stories, backgrounds, and the issues in this local context. Scripture verses that can be discussed are: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 and Romans 12:4-6. These speak about how everyone is part of the body of Christ and how each part needs to depend on each other.

Initial Post-Trip: The Preliminary Debrief

Too often teams come home and never meet again to discuss and pray about what happened on their trip. They may have a short presentation at their church about their trip, which can be informative, but more is needed than a presentation of what happened on the trip. An initial debriefing is needed the last day of the trip or a day or two after the team arrives home. They stop and reflect on their trip and they are asked, “What did you take away from this trip? What did you learn on this trip? How is God leading you in the future because of what you experienced?” If

some of the short-term missionaries' responses are, "I'm so happy that I wasn't born in poverty. I'm so thankful to be an American," or "Wow, those people are gross. I can't wait to have a hot shower at home," then the leaders of the trip need to work with them and guide them to a better reflection. However, if some of the short-term missionaries say, "I was overwhelmed by what I experienced at that orphanage. I think I need to consider working with children back home," or "I never realized it until the trip, but there are immigrants in my own back yard. Perhaps I don't need to go on another trip, but I think I should become friends with my neighbor who just moved to the U.S.," then the leaders can encourage them to follow through with these desires.

It should be noted that when teams go to an orphanage, a red light district, or a refugee camp, they might not be able to articulate and process what they witnessed. A leader on the short-term mission should not push team members to verbally process what they experienced because it may take months for them to adequately make meaning out of their experiences. The leaders on the team should be patient with the short-term missionaries and not expect that they are able to process everything they experienced immediately after the trip.

Post-Trip: Continuing Transformation

After the team comes home, they should continue to meet together for ongoing transformation, reflection, discussion, and prayer, looking for specific ways in which they feel led to live differently because of their trip. If they met together for three months pre-trip, they should meet together for three months post-trip, with this expectation being conveyed before the trip. Meeting together does not have to be formal with a session and a topic, but they can meet together to eat or go for coffee to reflect on their experiences. In this reflecting, they need to determine how they should change because of the trip.

Kolb and Fry proposed four phases where people learn from what they experienced: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb and Fry 1975). The short-term missionaries have the concrete experiences and they step back from their experiences, reflecting and observing them. The reflection is where the meaning is constructed, and short-term missionaries make

generalizations or abstract conceptualizations. They then apply the generalizations or conceptions to their life and the team, and they then actively try something different in their own context. The reflection process plays a large role in positive transformation back home for the team members. As Linhart says, “The learning process could begin at any point, but it generally begins when someone acts in the here-and-now and then reflects or observes the results of that action. Upon reflection a person would arrive at some concept or principle that would construct a connection between the experience and the general principle under which the instance falls” (Linhart 2010: 175).

Here is one example of ongoing transformation after the trip. The first example is a group of women from the U.S. who started a social network through which STM became an avenue for a not-for-profit medical group to continue to travel to Africa. The women saw the people on the short-term mission as “needy,” wanted to care for the least of these, and established this cross-cultural tie. The women functioned as a resource and cultural brokers in this connection (Priest 2009).

In the reflection process, one of the new behaviors that should be strongly promoted is to become friends with, and be with, people of other cultures in their own context. If the “other” culture and people on the short-term mission trip were thrilling and exciting, but if the immigrants in their own back yard are ignored, then deeper transformation has not taken root.

Conclusion

Utilizing the pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip framework with STM grants the leaders and the hosts a helpful way of looking at STM. Each section of the trip requires different types of teaching and leading. Before the trip, the concentration of the teaching is on Biblical and cultural content, and the purpose is for the short-term missionaries to engage with scripture and be more cross-culturally competent as a result of the pre-trip training. During the trip, the leaders and the hosts should guide the short-term missionaries as they make meanings out of their experiences, particularly as they experience disorientation. The post-trip formation is vital for short-term missionaries because what they experienced on their trip should change how they live as Christians at home. If short-termers

are more ethnocentric after the trip, one must take a serious look at how the teams are led. However, as suggested in this paper, disorientation and guided reflection on this disorientation are needed for transformation.

End Notes

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Susan Murithi

*Contextual Theological Education in Africa as a Model for
Missional Formation*

Abstract

This paper argues that teaching of contextual theological education in Africa can aid in missional formation of students, teachers, and their communities. Further, common African struggles are explored as a way of discovering how theological education can be used to address Africa's unique situation. The paper further asserts that the only kind of education with the power to form humanity is the one that relates to them and addresses their unique situations, and answers their questions. To form missional Christians in Africa, we need contextual education in our training institutions.

Keywords: theological education, Africa, contextual theology, transformation, teachers, missional

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Teaching in Africa

In traditional African societies, teaching was primarily done through apprenticeship. People learned many lessons ranging from how to be a good neighbor, have good family relations, hunt, and be a good carpenter. The older generation had a duty to pass down knowledge to the young in their midst. Children were taught how to relate well with others in order to foster peace in the community. Apart from social life, they also learned skills that would help them to pursue a trade or livelihood. During their teenage years, a young person would be linked with a professional blacksmith, or a successful hunter where he was expected to learn through observing the mentor.

In matters of religion and belief, religious leaders mentored young people and trained them on how to lead their communities to God. Upcoming mentees lived with the sitting priests or closely interacted with them to gain experience in priesthood. It was believed that by observing the life and actions of the senior priest, the young learner would be thoroughly informed and also equipped for the noble job ahead of him. Learning happened through living life together in community. Godly principles were taught while working, eating, playing and generally living life. As such, education was more caught than taught. Although the religious leader held the greater responsibility to teach the mentee, the whole community was involved. Thus, there was no dichotomy between formal and informal teaching.

Oral communication was the major form of knowledge transmission in traditional Africa with stories being the primary mode used. This was the medium through which the histories of the people were passed down to the younger generation. Parents told their history to their children, and those children likewise told it to their children. The stories told of the battles they had won and which warrior was instrumental in the victory. They also told about how God had saved them from certain pestilences. These “God stories” invoked trust and worship to the “High One”. Through this method, African theology was preserved for generations. This African way of teaching, i.e. stories, narration, learning in community, and merging of both formal and informal education can also be traced through the bible.

Community Learning and Orality in the Bible

The bible is rich with stories that display the theology of the Jewish people in the Old Testament. These stories tell about the victories that God wrought among God's people. Oral tradition was a big part of the Hebrew bible. There are numerous records in Psalms where songs and stories from joyful communities are used to tell of the victory and love of God. In Psalm 78:3-5 the Psalmist declares "We will not hide them from the descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done." It was the older generation's responsibility to teach faith and religion to the younger ones, thereby making the chain-link continuous.

In Deuteronomy 6:6, God instructs his people to live life in a way that honors him. There was no compartmentalization of secular life apart from sacred life. All life was to be lived in obedience to God's commands and in full acknowledgement of God's reign. Teaching happened when the people sat at home for a meal, or went out on journeys, or took a rest. Teaching took place in their houses and also at the gates outside of the house:

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut. 6:6-9)

In the same way, Jesus taught in the temple and also as he went about the usual business of life. The disciples learned about God's kingdom through their interaction with Jesus. They learned as a community about how to embody the kingdom of God on earth.

This biblical ideal of teaching corresponds with traditional African societies' models of teaching. However, colonial masters introduced new ways of learning different from what African societies were used to. Consequently, the foreign ways of teaching, and the imported types of education have not resonated well within the African context. Coming from another culture, this kind of education only answers the questions of the colonial culture rather than those questions posed by the indigenous society.

African people are thirsty for contextual education that takes into consideration her unique situation. This need is particularly evident in the teaching of theological education. It seems that the theological education offered in the majority of seminaries in Africa has not been able to quench the thirst of the African church. As such, there is a disconnect between what is taught in the seminary and what is needed to do ministry in the churches. Before looking at how to do contextual African theological education, we will explore the current context in Africa, especially as it pertains to the relevance of the Christian faith.

Contemporary Challenges in African Christianity

In order to understand any context, it is important to ask the right questions. For example: What does the African context look like? What are her celebrations? What problems or challenges does she face? How can we address these to enable a more vibrant Christianity? What kind of education does Africa need? What are the real needs and felt problems in the African church? Is it even possible to talk about these needs in general: for Africa and for the Church?

In trying to answer these questions, I have identified four areas that are crucial in many African contexts, and want to look at how these are affecting Christianity in general and the church in particular. The four areas are: power encounter, prosperity gospel, poverty, and HIV/AIDS.

Power Encounter

Since the Enlightenment, the world of beliefs has been shaped by a worldview that belittles the idea of spirits. Those who believe in these are seen as primitive and uncivilized. Hiebert observes, “most missionaries taught Christianity as the answer to the ultimate and eternal questions of life, and science based on reason as the answer to the problems of this world. They had no place in their world for the invisible earthly spirits, witchcraft, divination, and magic of this world, and found it hard to take people’s beliefs in these seriously” (Hiebert 1999:19). This worldview has brought many challenges to African Christianity and especially its mission-founded churches. The African Christian is at the crossroads where the pastor ignores his/her questions on spiritual encounters and yet forbids a visit to the diviner who is willing to answer them. The dichotomy between the sacred and the secular was non-existent in traditional society. This

division leaves the African wondering about the compartments in dealing with one's life.

Pastors trained in many African theological institutions are ill equipped to deal with this issue. Teachings in African theological schools that faithfully follow the missionary curriculum have failed to respond adequately to the person afflicted by spiritual powers. Hiebert shared the struggle he encountered with the Western worldview on spiritual warfare, while he was ministering in a different culture. "As a Westerner, I was used to presenting Christ on the basis of rational arguments, not by evidences of his power in the lives of people who were sick, possessed and destitute. In particular, the confrontation with spirits that appeared so natural a part of Christ's ministry belonged in my mind to a separate world of the miraculous — far from ordinary everyday experience" (Hiebert 1982:35).

The challenge with this kind of teaching is that it loses meaning for African people. People have had experiences with this middle world that neither science nor the church can explain. Science is clearly unable to address this issue and the church is either apathetic or uninformed about it. Consequently, people have concluded that they have to find an avenue that will take care of this middle level.

Meanwhile, the church and the academy are dismissive of the subject. This is evidenced by lack of any mention on the subject in systematic theology textbooks. As such, the African has little use for a theology that says there are no ancestral spirits. Hiebert argues that there is need for "a holistic theology that includes a theology of God in human history: in the affairs of nations, of peoples and of individuals. This must include a theology of divine guidance, provision and healing; of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world..." (Hiebert 1982:46). The failure of a communally experienced faith makes it difficult for people to deal with their prevailing situation. The pastor then becomes the custodian of academic theology while the masses are rife with oral interpretations of which spirit might have been offended and thus responsible for the people's suffering.

Prosperity Gospel

There is no doubt that the Bible promises a good life to those who obey God. There is health, joy, and sufficiency in following the Lord with a whole heart. Prosperity is taught in the bible and is a valid teaching.

The African situation especially, is at a point where people need hope in the midst of poverty and oppression. They need to hear that God will bless them, that God wishes for them to overcome problems and be free from the powers of disease and chronic poverty. However, that is not all that the gospel is about. Prosperity gospel preachers emphasize creating hope at the expense of any other biblical teaching in Christianity. Teachings on accountability, stewardship, and responsible living are deemphasized or not addressed at all.

Zac Niringiye, a Ugandan Anglican bishop, argues that authentic proclamation should only be a continuation of what Jesus did. Such proclamation guided by the Holy Spirit should produce much fruit. He notes that some preachers doing gospel rallies in Africa have had the temptation to present a gospel that does not call for repentance. It is all about miracle working. Although this may indicate that the preacher is succeeding in creating a scenario where problems are solved in magic-like style, it misses the power of the gospel that calls people to a different kind of life that is more concerned with glorifying God and fostering a deep relationship with a holy God. He further asserts that the community that is called into the body of Christ needs to be itself good news. It becomes good news by the way it lives, which should be so impactful that it draws others into itself (Niringiye 2008:17-18). The prosperity gospel is therefore not false so much as it is incomplete. Such a deficient gospel is toxic for Africans and should be a concern of all who hope to present an unadulterated gospel of God's kingdom. The toxic effect of individualistic wellbeing, rather than communal welfare, is antithetical to Christ's example.

Poverty

The rates of unemployment are at an all time high in Africa. Many people lack any means of earning an income, which ends up creating a high percentage of poor people. Bad leadership and dictatorial governments with officials whose main concern is amassing wealth for themselves from public coffers has left the citizens poorer than ever before. The situation is so prevalent that many have resigned themselves to embrace poverty as their only way of life and their destined fate. This has been fanned further by an individualistic mindset that does not concern itself with the welfare of "others". Pastors with little or no knowledge about development and poverty eradication do not bother themselves with helping the church to care for the "least of these". The story of Lazarus and the rich man was

used by Jesus to condemn apathy towards the marginalized. The problem with the rich man was not his wealth, rather, it was his choice to cushion himself and become completely insensitive to the suffering poor man at the gate. The African church needs a lasting response to the plight of the poor.

J.N.K. Mugambi a Kenyan theologian, is strongly concerned by how poor Africa has remained despite its growing number of Christians. He argues, “During the past thirty years, the economy of Africa has deteriorated at the same inverse proportion as church membership has grown. The more Christian the continent becomes, the more pauperized it is increasingly becoming. Is this a fact for Christians to rejoice about? If not, it is a challenge, which we have to take seriously” (Mugambi 1998:357). The task is to ask ourselves how well we have prepared our leaders so that they will be equipped to deal with this pertinent issue. “Poverty affects the whole person, whole families and whole communities. It is the root cause of many injustices and much violence. Poverty should become a central concern of every theological institution in the African continent” (Njoroge 2004:99). The African traditional worldview was more engaged with caring for the vulnerable people in the community. Their driving philosophy was what John Mbiti talks about, “I am because you are, and because I am therefore you are.”

HIV/AIDS

HIV is ravaging many communities in Africa. The big question that African Christian leaders should ask themselves is what should be their response to HIV and its twin diseases of stigma and alienation? In fact, it has been said that the disease that kills HIV infected people is not the disease itself, rather it is the aspect of being cut off from the community. This is coupled with negative judgment and stigma. Some people still view AIDS patients as immoral people, because HIV is supposedly only a disease of sexual promiscuity resulting in ostracism of the patients. Some people justify their actions by attributing the disease to divine punishment for immoral living. This is a faulty theology that presupposes that all who get infected must be sexually promiscuous people. In many cases, HIV infected people are innocent victims. However, even if the infected people were immoral, society needs to realize that we are all sinners and thus in need of God’s grace. God has loved us in our iniquities.

Peter Mageto observes, “HIV/AIDS offers an opportunity for Christian theology in Africa to engage with questions of sex, disease and

death that have troubled all peoples” (Mageto 2004:151). Christian theology needs to address the issues that ail the people in society. It should seize the unfortunate opportunity of disease and be a witness to God’s healing power and love for those cast out to the margins of society.

How Does Contextual Education Facilitate Formation

Education in Christianity has been categorized as Christian formation, spiritual formation, or missional formation. Christian Education hopes to create either one or all three forms of formation. Indeed, all of these formations aim at one goal; molding Christ-like behavior in believers. As they learn from the example of Christ, the sanctification process leads them towards the *Imago Dei*. The *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* defines learning as “the permanent change in behavior” (Scorgie 2011:677). People are always learning, and as such they keep on changing. Growth in Christianity does not happen overnight; rather it is a process that can be slow but sure. Paul Hiebert writes about moving away from a bounded set mentality to that of a centered set (Hiebert 1983). The important thing is that we are moving towards being more like Christ. This is the essence of Christian formation.

According to English, “Inquiring into the process of learning involves uncovering the discontinuity, disruptions and interruptions constitutive of learning, and the perplexity, frustration and irritation that characterize the learners” (English 2010:76). Theological training in Africa must recognize its discontinuity with education that does not respond to her needs, because it does not provide the formation needed. A foreign approach to education lingers on but does not penetrate deep enough to cause change. The fundamental values and worldviews are what change people either positively or negatively. They determine the direction that people follow. “To undergo a perspective transformation, it is necessary to recognize that many of our actions are governed by a set of beliefs and values which have been almost unconsciously assimilated from the particular environment” (Kinchin and Miller 2012:119 quoting Kember, Jones, et al. 1999). Change in people is inevitable, but the course they take is determined by foundational values in their lives. Contextual education takes seriously the needs of the people. It cannot afford to be generic. It is specific, strategic, and intentional. Education brewed in a context penetrates

people's consciousness and their souls, to the place where transformation begins to happen. For example, if one learns about a God who is willing to heal their diseases and save them from oppression, they will take the teachings of this God to heart and follow him in obedience.

The Incarnation as our Model for Contextualization

God is the chief contextual teacher, because God has always sought to teach humanity about who God is. God's desire is that we may not only know God, but also get the meaning of human life. God in Jesus Christ uses himself as a powerful teaching aid hanging on the cross while declaring undying love for humanity. Additionally, Jesus came to the world to help humans understand divine things. The incarnation was the ultimate contextualization. Jesus came to encounter humanity as a particular person: a male Jew in Palestine, and at a particular time. Jesus used miracles, parables and simple stories to help people understand matters of the kingdom.

The Holy Spirit took the role of our teacher when Jesus left earth. Jesus promised to leave his disciples with a helper who will teach them all things. At the time of Jesus' resurrection, Mary realizes that the man she had supposed to be the gardener near the tomb was actually her Lord and friend, Jesus. She exclaims "Rabbon," (which is Aramaic for teacher). It is important to note that Jesus had been many things to Mary; He had delivered her from demons, been her friend and her Lord. Yet the title that comes to Mary's mind at a subconscious prompting is "teacher." This shows that Jesus was a very impacting teacher. Mary remembered him for his teaching. He is indeed the chief teacher.

As theological educators, we are to join with Christ in this noble ministry and help people to find meaning in life through our teaching. God is our mentor in contextual teaching. He is leading in this path, as he knows it is the way by which we will form a community of disciples. He has set the example on how we need to teach, and we are to diligently follow him in his mission. The theological educator is therefore a channel through which God forms the student. God the great contextual teacher became incarnate to fit in a particular context. This is what enabled regular fishermen to be formed into the likeness of Christ. When people develop a heart for Jesus, they will not rest until the whole community can say "thy Kingdom come."

Way Forward: The Role of the Teacher in Formation Through Contextual Education

In the first part of this section, I want to address not only what the teacher does, but also what the institution in which he/she teaches will do, in moving towards contextual education. The two parties are crucial because the inefficiency of one affects the other in critical ways. This is in consideration of the fact that a teacher may desire to do incarnational teaching, but then their efforts would be strangled by structural ineffectiveness, and vice versa.

Theological institutions have a God-given mandate to provide direction in Christian teaching. These institutions can figuratively be referred to as the factories where Christian leaders are made. Pastors, evangelists, missionaries and sometimes- lay leaders pass through these institutions for at least three years to be prepared for the ministry. This is a great task that should be taken with the seriousness it deserves. If these leaders are not relevantly prepared, they go to the field and do more damage than good. The community that is looking up to them as resource people end up being disappointed.

It would be inaccurate to argue that the theological training in many African seminaries today is foreign and of no use at all. In fact, Western theology has shaped many African theologians in contemporary times. Most of Africa's celebrated theologians received their education in African schools that taught purely imported theology by Western professors. Others benefited from scholarship funds from the West and even attended Western institutions for their training. For this, the African church is grateful. In fact, this very education has shaped the thinking of many theologians who are now leaders in many African churches. However, time is ripe for African theology to answer African questions, thus solving the problems that are deeply felt by the people that it seeks to serve. The following are propositions of different ways through which the academy would offer contextual Christian theological education in Africa to ensure more vibrant Christ-like communities.

Communal Education Through Engaging the Masses

For a teacher to facilitate contextual education, he/she needs to listen to the theology that comes from the people on the ground. Contextual theology cannot be formulated from academies that are oblivious to the

people at the grassroots. The teacher as a theological educator needs to learn from the people which issues concern them. As the saying goes, it is the wearer of the shoe who knows where it pinches most. The masses that are ministered to by the clergy and missionaries who are trained in the academy can be a great resource as to what is missing. Learning in community and through community is a biblical model that should not be ignored. God has made people as relational beings and what he seeks to establish on earth is a kingdom community rather than pious disconnected individuals.

Teachers need to engage the community in helping shape theology. For example, students should intern in HIV support group centers where they can deal with their flawed theologies and prejudices before moving out to the community. Pastors trained in this way are profoundly formed to be missional in their contexts. This interaction does not only dismantle prejudices, it also gathers grassroots theology that is needed for the teacher to know how to formulate his/her content. In addition to gathering relevant grassroots theology, the teacher becomes aware of what is happening in the community and how God is working in the particular situation. This awareness brings awe and adoration as the teacher realizes that he/she is a partner with God in the *Missio Dei*. His/her role is drastically changed from that of a knowledge disseminator to Christ's change agent in the world.

As much as grassroots theology is very crucial, it is important to recognize that there are those fundamental doctrines and teachings that are non-negotiable. Those are the doctrines that unite us, as the body of Christ in the world and cannot be ignored. Consequently, not all grassroots theologies are valid and theological educators are responsible for offering direction in those areas. However, they cannot pretend to play deaf to the voices from the masses. Additionally, engaging the hermeneutical community that listens to the African teachers and offers feedback from global cultures is inevitable as advocated by the great 20th century missiologist, Paul Hiebert.

Relevant Curriculum

The theological educator should develop a curriculum that includes theory and praxis. To achieve this, the teaching space does not need to be confined to the classroom on campus. I realize that supervised ministry is supposed to offer this contact, yet supervised ministry is treated as a separate experience that happens after class is done. Because the sitting

pastor determines the learning experiences and may not stimulate critical thinking, the mentee is not usually afforded unconventional opportunities. What would it mean if students went to these practical classes outside the seminary, in orphanages and rehabilitation centers, as participant observers to establish not only what is happening, but also what is missing? Teachers need to challenge students to be critical thinkers who participate in solving problems that the African Christian society wrestles with. What if stimulating a keen eye and critical observation becomes part of the student learning objective that the educator has set?

Secondly, theological educators should seek to design and teach courses according to need. For example, why should students study language for six semesters when that is not their specialization? What differences would we observe if those many language class hours were reduced to create space for courses such as development and poverty reduction, or power encounter in missions? It should be noted that the idea is not to eradicate study of biblical languages or traditional courses that have always been offered in seminary on dogma. No, they are very important. But so are the other courses, especially those that are directly addressing the needs of the African context.

Role Modeling

The teacher is a role model of Christian formation. He or she is aware of his/her partnership with God in creating an alternative community in the world. As such, the teacher invites students to his/her life in the same attitude that Paul had when he said, "Imitate me even as I imitate Christ." Students should learn what the *Missio Dei* entails by looking at the teacher's life. The realization by the teacher that they are being imitated as role models of the faith will help them to be authentic imitators of Christ. Jesus' disciples learned the essentials of kingdom business by living life together with the master. The teacher becomes aware of the great impact he/she has in forming students' lives, creating a great impact in the teacher's life as well.

The teacher is a powerful teaching aid. There are no divisions between where sacred life starts and where it ends. Life is integral and as such, a teacher is always teaching. When he/she becomes involved in projects to serve the community, or engage in training leaders in the churches, or serve in beginning income-generating projects for orphans, the student is learning how to have a heart for the kingdom.

Additionally, a teacher who respects the student's worldview just like Christ did, and enters their context, embodies the gospel in very profound ways. Acknowledging the students' experiences makes the teacher privy to the experience of the students' community of origin. This enables the teacher to plan better on how to train the student to impact the community. Ultimately, both the trainer and the trainee are transformed.

Use of African Arts

Theological educators need to recognize that people are spiritually formed when they pray and worship God in their heart languages. By heart language, I mean the language of praise, the body language of dance, and the communal language of laughter. The African continent is endowed with a great artistic culture. It is a disservice to the community when this rich culture is not incorporated in the people's worship. Musa Dube argues for the need to study how the bible can be interpreted through crafts, songs, art, and dance in theological institutions. Christians already display their love for these artistic expressions in worship services. For example, stories feature a lot in African churches' testimonies. They tell of what great deeds God has wrought. Lay church members crave the orality practiced by African tradition and also by people in ancient biblical times. But a solid theology is yet to be developed in Africa's teaching institutions (Dube 2004:60). This would foster an intentional approach toward learning to appreciate our gifts, talents, and heritage.

Traditionally, worship for the African did not involve a silent prayer in the soul; it was a worship incorporating the whole body. Thus it was not strange to see dancing, clapping, jumping, in laughter and in tears, with emotion and passion, all constituting a worship event. LeMarquand agrees with the argument on the importance of Africa's artistic culture. He tells of how an African proverb helped him understand a biblical passage in a very intense way. He demonstrates that it is important not only for Africa, but for the whole world, in their endeavor to understand scripture. He points out that, "In many ways African culture and African experience can help the church around the world to understand the bible. But how can the rich biblical insights which Africa can provide become a part of the genetic code of our theological colleges" (LeMarquand 2004:82).

Contextual education therefore, is not going to be achieved through the teacher adding a little piece of our African heritage here and there. Rather the teacher will fashion the course in such a way that the very

DNA of its essence is true to its culture. This will in turn ensure that the people own the faith as authentically relevant to them. There is a deeper connection in worshipping God using the heart language, ways that are traditionally accepted as a means of reaching the divine as long as they are not portraying dangerous theology. This is what true Christian formation in Africa entails.

Hear the African Voices

Theological educators in Africa need to develop a theology hewed from the African soil. In addition to listening to grassroots theology, they also need to hear African scholars. Studying Paul Tillich and Karl Barth is good for African theological students. It helps them come in contact with some of the greatest minds in theology and global Christian history. But theological education in Africa is not complete until the students study John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Philomenah Mwaura, Mercy Aduyoye, Lamin Sanneh, Ogbu Kalu, J.N.K Mugambi, Peter Mageto, Saneta Maiko, Kwabena Asamoah Gyandu, Tite Tienou, Desmond Tutu, Esther Mombo, and many more like these.

One may wonder, what effect does educating our teachers outside of Africa bring? Does this argument not suggest that teachers should only be trained in Africa using African literature and theology? In fact, studying in Western theological seminaries does not make one cease to be an African theologian. The exposure and diversity they encounter in other countries opens their eyes to see the bigger picture of the gospel. They realize that Jesus does not require them to forsake their identities in order to follow him. They also realize that missing the African story in the global Christian story makes it deficient. Ironically, the most authentic African scholarship that I have interacted with in terms of published work has happened in schools outside of Africa. My argument is that the same kind of exposure should happen back in the African continent too. The great minds of Africa have something important to contribute to both African and world Christianity, because without them the whole story is not heard.

Andrew Walls tells of an imaginary group of people in a theater that he calls the "Human Auditorium." People seated in different parts of the theater will see different things from those in another part. Some will see more than others. Those in the balcony will have clear sight of some scenes and not of others. What one sees is affected by where he/she is seated (Walls 2002:43). Global Christianity needs to hear African voices, but even

more so, African Christianity needs to hear her own voices. Theological training in Africa, or for ministry in Africa, that does not feature African scholars is simply incomplete and consequently does not enable positive formation. By this, I do not mean adding a book or two to the required list. What I advocate is having African writers occupy a meaningful portion of the required readings.

Proactive Development of Healthy Theology

Theological educators need to be on the forefront in creating orthodox theology rather than waiting until the wrong one is displayed and then fighting it. Taking the example of prosperity gospel, many teachers of Christian education encountered it in its early stages, but did not think it would get very far. Teachers have a calling to correct heresy and ground society in the correct theology. People need to know that our hope in God is coupled with a responsibility; it is a hope that fosters resilience and it is a hope in obedience. When the prosperity gospel proclaims nothing but material wealth and health as the full gospel, it needs to be named as the lie it is. The church and the academy should be “consciously cultivating a desire for God as more authentic than our desire for things, which is a crucial antidote to the idolatry of brands, commercial domination, and material hopes and dreams that too often dominate the hearts and minds of the culture, including God’s people” (Elliott-Hart 2013:134). The African church should remember her calling to be an alternative community exemplifying kingdom values of love of neighbor and God.

Theological educators are called upon to challenge the prevailing falsehood in half-truths that are disastrous for the Christian faith. Unfortunately, some of these false preachers know no other gospel. They are either not trained or faultily trained and immature in faith. The teacher will remind his/her students specifically, and society in general, that true discipleship bids us to follow not only Jesus the savior but also Jesus the Lord. In the prosperity gospel arena, people are following the savior, healer, provider and not the Master, Lord and God of the universe.

Conclusion

The teacher of theological education in Africa has a difficult task ahead. It is a task to join the contextual God to further His incarnational ministry. This will be achieved through the teaching of contextual

education, a teaching that invites all God's children as equal participants into the theological discussion. God's mission is happening in community, as we live life. It is happening through both oral and written theologies. It respects peoples' contexts and worldviews, and yet challenges them to an alternative lifestyle and a higher calling as it embraces the eternal truths of God's kingdom. It is in this noble call that the teacher joins God to form both students and the community at large for achieving the kingdom goal. Consequently, the teacher is not left untouched by the same transforming truth.

As demonstrated in this paper, the only way to form people in a godly lifestyle is to enter their contexts and see the world through their eyes. Theological educators are not pie-in-the-sky pointers who are not in tune with every day struggles of the people. Theological educators in Africa in the twenty first century have a divine duty to address the issues with which Africans are contending. This venture will in turn produce strong, grounded believers on fire for a God who knows them and meets them where they are. Only then will the whole community of faith join God in the *Missio Dei* and with one voice declare; "Thy Kingdom Come"!

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Bill T. Arnold

*Lessons of the Jerusalem Council for the Church's Debate
over Sexuality*

Abstract

In the contemporary issue of same-sex marriage within the United Methodist Church, the Jerusalem Council's decision-making process to include Gentiles in Acts 15 has been appealed to as a model for the church to redefine and reshape its current interpretation of scripture. This article demonstrates how the hermeneutical approach of the Jerusalem Council, which made use of Old Testament understandings of Torah-authority, especially using Leviticus 17-18, did not aim to redefine or change the meaning of the Torah, but to use it for guidance and direction. Applying such a method to the current issue of same-sex marriage would be incompatible with this hermeneutical decision-making process of the early Church.

Keywords: Jerusalem Council, decision-making, Church, Torah, hermeneutics, homosexuality

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“To require of Gentile Christians obedience only to the four commandments which the Law itself imposes on them is not to set aside the authority of the Law but to uphold it.”¹

The United Methodist Church is deeply divided over same-sex practices. Church trials for ministers who have performed same-sex weddings against the express intent of church discipline and polity threaten to tear the church apart. Bishop Sally Dyck offered the following comments last November to members of her annual conference.

In Acts 15, the early church found itself in a conflict over the law as well as accepted and deeply held assumptions and traditions about who people are (circumcised or uncircumcised). It was a visceral reaction by some against Paul and others who were reaching out to the (uncircumcised) Gentiles. They stood on the side of the law but the church found a way to be together that seemed to work. I don't think it changed all the hearts and minds of the Jewish Christians but at least it wasn't impeding the outreach to the Gentiles. (Please read the chapter to see what they did and how they did it.) ... I will be announcing in the near future some evening, open gatherings where we can discuss how we can reframe this conversation, based on Acts 15.²

Was the problem addressed by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 “a conflict over the law” as Bishop Dyck suggests? Is the process for decision-making in Acts 15 helpful for our current impasse? It has long ago been questioned whether the analogy with first-century Christians in Acts 15 is appropriate or pertinent enough to override all other factors in the debate.³ Indeed, the analogy is *prima facie* dubious because the Jerusalem Council was considering the nature of salvation itself while the current debate is over an attempt to redefine Christian sexual ethics. Nevertheless, because the Council has been used so frequently in recent discourse especially in the popular media, I turn to a fresh examination of the details of Acts 15 in order to explore its message and possible contributions to the church's current debate over same-sex practices. Has it been accurately used in the debate? If not, what then are the lessons of Acts 15 for today's debates?

In an article entitled “Welcoming in the Gentiles: A Biblical Model for Decision Making,” Sylvia C. Keesmaat traces a number of dynamics involved in making the decision to include the Gentiles in the church.⁴ She concludes that “the central importance of hospitality” drives the narrative,

providing the background for the kinds of new friendships (such as Peter and Cornelius) making it possible for the Christian leadership in Jerusalem to hear each other and discern the voice of the Holy Spirit. The result was a ruling against Pharisaic Christians who argued that circumcision was required for Gentile believers, even though their argument appeared to have both scripture and tradition on their side. Keesmaat relies heavily from time to time on the older work of Luke Timothy Johnson, so my comments here will occasionally address his arguments as well.⁵

1. The Bible as Unfinished Drama or Unfinished Authority?

Keesmaat begins by raising the question of the nature of the Bible and its authority (pages 30-34). Her answer acknowledges diverse genres in the Bible, but relies on her doctoral supervisor, Professor N. T. Wright, in asserting that scripture “comes to us overwhelmingly as a narrative” (31). She emphasizes that the narrative is “an unfinished drama,” and that “we are in the middle of it.” With Wright, Keesmaat avers that, in order to live faithfully in the drama, we Christians today need (a) to be faithful to the story that preceded us and (b) to be creative in our living of the story. Christian integrity requires both fidelity to and creativity from the biblical drama. By the latter, Keesmaat means primarily the ability to discern how the biblical drama unfolds in new cultural situations, and in the light of new workings of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely this struggle for integrity that engaged the church at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

Of course, Wright’s “unfinished drama” is widely accepted and used today, and this is not the place to explore further its implications.⁶ For our purposes, it is enough to note here that Keesmaat simplistically equates the unfinished *drama* with an unfinished *authority*. What I mean by this is that she has assumed a position that Wright himself has critiqued in J. D. G. Dunn’s approach; that is, as a “cavalier freedom” in the way Christians approach the text. Dunn argued that Jesus and Paul treated the Old Testament with a cavalier freedom, and so we are free to do the same with the New Testament. Wright objected that Dunn’s approach is anachronistic because we are still living in the unfinished drama of the New Testament period, whereas Jesus and Paul were living in a different dispensation (for lack of better word). He objects further that Dunn’s approach is simplistic because it fails to appreciate fully the foundations upon which Jesus and Paul reacted as they did to the Old Testament proscriptions, such as circumcision and food laws.⁷ I believe Wright’s criticisms of Dunn are

correct, and should be applied here precisely to Keesmaat's understanding of the unfinished drama and unfolding authority of the Bible.

The description of the Bible as an unfinished drama is a useful metaphor. But the degree to which we emphasize our creativity in continuing the Bible as an unfinished authority for our day is open for critique. Clearly, when the church begins to consider itself determinant in the process, creating a new authority that overturns scripture and tradition, one can raise an objection that the church has turned the Bible into nothing more than an historical witness to God's redemptive activity in the past rather than an acting and living authority from that past to our present.⁸

Before moving onto the specifics of Keesmaat's treatment of Acts 15, I note further an irony in the way she explains how today's Christians are to live into the Bible as our story. She turns to Deuteronomy 6:5-9 in a beautiful description of the role of the story of the Bible in our lives.

[E]very moment of every day is supposed to be filled with Torah, with the story of who God is and what God has done. This story fills your very being, so that you cannot help talking about it to your children at home and to everyone you meet, no matter where you are. When you are awake, you tell the story; when you are asleep, you even dream in its symbols and metaphors. It is on your hand, so that you see it enacted in all that you do, and on your forehead, so that others see it in all that you think and say. Your home and your life in the public square are to be shaped by it. ... [W]e need intentionally to try to live out the narrative of scripture in our personal and (perhaps more importantly) our communal lives as a precondition of engaging in discussion of any issue. (32)

Of course, the only problem is that Deuteronomy 6:5-9 is not about a story. Ironically, this beautiful text is explaining the only logical and natural response any Israelite should make upon hearing the words of the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH alone." Her discussion has made the fundamental category mistake of confusing Torah-instruction with Torah-narrative. And the great irony of this portion of the discussion is that most agree today that the Shema is especially focused on the first of the Ten Commandments, listed in the previous chapter (Deut. 5:7). This way of explaining how our imagination should be shaped by the story, according to Keesmaat, is not about a story at all, but about legal instruction, which ironically, Keesmaat will argue no longer applies to modern Christians. And perhaps this also subtly critiques the pressing

of any metaphor too far. Yes, the Old Testament is largely a narrative. Yet ancient Israelites would likely have found the idea that it can be reduced to a metanarrative to be reductionistic, especially as this may miss the intent of “torah,” as we shall see.

When it comes to bringing the biblical drama to culmination in Jesus, Keesmaat turns to Mark 10:32-45 to illustrate the way biblical authority has been transformed by Jesus. The story of James’ and John’s lust for authority – as the Lord’s right- and left-hand commanders – is worldly authority, using violence and tyranny. But followers of Jesus are to exercise a servant authority that lays down life for others. This, claims Keesmaat, is “the way the story comes to its climax” (33).

The problem once again, however, is that Torah has been reduced to a story, and in this case, conveniently wrapped up in the disciples’ lust for power. But if we understand “torah” as I believe the Bible itself does ubiquitously, we would turn more naturally to the Sermon on the Mount. Here is where we learn specifics of the way Torah-authority is fulfilled in Jesus. Surely, this is where we learn that Jesus fulfills the Torah rather than abolishing it, and that not a single stroke of the Torah will pass away until all is accomplished. Because of Jesus, in fact, it is possible for believers to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, although it remains for the rest of the New Testament to explore how this is possible.

Here I hope to have shown simply that there is a difference between picking up and continuing the unfinished *drama* of the Bible, on the one hand, and picking up and continuing the unfinished *authority* of the Bible, on the other. Determinacy of authority is the biblical canon itself, and not simply the church’s ability to discern new revelation from God. The church is to interpret, and at times it may discern new illumination. But revelatory authority is determined first by the text, and such authority is particularly relevant where confirmed by the church’s tradition and teachings.⁹

2. *The Problem: The Origin of the Conflict Addressed by the Jerusalem Council*

Keesmaat next identifies the problem of Acts 15 as one of conflict in the early church over the conversion of the Gentiles (pages 34-36).¹⁰ She begins by asserting that the demand for them to be circumcised – “according to the custom of Moses” – was a way for Pharisaic Christians to ensure the Gentiles were leaving idolatry behind because it was essentially a commitment to keep the whole Torah (Acts 15:1 and 5).

It might generally be objected that the presenting issue for the Council was whether Gentiles must come to Christianity through Judaism. More specifically, I suggest here that Keesmaat has rightly identified the *legal aspect* of Torah, but not the more *general instructional* nature of Torah. And this objection to Keesmaat's approach brings us immediately to the heart of the disagreement about the way the Jerusalem Council is being used in the church today. In a word, it comes down to a common misunderstanding of the word "torah" (*tôrâ*). Like the ancient Pharisaic Christians, many readers of Acts 15 today have unfortunately perpetuated a narrow and reductionistic understanding of "law" as reflected in the demand itself: "It is necessary for [the Gentiles] to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law (*ton nomon*) of Moses" (Acts 15:1).

It may seem a trite assertion to make here, and one that most beginning seminarians have learned, but I cannot emphasize enough the wide semantic field of the word *tôrâ* in the Old Testament itself. It has been argued, rightly in my view, that Deuteronomy's use of *tôrâ* reflects the term's reservoir of numerous semantic variations. As the ideological "center of the Old Testament," Deuteronomy's nuances of *tôrâ* illustrate the legal, prophetic, didactic, and sapiential elements of the term, and set a trajectory of a rich and wide semantic field of meanings for the rest of the Old Testament.¹¹ Deuteronomy's unifying use of *tôrâ* led subsequently to its use for the Pentateuch itself as Greek *ho nomos*, famously attested in the second century BCE in the prologue to Sirach, with its references to "the Law and the Prophets and the other books."¹²

Some have considered the Septuagint (LXX) the point in time when *tôrâ* became *nomos*, a purely nomistic understanding of law, but I am not of the opinion that this is the Septuagint's fault.¹³ In that case, when did the overwhelmingly positive understanding of *tôrâ* as didactic, life-giving, and life-sustaining blessing in the Old Testament come to be reduced to a codified list of legally binding stipulations or *nomos*?¹⁴ The meaning of "law" in Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament is an exceedingly complex topic, far beyond the task I have set for this investigation. It is enough to say at this point that we must be careful not to place the blame for this reductionistic *nomos* at the feet of the halakic tradition of the Mishnah and Talmud, which traditions were surely only trying to be true to the *tôrâ* in the face of Hellenism and the ethnic and political oppression of the Diaspora.

At the same time, it must be admitted that it is possible to miss or minimize the all-encompassing Deuteronomic *tôrâ*, while taking up instead the particularizing senses of the Pentateuch's priestly traditions on the way to a reductionistic *nomos*. While we may never be able to trace the transition in history from didactic *tôrâ* to nomistic *tôrâ*, it is clear that in the New Testament itself, both concepts are present.¹⁵ In any case, one cannot speak of a comprehensive law versus gospel dichotomy in the New Testament (Matt 5:17) that culminates in a displacement of the didactic *tôrâ*. Instead, the New Testament represents the coming of Messiah as inaugurating an era that renders obsolete any misperceived soteriological benefits of the law. In this way, the New Testament retrieves the Old Testament's understanding that the law is not the means of salvation, but its consequent blessings (just as Abraham was circumcised *after* his faith; Romans 4:9-12).

In other words, the tension in the New Testament is not between its new saving grace and the Old Testament's *tôrâ*, but between saving grace and the statutory and reductionistic appropriations of *nomos*. And it is precisely here that I believe Keesmaat and others reading Acts 15 today have misdiagnosed the problem of Acts 15. She is correct to point out that the specific legal requirement of circumcision may have been a way of ensuring that Gentiles would keep "the whole of Torah" (36). But she has minimized the general instructional nature of *tôrâ*, by accepting the soteriological reading of the Judaizers and Pharisees, as stated in the initial objection that caused the crisis: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, *you cannot be saved*" (Acts 15:1).¹⁶ They have reduced Moses to the nomistic traditions of the priestly texts, while missing the didactic *tôrâ* of the Old Testament itself. And Peter's logic, which eventually won the confidence of the Jerusalem Council, is a direct refutation of their convictions.

⁸ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; ⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. ¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. (Acts 15:8-11)

The presenting problem before the Council was how to respond to a nomistic and soteriological understanding of Moses, one that I believe is not supported by the Old Testament traditions themselves. Peter transcended the debate by focusing on the definition of salvation itself, for both Gentiles and Jews (“...we will be saved..., just as they will”). The Gentiles are not saved by means of keeping the *nomos*, and furthermore, neither are we Jews! Peter has rightly placed the didactic *tôrâ* over against the constraining *nomos*, just as the Pentateuch itself sees the *tôrâ* coming subsequent to the saving acts of the Ten Plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the covenant at Sinai. The Gentiles do not need to “keep the *nomos* of Moses” (15:1) in order to be saved; rather, they have already been saved, and the question now is how the *tôrâ* of Moses relates to them. It would never have occurred to Peter, Paul and Barnabas, James, or anyone else at the Jerusalem Council, in my view, to raise the question *if* the *tôrâ* of Moses relates to the Gentiles at all (see below).

Ultimately, then, this distinction between the didactic *tôrâ* and the statutory *nomos* raises the problem of hermeneutical theory. Peter and the Council essentially concluded, “We Jews don’t keep Torah either, not any longer.” They had come to understand the *tôrâ* of Moses in a new and different way, for a new era, inaugurated by the arrival of Messiah. They saw a certain continuity with the *tôrâ* for it was still the word of God for the new church, while also acknowledging a distinct discontinuity in the requirement to “keep the law of Moses” as demanded by the Pharisees (15:1). In other words, this is as simple as the old maxim we use with students in beginning hermeneutics; the Old Testament law is God’s word for you, not God’s command to you.¹⁷ The Council moved quickly to affirm the *tôrâ* of Moses as God’s word for them, as we shall see below.

3. The Process: The Decision-Making Methods of the Jerusalem Council

The specific process of decision-making is next taken up as an example for today’s church. The implication is that, to be truly biblical, today’s church will follow a similar procedure in deciding moral and ethical questions raised by our new cultural context. The assumption here is analogical: today’s church must decide to include LGBTQ believers in the church just as the Jerusalem Council decided to include Gentiles.

Keesmaat describes the process generally as one of the “doing of theology” in which a narration of God’s work in the world, Peter’s experiences with Cornelius (Acts 10-11), takes center stage.¹⁸ Paul and

Barnabas follow with stories of their own about God's work among the Gentiles. Keesmaat finds significance in Paul's reliance on a narrative of his experiences among the Gentiles, telling of "all the signs and wonders" (Acts 15:12), rather than a critical argument against circumcision as we know Paul was capable of giving (Gal. 5:2-6). Reliance on narrative, on the telling of the stories of God's work in the world, becomes a central feature of doing one's theology.

Next, Keesmaat observes that James responds to the narratives of God's work among the Gentiles by appealing to scripture, specifically to Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:16-17). She finds great significance in the words introducing the quote from Amos, *καὶ τούτῳ συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν*, "and with this the words of the prophets agree" (Acts 15:15, obscured by the NRSV's "this agrees with the words of the prophets"). From this unusual introduction, she concludes, "scripture is seen to agree with the contemporary working of the Spirit, not the other way around" (38). In other words, James turns to scripture to confirm the new thing that God is doing among the Gentiles. She concludes that James "made the remarkable move of allowing the Old Testament to be illuminated and interpreted by the narrative of God's activity in the present" in deciding not to require circumcision for the Gentile believers. She concludes that, given the small number of texts in the Bible that appear to condemn same-sex practices, we might use scripture as James used the book of Amos in order to draw attention away from those texts, as he drew attention away from circumcision per se. This will aid us in focusing instead on the experience of the Holy Spirit in the lives of gays and lesbians in order to produce a new reading of the scriptures as a whole, as James focused on the experiences of the Gentile believers. At the Jerusalem Council, the witness of the Holy Spirit in believers' experience was confirmed by scriptural witness *as the scripture was reinterpreted in light of that experience* (Keesmaat, 39; emphasis hers).

In response to this theological process for decision-making, I need first to call attention to Keesmaat's passing reference to the idea that James and the Council might have drawn upon "many scriptural texts that could be used to make a case *against* admitting the Gentiles." She notes further that other Old Testament passages "insist on the need for circumcision for those Gentiles who want to join the community of Israel" (39). In a note, she appeals to the instructions for the institution of Passover, where foreigners or aliens residing with the Israelites are permitted to celebrate

the Passover only after being circumcised (Exodus 12:43-49) and to the institution of circumcision in the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17).¹⁹ But these texts are related to the constitution of national Israel, and none are related to the prophetic texts detailing the future day when Gentiles will be gathered into the kingdom of God. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and others (and perhaps Jonah as well) foretell the ingathering of Gentiles, and none of these mention circumcision as a prerequisite to their inclusion in the kingdom of God. Clearly a case can be made that the leadership in Jerusalem understood better than the Pharisaic party that the Old Testament made a clear distinction between (1) foreigners and immigrants who wished to be identified as Israelites and to join the Israelite ethnic people of God; as distinct from (2) the future day when all nations would be drawn to God in faith. This is a possibility not under consideration in Keesmaat's treatment.

My central criticism, however, of Keesmaat's approach has to do with the hermeneutical principle involved in the "doing of theology" in this way. On these points, I find an especially close affinity between her arguments and those of Luke Timothy Johnson, and so I take a brief detour to address features of his important treatment.²⁰ Johnson focuses especially on the freedom we have as the children of God to interpret scripture. As Christians, the scripture has authorized us to exercise certain freedoms of interpretation. Johnson avers this has two implications for our reading of the Bible's condemnations of same-sex practices.

First, Johnson like Keesmaat and others draws attention to the relative paucity of texts in the Bible condemning same-sex practices.²¹ In our freedom as interpreters, we should evaluate the number of such condemnations by comparison with the Bible's extensive and detailed condemnation of economic oppression at virtually every level of tradition, which should leave us with the impression that the Bible's "off-handed rejection of homosexuality appears instinctive and relatively unreflective."²² My response is to suggest that surely the amount of material in the Bible devoted to economic oppression, among the Old Testament prophets for example, is commensurate with the recurring and intractable issue caused by social injustice in their society. This was a concern Israel's prophets returned to over and over again, mostly because their audience failed to grasp the sinful nature of their behaviors in light of the Torah's instruction. By contrast, it might be argued that the Torah's instructions on sexual behavior were not "unreflective," as Johnson avers, but were not frequently

repeated because they were already widely understood, if not universally obeyed. Furthermore, it might be equally argued that Leviticus 18:22, for example, is highly reflective of Israel's context by issuing a call to holiness of life in contrast to that of the Egyptians behind them or the Canaanites before them (Lev. 18:2-5 and 24-30). And in comparison to ancient Near Eastern attitudes to same-sex practices, an excellent case can be made for Israel's deep theological reflection in these prohibitions.²³

Second, Johnson focuses on our freedom as interpreters to assess the contexts of the Bible's proscriptions of homosexuality in light of general warnings against *porneia* (any form of sexual immorality), and especially free to consider "the grounds on which the texts seem to include homosexuality within *porneia*, namely that it is 'against nature,' an abomination offensive to God's created order."²⁴ He argues that for many, the acceptance of homosexuality is an acceptance of creation itself, and is not a vice that is chosen. He asks, "If this conclusion is correct, what is the hermeneutical implication?" I will argue below that in fact, the Apostolic Decree issued by the Jerusalem Council warned Gentile believers against *porneia*, not on the grounds that it was "against nature," but ironically enough, on the grounds of the *tôrâ* of Moses, specifically Leviticus 18. And so it is not correct that the condemnation of same-sex practices is rooted in creation alone, but is also rooted in *tôrâ* instruction. It should also be observed that Johnson's discussion at this point begs the question of essentialism, which assumes that homosexuality itself is a biological fixity.²⁵

Returning to Keesmaat's view of the process of decision-making in Acts 15, we may raise a few additional questions. First, why should today's readers of scripture assume we have the freedom to interpret scripture in the same way as James and the Jerusalem Council? The problem of modeling our hermeneutical approach after New Testament characters is fraught with difficulties because they used a distinctive interpretive model from the first-century, and we are modern and postmodern readers living in the wake of the Enlightenment. We have entire courses of study and scores of secondary literature devoted to reading strategies for Christians reading our Bibles. It strikes me as problematic to propose that we have the freedom, indeed that we are authorized by the Bible itself, to take freedom and to interpret the Bible in the same manner that the New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament. Simply put, we are not New Testament authors.

Second, I think it is also safe to conclude that Peter, Paul and Barnabas, James, and everyone else at the Jerusalem Council, including the Pharisaic party, understood that the Gentiles were not eligible to become members of *ancient Israel*. The Council itself was not ancient Israel. If ancient Israel had still existed in the first century as an ethnic and political entity, perhaps the requirement of circumcision would have been an important requirement. But the fact is, the Council members understood ancient Israel no longer existed. The arrival of Messiah had changed everything, inaugurating a new era of salvation history, a new “dispensation” for lack of better term that is in fact still ongoing. That new era was identified by them, as James’ use of Amos 9 shows, as the period of Gentile ingathering, and therefore their relationship with the *tôrâ* of Moses has also changed. Moses has not been superseded or discarded as obsolete, except for the misconstrued nomistic interpretations, which were really only bastardized versions of the *tôrâ* anyway. In the new era, Christians would come finally to grasp *tôrâ* as it was intended all along, as useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).

In sum, the process for decision-making at the Jerusalem Council did not involve lifting the readers of the text above and/or against the text; experience did not become a trump card over scripture in Acts 15. We may speak of freedom in the “doing of theology” that considers meanings of old texts for new contexts and new situations. But we are not free to make experience an arbiter over scripture. Our freedom has distinct boundaries, which hermeneutical principles govern, putting limitations on our freedom.

4. The Parameters: The Conclusion of the Jerusalem Council

Keesmaat turns finally to a consideration of the Council’s decision, especially as issued in the Apostolic Decree of verses 28-29 (and compare verse 20). She avers that the issue in this declaration was idolatry, and especially everything related to idol worship in the Roman Empire, so that “idolatry was at the heart of the worship that the Gentiles now had to abandon” (40).

While not requiring circumcision for new Gentile believers, the apostles decided upon four prohibitions: (1) they could not eat food offered to idols, or (2) blood, or (3) meat from strangled animals, and (4) they must abstain from sexual immorality. Of the fourth prohibition, *porneia*, Keesmaat says the following.

[*Porneia*] had a wide variety of overtones: adultery, sex for hire, temple prostitution. All of these ways of behaving betray a sexuality rooted in the idolatrous practices of the empire, a sexuality characterized by promiscuity, instant gratification, and consumption. Instead, the Jerusalem Council called these Gentile believers to a sexuality rooted in commitment and faithfulness, a sexuality that creates and builds up community rather than tearing it apart. (Page 41)

While I do not doubt the Council would have agreed with Keesmaat's assessment that they were calling for sexual faithfulness, one wonders if this is all that we can say about the use of *porneia* in this Apostolic Decree. New Testament scholarship has expended a good deal of energy trying to discern how the Council arrived at these four specific prohibitions.²⁶ While there can be no doubt they were concerned about idolatry among the Gentiles, I have been persuaded by the arguments of Richard Bauckham that these four prohibitions are based concretely on Leviticus 17-18, and especially on the recurring phrase "the aliens who reside" (NRSV) among the ancient Israelites. The apostles appear to have systematically searched these two chapters of Mosaic *tôrâ* and found five occurrences of the phrase (Leviticus 17:8,10,12,13; 18:26). These occurrences explain what non-Israelite foreigners were obligated to do while living in ancient Israel. And the four things prohibited in Leviticus are then repeated in the exact order as listed in the official version of the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15:29.²⁷ If Bauckham is correct about this association, and I believe he is, then a good deal more can and should be said about the use of *porneia* in this text.²⁸

Again, if Bauckham is correct, then it certainly can no longer be asserted, as it often is in popular and pastoral-theological discussions, that Acts 15 is an example of the early church placing aside the Mosaic law in order to be inclusive of new people in the church. Note especially the substantiation of these four prohibitions in the conclusion of James' speech. "For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues" (Acts 15:21). The substantiating nature of the sentence is marked by the conjunction *γὰρ*, "for, since." James finds support for the prohibitions of the Decree by observing that the Gentiles are surely aware of Moses, and perhaps even vaguely aware of the content of Mosaic *tôrâ*. This is an appeal to the perfectly reasonable and fair nature of imposing these

four requirements on the Gentile believers; they would have already been familiar with these details. Regardless of the extent to which the Gentiles knew the Mosaic *tôrâ*, this Apostolic Decree was certainly not placing it aside or superseding its authority. On the contrary, the Jerusalem Council was turning to the *tôrâ* as a definitive and irreplaceable authority, and seeking in its pages guidance on how it relates to the Gentile believers. Indeed, they understood Mosaic *tôrâ* as God's word for a new day, if not God's *nomos* to be obeyed in every particular. Bauckham's conclusion is noteworthy.

Acts 15:16-18 establishes that Gentiles do not have to become Jews in order to belong to the eschatological people of God, and so authorizes James' decision announced in Acts 15:19. The proviso in Acts 15:20 is not an arbitrary qualification of this decision, but itself follows, with exegetical logic, from Acts 15:16-18. If Gentile Christians are the Gentiles to whom the prophecies conflated in Acts 15:16-18 refer, then they are also the Gentiles of Jer. 12:16; Zech. 2:11/15 [Eng. 2:11; Heb 2:15], and therefore the part of the Law of Moses which applies to them is Leviticus 17-18.²⁹

The apostles sought and found principles in *tôrâ* for a new formulation of Christian sexual ethics. Ironically, they were not overturning Mosaic *tôrâ* but relying on it for guidance. Again, Bauckham: "Just as the conversion of the Gentiles has been made known by God in prophecy from long ago (Acts 15:17b-18 = Isa. 45:21), so the laws which apply to them are not novel inventions, but have been read out in the synagogues in every city from ancient times" (Acts 15:21).³⁰ It could even be said, based on Acts 15:21, that the Apostolic Decree shows "the law of Moses continues to be valid for Jews as Jews and for Gentiles as Gentiles."³¹

Thus the specific understanding of *porneia* in the Decree, and one to be required of the new Gentile believers, was more than a general condemnation of idolatry by calling for sexual purity that shuns the promiscuity of the Roman Empire (Keesmaat). In a concrete way, the Apostles were relying on the sexual purity laws of Leviticus 18 to articulate a minimum sexual ethic. In this way, the Apostolic Decree is more relevant to our debate than merely a means of distancing the Gentiles from promiscuous Roman practices. The foundation of the new Christian ethic for Gentiles was, in fact, Mosaic *tôrâ*.

5. *Conclusions: The Lessons of the Jerusalem Council*

What then can we say about the relevance of the Jerusalem Council for the church's contemporary debate over human sexuality? First, we need to acknowledge that the Old Testament data on human sexuality cannot be swept away or dismissed as irrelevant to our current debate. Many attempt to exclude the proscriptions of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as statutory *nomos*, and therefore irrelevant for today's Christians. But their value as didactic *tôrâ* cannot be jettisoned or cut from our canon; these texts mean something, and our debates must deal with all the biblical data in one way or another. If it is true that the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:28-29 was dependent upon Leviticus 17-18, then the first Christians at the Jerusalem Council relied on the didactic *tôrâ* to devise a new Christian sexual ethic for Gentiles. As Mosaic *tôrâ*, these data cannot be ignored.

This first conclusion of our investigation relates to the assessment of Christopher R. Seitz about the last forty years of debate over same-sex practices. Seitz identifies three separate and distinct phases in the church's understanding of scriptural statements on same-sex practices.³² (1) By reevaluating the exegetical details, scholars argued the texts condemning same-sex practices had been misunderstood for centuries, concluding they were condemning rape, pederasty, or cult prostitution. Since the biblical authors had no context in which to evaluate faithful, same-sex commitment, these texts were deemed irrelevant for our context. This phase was marked by confidence that we had finally come to understand the texts, and we were able now to correct the misreadings of the past. Although one occasionally still hears such arguments in the popular-level discussions, this approach to same-sex references in scripture is now largely abandoned in the scholarship, because it is clearly eisegetical in its assumptions. (2) Next, in light of the paucity of biblical statements about same-sex practices, it was argued that scripture offers little to go on, and provides instead a rough guide for decision-making in the church. The Jerusalem Council's decision in Acts 15 has played a significant role in this phase. The first-century church in Acts 10-15 in the decision to include Gentiles is said to be analogous to today's debates over acceptance of LGBTQ Christians in all aspects of church life, including the blessing of same-sex marriages, ordination, and what is usually termed "full inclusion." My investigation of the hermeneutical principles used in this approach raises significant challenges to the analogy as an interpretive model, especially as sufficient to overturn scriptural and traditional mandate. (3) Finally, in the third phase, some argue the scriptural

texts prohibiting same-sex practices are clear but irrelevant to our current debate. The argument is that monogamous, faithful homosexuality, which Luke Timothy Johnson calls “homosexual holiness,” was simply not known in antiquity.³³ We cannot expect the authors of the Bible to sanction and bless such relationships or to speak to our world today on this issue because it was developmentally beyond the range of their religious progression.

Seitz astutely observes that the trajectory of these three phases is paralleled by a reduction of the church’s scripture to “a book of religious development, from one Testament to the next,” and ultimately, to our enlightened modern times.³⁴ The Bible loses all canonical authority in such an approach, which reduces scripture merely to a resource for thinking about doctrine and practice. It essentially reduces scripture to an historical document about God’s revelation in the past instead of an inspired canon as the foundation for our theological reflection.³⁵

The second conclusion of our analysis raises a question about the way Keesmaat and others refer to the “process” of decision-making, as though mimicking a process in the early church is an appropriate model for today. The method of exegesis used by the authors of the New Testament is not one we can or should model in our own reading of scripture.³⁶ Similarly, the process of decision-making used in the early church, although perhaps instructive on a number of levels, is not an authoritative or inspired model for the church’s decision-making today. The process of exegesis is not the object of inspiration. But the result of ancient exegesis as written and preserved in the canon is the object of inspiration. We are not free to interpret the Bible the way first-century Christians exegeted the Old Testament. Our freedom in Christ has distinct and liberating elements for interpreting God’s truth for our world. But we have hermeneutical boundaries around that freedom, which establish equally distinct limitations to our freedom when it comes to overturning longstanding scriptural and traditional precedents.

A possible third conclusion to be explored is the definitive nature of conciliar decisions. Further investigation and theological reflection is needed to evaluate the degree to which formal, conciliar decisions made by the church can be reevaluated or reconsidered by later groups. While equally difficult decisions were reached by later ecumenical church councils, especially those of Nicaea (325 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD), I find little to validate the idea that subsequent generations of believers were free to return and reconsider those decisions. Indeed, in these cases it appears

the saints moved forward without coming back time and time again to reconsider the question, opening old wounds and challenging the previous decisions. Perhaps we need an understanding of such church councils that agrees that once a controversy has been thoroughly debated, all sides have been heard, and the saints have decided, there comes a time to move forward in the work of the church.

Endnotes

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¹ Richard Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles (Acts 15.13-21)," in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. Ben Witherington; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154-184, esp. 179.

² Bishop Sally Dyck, "Open Letter to the Northern Illinois Conference," November 19, 2013. <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Bishop-Dyck-s-Open-Letter-to-NIC.html?soid=1101858679078&aid=9DAyXoMc1O0>

³ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 396.

⁴ Sylvia C. Keesmaat, "Welcoming in the Gentiles: A Biblical Model for Decision Making," in *Living Together in the Church: Including our Differences* (eds. Greig S. Dunn and Chris Ambidge; Toronto: ABC Pub., 2004), 30-49, esp. 42.

⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in The Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), which is itself a revision of *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

⁶ Found, of course, in several of his writings, but we note especially N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?," *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32. For discussion, see Ben Witherington, *The Living Word of God: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 30-34.

⁷ Wright, "Authoritative," 20, and esp. note 6. He is critiquing James D. G. Dunn, *The Living Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). The question of the way New Testament authors used the Old Testament continues to be a debated

issue; see, e.g., Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of The Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005); Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley, eds. *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture* (SBLSymS 50; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007).

⁸ Christopher R. Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 190. Richard N. Longenecker has argued convincingly that the New Testament authors' creative exegesis is no authorization for today's Christians to engage in our own "creative," "existential," "imaginative," or "ecclesial" readings of scripture, whether such readings claim to be inspired by Christ living within us, by the Holy Spirit illumining us, or by the church conditioning us. He warns further that such has often been attempted in church history, usually with disastrous results. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), xxxviii.

⁹ [Then Cardinal] Joseph Ratzinger, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986)," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (ed. Jeffrey S. Siker; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 39-47, esp. 40-41.

¹⁰ The next three section-titles of my investigation will follow Keesmaat's outline as it relates to Acts 15: the problem, the process, and the parameters.

¹¹ Felix García López and Heinz-Josef Fabry, "tôrâ, instruction, teaching," *TDOT* 15:609-46, and on Deuteronomy's use especially, see pages 640-43.

¹² The prologue has three such references. On Sirach in general, see T. C. Vriezen and A. S. van der Woude, *Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Literature* (trans. Brian Doyle; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 532-38. Against the atomizing tendencies of individual instructions in the priestly materials of the Pentateuch, which led subsequently to rabbinic casuistry, Deuteronomy, and to some extent Hosea and Isaiah, developed the idea of the unity of tôrâ, which then led to its use not only of the Pentateuch as a whole but of the entire Old Testament canon; G. Liedke and C. Petersen, "tôrâ instruction," *TLOT* 3:1415-1422, esp. 1421-1422; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper, 1962), 1:221-223.

¹³ García López and Fabry, *TDOT*, 15:643.

¹⁴ On the general tenor of the OT regarding tôrâ, see Peter Enns, "Law of God," *NIDOTTE* 4:893-900, esp. 896-97. Recently, Joshua Berman argued that we ought to assume a "common-law approach to jurisprudence" when reading Israelite law rather than the "statutory approach" that came to dominate the west in mid-nineteenth century Europe; Joshua Berman, "The History of Legal Theory and the Study of Biblical Law," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 76 (2014): 19-39. This article has enormous implications for how ancient Israelites perceived their legal collections in the Pentateuch, and for the way today's Christians ought to view them.

¹⁵ D. J. Moo, "Law," *DJG*, 450-461; F. Thielman, "Law," *DPL*, 529-42.

¹⁶ And it is surely misleading to say, as Keesmaat does, that “the Pharisees who opposed Paul had both scripture and tradition on their side” (36). They certainly had the first-century interpretation of *nomos* on their side. But this interpretation reduced circumcision to a statutory act, against the Old Testament itself, which always understood circumcision as a spiritual reality (Deut 10:16; 30:7; Jer 4:4; 9:25). Moreover, the emphasis on circumcision is restricted largely to the ancestral and Mosaic periods. Few prophets foreseeing the ingathering of Gentiles think of circumcision as a requirement for them.

¹⁷ Although exceedingly simplistic, this useful maxim needs to be fleshed out in precise exegetical method. See especially the process we call “evaluation” of the canonical message of Scripture (also known as “appropriation”); David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 279-325. For how this relates specifically to Old Testament law for today’s Christian reader, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 314-25; Bruce C Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (1st ed.; Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 157-172; and William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (2nd ed.; Nashville: Nelson, 2003), 341-351. It could also be argued that *legally*, none of the laws of the Old Testament are binding upon Christians, while in a *revelatory and pedagogical sense*, all of them are binding upon Christians; David A. Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 321-334.

¹⁸ Keesmaat, “Welcoming the Gentiles,” 37-38; for some of this discussion, she relies on Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 98-108.

¹⁹ She also lists Gen 34 in this category, which might strictly speaking be considered irrelevant in this discussion. One would need more serious consideration of Jer 12:16 and Zech 2:15 [Eng 2:11], for example.

²⁰ See Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 145-46.

²¹ He lists the following as relevant to the debate, which he says define homosexuality as a vice and cannot be ignored: Lev 18:22; Wis 14:26; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9. On the inadequacy of making the case based on the paucity of texts, see my critique in Bill T. Arnold, *Seeing Black and White in a Gray World: The Need for Theological Reasoning in the Church’s Debate over Sexuality* (In All Things Charity: A Series; Franklin, Tenn.: Seedbed Publisher, 2014), 71-73 and 98-102.

²² Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 146.

²³ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 134-42.

²⁴ Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 146.

²⁵ For definition and critique of essentialism, see David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 482-499.

²⁶ An interesting case can be made that the council members had the Noahide commandments in view, which were considered to be universal and binding on Gentiles; David Instone-Brewer, “Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 (2009): 301-321, esp. 307-8. It is possible they saw Lev 17-18 as confirming the Noahide commandments, so that both were in view. But the evidence for the Leviticus connection is more convincing, in any case. I am unconvinced by the argument that “strangling” in the Apostolic Decree relates to infanticide among the Gentiles. On the Mishnah’s seven laws of Noah in Jewish tradition, and what we may call “natural law” as “the universal common sense of the human race, as well as the foundation of its uncommon sense,” see J. Budziszewski, *What We Can’t Not Know: A Guide* (Dallas, Tex.: Spence, 2003), 15. It is in the written *tôrâ* that the elementary principles of the moral law known by nature are “elicited, elucidated, and elaborated by tradition” (Ibid., 25).

²⁷ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles,” esp. 172-178. See also Richard Bauckham, “James and The Jerusalem Church,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (ed. Richard Bauckham; *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* 4; ed. Bruce W Winter; Grand Rapids, Mich. / Carlisle, UK: Eerdmans / Paternoster Press, 1995), 415-480, esp. 458-59; I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007), 513-606, esp. 593-94; and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 556-558.

²⁸ Ben Witherington has critiqued Bauckham’s analysis as straining the evidence because of a lack of blood-strangulation in Leviticus 17-18; Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 460-67. Witherington’s critique focuses on lexical connections, which assumes Bauckham’s argument is dependent upon formal intertextuality. As I understand Bauckham, however, he is not suggesting intertextuality or a formal textual echo between Acts 15:28-29 and Lev 17-18, but rather a first-century example of halakic argumentation. On the other hand, I do not think Bauckham’s association of εἰδωλοθύτων with Lev 17:8-9 is necessarily incompatible with Witherington’s treatment of it as meat sacrificed to idols and eaten in a pagan temple; Ben Witherington, “Not So Idle Thoughts About Eidolothuton,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44 (1993): 237-254. The Council would likely have understand the latter as a continuation of the former.

²⁹ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles,” 177.

³⁰ Ibid. 177-78.

³¹ Earl J. Richard, “The Divine Purpose: The Jews and the Gentile Mission (Acts 15),” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1980 Seminar Papers* (ed. Paul J. Achtemeier; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 267-282, esp. 273.

³² Seitz, *Character of Christian Scripture*, 176-77.

³³ Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 148.

³⁴ Seitz, *Character of Christian Scripture*, 177.

³⁵ By contrast, a more nuanced and sophisticated “redemptive-movement hermeneutic” will consider the differences between the Bible’s views of women and slavery, on the one hand, and same-sex practices on the other. Such a hermeneutic traces an *absolute* movement from the ancient culture to the biblical text on the question of sexuality, but on the questions of women and slavery it discerns a *preliminary* movement. The role of the church today is to continue the absolute movement of the Bible on sexuality in order to be redemptive, just as it must advance the preliminary movement begun in the biblical ethic related to women and slavery; William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 30-41.

³⁶ “Our commitment as Christians is to the reproduction of the apostolic faith and doctrine, and not necessarily to the specific apostolic exegetical practices”; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, xxxv.

Christopher T. Bounds

New Testament Considerations on Unity and “Amicable Separation” in the United Methodist Church

Abstract

This paper explores the proposal of “Amicable Separation” in The United Methodist Church through the lens of New Testament teaching on Church unity and schism. First, the concept of ecclesial oneness is examined closely in the Gospel of John, Ephesians, and other related passages. Second, every instance of schism or threat of schism is studied in Acts, I Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, I Timothy, and I and II John to see how separation is understood and addressed. After a summary of the study is given, application is made finally to the “Amicable Separation” proposal.

Key Words: Ecclesiology, Schism, United Methodist Church, Amicable Separation

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Introduction

During the 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania an informal proposal of “amicable separation” was offered as a solution to the seemingly intractable impasse between conservatives and liberals in their respective agendas for the denomination. While the proposal was never brought officially before the General Conference body, a firestorm of reactions was generated among the delegates and the larger church. In hasty response, a formal statement of unity was approved overwhelmingly on the last day of Conference. However, in spite of apparent solidarity by the delegates in their resolution, the issue of “amicable separation” persists, not only as a subject of discussion and debate in different quarters of the church, but as a possible option for United Methodists.

The events of the Pittsburgh Conference and their aftermath have brought to the fore the ecclesiastically related issues of unity and separation with greater urgency, forcing the church to grapple with and seek clearer understanding of them. Questions surrounding the true nature of Christian unity and the appropriate theological grounds for division in a denomination are central. The answers to these questions can help protect the church from two extremes: settling for a superficial unity, where unity is elevated to the point that essential doctrinal integrity is compromised, making the United Methodist Church no longer a part of the church universal, or minimizing the importance of unity, where the hard work of unity is surrendered too easily, bringing about disastrous and ungodly schisms in the church.

With these 2004 General Conference issues as a backdrop, our paper will seek to identify relevant New Testament teaching on the issues of unity and separation in the Christian church and begin to explore its implications for the present state of the United Methodist denomination. Specifically, we will focus our attention on the concept of ecclesial oneness as developed in the Gospel of John, Paul’s teaching on the church’s unity in his Letter to the Ephesians, and other related New Testament teaching. Next, we will examine specific episodes of group and individual schisms or threats of schism addressed in Acts, I Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, I Timothy, and I and II John to see how separation is understood and addressed. Then, we will attempt to summarize the New Testament teaching on unity and separation. Finally, we will conclude by making application to our current state in The United Methodist Church.

1. New Testament Teaching on Church Unity

While the New Testament uses a number of expressions regarding Christian unity in its prayers, exhortations, commands, corrections, and instructions, the New Testament's recurring description of the church as "ἕν" ("one") is the most crucial for our study.¹ An examination of "ἕν" ("one") in reference to the church quickly reveals that the clearest teaching and highest expression of ecclesial "oneness" is found in John's Gospel, particularly in Christ's priestly prayer, and Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.² Significantly, as we will see, this ecclesial language, "ἕν," is used to describe the "oneness" of God (Rom. 3:30, I Cor. 8:4, Eph. 4:4, etc.).

A. The Teaching on Unity in Jesus' Prayer in John 17

The most pressing concern of Jesus' prayer in John 17 is unity for his present and future disciples. Because of what Jesus says, the historical context in which he says it, and the place where John presents it in the literary scheme of his Gospel, Christian unity is undoubtedly a central concern for Jesus and the Gospel writer. Specifically, Jesus' earthly ministry is drawing to an end. Recognizing the cross is before him, Jesus gathers his disciples together for one last meal, as a part of the Passover celebration, in which he shares with them his most intimate thoughts. At the end of their time together, in the context of this meal, Jesus shares with his disciples a prayer that forms the climax of his teaching in John 13-16.³ Afterward, Jesus will retreat to a garden for private prayer to the Father.

In his prayer Jesus asks the Father to protect his present and future disciples (vs. 11, 20). He does not request protection from physical danger, tribulation, false teaching, or apostasy for his followers, but rather protection from anything that would divide them, breaking their fellowship with one another. He prays, "Holy Father protect them...so that they may be one..." (v.11). Christ's earnest desire for unity is underscored further by the fact that Jesus petitions three more times, "that all of them may be one..." (v. 21), "that they may be one..." (v.22) and "that they may be brought to complete unity" (v. 23). Here, Jesus' greatest concern is for his disciples' oneness.

Jesus clarifies that the unity he is requesting is not an ordinary or superficial unity, but one that is only appropriately modeled by the oneness existing between Jesus and his Father. Jesus states, "I pray...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (vs. 20-21). By placing the example of his oneness with the Father at every petition for

Christian unity (vs. 11, 21, 22, 23), Jesus leaves no room for doubt that the oneness existing in the Trinitarian relationships is the model of unity he desires in his followers. Jesus further clarifies that the defining mark of the unity between Father and Son is love, and by extension the disciples' unity with each other (vs. 23, 26).

Jesus' prayer also intimates that he has provided his followers with all of the resources they need to walk in unity with one another. Jesus states, "I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one" (v. 22). All that the Father gave to the Son to make unity possible for his followers has been made available to them. The oneness modeled by the Father and Son is possible for Christ's disciples.

Finally, Jesus makes clear in his prayer that the oneness of his followers will be the defining witness to the world of his truth. Jesus states that when his disciples live in unity with one another, "then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (vs.23). Jesus' prayer echoes statements made earlier in the evening. Previous to his prayer Jesus told his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (v. 13:34). The truth of Jesus and his teaching will be vindicated in the loving relationships Christians have for one another. In the absence of loving unity, the world will have little reason to believe the Gospel.⁴

B. The Teaching on Unity in Ephesians

The Letter to the Ephesians is unique among the Pauline corpus. The apostle Paul is not responding to or addressing a pastoral problem or a personal concern. He has no larger purpose for writing than to edify and encourage believers. Ephesians was written intentionally as a letter to be circulated among many churches. As such, Ephesians provides an accessible entrée into the driving issues of Paul's theology and life. A cursory examination of the letter quickly reveals that the unity of the church is a core value in Paul's thought and in his understanding of the larger purposes of God for humanity.⁵

The overarching theme of Ephesians is the "mystery" made known in the Gospel (1:9; 3:3-6, 9; 5:32; 6:19), revealing that through Christ's death and exaltation, "the dividing wall of hostility" between Jews and Gentiles has been broken down, bringing them together into one body, the church, making them into one humanity, experiencing the promises of

God in Christ Jesus (2:11-22; 3:3-6), to the end of reconciling humanity to God. Within this context, Paul sees the church as the instrument through which the end of Christ's death and exaltation are brought about in the world. The church is the context in which the union of humanity takes place and humanity is reconciled to God, becoming one holy temple (2:6, 11-18; 3:9-10). As a community where divisions in humanity are overcome in "reconciliation, love and unity," the church exists as a witness "in heaven and on earth," declaring "the manifold wisdom of God" to the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places" which seek to divide humanity and to the unredeemed world (2:11-21; 3:6, 10).

In Ephesians, Paul refers to the church as the "body" of Christ, with the "head" of the body being Jesus Christ. In previous epistles, particularly in Romans and I Corinthians, Paul uses the body metaphor to describe the local church (or fellowship of house churches), with the "head" being just another "member" of the total body. However, in Ephesians, as well as in Colossians, the "body" refers to the universal church with Christ as its "head." The new humanity brought together in the universal church is inextricably bound together in solidarity, ruled by Christ and filled with his presence (1:22-23).

According to Paul, the union existing among Christians, the unity manifested in the church, reflects and testifies to the oneness of God, from whom all the families of the earth are named (3:15; 4:1-6). In Christ Jesus and in the unity of the church, the glory of God is made manifest in the world (3:21). If the church is not unified then God's work of bringing together "all things on earth" in Christ will remain incomplete, and his plan to unite all of his creation in Christ will go without witness to the hostile "heavenly powers" and the world.

However, Paul recognizes that there are challenges to this unity and that at times oneness may not be realized fully in the church. Therefore, he exhorts, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3) and he provides specific instructions (chapters 4-6) to assist the church in actualizing the unity they already have in Christ (2:13-16; 4:3-6). To begin, Paul teaches that in their relationship with one another Christians should be "completely humble and gentle...bearing one another in love" (4:2). Paul then teaches that Christ has given a diversity of gifts and ministries to be exercised by Christians in the church (4:7), including leadership gifts (4:11), to the end that "the body of Christ may be built up until" the church reaches "unity in the faith," becoming "mature, attaining

to the full measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). Next, he exhorts Christians to speak truthfully to one another and avoid letting their anger simmer, thereby allowing the “devil to get a foothold” in their lives (4: 25-27). Furthermore, he states that they should engage in productive work that will allow them to share with those in need (4:28), that they should abstain from any unwholesome speech and replace it with edifying and gracious words (4:29); that they should get rid of all “bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (4:31); and that they should be kind and compassionate to one another, “forgiving each other, just as in Christ God” has forgiven them (4:32). Paul culminates his practical advice on walking out oneness in the church by summarizing the defining aspect of Christian unity - love. He states, “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...” (5:2).

Paul also teaches that since God has chosen Christians to be “holy and blameless in his sight” (1:4) and since Christ died “to make her holy” (5:26), the one church must guard her moral purity. He teaches that the church should distance themselves from the “Gentiles’ way of life” and they should be living a life consistent with the new creation God has been forming since the coming of Christ (4:22-24; 5:3, 8-18). Furthermore, the church working together as one is important, otherwise the church will fail to be a witness to God’s purposes for the universe (1:10; 3:10); but God’s goal will be equally frustrated if the church is “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (4:14) and if the church does not speak the truth (5:6-7). Leaders have been given to the church not only to hold the church in unity, but also that by its unity it might guard against false teaching.⁶

C. A Summary of Other New Testament Teaching on Church Unity

Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians and John’s record of Jesus’ prayer on behalf of Christian disciples help us to see more clearly a New Testament understanding of Christian unity. They show that oneness among believers is not a peripheral or ancillary concern to the church, but a central concern to Christ in his earthly ministry and God’s eternal purposes. Unity is a priority and mandate for the church. This is substantiated in the rest of the New Testament by the recurring reminders by biblical writers for local churches to recognize their oneness in Christ and walk accordingly. In Acts, the earliest Christian community arising out of

Pentecost was marked by their devotion to the “teaching of the Apostles and to the fellowship” (2:42). Writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul argues that “in Christ” every believer forms “one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (12:5); to believers in Corinth in his First Letter, Paul shows a divided community that because they are all in communion with the same Christ, represented by the one loaf at the Lord’s Supper, they are one body, although many members (10:17); to the Galatians, who are guilty of legalistic and discriminating practices, Paul declares, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for ... all are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28); to the Philippians, he encourages them to be “firm in one Spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the Gospel” (1:27) and to the Colossians he writes to remind them that they are “members of one body” (3:15).

2. New Testament Examples of Separation or Threats of Separation

The New Testament word for separation *σχίσμα* (“schism”) or its verbal form *σχίζω* (“to split or tear”) is used twenty times in the New Testament. The verb *σχίζω* is used to describe the heavens being “torn open” and the Spirit descending upon Christ at his baptism (Mk 1:10), a patch being “torn” from a new garment to patch an old one (Lk. 5:36), the decision by the soldiers at the crucifixion not to “tear” Jesus’ garments (Jn. 19:24), the temple curtain being “torn” and the rocks “splitting” at Jesus’ death (Mt. 27:51, Mk. 15:38, Luke 23:45), the fishing nets of Peter not being “torn” after a miraculous catch (John 21:11), and people being divided in their responses to Paul’s speeches (Acts 14:4, 23:7). The noun is used to describe the “tear” caused by sewing an un-shrunk cloth on an old garment (Mt. 9:16, Mark 2:21), the “divisions” among people in response to Jesus, his teaching, and his act of healing on the Sabbath (Jn. 7:43, 9:16, 10:19), and most relevant to our paper, “divisions” in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:10, 11:18, 12:25).

Therefore, outside of its usage in the Corinthian context, a New Testament word study of separation provides little information to assist us in our task. However, if we look at individual events where unity among churches or individual Christians occurs or is threatened, we find relevant material for our present discussion. Specifically, we will look at Acts, I Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, I Timothy, and I John for particular examples of separation or threats of separation among groups, since this is

most relevant to our topic. Then we will address examples of separation or threats of division between individuals.

A. Division within the Corinthian Church

The only place the New Testament uses *σχίσμα* (“schism”) in relationship to the church is Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.⁷ Paul received a report that the Corinthian church, which was comprised of a collection of small house churches that would meet together regularly as a whole (Romans 16:23), was plagued with “divisions” and “quarrels” (1:10-11). Primarily, the divisions arose as a result of individuals and groups in the church claiming superiority at the expense of other members. According to David DeSilva, the schismatics were bringing from their Corinthian culture “the norms and expectations of their social status” into the church (DeSilva 1999:566). They asserted their status by (a) claiming a special association with a Christian leader, Paul or Apollos, that they perceived to be superior to the other (1:12-13), (b) by taking fellow Christians to secular courts to win settlements, often without just cause (6:7-8), (c) by claiming greater spiritual knowledge, allowing them to eat meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-2), (d) by celebrating the Lord’s Supper in a manner that maintained social rank, reminding other members of their lowly status (11:17-34), and (e) by claiming greater spiritual gifts than others (12:1-14:40). Secondly, the Corinthian church was divided over serious moral and doctrinal issues, with some members sanctioning a man’s incestuous relationship with his stepmother (5:1-5), others indulging in sexual immorality (6:15-16), and some denying the bodily resurrection of Christ, thereby rejecting belief in the general resurrection of humanity in the eschaton (15:1-58).

Paul responds to the schisms caused by the Corinthian social-cultural expectations by teaching that divisiveness among the Corinthians must yield to cooperation and unity, social and spiritual discord must give way to the oneness of all believers united in Christ, and personal boasting must acquiesce to humble gratitude for God’s gifts of service. Paul argues that “conventional wisdom and notions of power and status crumble before the mystery of the cross. There, the nature of God’s wisdom and power makes itself known by commending as Lord of glory the One who died in disgrace and weakness for the sake of others (1:18-25). Such a revelation must overturn human ideas about what constitutes genuine honor and advantage,” leading to the abandonment of personal claims to honor and demands for privileges out of unity in and love of the whole

church (DeSilva 1999:567). Ultimately, in the one body of Christ, in which each member is incorporated through the Spirit, in which social divisions are overcome, “whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free,” each member plays an indispensable part of the whole body, with the parts that seem to be less “honorable,” having a place of “special honor,” and each part having equal concern for the others in love (12:12-26).

To the schisms caused by physical self-indulgence, Paul asserts that physical appetites must surrender to the sanctification of the whole person, soul and body. Specifically, Paul directs the Corinthian church to exercise discipline by expelling from their midst a man who is engaging in sexual relations with his father’s wife. The purpose of the discipline is ultimately so the man will repent, rejoin the church, and “be saved on the day of the Lord” (5:1-5). Paul also addresses another problem of sexual immorality: some Corinthian church members are engaging in sexual relations with prostitutes out of the mistaken idea that the body does not ultimately matter to God (6:12-13).⁸ While Paul corrects their misunderstanding by teaching that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and that their bodies are redeemed, not just their souls, he does not proscribe any directions as to what to do with these people.⁹

Paul responds to the divisions over doctrinal issues by reminding the Corinthians of the basics of the Gospel. Paul states, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain” (15:2). An essential aspect of this gospel is the bodily resurrection of Christ. They must stand firm in the teaching they have received and let nothing move them (15:58). Most likely, differences in understanding about the bodily resurrection were related to the sexual struggles of the Corinthian church. If salvation was spiritual and not physical, then physical holiness was not necessary and indulging in sexual relations with prostitutes was permissible. However, the bodily resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection in the future support the fact that salvation is for the whole person, soul and body, and that the physical body is important to God.

Underlying Paul’s address to the Corinthian divisions is a concern for the “weaker” or “less noble” members of the church, as well as “inquirers” or unbelievers. For example, the division in the church over food sacrificed to idols threatened the spiritual life of some of their members, possibly placing their lives in the path of spiritual “destruction” (8:9-13). Therefore Paul states, “Be careful, however, that the exercise of

your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (8:9). Also, he admonished that the confusion in worship, with roots in the Corinthian divisions, may prohibit seekers from believing the Gospel (14:16-17, 20-25, 31). Ultimately, Paul’s teaching on this is summarized in his statement, “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews or Greeks or the Church of God ... for I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved” (10:32-33).¹⁰

B. Schism in the Johannine Community

While the Corinthian schisms did not involve one group pulling out and separating themselves from the church, which is our natural understanding of separation or schism, what happened within the Johannine community did.¹¹ In the First Letter of John, the author addresses a Christian community where some members have denied that Jesus is the Messiah (I John 5:1), that Christ has come in the flesh (I John 4:2), and that Jesus is the Son of God (1:3, 7; 3:8, 23). Furthermore, they had asserted that they were without sin (I John 1:10), decided they could no longer remain in relationship with their fellow church members, left to form their own congregation (I John 2:18-19), and finally were competing for adherents in their former community (II John 10-11). In so doing, according to the author of I John they broke the bonds of love and unity.¹²

More specifically, from the author’s perspective the secessionists were guilty of two intimately related errors. The first is theological. In rejecting the incarnation of Christ, they rejected the salvific nature of Christ’s death and denied the cross as the supreme revelation of the character of God. The cross is the means by which redemption and forgiveness are brought about for humanity and ultimately the cross is the proof that God loves humanity (I John 3:16a, 4:9-10). The second is ethical. The love of God manifested on the cross is the standard for the love that defines the Christian community. The cross makes manifest a divine love that is real, sacrificial, and other-oriented, not self-focused (I John 4:11). The love expressed by Jesus on the cross is the love Christians are to express to one another. In gratitude and obedience to the God who loves, Christians are to love one another in the same way God loves. For example, John states, “If any of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but has not pity on them, how can the love of God be in you?” (I John 3:17). Love for fellow Christians is the sign that a person is truly Christian.

The author brings the theological and the ethical together. If the incarnation did not take place, if God's son was not crucified on the cross, then there can be no confidence that God loves humanity and there can be no basis for or example of love among believers. The writer states, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (I John 3:16). Developing this idea more fully he writes, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we may live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:9-11). From the perspective of the writer of I John, the secessionists' greatest sin is the ethical - lack of love for their fellow members.¹³ However, their sin is rooted in the theological – a denial of the love of God made manifest in the cross of Christ. Ultimately, while orthodoxy does not insure the practice of discipleship, it does serve the promotion of selfless love for sisters and brothers in Christ (DeSilva 1999:460).¹⁴

C. The Threat of Separation between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the Church

One of the earliest and greatest threats to ecclesial unity in the New Testament is the controversy surrounding the incorporation of Gentiles into the church. Specifically, did the Gentiles need to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law in order to be Christians? The significance of the problem is seen in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians and the subsequent Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15.¹⁵ The first Christians were Jews (Acts 2:22; 4:10; 5:21) who continued to observe the law of Moses, particularly circumcision, the offering of sacrifices, and dietary regulations (Acts 21:20-26). As Gentiles became believers, this presented a number of practical problems for Jewish Christians. To eat together in a common meal in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated, meant that Jewish Christians would be expected to eat with unclean, uncircumcised Gentiles, as well as eat the food that would not have met Jewish regulations. In response some Jewish Christians avoided eating with Gentile Christians altogether. This appears to be the root behind Paul's problems with Peter as described in Galatians 2:11-13. Another response was to require the Gentile Christians to become circumcised and to follow the requirements of the law, not just to have fellowship with Jewish Christians, but to be truly Christian (Gal. 1:6-9; 3:1-6; 5:2-6; 6:12-16) (Marshall 2004:211-212).

Paul writes Galatians in response to these attempts to make Jews of Gentile Christians. He sees that by faith in Christ Jesus, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The divisions that have existed historically are overcome through Christ. Faith in Christ is what constitutes all believers, whether Jew or Gentile into the one people of God. To believe that salvation is brought through circumcision and obedience to the law and that disunity is overcome in the same way calls into question the very essence of the gospel (Gal. 2:6-9).

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 arrived at a similar answer to Paul’s. The council recognized that Gentiles had received the gift of the Spirit without being circumcised, that keeping the law was “a yoke” that Jews in the past and present had been unable to bear, that the law was unable to bring about justification, and that salvation is “through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” (15:10-11). Therefore, keeping the law and circumcision were unnecessary to being a Christian. However, the council decided that Gentile Christians were required to abstain from sexual immorality and out of respect for Jewish Christians they were to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from “blood” and “from the meat of strangled animals” (15:29).¹⁶

D. Threat of Division over the Distribution of Food among Widows

Another threat to the unity of the Church recorded in Acts is the turmoil surrounding the feeding of Christian widows. Hellenistic Jewish Christians, most likely Greek-speaking, complained against the Hebraic Jewish Christians, most likely Aramaic-speaking, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (6:1-2). This was the first serious threat the early Christian community faced to its “fellowship” (2:42), to its being “together” (2:44), and to its distribution of resources as “anyone might have need” (2:45). Furthermore, the complaints threatened to divert the apostles’ attention from their primary call to prayer and to preach the “word of God” (6:2, 4). To address this practical problem, rooted in cultural and linguistic differences, the Apostles instructed the church to select seven men, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to take responsibility and address the problem. So seven men among the Hellenists were chosen with the result that this early threat to Christian unity was averted (6:3-6), the church continued to increase, and many priests became believers (6:7) (Bruce 1988:120-122).¹⁷

E. Threat of Christians Being Separated from the Church through False Teaching at Colossae

In the church at Colossae, Paul addresses a community characterized by discipline, firm faith in Christ, and love for all Christians (1:3; 2:5). However, some in the church had begun to entertain a “philosophy” which had caused some Colossians to lose “connection from the head (Christ)” of the Church (2:19) and risked causing others to be “disqualified” (2:18). Because of false teaching, a group in the church risked being separated from Christ and the church. While Paul does not give complete details about this “philosophy,” he indicates that it involved “elemental spiritual forces” (2:8-10, 15, 20), regulations concerning food and drink, adherence to certain religious observances (2:16), false humility, worship of angels, claims to superior spiritual experiences (2:18), restrictions on touching or handling certain items (2:21), ascetic exercises (2:23), and sensual indulgences of the body (2:23).¹⁸

Paul’s response to the challenge of this “philosophy” was to articulate the supremacy of Christ. Christ is Lord over everything in heaven and on earth. He exercises authority over any “powers and authorities” (2:10), “having disarmed them ... he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (2:15). Because Christ is the head of the “body,” the church, Christians are directly linked to the exalted Christ (1:18, 3:1, 2:19) and are free from any elemental power or authority. The church’s exaltation with Christ leads Paul to exhort the Colossians to “put to death” whatever belongs to their “earthly nature,” to “put on love, which binds” all virtues (“bearing with each other,” “forgiving one another”) together in “perfect unity,” and “let the peace of Christ rule” since as “members of one body” they are called to peace (3:12-15).¹⁹

F. Separation and Threats of Separation between Individuals

In the New Testament there are examples of separations or threats of separation on a smaller scale. Perhaps the most famous is the “separation” of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-41. At some point after the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas planned to revisit believers in towns in which they had ministered. Barnabas proposed that they take John Mark with them. Because John Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas earlier in Perga without justification, Paul thought it unwise to take John Mark with them again. A sharp disagreement arose and they decided to “part company,” with Paul taking Silas and Barnabas taking John Mark in

their respective missionary journeys. The fact that Barnabas had earlier behaved in a way contrary to Paul's thought in Antioch, being led astray by the "circumcision" group (Gal. 2:12-13), may have exacerbated the problem. In Luke's description of the argument, there is no designation of blame. However, other New Testament materials point to reconciliation between the parties as Paul's positive comments about John Mark (Col. 4:10, Philemon 24) and Paul's ministry (II Tim. 4:11) with John Mark attest.²⁰

A similar division between two Christians is dealt with in Paul's letter to the Philippians. Typical to Paul's writings, he exhorts the Christian community to practice unity in attitude, in purpose, and in commitment to each other (1:27, 2:1-5, 3:15). In his conclusion, Paul directs this instruction to two women, Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3), who had labored with Paul in Philippi. Apparently, there was some difference in understanding that was dividing them. Paul urged them to have the same mind in the Lord. He also instructs his "true companion," a possible reference to a leader in the church, to help bring about reconciliation among the women (4:3).

Earlier, we examined one example at Corinth of a person being intentionally separated from the Christian community as an act of discipline by the apostle Paul. Another example of similar action takes place in Paul's first letter to Timothy. Specifically, Paul charges Timothy to exercise his authority in the church by not permitting teachers to propagate false doctrine in the Christian community (1:3-5). Paul gives Timothy an example of exercising authority against false doctrine, by mentioning Hymenaeus and Alexander, both of whom Paul "handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme" (1:19-20). As in Corinth, the purpose of Paul's discipline is not only to keep those entrusted into Paul's care from "shipwrecking" their faith, but also in order for there to be redemptive discipline applied to Hymenaeus' and Alexander's lives. This is the type of authority and discipline Timothy is to exercise in his ministry.

A final example of disciplinary separation, intimated earlier in the discussion of schism in the Johannine community, is found in II John. Here the "Elder" instructs a house church to not allow any representative from the schismatic group to have entrée into their fellowship. He states that when a secessionist "comes to you, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds" (II John 10-11). Specifically, the "Elder" does not want the house church to be used by the secessionists as an opportunity to

propagate their false teaching and further divide the Johannine community. The general practice of hospitality is suspended in such an instance. Authority is exercised by the “Elder” and the house church is instructed to keep separate from the schismatics.

While in the other cases of disciplinary separation in the New Testament there is a redemptive purpose in mind, this particular episode in II John does not give us any hint of redemptive discipline. However, this case is unique in that the secessionists have deliberately broken fellowship with the Johannine community. They have left. In every other case we have seen, discipline exercised toward immorality, false teaching, or a combination of the two is directed toward individuals or groups that have not broken fellowship with the local church. They have not left the church. The explicit purpose in such discipline is to protect the larger Christian community and to restore the church member(s) to the community. In contrast, in the Johannine church, the unity of the church at the foundational level has been broken. As such we should not be surprised to see discipline used in a different way. Nevertheless, silence by the “Elder” in his letter on the possibility of reconciliation as a basis for refusing hospitality as an act of discipline, does not mean it is without consideration in his mind.

3. A Summary of New Testament Teaching on Unity and Separation in the Church

In our examination of New Testament teaching on unity and separation, we see that these ecclesial ideas are intimately related. New Testament teaching on unity is almost always set within the larger context of the possibility of separation. Jesus’ greatest concern for his disciples is their possible division or separation. Paul sees separation in the body as the greatest threat to the church’s call to be the place where fractured humanity is made into one and reconciled to God. Likewise, in every episode of group schism or threat of separation in the New Testament, the theme of unity becomes the guiding framework and goal by which they are addressed. The social, moral, relational, and doctrinal questions that divide the New Testament church are addressed in order to strengthen, protect, and restore church unity.

From our study a number of observations can be made. First, the Trinitarian nature of God is the foundation for the unity of the church. Just as God is one being in a plurality of three divine persons, the church is constituted as one community from many human persons. Unity in the

church is an analogue to the oneness in the Trinity. God's nature as Triune is revealed most notably in Jesus Christ, but the unity of the church also serves as revelation of this nature as well. Specifically, Jesus prayed that the church would have the same unity as he and the Father have. The apostle Paul taught that Christian unity, the oneness manifested in the church, is a reflection of and a testimony to the oneness of God. As such the church manifests the glory of God.²¹

Furthermore, while New Testament writers establish the Christian imperative to "love one another" in the self-giving love of God, manifested in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, Jesus makes clear that the love existing between him and the Father, the love defining the relationships of the Godhead, is the ultimate foundation for the love Christians are to have for one another. Jesus states, "I have made you known to them ... in order that the love you have for me may be in them" (John 17:26). This love, above all else, is the distinguishing mark of unity in Christian relationships with each other, individually and collectively.

Second, in every example of separation or threat of division among groups in the New Testament, whether an internal division within a collective body as in Corinth or a physical separation of one group from another as in the Johannine community, division is seen fundamentally as a violation of the law of love and love's corollary - unity. There is no example in the New Testament where one Christian community is authorized to separate itself from another Christian community. Even the willful separation of a heretical community from the "orthodox" community is seen as breaking the command of Christ to love and work for unity.

On an individual level, we see a similar attitude at work. In the context of addressing unity and love in the church at Philippi, Paul instructs two sisters in Christ, Euodia and Syntyche, to resolve their differences and he enlists the aide of the larger community to mediate their reconciliation. While a contrary argument might be made from Paul and Barnabas' schism in Acts, even in this case, evidence points to an eventual reconciliation between the two of them. Also in the exercise of church discipline, when the church separates a member from the larger body, as in the case of the Corinthian man having sex with his father's wife or in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander, the expressed purpose is to facilitate an eventual reunion with the larger Christian community.

Third, the New Testament makes clear that the church has been given every necessary resource to experience unity among believers. In his

prayer for the disciples Jesus declares that he has given his disciples all that they need to walk in unity with one another. Through Christ's life, death, resurrection, and exaltation the unity of the church has been objectively accomplished – one, new and undivided humanity has been brought into being - and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit unity can be subjectively experienced in the church. Paul teaches that the Spirit enables Christians to walk in sacrificial love in relation to one another and the Spirit bestows particular gifts to each believer for the edification and unity of the body.

However, while the New Testament writers have an “already” in their understanding of the present experience of the unity in the church, they also recognize there are times of “not yet” as well. While oneness has been brought about through Christ, and the church has the resources to bring about unity, that unity is continually challenged. As a result, the church may fall short of her God given oneness and experience division. In his prayer for the disciples' protection from disunity, Jesus recognizes that this is his disciples' greatest threat. Paul makes clear that unity in the church is one that is not easy and requires great work and sacrifice on the part of believers. Social, cultural, moral, relational, and doctrinal issues will arise in the church; issues that will seek to undermine the unity of the church and thwart love between believers. In the midst of these challenges, “every effort” must be made “to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

One of the most important gifts the Spirit gives to the church to face the rigorous challenges to unity is leadership. Paul teaches that the Spirit gives leadership gifts to certain Christians expressly for the purpose of bringing the church “to the unity of the faith.” This gift and accompanying authority are seen in almost every occurrence of division or threat of separation in the New Testament. For example, in Corinth Paul works to make sure the “weak” are treated appropriately and disciplines redemptively a sexually immoral member; in the growing tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians over circumcision and adherence to the law, the apostles and leaders of the early church gather together in Jerusalem to reach a common mind and decisively settle the issue; in order to protect the unity of the Johannine community, the “Elder” instructs the community to not allow secessionists into their house churches to instruct their members. The most notable exercises of authority in these cases are acts of discipline. However, this discipline is marked by its redemptive character. While

exercised in different ways, the end of discipline is to redeem, protect, nurture, and bring about reconciliation, which are essential for ecclesial unity.

Finally, in the New Testament, Christian unity, manifested in loving, sacrificial relationships between members, embodying analogically the unity in the Godhead, is the ultimate witness to the world of the truth of Christianity. Jesus states in the Gospel of John that the unbelieving world will recognize his disciples through their love for one another. Paul teaches that ecclesial unity boldly declares to the hostile “powers and principalities,” the forces which seek to divide humanity and thwart the eternal purposes of God, that the work of Christ in life, death, and exaltation is not in vain. The ultimate purpose of God, the formation of a united humanity in Christ through the Church, is happening. Ultimately, for John and Paul the task of evangelism and Christian testimony in “heaven and on earth” are radically compromised by disunity in the church and give the “powers and principalities” an opportunity to boast.

4. Application to Issues of Unity and Amicable Separation in the United Methodist Church

As we begin to think about how we might apply New Testament teaching to issues of unity and amicable separation in The United Methodist Church, a qualifying comment must be made. Unfortunately, our task is not as simple as it might seem initially. While there is significant attention given to the issues of unity and separation in the New Testament, it is couched in particular historical and cultural contexts that often do not correlate directly with our present situation, thus being subject to multiple ways of application. For example, and perhaps the most problematic for evangelicals seeking “amicable separation,” there is no place in the New Testament where an orthodox community separates itself voluntarily or involuntarily from the larger Christian community, or where the orthodox party advocates separation from another Christian community. This is not to say that such an action is without any biblical warrant or foundation, but to recognize there is no direct correlation in the New Testament with the present proposal of amicable separation. As a result, application of New Testament teaching to our present situation involves interpretation and translation into our present situation, which can be fraught with difficulty.

With this caveat in mind, let us turn to “New Testament considerations on unity and amicable separation in The United Methodist

Church.” First, in the midst of heated debate and disagreements in The United Methodist Church, we must remember the priority and mandate of unity in the church as expressed in Jesus’ prayer and Paul’s teaching in Ephesians. New Testament writers recognize that unity will be continually challenged, difficult to maintain, and at times never achieved. However, there can be no settlement for anything less in the church. Weariness of debate and internal division, increased bitterness from persistent personal attacks, toxic anger toward “enemies” in the church, despair over specific actions of those in authority, distaste for church politics, and the existence of false doctrine and moral turpitude are not sufficient reasons for separation. The New Testament recognizes in one way or another that these exist in the church as threats to unity, but they must be overcome through love, humility, forgiveness, perseverance, redemptive discipline, and reconciliation, not separation.

If these are not acceptable grounds for an “amicable separation,” what would be? As stated earlier, there is no New Testament warrant for “amicable separation” between believers in a Christian community. Any division of this sort is unacceptable. Here, the operative word is “among believers.” A case can be made from the New Testament that if the church ceases to be the church, if a community as a whole ceases to be a Christian community, then separation is expected by believers within this community.²² However, the purpose of separation is disciplinary in nature – the believing community either withdraws from or exorcises the apostate community for the ultimate purpose of bringing the group back into fellowship with the true church. The New Testament principle here is the example of disciplinary separation on the part of the Christian community, where the church exercises authority to discipline a person for gross moral failure or propagating serious heresy, for ceasing to be Christian, then redemptive discipline is applied by removing the person from the community with the goal that the person will repent, be reunited to the church, and “be saved on the day of the Lord.” As we can see, again, the driving principle of New Testament unity is the priority and mandate. Therefore, from a New Testament perspective, the United Methodist Church has no warrant for any type of separation as long as the church as a whole is Christian. However, if the denomination ceases to be Christian, then disciplinary, redemptive separation must become the guiding principle of direction for Christians in the United Methodist ranks.

Similarly, the New Testament indicates that one of the keys to addressing internal divisions and threats to the overall unity of the church, the key to addressing issues that could lead to a church ceasing to be a part of the church universal is the exercise of discipline. While our contemporary cultural climate within The United Methodist Church eschews the use of power and authority, New Testament teaching shows that it is necessary to protect and promote the unity of the church. Again, the purpose of discipline is to act redemptively. The discipline is done as an act of love. Therefore, individuals and groups in The United Methodist Church who are concerned about the unity of the church and threats to unity must be willing and able to exercise power redemptively in the Church.

Second, in any discussion of “amicable separation” in The United Methodist Church, we must take into account the incredible spiritual cost involved with such a possible disruption in the life of the church. There will be negative consequences for individuals, churches, and annual conferences in any act of schism. If an “amicable separation” is sought for any other reason than as an act of redemptive discipline, New Testament teaching helps us to see that believers in the community will be harmed, the Methodist witness to the world will be compromised, and the “principalities and powers” that seek to divide humanity and the church will have triumphed. Even an act of redemptive separation will have spiritual cost as well. However, in redemptive separation the need for the church to remain the church of Jesus Christ is the only justification for the price that will inevitably be paid by a division.

If a separation in The United Methodist Church takes place, other Christians in the denomination, particularly the weak and those not established well in their faith, will be adversely impacted. For example, if the orthodox wing of United Methodism separates from the denomination, there will be Christians left behind for various reasons (because of connections to particular local churches, personal relationships, conference ties etc.), who will no longer be able to benefit from the evangelical presence. Also, there will be some Christians, who, out of thorough disgust for the whole affair, will leave the church altogether and risk being separated from Christ as well. John Wesley in his sermon “On Schism” describes well the dangers associated with the separation of one group from another, particularly as it relates to individual believers. He states,

A plentiful harvest of all the works of darkness may be expected to spring from this source; whereby, in the end, thousands of souls, and not a few of those who once walked in the light of God's countenance, may be turned from the way of peace, and finally drowned in everlasting perdition... The hunger and thirst after righteousness, after either the favor or the full image of God, together with the longing desires wherewith so many were filled of promoting the work of God in the souls of their brethren, will grow languid, and as offenses increase, they will gradually die away. And as the "fruit of the Spirit" withers away, "the works of the flesh" will again prevail, to the utter destruction, first of the power, and then of the very form, of religion. These consequences are not imaginary, are not built on mere conjectures, but on plain matter of fact ... These have been the fruits which we have seen, over and over, to be consequent on such a separation. ("On Schism," VI: 402-403).

If "amicable separation" in The United Methodist Church occurs, the church's witness in the world will be minimized. Christian testimony in "heaven and on earth" are radically compromised by disunity in the church and give the "powers and principalities" an opportunity to boast, enabling their work to go unchallenged in the very place that is to witness to their defeat. If Christian unity and love for one another is a witness to the world of the truth of Christianity, as Jesus, John and Paul clearly teach, what does it say to the world when Christians are divided? The very truth of the Gospel is undermined. The wall of hostility that divides the world is played out in the church and not overcome in the church. The very heart of the Gospel is called into question. An increasingly skeptical world will have their doubts and suspicions about Christianity strengthened. As such, a separation should only take place if The United Methodist Church ceases to be a part of the church universal.

Third and finally, in any discussion of unity and "amicable separation" in The United Methodist Church, we must remember grace is available to heal disunity and bring oneness to the church. New Testament teaching makes clear that the objective work of unity has already been brought about and that Christ makes available to the church every resource necessary to walk in loving unity with each other. True Christian unity can be brought about in The United Methodist Church. Every threat to disunity that presently faces The United Methodist Church has been faced by the New Testament church and has been faced in the church universal throughout her history. Jesus knew the challenges the church would face

and equipped the church to face those challenges. The task of renewing The United Methodist Church and keeping the church accountable to be the church of Jesus Christ is possible. Grace flows through the church from Christ who is the head making unity possible. As long as The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, then the church has access to grace that can overcome any present division in the church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church brought to the fore the issues of Christian unity and “amicable separation” in the denomination. Because of the gravity of both ideas, they must not be treated superficially by their respective advocates. From a New Testament perspective, the unity of the church is a biblical priority and must be understood as a divine mandate. Therefore, any discussion of “separation” must be seen in the light of New Testament teaching on ecclesial oneness as seen in Jesus’ prayer in John 17, in Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2 and 4, and John’s teaching in his first letter. As we have examined these passages, we have seen there are no New Testament grounds for separation between Christians. There is never a justifiable reason for one group of Christians to divorce themselves from another group of believers.

However, any appeal to Christian solidarity or resolution on “unity” must be seen in the light of sound ecclesiology. The mandate for ecclesial oneness holds true only as long as the parties involved are Christians. If the United Methodist denomination as a whole ceases being the church, departs from the church universal, then grounds for redemptive separation are established. In such a case, any act of separation must be undertaken in a way that seeks to redeem the community that has departed from Christ and seeks to be reconciled to that community, if they repent and return to the universal church.

Because The United Methodist Church’s status as a member of the church universal is threatened, orthodox evangelicals must seek to exercise appropriately redemptive power and discipline to protect the denomination’s fidelity to Christ. However, redemptive discipline is not enough. Evangelicals also must seek to access the riches of God’s grace, the abundant resources made available through the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to bring spiritual renewal to the church. Only when United Methodists are able to

bring both together can a full and robust ecclesial unity as described in the New Testament be possible. Then The United Methodist Church will be an even greater witness “in heaven and on earth” to the truth of Jesus Christ.²³

End Notes

¹ Examples of these expressions include: in Acts Christians “devoted themselves to ... fellowship” (2:42), in Corinth the church is asked to be “perfectly united in mind and thought” (I Cor. 1:10), in Ephesus the church is called the “body” of Christ (1:22-23), in Philippi the church is described as “striving together in one accord” (1:27), in Hebrews the church is called “God’s house” (3:6; 10:21), in First Peter Christians are exhorted to love one another “deeply” (4:8), and John calls the collective church the “bride” of Christ (Rev. 19:7). Unless otherwise specified, all New Testament quotations are taken from *Today’s New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Zondervan and the International Bible Society, 2005).

² Specifically, John 10:16; 11:52, 17:11-23; Romans 12:4-5; I Corinthians 10:17; 12:11-26; Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:2-15; Philippians 1:27, 2:1-2; Colossians 3:12-15; and I Thessalonians 5:11 address the oneness of the church.

³ Again this underscores the importance of unity to Christ and to John’s concerns in his Gospel.

⁴ For an excellent study of the primary biblical teachings in the Old and New Testaments on ecclesial oneness, written with laity in mind, see Gilbert Bilezekian’s *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1997). His comments on John 17, pp. 35-37, are particularly insightful and have informed our discussion here.

⁵ In some manuscripts the word “Ephesus” does not appear in the body of the letter, leading some scholars to believe even more that this is a letter meant for general circulation and is not a response to a specific problem or specific personal concern in the church. See Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1971), 601.

⁶ For a more detailed examination of the unity of the church in Ephesians as outlined in our paper, see David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation* (Intervarsity Press, 1999), 716-731; Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church: An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (Intervarsity Press, 1995) 132-146; and Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2005), 393-407.

⁷ While this epistle to the church at Corinth is called First Corinthians, Paul makes clear that this is not his first letter to the church (I Cor. 5:9).

⁸ Misunderstandings in the Corinthian church about the significance of the body in Christian salvation appear to be the basis for questions and divisions

about the bodily resurrection of Christ, as well as the general resurrection in the eschaton (15:1-58). Most likely ignorance by some in the Corinthian community of the significance of bodily union with prostitutes and questions about bodily resurrection are related issues.

⁹ While not explicit, if Paul's teaching does not correct the problem, a similar act of discipline as given to the man practicing incest might be expected. Again the end of discipline would be the salvation of those being disciplined.

¹⁰ For a more detailed examination of the schisms in the church at Corinth and Paul's response as outlined in our paper, see David Barton, "I Corinthians," *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 1314-1351; David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 555-574; I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology* (Intervarsity Press, 2004) 267-280; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 276-306; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Eerdmans, 1995), 5-35.

¹¹ John Wesley in his sermon "On Schism" recognizes that the Corinthian schism is not an example of what is traditionally associated with schism. He states, "Let us begin with the first verse, wherein St. Paul makes use of the word. It is the tenth verse of the first chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians. The Words are, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms' (the original word is scismata) 'among you.' Can anything be plainer than that the schisms here spoken of were not separations *from*, but divisions *in*, the Church of Corinth? Accordingly, it follows, 'But that ye be perfectly united together, in the same mind and in the same judgment.' You see here, that a union in mind and judgment was the direct opposite to the Corinthian schism. This, consequently, was not a separation from the Church or Christian society at Corinth but a separation in the Church; a disunion in mind and judgment, (perhaps also affection,) among those who, notwithstanding this, continued outwardly united as before." John Wesley, "On Schism," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; Reprint by Baker Book House, 1978), VI: 402-403.

¹² Some scholars have asserted the secessionists were a group who suffered from a docetic heresy, a teaching that so emphasizes the deity of Jesus Christ that Christ's humanity is denied or neglected. See Raymond Brown, *Epistles of John*, 47-103; David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 449-450, and "John, Epistles of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 3:905.

¹³ While there are multiple problems with the secessionists, the issue of love appears to be preeminent. This can be seen in the fact that love is the driving theme of I John. As a noun ἀγάπη is used 18 times and as a verb αγαπάω is used 28 times. See I. Howard Marshall's comment on this issue in his *New Testament Theology*, 539.

¹⁴ For a more detailed examination of the schism in the Johannine community and the response of the writer of I John as outlined in our paper, see Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Doubleday, 1982) 47-103; David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 449-473; I. H. Marshall, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles of*

John (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978) 32-57; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 536-568.

¹⁵ While many scholars would date Galatians after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, there are good reasons to believe that the problem of “Judaizers” takes place before the Jerusalem Council. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 13-20.

¹⁶ The reference to “blood” most likely refers to meat that has not been slaughtered in the Jewish manner. See I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 164.

¹⁷ See also John T. Squires, “Acts,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, 1227-1228.

¹⁸ By Paul’s repeated mention of the mystery of the gospel (1:26, 27, 2:2, 4:3) his insistence that they have all knowledge necessary for salvation (1:9; 2:2), entering the divine realm, and experiencing the divine fullness (1:9, 19, 2:2, 9-10), some New Testament scholars have seen this philosophy as a Gnostic or proto-Gnostic sect.

¹⁹ For a more detailed examination of the theological problems and threats to the church at Colossae as outlined in our paper, see Morna D. Hooker, “Colossians,” *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, 1404-1411; David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 694-703; Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church?*, 126-132; I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 366-378; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 378-386.

²⁰ In II Timothy 4:11 Paul instructs Timothy to “Get John Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in ministry.” Whatever problems existed between Paul and John Mark were addressed so that they did ministry together and John Mark became a valuable resource in Paul’s ministry.

²¹ From this perspective, internal division or external separation among Christians, where there are human persons, but no real unity among them, does a disservice to God by pointing to a tri-theistic, polytheistic God, rather than a biblical Trinitarianism, which has its analog in a unity of persons.

²² The importance of this point cannot be made emphatically enough. Although it is beyond the scope of our paper, the ontological understanding of the church or a sound definition of the church is crucial here. Central questions include: What makes a local church or denomination a part of the church of Jesus Christ, the church universal? What are the marks of the true church? When does a church cease being a part of the church universal? Only a theologically sound understanding of the nature of the church can inform discernment on whether a denomination has ceased being a part of the church universal.

²³ My paper is indebted to Dr. David Smith, Professor of New Testament at Kingswood University in Sussex, New Brunswick, Canada for his constructive comments and critical insights into the New Testament texts and issues examined in our paper.

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Jody Fleming

*The Faith and Praxis of Women in Missions in the Early
Pentecostal and Holiness Movement*

Abstract:

Women in the early years of the Pentecostal and Holiness movement played a very important part in the advancement of local and world mission. This paper examines not only the contributions women made during this time period, but also the balance they had between their faith and the practice of that faith. This study includes a select group of women chosen for their comprehension of Christian faith and how it impacted their understanding for reaching out to the world around them. Some are better known than others, but each of their stories represents the impact of women on Christian missionary work of their day.

Keywords: mission, women, faith, praxis, Holiness, Pentecostal

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Introduction

The idea of women in leadership positions in the Christian tradition has been a source of controversy for many years. The Christian community has had to wrestle with the problem of understanding what the Bible truly says about women in leadership in the church, and what to do with women who exhibit strong leadership capabilities. Many women throughout the history of God's people have exhibited giftedness as leaders through the power of the Holy Spirit, but sadly were not afforded the opportunity to exercise those gifts. Yet they found ways in which to powerfully serve God and contribute to his kingdom.

During the final part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries the Pentecostal Holiness revival was sweeping the United States. In addition to the changing societal roles, women were embracing scriptures such as Joel 2:28-29 that says, "[God's] Spirit will be poured out on all flesh" as a call to service. After experiencing an infilling of the Holy Spirit, many women felt called to serve God in foreign missions. Many of these new missionaries were single, some were married and others widowed. Armed with a fresh wind of the Spirit and a desire to impact the world for Christ, women in the Pentecostal Holiness movement embraced missionary work.

This paper will argue that the contributions of a small cross-section of women from that era are a result of their experience with the Holy Spirit. Those experiences led them to live out their understanding of the balance between faith and praxis in domestic and foreign missionary service. The empowerment they received was a catalyst for the impact they had on their world. The method used here will be to first discuss the tension between biblical faith and praxis in regards to mission work and evangelism. This will be followed with a brief discussion on the historical background of women in the Pentecostal Holiness movement and their role in society, and the mission of the church during that time period. Several case studies on women of that era will follow highlighting their understanding of the tension between faith and praxis. They will include: Phoebe Palmer, Pandita Ramabai, Minnie Abrams, Susan Norris Firkin, and Lucy Leatherman. These women are a small representation of the vast number who dedicated

themselves to mission work. Final considerations will be given to how the contributions of these women have and will continue to impact the church and her mission.

The Missiological Tension of Faith and Praxis

As with many subjects in the Christian faith tradition, there seems to be a tension between faith and works. The New Testament writers speak on the subject quite frequently and at times there seems to be a contradiction in their teaching. However on closer examination we can see that there is an interconnectedness that exists between faith and praxis - works/deeds, which has a direct correlation to those who have dedicated their lives to missions. The women of the early years of the Pentecostal Holiness movement had various forms of this understanding. So to appreciate how they may have developed their sense of mission work from the Christian faith, the tension between the two subjects must be briefly explored.

There are many examples in the New Testament epistles that explain the importance of salvation through faith. Romans 10:9-10 says: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” Ephesians 2:8-9 also expresses the importance of faith for salvation: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

These passages along with many others clearly identify the importance of faith for the assurance of salvation. For Emmanuel M. Jacob,¹ the example of the tension between faith and praxis of Jesus’ teachings in Matthew supports the idea that saving faith is a product of genuine discipleship. As a life of discipleship to Christ develops, the love for others and the desire to build a better world translates into a desire to partner with God in his plan to redeem the world. According to the author, transformation through faith leads us to engage in the divine mission, the *missio Dei* (Jacob 2002: 108). With that concept in mind, the idea of works of the faithful begins to take shape. In the second chapter of James it is says:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:14-17, 26) Jacob’s article focuses mainly on the idea of a disciplined life modeled after the life of Jesus as shown in Matthew, however, this statement in James seems to sum up his point of the tension between faith that is lived out in mission.

The hermeneutical approach to faith and praxis in relation to mission is well understood in the Pentecostal movement of Christianity. Gordon Fee notes that global mission is “deeply woven into the biblical understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection for all people.”² The universality of faith in Christ is directly linked to serving others both locally and globally. To carry out the missional call of God, the faithful are empowered in life and ministry by the Holy Spirit. So the idea of faith and praxis in mission are held together by the evangelical model of living a life of discipleship that pours into a desire to preach the good news to the lost.

But what does that have to do with the social concerns that are mentioned in the passage from James? The text suggests that mission is more than just preaching the good news – there must be another component. Murray Dempster argues that church mission must consist of both evangelism and social concern. This understanding of praxis is essential in order for the church to bear authentic witness³ – faith without works is dead. As the church is to be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God, Dempster identifies several key elements that are manifest in the Pentecostal approach to mission. The church’s role includes proclaiming the Kingdom of God through the spoken word, picturing the kingdom in social witness, and manifesting the kingdom in moral deeds (Dempster, et al. 1991: 24-38).

The understanding of faith and praxis as a biblical model for mission is supported through the Evangelical and Pentecostal efforts to participate in God’s plan. Faith in community that manifests in spreading the good news of God’s kingdom through proclamation of the word and social interaction and service is essential to the call to *missio Dei*. The early

Pentecostal Holiness movement understood this tension. The women whose lives will be discussed here will show a deep understanding of this tension of faith and practice. But before their stories are heard, it is important to understand the theological and cultural dimensions of the time period in which they lived.

Women and Pentecostal Holiness Beginnings

It could be said that positive tension of faith and praxis were, in part, one of the mainstays of the early Pentecostal Holiness movement. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, revival began to take place in Christian churches across the United States. A renewed understanding of a holy life was developing and the influence of John Wesley from a century before was being felt. The awakening of the Holiness movement within the Methodist church began as an attempt to revitalize discipline and commitment to the Christian faith.⁴

The women whose stories will be examined lived and worked in ministry during this time period were active in the Holiness movement that would develop into the Pentecostal revival, which began shortly after the turn of the twentieth century in the United States. Women had an increasingly active role in the Holiness movement that continued into the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement for several reasons. Positive roles for women in ministry began in various places leading up to the Pentecostal Holiness movement. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Quaker women had had some freedom to serve in leadership in the church. Quakers were known to emphasize the scriptures and the interior life of faith over the outward forms of ritual and institution. Men and women were equal in their responsibility to walk in relationship with the Lord. That intimacy led to a respect for others and the willingness to see the giftedness of the Holy Spirit in both men and women (Synan 2001: 234).

The equality that Quaker women experienced continued to develop as the Holiness movement began to take shape. Again the importance of spiritual giftedness and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit served to balance the scales for women in ministry. Evangelical movements, many from the Methodist Church, began to stress the importance of the Holy Spirit as the driving force behind faith and praxis. Women as well

as men were experiencing the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, which empowered them to overcome intentional sin and live a life of harmony with God. As women studied the scriptures they became more confident of their ability to serve God in areas that had previously been closed to them. They believed that God's sanctifying grace saved them from sin and empowered them for service. According to Barbara MacHaffie, this led to women making up a high percentage of Holiness ministers well into the twentieth century (MacHaffie 2006: 198-199).

Janette Hassey cites several factors for the increase in the positive view of women in ministry through the growth of Evangelicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During that time period the church was struggling with theological liberalism, which actually helped the cause of women in ministry. Biblical literalism was the answer to liberal theology. This led to a fundamentalist understanding about prophecy that saw women as equally gifted as men (Pierce and Groothius 2004: 39).

Pentecostals would emphasize the same equality with an emphasis on the call of God (Ma 2010: 194). The empowerment that women received through their faith and experience with the Holy Spirit motivated them to be actively involved in ministry. By the latter part of the 1880's many bible training schools opened their doors to women. Leaders such as A.B. Simpson, A.J. Gordon, and William Bell Riley believed that a sanctified spirit-filled life, and not gender, was what qualified people for ministry in the church (Pierce and Groothius 2004: 41). Charles Parham also included women in his Bethel Bible School, which saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in early 1901 (Synan 1997: 90). Parham's School was influential in the events that developed the Azusa Street Mission that also included women in leadership.

Susan Hyatt provides three basic biblical themes from the Pentecostal Holiness beginnings that strengthened women's right to public ministry. These themes identify equality for women as they stepped into roles that had previously been dominated by men. The three themes include: a theme of biblical equality stated in Galatians 3:28 as "all being one in Christ," the equality of redemption for women through the work of Jesus Christ, and the Pentecostal theme of equality as quoted from Joel

by the Apostle Paul in Acts 2:17-18 that the Spirit fell on both men and women alike (Synan 2001: 238). As these themes gained traction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women engaged in ministry that had previously not been available to them. As a result, women engaged in activities focused on social reform and Evangelism. Not only were they involved in the work, they also supported it financially and produced written works about their experiences. Fueled by their faith in Christ through their sanctification experiences, women moved into the practical application of their call.

Women, Society and Mission

Due to the advances in technology during this time period, domestic work that had previously occupied much of women's time was greatly reduced. Women had more time to pursue other interests outside of their domestic duties. As women of this time period began to identify God's call on their lives, they took on new roles in the church and society. Faith was central to their life and now they had time to live out the call of James to put that faith into practice. Not only did they desire to train their children in the faith, but they also had deep concerns about societal issues both in their own cities and across the globe.

Along with the spiritual developments of the time period, sociological and cultural components helped to shape the role of women. MacHaffie notes that what historians have called the "cult of true womanhood" elevated women to a more prominent place, even if it was still within the realm of home and family (MacHaffie 2006: 159-60). This concept developed in the mid nineteenth century and highlighted virtue and piety as marks of a true woman and one who was held in high honor. MacHaffie notes several results of this higher standard for women including their pastoral role in bringing their husbands and sons to salvation. As they were thought to be morally and spiritually superior to men, they began to question why they should not take on a more substantial role in elevating society outside of their traditional roles of wife and mother (MacHaffie 2006: 163).

As a result of this new understanding of worth, women began to organize and identify areas in which they believed they could make a difference. Social concerns such as prostitution, alcoholism, slavery, and

illiteracy were at the fore of women's thought. Throughout the nineteenth century, maternal societies, Sunday schools, and benevolent associations were the focus of women putting their faith into practice (MacHaffie 2006: 164-7). By the time of the Pentecostal Holiness movement, several well-known societies had been or were beginning to be developed.

One of the major forces of social reform during this time period was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The WCTU was driven by the idea that it was a woman's responsibility to save husbands, sons, and Christian civilization from the devastation of over-indulgence in alcohol (MacHaffie 2006: 167). Patricia Hill notes that the WCTU gradually incorporated feminist goals, and like many other benevolent organizations of the day, served as a bridge for women from their domestic sphere to the male-dominated public realm (Hill 1985: 25). The WCTU was influenced by its forerunner, the Woman's Crusade of 1873-74, which focused on a campaign of prayer and exhortations in saloons that called for owners to covert (MacHaffie 2006: 167). The driving force behind the work of this group of women was faith, faith that stirred them to action. While the WCTU was not necessarily a foreign mission agency, it does highlight the new found freedom of women who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to push for social change.

Closely related to the temperance movement was the development of Women's missionary organizations. Women developed and ran complex organizations that allowed them to adopt entrepreneurial and money management skills. The missionary boards developed by these women provided much-needed ministry in other cultures where male missionaries were not able to speak to or care for women. Missionary wives at that time were too busy with their homes and children and supporting their husbands that they did not have time to minister "in the field" to the specific needs of women. As a result professional women were needed to serve on the mission field. While women were still not ordained in ministry, they went to the field as teachers, doctors, nurses, and social worker rather than preachers. Foreign aid societies such as the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) allowed women at home to become experts in the new "science of missions" (Hill 1985: 4).

By the year 1900, there were forty-one American women's agencies supporting twelve hundred single missionaries across the world.⁵ Social

reform organizations such as the WCTU overlapped with mission agencies in some places, but the growing concern and urgency of conversion for “heathen” lands had the mission agencies moving ahead by the early twentieth century. Hill notes that the Victorian view of women as nurturers and mothers made them uniquely qualified for the mission task at hand and the role was no longer limited to the women of non-Christian cultures. Ideal womanhood had a new perspective as “educated motherhood” which opened doors even farther for women in mission (Hill 1985: 5). From this background emerged women who would have significant impact in their world, both at home and in distant lands.

Faith and Praxis in Missionary Women

Having outlined the social and cultural climate of the time period in the years around the turn of the twentieth century, attention will now turn to some individual biographical sketches. These women are a very small representation of the many who were involved in the mission movements of the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions. Each one had a unique call and contribution to foreign and domestic mission. These women had varied backgrounds, ethnicities, and faith traditions. Some were married, some widowed and others single. What they all have in common is a desire to see the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit that they experienced, empower others not only for conversion, but to improve their own lives and societies. The biographies start with the forerunners of the Holiness revival and extend through the beginnings of Holiness and Pentecostal traditions.

Phoebe Worrall Palmer (1807-1884)

Phoebe Worrall Palmer was born in New York City to parents who had been converted under the influence of John Wesley in Great Britain (Hammack 1984: 115). In 1827 she married Walter C. Palmer, a physician, who joined her in kneeling to pledge their lives to promoting Holiness at a revival held at the Allen Street Methodist Church in 1832. In a few short years she and her sister combined their two women’s prayer meetings. Phoebe testified to the sanctifying grace she received and soon became the leader of the prayer meeting known as the “Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness.” By 1839 the meeting was open to men and Mrs. Palmer’s circle of influence would include Methodist bishops, ministers and

laymen and women (Ingersol 2011). Many of the Holiness and Pentecostal denominations credit Palmer with the beginnings of an American renewal movement that would spread around the world.

Not only did she lead the prayer meetings, but she was also a prolific writer on the subject of holiness. Palmer believed that it was holiness that could make the soul beautiful which empowered a believer to live a well-balanced or “symmetrical” life (White 2003: 22). Her influence expanded nationally and internationally through articles in the *Christian Advocate Journal* and books such as *The Way of Holiness* (1843), *Faith and Its Effects* (1848), and *The Promise of the Father* (1859). She also served as the editor to the *Guide to Holiness*, which the Palmers purchased in 1863 (Ingersol 2011). It is hard to believe she had time to do much else than lead prayer meetings and write for publication, but she and her husband found time to serve others through missions both in America and abroad.

While Phoebe Palmer is more known for her writing and teaching on sanctification that sparked the Holiness revival of the late nineteenth century, that does not mean she did not have a heart for missionary works and service. For her, living the holiness life entirely surrendered to God would not only stand as his witness to others, but would also empower believers to answer his call. A sense of the urgency she had for others to receive holiness is noted as she writes: “Let me assure you dear friend, that as surely as you heed holiness *now*, so surely it is for you *now*. The provisions of the Gospel are all suited to the exigencies of the present time.” She goes on to attempt to answer three important questions, the third being, “What will be the advantages to ourselves and others of living in possession of [holiness]?” (Oden 1994: 285). Even though a specific missionary call is not indicated, the theme here shows a desire to effect the lives of others with the Gospel.

In her notes accompanying *The Way of Holiness*, Mrs. Palmer recounts the struggle to heed God’s call for complete devotion. While this is a personal account of surrender, there is a hint of the missional call here as well. She writes: “She then took this passage, ‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.’ Previous to this she had taken as the motto of life, ‘Entire devotion of heart and life to God.’ She then asked what has induced this resolution and led to corresponding action? ‘The Spirit of God’ was the reply” (Palmer 1843: 122). The importance of resolving to

devote heart and life to God and a life of holiness is coupled with action that is Spirit led. Mrs. Palmer's experience and teaching on holiness were at the center of her theology. Even though she is not considered a systematic theologian, her explanation of holiness influenced many generations to come.

Her desire for holiness in heart and life spilled over into her concern for the world around her. She and her husband did serve others diligently throughout their lives. Charles Edward White describes Mrs. Palmer as a revivalist who had an impact on the feminist movement through her public speaking and publications. He observes that shortly after her sanctification experience, Palmer took to the streets to distribute tracts as a means of reaching those who might never hear the gospel in a church. She was known to go to the "cellars, garrets and alleys" to reach people and bring them along to church, sometimes provided them with proper clothing. While the spiritual need for salvation was at the center of her work, she was aware of the other needs around her as well. Working in tandem with his wife, Dr. Walter Palmer often offered free medical care to poor patients, often providing money for food or medicine (White 1987: 30).

Phoebe Palmer also organized others to serve the needs of the poor. As part of her work in the Methodist Ladies' Home Missionary Society in 1850, she established the Five Points Mission in one of New York's worst slums. The project stands among many of her contributions to the history of mission. White notes that while Charles Dickens visited the mission under police protection, Palmer was undaunted in her work to serve the poor of that area. The mission included a home, school, workroom, and chapel, and could be considered as one of the Protestant movement's first outreach projects intended to reach the rapidly expanding American slums. The Palmers would also minister in Canada, and in 1859 their preaching and missionary journeys took them to the British Isles. They would minister there for the next four years.

If there could be such a thing as a "Holiness Hall of Fame," Phoebe Palmer would have to be one of the main inductees. Ingersol, and no doubt many others, consider her to be the mother of the Holiness revival (Ingersol 2011). For Mrs. Palmer, salvation through Christ and sanctification in the Holy Spirit were at the center of a disciplined life. By

faith, she attained holiness as a blessing from the Lord. However, she did not rest in the wonder of that blessing, but instead put her faith into action through writings and missions that would serve to inspire many generations to come.

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922)

One of the most prominent women of the early Pentecostal movement came from the most unlikely place. Pandita Sarasvati Ramabai, a native born Indian woman, is honored as a Christian, reformer, Bible translator and social activist,⁶ and one who had a major impact in Christianity in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Pandita was born to Brahmin parents, the highest caste in the Indian social political system. Her father, a scholar and social reformer, went against his culture and taught his daughter how to read and write Sanskrit. In 1877, a severe famine swept India leaving Pandita and her brother as the only ones from their family to survive. She and her brother set out for Calcutta and when they arrived, impressed the Bengali Brahmins with their level of intelligence and ability to speak publically (Hosier 2000: 258).

Going against cultural norms, Pandita married outside of her caste. After three years of marriage, she was widowed in 1882 and left to raise her infant daughter on her own (Burgess 2003: 1017). She traveled to England where the Sisters of Wantang took her in (Oden 1994: 321). While there she became a Christian and studied education at the Cheltenham Ladies' College. Her travels took her to America (1886-8) where she studied educational systems in Philadelphia. During her time in the USA she publicized her planned mission in India raising support as she traveled (Anderson 2007: 77). Her travels through India and Britain gave her a deep sense of the need for women's rights. Through trips to the underprivileged in London, she was moved by the Christian compassion and love shown to unfortunate women and children (Burgess 2003: 1017). She was determined to raise the standard of women in India, especially those who had become child widows, and in 1887 published a book on the subject. *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* was written as her vision of creating educational institutions for Indian women (Anderson 2007: 77).

Her own story of faith that led to practice is recorded in a testimony that Ramabai wrote in 1907. She describes the Hindu religion and how she found it to be a false means of faith in that a woman's whole-hearted devotion was to be given in worship to her husband. Gradually she began to experience the love of Christ, and describes seeing light in the darkness and eventually meeting Jesus Christ (Oden 1994: 324). Through this experience, she realized that there was no caste system in the kingdom of God. All believers were equal in sin and salvation. In describing her experience of understanding salvation through Christ as a present reality, she wrote: "At the end of 1896 when great famine came on this country, I was led by the Lord to step forward and start a new work, trusting Him for both temporal and spiritual blessing..." (Oden 1994:326). Pandita Ramabai is describing her faithful steps into action in expanding her fledgling mission to 300 girls rescued from famine in Madhya Pradesh (Anderson 2007: 79).

The Mukti Mission and subsequent Pentecostal revival began with the establishment of a widow's home in Bombay. Ramabai offered refuge to widows, both young and old, from the harsh treatment of men that she witnessed in her own country. In 1895 her work moved to a farm near Poone (Pune) where she planted fruit trees and crops, and dug wells (Hosier 2000: 260). The farm helped to sustain the women and children who were housed and educated there. The mission expanded so quickly, that by the turn of the century overseas missionaries came to serve at Mukti.

The mission also included the teaching of Christian doctrine. Anderson notes that the mission was a "purely undenominational, evangelical, Christian mission," that focused on training women and orphans from all levels of Indian society to be teachers or Bible women working in different Missions (Anderson 2007: 78). Pandita experienced an infilling of the Holy Spirit around 1894, and began to believe others should seek the same blessing. Daily prayer meetings led to the establishment of "Prayer Bands," groups of young women who were trained in witnessing about their faith. As the charismatic tone of the mission grew, revival began to sweep across India (Anderson 2007: 79).

Pandita Ramabai's contribution to missions in India and the Pentecostal movement as a whole is a clear example of the balance between faith and praxis. She notes the following:

Many hundreds of the girls and young women who have come to my Home ever since the doors were opened for them have found Christ as I have. They are capable of thinking for themselves. They have had their eyes opened by reading the Word of God, and many of them have been truly converted and saved... I thank God for letting me see several hundred of my sisters, the children of my love and prayer, gloriously saved. All this was done by God in answer to the prayers of faith of thousands of His faithful servants in all lands, who are constantly praying for us all..." (Oden 1994: 326).

Her missionary endeavors allowed women to play a prominent role in the Indian revival, demonstrating to her countrymen that women had the ability and competence to accomplish great things (Anderson 2007: 88). Because of her unique blend of social concern, compassion, scholarship, and administrative skill, she is credited with being one of the most amazing women of modern times (Burgess 2003:1018).

Minnie Abrams (1859-1912)

Minnie F. Abrams was born in 1859 to a farming family in Mapleton, Minnesota. She attended school to become a teacher and spent two years at the University of Minnesota before heeding her missionary call. She never married, but her influence in mission bears reflection. Gary B. McGee (1999) calls Minnie Abrams, "the most prominent of the veteran missionaries who moved through the ranks of the holiness movement to Pentecostalism." However much of her work has gone unnoticed, which McGee notes was the case of the contributions made by many Holiness and Pentecostal women to the field of missions.⁷

After her teacher's training and studies at the University of Minnesota, she enrolled as one of the first students of the Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions, established by a leader in the Methodist deaconess movement. This was in keeping with many other young women of her day who gave up marriage and family for a more "useful" life as a missionary (McGee 1999: 516). When she graduated, the Minnesota branch of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society commissioned her as a "Methodist deaconess-missionary" (Burgess 2003: 305).

Minnie was highly influenced by the urgency to evangelize the nations before the return of Christ. This urgency was connected to the Wesleyan Holiness and “Higher Life” (Keswickian) teachings on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and subsequent gifts that was being embraced by many missionaries in India at the end of the nineteenth century (McGee 1999: 517). Her passion for faith and mission can be heard as she stated: “God had a way of subduing me and He did it... and when I was subdued I found myself a faith missionary, working under an East Indian woman, Pandita Ramabai, who was also living by faith” (McGee 1999: 517). The balance of faith and praxis is shown in her passion to be a “faith missionary,” trusting God alone for her needs (Burgess 2003: 305). McGee notes that as she stepped out in faith, she flourished, which in turn spurred her on to have greater faith in God’s provision. Ms. Abrams came to work at the Mukti Mission through her desire to serve God and enter the mission field.

Before her time at Mukti mission, Abrams had begun her work in India at a boarding school in Bombay. Like many other women missionaries of her day, Minnie’s main concern was the educational training which reflected the missiology of “Woman’s Work for Woman,” a movement focused on improving the lives of foreign women (McGee 1999:516). However she began to feel confined by the compound as she felt a deep compassion for the people she had seen suffering. She longed to be involved in hands-on evangelism and after waiting ten years was given permission to become a full-time evangelist (Burgess 2003:301).

Her passion for evangelism led her to resign her Methodist appointment in 1889 and join Pandita Ramabai as an administrative assistant. As a faith missionary at the Mukti Mission, Abrams would serve hundreds of child widows and famine victims. Shortly after the turn of the century, stories of revival were reaching India. Ramabai sent her daughter and Ms. Abrams to Australia in 1903 to investigate the crusades of R.A. Torrey and Charles Alexander, which sparked revival there. Within a few years, revival was breaking out among the tribal people of Northeast India. Before long, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit came to the mission (McGee 1999: 517).

In 1905, the Indian revival would sweep into the Mukti mission. The experience of a Mukti resident seemingly being doused by flames as she was being “Spirit baptized,” resulted in the mission being a center for

repentance and revival. Soon after, Abrams organized a massive evangelism initiative. She had trained the women at the mission as evangelists and organized them into “prayer bands.” The groups of fifteen women were dispatched twice a week to the surrounding countryside to preach the gospel in the nearby towns (McGee 1999:517). From her experience at the mission, Abrams wrote *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire* in 1906 describing the revival and its theological underpinnings (Burgess 2003: 301).

Her desire for evangelism, fueled by her own faith in Christ, compelled her to put her faith into action. Her ministry as an administrator, educator, and evangelical trainer played an important role in the wave of revival that swept India just before the Azusa Street mission experience. Abrams returned to Minnesota in 1910 and was disappointed to hear evangelism being promoted as a “man’s job” at a Layman’s Missionary Convention. From her own experience, she knew that global evangelism would not be able to be accomplished without women. On returning to India, she organized a group of women evangelist as the Bezaleel Evangelistic Mission to travel to the unreached mission fields of northern India. Before long, many American women were joining the work. Bezaleel may have been the only women’s missionary society from the Pentecostal tradition (McGee 1999: 219).

Minnie F. Abrams was able to train and mobilize women to evangelize the unsaved through her faith and dedication. McGee (1999) notes that she is one of the most prominent of the veteran women missionaries, yet unfortunately her story is not all that well known. She was able to find a balance between institutional ministry and gospel proclamation. Her desire to see people come to salvation and be baptized with the Holy Spirit through “signs and wonders,” in tandem with serving their physical needs, is a wonderful example of the contributions of women in the field of missiology at the turn of the twentieth century.

Susan Norris Fitken (1870-1951)

Another example of a missionary career of women at the turn of the century is found in a Canadian born Quaker. Susan Norris was born near Ely, Quebec in 1870 to Quaker parents. Her parents were active in the temperance reform movement and her mother served in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union as a delegate to the convention in Ottawa.

Her pietist roots were the result of her connection to the Quaker church; however she did attend an Anglican and an interdenominational church that had a strong evangelical emphasis (Ingersol 2012).

As a teenager, Susan experienced some major illnesses that threatened to take her life. At age 17 she was diagnosed with cancer, and a year later almost died of typhoid fever (Laird 1993: 72). These experiences drew her closer to her religious convictions, and at times she would experience dreams and visions (Ingersol 2012). One of those experiences was a vision of the Lord that assured her that she would get well. When she did recover enough to travel to visit family, she had another vision that she believed was a missionary call (Laird 1993: 72). After her recovery in 1870, she offered herself as a missionary to the China Inland Mission, but due to her health concerns, was turned down. She was not able to find an opening that would accept her, so she turned her efforts to local ministry. Hearing again from the Lord that she was not to minister overseas brought her disappointment, but did not derail her from her passion for evangelism (Laird 1993: 72).

Despite her disappointment, Ms. Fitken was sent to a Christian Endeavor convention in New York City, where she heard about the Friends' Bible Institute and Training School in Cleveland. She was determined to attend the school and enrolled in the fall of 1892. While there, she blossomed as a gifted preacher alongside her fellow male students and was assigned to a church in Vermont. During her work at another church in the Green Mountains of Vermont, Susan was invited to use her gifts in evangelistic work by the Chairman of the Evangelistic Committee of the Friends Society. Reluctantly she agreed to lead a revival in New York. While there she attended a Holiness convention and received the "second blessing" of sanctification in the Holy Spirit (Laird 1993: 74-5).

The revival was a success that led to Susan being sent out for other revival meetings in the area. She was teamed up with another "gifted evangelist," Abram F. Fitken. In the summer of 1896, they married and traveled together as co-evangelists. However the quiet Quaker style did not seem to fit their desire for preaching holiness and sanctification in the Spirit. The couple decided to join the church they had started with the Association of Pentecostal Churches in America, one of the branches that would eventually combine as the Church of the Nazarene. Susan was ordained by

the church, but credited her authority to her divine appointment from God (Laird 1993: 78).

As the couple started a family, Abram moved into a career on Wall Street. Susan continued to preach on Sundays and worked with the fledgling women's missionary society. In 1915, the Church of the Nazarene recognized the society's work and approved a national organization, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS). Fitken was approved as the president, a position that she held until 1948 (Laird 1993: 79). She continued to contend for the power of the Holy Spirit as she wrote: "We cannot be all the Lord wants us to be, or do our best for Him, without the baptism with the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying power, not only making our hearts pure, but filling us with His holy Presence" (Fitken 1940: 711-12). Her understanding of faith and praxis were clearly stated:

Holiness and Missions like Siamese Twins are inseparable. God is a Holy God, manifested as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Bible is a Holy Book, revealing God's plans for a lost and ruined race. God is a missionary God...The Bible is a missionary Book. The theme of the Bible is redemption. The Central Figure is Christ, the First Foreign Missionary who came to make provision that all men might be saved from all sin; that God might have a holy people who would worship and serve Him here, and dwell with Him in a holy heaven through all eternity (Fitken 1940: 44-8).

While these statements were recorded later in her life, they indicate a missiology that held faith and action together.

Her desire to serve on the mission field overseas would eventually come to fruition. She would travel to the British Isles to witness and support the work of the WFMS there. By the time of the Great Depression in the U.S., the WFMS had seen significant growth in both members and finances. This allowed her to take on a special project of building a hospital in Swaziland, Africa. It would be dedicated and named after the Fitken's oldest son, Raleigh, who had died at the age of 10. Other missionary trips would include Mexico, Trinidad and Barbados, Panama, Central America, Hawaii, and South East Asia. Susan Fitken's understanding of the interconnectedness of faith and praxis in mission is unmistakable in the

area of mobilizing women to support missions and missionaries through the WFMS. Laird notes that in the three decades of her leadership, the women of the WFMS had raised over \$6,000,000 and enrolled 80,000 women in membership (Laird 1993: 82). Even though she could not physically serve on the mission field for extended periods of time, Susan N. Fitken's contribution to missions in the early decades of the twentieth century is remarkable.

Lucy Leatherman (1880-1921/3)

Little is known about the final person for consideration for the impact of women missionaries in the early Pentecostal-Holiness movement. While her name may not be all that familiar in mission histories, her contribution to the field is notable. What is known about her is that she was born near Greencastle, Indiana, and was the widow of a physician (Alexander 2005: 71). She is noted to have received the Pentecostal experience through the initial wave of the Spirit at Azusa Street.⁸ As it was for many who attended the Azusa Street revival, Leatherman experienced the gift of tongues. She was believed to have the gift of xenolalia, the ability to speak in a known language. What she spoke appeared to be a Turkish language, which was believed to be in preparation for the mission field in the Middle East (Alexander 2005: 72-3).

Even though there is not much known or written about her, she was a prolific writer for the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century. She regularly posted reports to publications both in America and Europe. Leatherman would travel across the United States and eventually become an itinerant evangelist to Jerusalem, not affiliated with any one church or denomination. Kowalski notes that Leatherman traveled farther and more frequently than the majority of Pentecostal missionaries (Kowalski 2010: 271).

What drove Lucy in her missionary endeavors was her desire to spread the message of Pentecostal Spirit Baptism. The sense that we get of her life and missionary journeys is that she was more focused on evangelism than theology or missiology. Most of her work was done to plant churches and promote the Pentecostal experience of Spirit Baptism.

What is unique about her is that she was not afraid to travel alone and did so in countries where women were considered second-class citizens, and had limited ability to move around freely or participate in public activities. She was likely one of the most well educated women in the Azusa Street revival. Most importantly, she was known to fully engage in the culture to which she was ministering. She would often dress in native clothing and endure the harsh traveling conditions that existed in the places where she ministered (Alexander 2005: 71-2).

Her overseas missionary work began in 1907 in Egypt and would take her to more than eight other countries. Her travels took her to Jerusalem and Beirut, as well as conducting revival services in Nazareth and Galilee. Several of her reports noted revivals that had outgrown their meeting places forcing the gathering outside. In a short article titled “Apostolic Revival in Egypt” she wrote:

Magnify the Lord with me for the great revival in Egypt. Multitudes have been saved, sanctified and baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire. We have out-grown our mission rooms and must live out-doors. God willing, as soon as the missionaries arrive from America, I will go to new fields of labor as He opens the way. I believe Arabia will be where my Father will send me next. Pray for me. (Alexander 2005: 76).

Her writing indicates a faith and dependence on God to carry out the missional task that has been given to her. Although she is not known for her social mission, she did visit Ramabai and Abrams at the Mukti mission where there had been an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Kowalski 2010: 271).

Lucy Leatherman traveled to Southeast Asia, Chile, Argentina, and Peru ever mindful of the social and political climates around her. Allan Anderson credits her as the first Pentecostal missionary to arrive in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria (1906) and in the Philippines (1909) during the first decade of Pentecostal missionaries (Anderson 2007: 288). Unfortunately, the trail of her recorded mission work goes cold in 1923 and it is unclear if she died at that time or earlier in 1921. The impact of her faith in God and her Spirit Baptism at Azusa Street fueled her desire to spread the Pentecostal message wherever God led.

Conclusion

Each one of these women is a wonderful example of the greater work in missions that was taking place during this time period. Women were becoming a formidable force in understanding their faith and how that translates into social concerns and mission to the poor and lost. The role of women in society had shifted at least a little more in favor of women in ministry, even if it was not in preaching or pastoring established churches. Of course there are many other women whose contributions have done much to advance the gospel, but these in particular had a uniqueness that made their contributions important for this study.

What they all had in common was an experience with the Holy Spirit. Whether it was a sense of warmth, a response to an altar call, or receiving the spiritual gift of tongues, each one understood the importance of having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Their faith allowed them to be sensitive to the leading of God. That openness and faith moved them to works that served others. Their stories are also a testimony of how God uses people from all walks of life to accomplish great things.

Phoebe Palmer chose to teach others, including men and serve the poor in the slums of her city. Pandita Ramabai was from a high Hindu caste, but led a mission and revival in home country to serve women and children who were oppressed. Minnie Abrams used her administrative gifts as a veteran missionary to help organize and train women for evangelism. Susan Norris Fitken trusted God for direction and built one of the largest foreign mission aid societies in the U.S. Lucy Leatherman was the first Pentecostal missionary to reach Palestine as a “faith missionary” and adapted to the cultures in which she ministered. Each one had a part to play in the development of missions and mission agencies. While they still may have not received the same recognition as their male counterparts, there is no doubt these women were leaders in their circles of influence.

Their stories give us a better understanding of the balance and sometimes tension between faith and praxis. It is clear that each one had an understanding that they were “saved by faith...not by works” (Eph. 2:8-9). However, after experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit, they were compelled to live out that faith because “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). I would agree with Rosemarie Kowalski that missionary theology is

sometimes messy in process and that today we decidedly need “a theology ... capable of integrating programs of evangelism and social concern into a unified effort in fulfilling the Church’s global mission”(Kowalski 2010: 291). The legacy of these women serves as a reminder that God wants to use us in mission, faith, and praxis, no matter if it is across the globe or across the street.

End Notes

¹ In his article “Discipleship and Mission: A Perspective on the Gospel of Matthew,” *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 360 (Jan. 2002), Emmanuel M. Jacob points to the parable of the sheep and the goats as a missionary mandate for social responsibility within the Christian community. His cultural background as a South African living during apartheid gave him a unique perspective on the balance of faith and praxis. His article is limited to a study on Matthew, however his understanding of the presence of Christ as necessary for putting faith into action supports the faith vs. works discussion (page 108).

² Gordon D. Fee argues for a understanding of global mission through what he determines as Jesus’ continuous teaching on the Kingdom of God in his chapter “The Kingdom of God and the Church’s Global Mission” in *Called & Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991). God’s kingdom is both now and not yet, which Fee contends provides the power to accomplish the ongoing work of the Spirit (page 16).

³ Murray W. Dempster also contends for interpreting Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God as a way of integrating a holistic approach to the theology of church mission and ministry in “Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God” in *Called & Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991, page 24).

⁴ In Barbara J. MacHaffie’s chapter on “Women in the Evangelical Tradition” in *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), she notes that the Holiness movement opened new areas of service in public life for women that had not be available for them previously. Sanctification through the Holy Spirit was a mainstay of the Holiness renewal movement, which in turn led to living out the Christian faith in service to others (page 198).

⁵ David J. Bosch identifies a shift in thinking about women in ministry and volunteerism as part of the post enlightenment understanding of mission in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, page 328).

⁶ Allan Anderson provides an excellent summary of the Mukti Mission and the Indian revival in *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, page 77).

⁷ Gary B. McGee's article, " 'Baptism of the Holy Ghost & Fire!' The Mission Legacy of Minnie F Abrams," *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 4. (October, 1999) outlines the life and ministry of one that he considers to be a veteran Pentecostal missionary. According to McGee, her missiology impacted countless women in India and is credited with spreading the Pentecostal revival to Chile through the publication of her book (page 515).

⁸ In "The Missions Theology of Early Pentecost: Call Challenge and Opportunity," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19, (2010), Rosemarie Daher Kowalski explores the historical components of Pentecostal theology that influenced missions through four case studies. She notes that the Holy Spirit was central to the women's call and passion for God's missionary service (page 271).

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Christopher P. Momany

Faculty Psychology in the Holiness Theology of Asa Mahan

Abstract

As America awakened to a greater antislavery consciousness, Asa Mahan, president of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute, presented his seminal reflection on Christian Perfection. Mahan offered an unusually precise definition of perfection or holiness. The Oberlin president borrowed from Scottish Common Sense Realism to suggest an understanding of Christian Perfection that was both personally rigorous and socially prophetic. This conception of holiness was also rooted in a commitment to objective truth.

Key Words: holiness, Christian Perfection, realism, Common Sense, faculty psychology

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Introduction

In her riveting narrative of Ohio's Underground Railroad, Ann Hagedorn writes:

Eighteen hundred and thirty-eight was the year of the great escape of the Maryland slave Frederick Augustus Bailey, who, dressed as a sailor back from duty at sea, fled on a train to New York, where he changed his surname to Douglass after a character in the poem *The Lady of the Lake* by Sir Walter Scott. It was the year when Pennsylvania Hall, a large new building in Philadelphia erected for the cause of free speech, including abolitionism, opened with an assemblage of thousands, including William Lloyd Garrison – and closed four days later, after a mob burned it to the ground. And it was the year when the government forced the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole to march a thousand miles along a “trail of tears” out of their indigenous Southeastern U.S. to land west of the Mississippi (Hagedorn 2002: 140).

Eighteen hundred and thirty-eight was also the year that Asa Mahan, antislavery president of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute, presented a seminal paper on Christian Perfection. During the evening of September 4, 1838, Mahan addressed the Oberlin “Society of Inquiry” regarding the question, “Is Perfection in Holiness Attainable in this Life?” (Mahan 1838:1). From that point forward, Oberlin's commitment to human rights became inextricable from its promotion of a unique holiness theology. This integrated conviction went far beyond an application of perfectionist ideas to social problems. Mahan articulated a very precise view of Christian holiness. His definition of spiritual maturity demanded an unconditional regard for the intrinsic worth of God and people.

The Case for Egalitarian Realism

Asa Mahan was born on November 9, 1799 in Vernon, New York and thus came of age among a religious populace warmed and worn out by revival fires. His upbringing matched the intensity of New York's “Burned Over District,” and he was graduated first from Hamilton College and then Andover Seminary. In 1831 Mahan accepted the pastorate of Cincinnati's Sixth Presbyterian Church and also took on duties as a trustee of Lane Theological Seminary. His staunch support for the student antislavery movement at Lane brought both condemnation and opportunity (Madden and Hamilton 1982: 26-51). Mahan and many of the Lane abolitionists

eventually moved to Oberlin, Ohio. Here Mahan served as president of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute from 1835-1850.

Asa Mahan did not take up presidential duties without philosophical predisposition. He is best known for uniting a theology of Christian Perfection with uncompromising social principles. However he developed this witness against the backdrop of clear metaphysical and epistemological commitments. From beginning to end Mahan was a realist of the Scottish variety. His two-volume work, *A Critical History of Philosophy* (1883), sorted all cognitive traditions into four basic schools: idealism, materialism, skepticism, and realism. Mahan claimed that idealism reduces external realities to subjective operations of the mind, and materialism subordinates reflection to external objects. Skepticism denies knowledge in either subjective or objective form. Only realism, according to Asa Mahan, offers a perspective that honors both the subject and object in relations of understanding (Momany 2005: 75-84 and Momany 2009: 142-153).

The Scottish philosophy of Common Sense was a form of realism codified and then popularized by Thomas Reid (1710-1796), Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), and others. Most identify its establishment in America with the college presidency of John Witherspoon at Princeton (1768-1794). This perspective claimed for humanity an innate ability to know the world as it really exists. Moreover, realists of the Scottish school held that every human being enjoyed the intellectual capacity to conceptualize both the self and others with remarkable accuracy. Realism was, at once, a straightforward and demonstrably egalitarian viewpoint. It also developed a regional flavor. Idealism held strong appeal in New England. Materialism radiated from Philadelphia to points south. Realism was a quintessentially middle-American philosophy, given distinctive stamp in New Jersey and then sent west.

Asa Mahan's commitment to Scottish Common Sense was typical and is easily overlooked. This form of realism pervaded the frontier expansion of antebellum higher education, so much so that it received the scorn of more imaginative critics. By the twentieth century, Common Sense was judged a superannuated construct possessing little vigor. Even more generous appraisals described it as an artifact of increasingly irrelevant religious traditions. I. Woodbridge Riley's landmark study of American philosophy (1907) considered the role of realism in collegiate life and concluded that it was "an eminently safe philosophy which kept undergraduates locked in so many intellectual dormitories, safe from the

dark speculations of materialism or the beguiling allurements of idealism” (Riley: 477). A nation come of age during the late nineteenth century could not help its urbane desire to cast off shopworn epistemological habits. The Scottish philosophy fell into disrepute.

As the twentieth century dawned more refined intellectuals continued to distance themselves from Scottish Realism. Not until Sydney Ahlstrom’s 1955 article, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” did a more charitable evaluation appear (Ahlstrom: 257-272). Ahlstrom was no promoter of naïve realism. Rather, hindsight brought a less disdainful treatment of the movement.

Meanwhile, Common Sense Realism remained a force in certain church circles, especially those attracted to fundamentalism. Mainline and secular academics could appreciate Scottish thought by the 1950s, primarily because they had not defended its assumptions for decades. Evangelical scholars faced a unique challenge. Among conservative Protestants, the assertions of Common Sense were alive, if not exactly well, long into the twentieth century. George Marsden and Mark Noll have charted the tradition’s trajectory among Evangelicalism from the Civil War to World War II (especially Marsden 1980 and Noll 1985: 216-238). Yet they and others have never really made up their minds whether Common Sense proclivities deserve a residual courtesy or outright censure. By the late twentieth century, self-conscious Evangelicals considered Scottish Realism an intellectual embarrassment. However, this belated criticism invites its own critique, especially since the dominant historiography has come from Reformed church historians (Noll 1994: 83-107).

Even before most Protestant conservatives declared independence from their cumbersome legacy, others were prepared to consider realism anew. The publication of a two-volume work, *A History of Philosophy in America*, by Elizabeth Flower and Murray Murphey (1977) introduced an authentic appreciation for Scottish Common Sense. Flower and Murphey acknowledged that the philosophy had long been dismissed, but they wielded their impeccable Ivy League credentials (the University of Pennsylvania) to register a series of “character witnesses” for realism (1997, vol. 1: 203). As with the earlier analysis of Ahlstrom, Flower and Murphey did not endorse simplistic theories of knowledge, but they did commend the tradition’s more admirable qualities.

Recent scholarship has noted ways in which Common Sense was employed by the dispossessed and marginalized. Maurice Lee’s fascinating

study of nineteenth-century American literature and its philosophical grounding is one example. Lee compares two of the autobiographies written by Frederick Douglass in 1845 and in 1855. He demonstrates how the latter version incorporates specific themes from the Scottish school that are lacking in the first book (Lee 2005: 93-132). The second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, contains analysis similar to that of Douglass's colleague, James McCune Smith – a Scottish-educated physician of African descent. Smith even wrote the preface to this second autobiography.

By 1855 Douglass insisted upon speaking for himself, not only *about* his experience but most especially about the *meaning* of his experience. Invoking and then deploying peculiarly Scottish notions regarding the mind, Douglass was no longer content to narrate his victimization. He became the proprietor of his reflection. He claimed the power of his consciousness. When white New England abolitionists asked Douglass to present the “facts” of slavery so that they could give it a philosophical critique, he confronted them (Douglass 1994: 367). Douglass eventually moved from the controlling, New England influence of William Lloyd Garrison and to the more independent (and western) environment of Rochester, New York. The realism of Frederick Douglass affirmed his intellectual powers; that of Asa Mahan embraced those excluded by more fashionable philosophies.

Faculty Psychology and the Law of Love

Key to understanding the Scottish tradition is its assertion that all people share a universal human nature. The claim that this nature provided all with direct access to reality might be lampooned by more sophisticated critics, but the implications regarding equality and human rights were compelling. This latter point was not lost on Asa Mahan.

In 1846 Mahan released a most intriguing, eclectic, and evocative article. Writing for *The Oberlin Quarterly Review* he gave his piece the rather nondescript title: “Certain Fundamental Principles, together with their Applications.” This article was really a manifesto of first principles for human rights advocacy, as conceived by the Oberlin president. Front and center stood the statement that all rights and interests of humanity “rest exclusively upon the permanent and changeless laws of human nature itself, upon the elements of humanity common to all individuals of the race” (Mahan 1846: 228). Further on he concluded that this shared identity is so seminal, any acceptance of its violation in a single person degrades our own dignity (Mahan 1846: 229-230).

So just what was the Common Sense anthropology? For this realists turned to the sub-discipline of Mental Philosophy. Accordingly, humans were posited as beings of three distinct faculties: the Intellect (or Intelligence), the Sensibility, and the Will (see especially Meyer 1972). Variations on this triad abounded in antebellum America, and moral philosophers were especially adept at bending these categories to advance their respective theories. Asa Mahan made explicit late in life the viewpoint he carried very early. His 1882 text, *The System of Mental Philosophy*, reiterates a more-or-less typical faculty psychology. Yet one curious fact remains. Mahan is remembered for an emphasis upon volition. His *Mental Philosophy* devotes 185 pages to the Intellect, 74 to the Sensibility, and a mere 13 to the Will (Mahan 1882).

This imbalance is more than rectified by an earlier book devoted exclusively to the Will. His 1845 *Doctrine of the Will* is often cited as a classic refutation of the determinism bequeathed by Jonathan Edwards, and some have concluded that the book trumpets a “decisionistic” ethic (Maddox 1995/1996: 160 and Maddox 1998: 46-47). Regardless, careful readers will detect an impressively subtle and supple faculty psychology.

Mahan granted that the Intellect and the Sensibility are dominated by involuntary characteristics. We know that which we know and feel that which we feel. However, the realm of action has a quality all its own. We are not destined to act in the same way that we know or feel things (Mahan 1845: 124-129). Mahan’s explication of this peculiar freedom is open to debate. Traditional Wesleyans might wonder whether he leans more toward a natural ability than a gracious ability, but it is not quite fair to accuse him of teaching a bootstrap theology. Additionally, if Mahan appears at times to suspect the affective side of things, we might withhold our judgment until hearing him out.

The eleventh chapter of the *Doctrine of the Will* is crucial. Here Mahan addresses the relationship between the Intellect, the Sensibility, and the Will when action is deemed morally right and when it is deemed morally wrong. His remarks are revealing: “In all acts and states morally right, the Will is in harmony with the Intelligence, from respect to moral obligation or duty; and all the desires and propensities, all the impulses of the Sensibility, are held in strict subordination. In all acts morally wrong, the Will is controlled by the Sensibility, irrespective of the dictates of the Intelligence” (Mahan 1845: 156). This statement may lead one to conclude that Mahan was suspicious of all feeling, that he was some kind of rigid

formalist when it came to ethics. Yet the real focus of these remarks is the Intelligence. Consistent with his Common Sense tradition, Mahan trusted humanity's ability to know the world outside, its character, and especially its value. In fact, his reliance on the Intellect, as opposed to the Sensibility, was actually Mahan's way of avoiding self-absorption. His brand of realism was not so much an overconfident theory of knowledge as it was a reminder that we have obligations to those around us, even when we do not *feel* such commitment.

This other-directedness is given more specific articulation when Mahan moves into a discussion of the moral law. Like most he reiterates the teaching of Jesus regarding love of God and neighbor. However Mahan also attempts to place this instruction in philosophical context. He pushed himself to develop a specifically metaphysical, even ontological, principle that captures the essence of love. His expression may not be elegant, but it is comprehensive: "It shall be the serious intention of all moral agents to esteem and treat all persons, interests, and objects according to their perceived intrinsic and relative importance, and out of respect for their intrinsic worth, or in obedience to the idea of duty, or moral obligation" (Mahan 1845: 163). The notion of an intrinsic worth, outside of the self, is the fulcrum around which Mahan's entire ethic turns.

Because God and human beings are of inestimable worth, they command our primary regard. In 1840, Mahan wrote: "If the question be asked, why ought God to be the object of supreme regard? the answer, and the only answer is: His intrinsic excellence is greater than any or all other objects. If it be asked: why ought we to love our neighbor as ourselves, the only answer that can be given is this: his [or her] interest is of the same intrinsic value as ours" (Mahan 1840: 208). Mahan considered this axiology an objective truth.

The Oberlin president's 1848 *Science of Moral Philosophy* clarifies the role of the Intelligence in perceiving intrinsic worth. Here he discusses "subjective servitude" or the captivity to feelings. In contrast, Mahan argues that people are free when they act toward objects according to "their intrinsic and relative importance, as apprehended by the intelligence" (Mahan 1848: 307). If subjective servitude entails being driven by the Sensibility, then an affirmation of intrinsic worth, as known by the Intelligence, promises true liberty.

Mahan's faculty psychology provided much more than a variegated theory of action. It grounded his entire pedagogy. The free and

educated person was characterized by an ordered Intelligence, Sensibility, and Will. Mahan gave intricate expression to this view when he said:

The great want of universal humanity is a knowledge of truth, and a state of feeling and action in harmony with truth manifested to the mind. To this great end all the mental powers are, as designed by the Creator, in fixed correlation. The intellect is adapted to one result – the discovery and retention of truth, and its presentation to the heart. The exclusive sphere of the Will is perpetual action in harmony with truth known, and the continued employment of the intelligence in the discovery of the unknown; while the equally exclusive sphere of the Sensibility is to delight in the former, and through the influence of desire to impel the Will in directing the Intellect in search of the latter. The true idea of education is mental development in fixed correlation to this great end (Mahan 1846: 234-235).

This text invites several observations. Perhaps most important is its holistic character. To consider these words is to ponder an integrated, even symbiotic type of faculty psychology. For instance, the Sensibility seems to receive greater recognition here. Was the college educator simply inconsistent? No. He appreciated the affective more than most contemporary commentators grant, but the delight involved was a joy in the presence of truth. Always the realist, Mahan began and ended his reflection with a respect for the value of things as they are.

Holiness as Delight in Truth

It is perhaps ironic that Mahan titled his groundbreaking 1838 essay, “Is Perfection in Holiness Attainable in this Life?” Much of the ensuing Holiness Movement would be preoccupied with this question. It can be argued that more energy has been expended debating the attainability of Christian perfection than defining what is meant by Christian perfection. The latter issue was exceedingly important to Asa Mahan.

The best known expression of Mahan’s holiness teaching is his 1839 *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection*. The book begins with a chapter on the “nature” of Christian perfection. Mahan links his definition of holiness to a healthy interaction of the mental faculties. Within the sanctified person, the intellectual powers will seek “the truth and will of God, and by what means we may best meet the demands of the great law of love” (Mahan 1839: 14). Likewise, the feelings and susceptibilities will

be “in perfect and perpetual harmony with the truth and will of God as apprehended by the intellect” (Mahan 1839: 15). Mahan employed a faculty psychology in his very early articulations of holiness theology.

An even more detailed explication of the role faculty psychology played in Asa Mahan’s holiness teaching can be found among his handwritten, manuscript notebook. After various lecture outlines, sermon ideas, and philosophical musings, Mahan explored the topic of “Sanctification” with reference to the mental faculties. Underscoring these notes is a connection between the conception of Christian perfection and that of “truth.” Mahan referenced John 17:17, as translated by the KJV: “Sanctify them through thy truth” (Mahan, “Manuscript Writings, Miscellaneous”). Whether Mahan’s interpretation of “truth” is the same thing intended by the writer of the Fourth Gospel can be argued. Yet truth, in some expression, anchored the Oberlin president’s approach to holiness, just as it figured prominently in his faculty psychology.

A considerable part of Mahan’s emphasis on truth can be traced to his belief in a knowable, objective reality. These same notes on sanctification stress that the holy person is one whose intention “will be in perfect harmony with the nature, character, and relations of all objects apprehended by the intelligence” (Mahan, “Manuscript Writings, Miscellaneous”). Moreover, one’s “feelings will correspond with the nature of the objects presented” (Mahan, “Manuscript Writings, Miscellaneous”). The interaction between Asa Mahan’s faculty psychology and his theology of holiness is so complete that it is virtually impossible to extricate one from the other.

While some might question the role played by the Sensibility in Mahan’s holiness teaching, others may find his focus on the world outside refreshing. There is nothing in Mahan’s witness that deprecates “heart” holiness, but there is plenty to keep us from turning the tradition into incessant navel-gazing. This might be Asa Mahan’s most powerful and enduring contribution. It might also be an incisive gift for today’s church.

Popular religious language these days is all about “passion” – how to find your passion, how to live your passion, how to maintain your passion. Not surprisingly, this terminology differs little from that celebrated in the rest of American culture. We might note that one university with a reputation for releasing annual lists of overused and clichéd terms opened 2013 with a ban on the word: “passion” (Patterson 2012). Such self-anointed policing of the language could be nothing further than hype and bombast

generated by the culture it seeks to correct, but there may be something to the indictment.

I work with young adults as a college chaplain and as a professor. My scholarship needs to intersect with the deepest yearnings of undergraduates. My student friends might seem to want outlets for their constructive passion, and to a significant degree, they do. However I have been astounded by the ways in which they want more than passion. They want truth – truth in all of its forms. They want something substantial enough to sustain them when their short-lived desire fails. They want something eternal and beautiful that can orient their delight and joy. They want holiness that will leave them with more than a warm feeling. They want a holiness that will point them toward God and other people. Here is where Asa Mahan’s theology has much to offer us today.

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Moshe Reiss

*Esau, Son of Isaac and Grandson of Abraham: The Model
of a Faithful Son*

Abstract

The story of Esau and Jacob, the two powerful sons of Isaac and Rebekah is one of the several conflicting families noted in the book of Genesis. Jacob, whose other name is Israel, is the father of the twelve tribes and thus the founder of the Jewish people. Rebekah may be the most powerful of the matriarchs; the one God talks to directly about her role in the covenant. The reconciliation of the brothers is one of the more powerful descriptions in the Bible.

Key Words: Esau, Jacob, Rebekah, Isaac, reconciliation, scripture interpretation

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Introduction

After twenty years of barrenness, suddenly Rebekah becomes pregnant. It was a difficult pregnancy. She seeks after God for an explanation of what she considered her excessive suffering. She asks in Hebrew “*lamah zeb anochi*” “Why me?” or “Who am I?” or perhaps “Why am I?” (Gen. 25:22).¹ This is a surprising question in view of the assumed happiness of finally conceiving after twenty years of barrenness.

God informs Rebekah “two nations are in your womb, two separate peoples shall issue from your body. One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). The younger will subdue the older. This is a prediction of two forms of nations, comparable perhaps to Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. It is not explicitly stated whether Rebekah shared this revelation with her husband Isaac, however from the remainder of the story it is apparent that she did not.

Rebekah had already received Abraham’s blessing (from her own family) to have descendants by the “thousands and tens of thousands . . . to gain possession of the gates of their enemies” (24:60). That is a repetition of the blessing given by God to Abraham at the end of the *akeda*. “Your descendants will gain possession of the gates of their enemies” (22:17). Thus, Rebekah is called a “*na’ar*” (a masculine form) four times when she is introduced (24:16,28,55,57) and not called using the feminine form “*na’ar’ah*,” and she is asked her opinion about the marriage (24:58). She gets the mission to carry the blessing, not her husband Isaac. That is particularly surprising in a patriarchal society.

The Twins

The children were fraternal twins and we quickly learn that Esau appears to have his mother’s aggressive personality, whereas Jacob tends to be like his father. Isaac, the passive patriarch (who literally did little more in his lifetime than follow in his father’s footsteps), prefers his aggressive outgoing son Esau, the son he was unable to be. Rebekah prefers her passive son, perhaps one she can mold from a tabula rasa into *her* image of a son. Jacob stays at home, in Rebekah’s tent. He would be different from his father, part-blinded and traumatized from his *akedab* (binding – his near sacrifice). Jacob learns from her to deal with the world by means of guile and manipulation, while she may be over-protecting her weaker child.

Esau, the first of the twins was born impressively mature and fully developed with a red hairy body - hence they called him Esau (from *se'ar* -hairy). His body was so distinguished that 'they' - Rebekah and Isaac - called him Esau. The second born was called by "him" - presumably Isaac - 'Ya'acov' - Jacob, because Isaac noticed that the younger child held onto his older brother's heel (from *akev* - heel), struggling to be the first born. Jacob, we are told is smooth skinned (27:11), and less developed than his brother.² He is the weaker of the two children and perhaps for that reason, among others, his mother protects and loves him. We are also told he was '*tam*', which means in Hebrew both "complete" or "simple" or perhaps "mild." Jacob is actively attempting to supplant his brother. He is smooth skinned and perhaps slippery like one attempting to slip past his brother.

Did Rebekah believe that Esau was the cause of her difficult birth? Perhaps she believed that it was the stronger more robust and developed child who kicked in the womb causing her pain. Jacob was a more passive child, easier to handle and perhaps to nurse. Both parents realized the stark contrast between the children at birth. Did Esau's more developed body make it difficult for Rebekah to bond with him, while at the same time making it easier for passive Isaac to bond with him? Did Esau suffer a fate similar to Ishmael, the son rejected by Sarah but not by Abraham? Did Jacob appear to his mother to bear a resemblance to Isaac, the near sacrificed son? Did Esau remind Isaac of Ishmael, the non-traumatized son, the older brother exiled for incomprehensible reasons (perhaps to both Ishmael and Isaac). Did his mother reject Esau, as Sarah rejected Ishmael? Rebekah also believed staunchly in her vision, which gave her the mission to choose the son who was entitled to get the blessing.

As Esau grew into an outdoorsman - a skilled hunter, not unlike his Uncle Ishmael, (and his nephew Joseph blessed by his father to be a warrior - 49:24) he was the embodiment of a masculine man - one who goes out to dominate nature, to be in control. Esau was born with an aggressive personality. Jacob was as a "mild man of the tents," however by grasping on to his brother's heel he invested much of his life striving to be like his aggressive brother. Esau, on the other hand, with his personality was content to be as he was created.

Isaac, the passive patriarch thus gravitates naturally toward Esau and openly displays his preference for him. He finds his aggressive masculine value system attractive and comforting. Isaac can be viewed as the embodiment of passivity, even at critical moments, such as when his

father Abraham was about to sacrifice him. Isaac had a powerful father and eventually two powerful sons. He recognized Esau's masculine personality and perhaps preferred a value system different from his own. Esau is a man's man. How can one imagine life for Esau, the outgoing aggressive personality growing up with a quasi-autistic father? Esau may have been a highly active, in all likelihood a "troublemaker" as a child, but somehow restrained when with his father. How did Isaac's demeanor affect both his children? Was he able to inspire them, to discipline them, to command their respect?

Jacob, although passive in temperament, thrives on his mother's active disposition. Did Rebekah favor Jacob for his passivity? Did Rebekah "adopt" Jacob by choice and leave Esau for Isaac? Conversely, did Isaac "adopt" Esau and leave Jacob for Rebekah? Did Esau seem like a "*iikkun*" - to Isaac - an opportunity for a corrective experience to rewrite his own history - the passivity he exhibited at the *akedah*? We have no reason to believe that Isaac did not love Jacob, nor that Rebekah did not love Esau. Each simply preferred the one personality most in contrast to their own personality. How did Esau react to his mother's personality and her preference for Jacob? How did Jacob react to his father's personality and his preference for Esau? Rebekah was shrewd, manipulative, and convinced of her mission from God. Nothing could restrain her.

Esau, a classic parental child in a dysfunctional family protects his passive father, recognizes his father's limitations and devotes his life to care-taking of both his physical and emotional needs. One can imagine Esau, an outdoorsman having to overcome his natural proclivities in order to tend for his father. Jacob lives in his mother's tent; Isaac appears to no longer live in the same tent as his wife. Esau being separated from his mother lives with his father and is more available to meet his needs. It seems plausible that Esau reminds his father of his own lost older brother - Ishmael. Isaac loves fresh wild meat, so Esau hunts and brings it home, and even cooks it for his father. His brother Jacob, whose role is to cook for the family, prefers vegetarian dishes - not what his father desires. One day, Esau had a particularly frustrating day hunting - it is perhaps during a very hot *khamisin* (hot desert wind). He comes home famished and thirsty, nearly dehydrated, to the kitchen and sees Jacob cooking a red lentil dish - hardly to Esau's liking - but he is on the verge of expiration and asks, does not demand, food from his brother. Jacob, the articulate man of culture makes a trade with his more boorish brother who has called the lentil soup

“this red stuff.” Jacob unabashedly formulates a deal. The text is clear, Jacob demanded an oath from his brother to sell him the birthright. “First give me your birthright in exchange” (25:31). Jacob takes advantage of his weakened brother. Esau, oblivious to anything but his hunger and possible dehydration says, “Here I am at death’s door, what use is a birthright to me?” (25:32). Esau “ate, drank, got up and went away” (25:34), no doubt totally disgusted with his brother. Jacob, presumably unaware of his mother’s divine mission, is fearful of his brother but wants to best him. Where has Jacob learned this competitive behavior? This issue will come up again when Jacob obtains his father’s blessing through stealth. Jacob had obviously been trained by his mother.

The Deception

When Isaac “had grown old,” (27:1) he called Esau and said to him “take your weapons, your quiver and bow; go out into the country and hunt me some game. Make me the kind of appetizing dish I like and bring it to me to eat and I shall bless you from my soul before I die” (27:3-4). Rebekah overhears Isaac’s conversation. She convinces Jacob to deceive his father, her husband the almost blind patriarch, and to steal the blessing from him. Jacob is fearful of engaging in deceit towards his father, but his mother allays his fears by assuming total responsibility for the theft and deception “On me be the curse, my son, just listen to me” (27:13). Perhaps Jacob pondered whether a blessing stolen remains a valid blessing.³ Do we support “situational ethics”, the idea that under certain conditions we may justifiably lie? That lying is a sin is clear from the Bible, (Ex, 20:12, 23:7, Lev. 19:11).⁴

Rebekah devised a plan to ensure Jacob’s receipt of the blessing. She dressed Jacob in Esau’s clothing and in the skin of a lamb. Isaac caught the scent and uttered “come closer, my son, so I might feel you” (27:22), which is precisely what Jacob feared (27:12). Did Isaac suspect his wife and younger son might attempt to deceive him? When the blind Isaac asked Jacob to identify himself, Jacob responded deceitfully “I am Esau your first born . . . [Isaac responds] are you really Esau?” (27:19). Jacob arrived too quickly for hunting and cooking and Isaac asked, “How did you succeed so quickly? He said ‘YHVH made things go well for me’” (27:20). Jacob blatantly lied to his father using God’s name as a witness. His mother engineered the entire plan, slaughtered, and cooked the goat. It was not God. Isaac senses something is amiss and utters his suspicion “the voice

is Jacob's voice but the arms are the arms of Esau" (27:23). Isaac did not trust his ears when he heard the voice of Jacob, nor his intuition. He could never trust himself after the deception brought on him by his father.

The deception is executed, the crime pays, and the theft is successful. The blessing is not addressed by name to either son, yet it is clearly meant for Esau. However, the blessing intended for Esau goes to Jacob. "[T]he smell of my son is like the smell of a fertile field" (27:27). Who smells like a "fertile field," Jacob or Esau? Jacob is concerned that his father will smell him and recognize Jacob's smell. Esau clearly meets this description. "May God give you dew from heaven, and the richness of the earth, abundance of grain and wine" (27:28). Who lives under the heaven and subdued the "richness of the earth" - Jacob or Esau? "Let people serve you and the nations bow low before you" (27:29). Who is the hunter who subdued the "richness of the earth"? Moreover, who subdued other people, but a hunter? In addition, who is the hunter? - Esau. And whom "will people serve ... and nations bow low" to? The crux of the blessing is "be master of your brothers; let your mother's other sons bow low before you" (27:29). This blessing is, almost precisely, what Rebekah had been told, "One nation will have the mastery over the other, and the elder will serve the younger" (25:23). "Curse be those that curse you and blessed be those that bless you" (27:29). Given the history of Jacob and his family and Esau and his family, one can ask who in fact received the curse and who received the blessing?

Esau dutifully returns with the meal he prepared at his father request. Isaac realized that "your brother came with guile, and has taken away your blessing" (27:35). "Have you but one blessing, my father" Esau wept. He instantaneously changed from the son of who it is sometimes claimed needed immediate gratification to one with a need for a future. However, it was too late, his brother and his mother had stolen the blessing. It is hard not to sympathize with Esau and Isaac for the harm inflicted on them. Isaac nevertheless proceeds to bless Esau.

The first part of the blessing is almost the same "Behold of the fatness of the earth shall you dwell and with the dew of heaven" (27:39). Jacob received the "dew of heaven" first and then the "fatness of the earth," for Esau the order is reversed; Esau receives first the "fatness of earth" and then "the dew of heaven." Presumably, Jacob is blessed first with the spirituality of heaven and then the materialism of the earth, for Esau it is the reverse. However, both receive both blessings. Even the

blessing Rebekah received that “One nation will have mastery of the other” is only short term. Isaac blessed Esau “to live the life of the sword but to serve his brother. But when you win your freedom, you will break his yoke from off your neck” (27:40). Thus, whatever the original plan envisioned in Rebekah’s vision, the blessing was divided. In Jewish tradition, Jacob prefigured the conflict between the Jewish people and Rome, as the expulsion of Ishmael prefigured the conflict between the Jewish people and Islam.

However, the Hebrew text is not as clear as usually assumed. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the recently retired Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth states as follows,

The words *ve-rav yaavod tsair* seem simple: “the older will serve the younger.” Returning to them in the light of subsequent events, though, we discover that they are anything but clear. They contain multiple ambiguities. The first (noted by Radak [David Kaspi – 1160-1235, Provence, France] and R. Yosef ibn Kaspi [1279-1340, Provence, France]) is that the word “*et*,” signaling the object of the verb, is missing. Normally in biblical Hebrew the subject precedes, and the object follows, the verb, but not always... Thus the phrase might mean “the older shall serve the younger” but it might also mean “the younger shall serve the older.” To be sure, the latter would be poetic Hebrew rather than conventional prose style, but that is what this utterance is: a poem.

The second is that *rav* and *tsa’ir* are not opposites, a fact disguised by the English translation of *rav* as “older.” The opposite of *tsa’ir* (“younger”) is *bechir* (“older” or “firstborn”). *Rav* does not mean “older.” It means “great” or possibly “chief.” This linking together of two terms as if they were polar opposites, which they are not – the opposites would have been *bechir/tsa’ir* or *rav/me’at* – further destabilises the meaning. Who was the *rav*? The elder? The leader? The chief? The more numerous? The word might mean any of these things.

The third – not part of the text but of later tradition – is the musical notation. The normal way of notating these three words would be *mercha-tipcha-sof pasuk*. This would support the reading, “the older shall serve the younger.” In fact, however, they are notated *tipcha-mercha-sof pasuk* – suggesting, “the older, shall the younger serve”; in other words, “the younger shall serve the older.” (C&C Toldot 2007).⁵

Jacob was rather easily convinced by his mother to participate in this fraud. He accepts her response in advance of the deed; that she will assume responsibility for the deception. His mild personality allows him to accept the rules of the world, at least his mother's rules. At this point in his life, he lacks the assertiveness and the ego strength of his mother, his brother, or his grandfather Abraham. He does not rebel nor display any anger. Is he programmed by his mother to acquiesce? Does he also seek his father's approbation? Every son needs his father's love (and his mother's). By saying, "I am Esau your firstborn" and feeding his father could he believe his father loved him?

Esau plots to kill Jacob for this deception and said to himself after my father dies I will kill him. It is noteworthy that respecting his father precedes even his acting out on his rage. Even in his rightful anger, he will not disturb his father's peace, a remarkable sense of honor. However, Rebekah understands, despite Esau's comment being an interior monologue, what an aggressive personality would do, and perhaps she would do the same. She sends Jacob away, to her brother from whom he will further learn guile, manipulation, and deceit. She tells Jacob to stay for a while (27:44). How long did she expect this forced separation to last? Did she really think Jacob would be back in a few days or weeks? Can she foresee that she would never see him again? Does Jacob wonder about his mother's claim to take responsibility for the consequences of the deceit? Does he really believe that in a few days or weeks Esau will relent in his thought of killing Jacob? Esau hears his father telling Jacob "do not choose a wife from the Canaanite women." Despite all of the pain his parents caused him, he goes to Uncle Ishmael and marries one of his daughters, a granddaughter of Abraham. What an extraordinary loving son to his father.

Reconciliation After More Than Twenty Years

Longing to return home after two decades, Jacob dispatches Esau a message offering to meet, informing him of his riches and sending servants to offer a large gift, perhaps to appease for the theft. Esau decides to meet his brother and travels a great distance. Jacob offered his brother "200 she-goats, 20 he-goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 20 camels rich in milk and their calves, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys and 10 male donkeys" - a veritable fortune - a gift begging forgiveness - an admission of guilt. "I will

atone in his face, with the presents going before my face, and afterwards I will see his face, perhaps he will raise my face” (32:21).⁶

Jacob crossed the River Jabbok, a word play on his name Jacob, with his family. Jacob then returned across the river to be alone. On the banks of the river Jabbok – his Rubicon - he wrestles with a “man/angel” all night (32:25). The man/angel cannot break away and escape from Jacob. Where does Jacob get the power and strength to fight all night? Does he have Esau’s power? However, the man/angel damaged the sinew of his hip and Jacob limped for the remainder of his life. As dawn breaks the “man/angel said ‘let me go, for dawn is breaking’, but Jacob answered ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me’”(32:25-27); he understood that the man had special authority. What does it mean that the man/angel needs to go “for the dawn is breaking”? Jacob stole the blessing of Power from his blind father who was in the darkness all the time. Does he now wish to get a blessing honestly? Can the man/angel be fearful of light?

One set of Jewish Midrashim (plural for Midrash)⁷ tells us the “man/angel” represents Esau. The idea of personal combat with a divine being is a very unusual event in the Bible. The only other event is when God seems to want to kill Moses right after giving him his life-long mission (Ex. 4:24-26). This entire conflict between Jacob and his brother Esau can only take place at night. Jacob needs a blessing of forgiveness from Esau. The Hebrew word *‘vayeyaveyk’* is usually translated as “wrestling,” but also means in traditional commentaries “to embrace, an intimate conflict.” Another set of Midrashim claim it was Jacob’s own angel confronting him. As a youth, he was dominated by his mother and the last twenty years by his father-in-law, who was his mother’s brother. His grandfather Abraham, whose blessing he carries, was a monumental man of faith. His father is the equivalent of a holocaust survivor, who preferred his brother Esau. Where does that leave Jacob? Who is he? Am I worthy of this blessing I deceived my father to receive? Did it indeed rightfully belong to my brother? The struggle with the angel seems to indicate a struggle for self-identification.

The “man/angel” demands of Jacob, “what is your name?” Since he knows whom he is fighting, is he really asking Jacob who do you think you are? He does not allow Jacob to answer but continues “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel since you have striven with god and men and have prevailed” (32:29). His name Jacob represents his living in the tent of his mother. Israel can be translated as “God-fighter.” Is his name comparable to his brother? Another version is that Jacob means “crooked”

as he has acted most of his life; while Israel from “*sarita*” (in Hebrew) can mean “straight”; only if he is straight can he reconcile with Esau. Jacob is thus informed that he has achieved his life-long objective. He has attained the power he had always sought. Jacob, in turn inquires of the man/angel his name, a reversal of the “man/angel’s” question. The “man/angel” offers a blessing (32:29-30) as Jacob had earlier requested. However, the blessing is not stated. Is it Esau’s forgiveness of his stealing their father’s blessing? Alternatively, is it the blessing of Abraham, deceptively stolen from Isaac? Does Jacob now get a blessing that he may be entitled to as opposed to the one he stole from his father?

Jacob then calls the place “*Peniel*” “because I have seen the face of God face to face” (32:31). Jacob later tells us he saw God’s face in Esau (33:10). The next verse says, “as the new day dawned Jacob left ‘*Penuel*’ and limped on his thigh.” What is the difference between “*Peniel*” and “*Penuel*”? (The correct term for “the face of God” would be “*Pna-el*’.) “*peni*” is the singular (feminine) of face, and “*peni*” is the plural – faces. The plural may be that Jacob/Israel recognizes that he and Esau are intricately connected and are the shadows of each other. Moreover, his double name represents that he recognized and joined his shadow.⁸

As Jacob approaches his brother, he bows seven times to the ground, until he reached his brother. When Esau saw Jacob, he ran “to meet him, took him in his arms, threw himself on his neck and wept as he kissed him” (33:4). Esau was overcome with emotions at seeing his brother Jacob. The servants and their children bowed low and then Leah and her children bowed low, and finally Rachel and Joseph bowed low before Esau. Esau was baffled by all the gifts and asked what they were? Jacob responded, “To win my Lords favor.” Esau responds to his brother “I have more than enough, my brother. Let what you have remain yours” (33:8-9). Jacob bows down to Esau seven times. Seven times Jacob calls Esau “my lord.” Five times Jacob refers to himself as “your servant.” The roles seem to have been reversed. Esau does not become the servant of Jacob. Instead, Jacob speaks of himself as the servant of Esau.

Esau responded by forgiving his brother. Jacob, whose emotions included the expectation of violence at his brother’s hand, is amazed that his brother can forgive him. He views this forgiveness as almost god-like, “forasmuch as I have seen your face, as one sees the face of God, and you were pleased with me” (Gen. 33:10). Esau who had “more than enough” (33:9) forgave Jacob who now had “everything” (33:11). Jacob who had

previously described the numerous animals he had intended to give his brother as a “*minkhati*” (33:10) a gift, now offers his brother his “*birkehati*”, (33:11) a word that means both “birthright” and “blessing”.

Both Esau and Jacob lives can now begin anew. We know much about Jacob’s life but almost nothing about Esau’s from the time of the stolen blessing. Esau’s personal growth and development must have been extraordinary. What was it that enabled Esau to gracefully forgive Jacob? What has effected this transformation from a man earlier described as a boor to becoming such a gentleman? One wishes one could understand how this man, loving and caring for his ill father, hating his brother for stealing his birthright and his blessing, managed to achieve that extraordinary psychological growth. It seems from the text that Esau has forgotten about Jacob and gotten on with his life. Jacob, however, never forgot his desire to be Esau. Esau is the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, whose God is image-less, but Jacob can see him at Jabbok and in his brother’s face.

The brothers understand that they both have achieved their goals; both have been blessed by God and no longer need to resent each other. They are reconciled to each other. Jacob has been motivated predominately by quiet careful thought throughout this entire episode out of the guilt he felt. His actions are consistent with his life of calculation and manipulation. Esau’s actions are consistent with his prior behavior. He is open, emotional, nonjudgmental, and short sighted. He sells his birthright, cries at the lost blessing, vows to kill his brother, and ends up kissing him. He acted chivalrously, generously, and with forgiveness toward his brother.

Conclusion

Had Rebekah shared with Isaac her vision from God, that the blessing was to go to Jacob, their relationship might have been totally different. The vision did not require a single process to accomplish the end objective. Rebekah chose the process and it was a process of aggressive manipulation, of deceiving her husband and one of her sons at the expense of the other. Abraham was still alive during the twins early childhood and he was the origin of the blessing. It was him to whom God gave the promise. Why did she not go to Abraham and consult with him as to how to raise the twins? He had two children, only one of whom could get the covenantal blessing, but both received a blessing. Isaac and Rebekah could have developed a strategy to teach their children the different roles each

was to play. One (Esau) was the man of physical strength and one (Jacob) was destined to be the man of faith. Why not go to the original man of faith, Abraham, and discuss how to develop a strategy for both children?

In the Book of Jubilees⁹ Rebekah is the model matriarch.¹⁰ Rebekah does go to Abraham and he confirms that Jacob is the righteous son (Jub. 19:17-21). John Endres considered that “in Jubilees Rebekah’s status was highly elevated, far beyond any reasonable expectations.” One of the reasons he suggests was “the possibility of re-defining spousal relationships and responsibilities.”¹¹ Halpern-Amaru believes that Rebekah “provides the biblical portrait of . . . a skeletal archetype for the facilitator role of all the matriarchs.” The Genesis version hints this in less obvious, but clear ways. Her revelation suggests the younger will be stronger, but she understands this strength is spiritual not material. Isaac seems unaware of Jacob’s future. She is so convinced as to deceive her husband as to who will receive the blessing. Nothing in Genesis explicitly explains her knowledge, motivation, or actions as they enhance covenantal history.¹²

Two nineteenth century commentators have recognized the deception of Rebekah. They suggest that Isaac and Rebekah did indeed discuss the situation, but disagreed on the appropriate strategy. Rabbi Meir Lebusch Malbim (1809-1880)¹³ and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1800-1900)¹⁴ both suggest that Isaac wanted to separate the blessing. He felt that Jacob had the ability to lead spiritually, while Esau had the ability to lead the material/warrior world and both could have formed a partnership. Rebekah disagreed. She was convinced that the blessing had to be bestowed to one son and Jacob was the sole choice.

Esau eventually forgave Jacob for his deception, yet the use of family rivalry and enmity that he learned from his mother continued with Jacob’s own children. They would have conflict and the older brothers would consider killing Joseph. Jacob then adopted his father’s original plan and divided the blessing. Jacob later gave the spiritual blessing to Judah and the material/warrior blessing to Joseph and various parts of the blessing to his other children.

One can argue that Rebekah, who suggested Jacob go away for a “few days” (Gen. 27:44) never sees Jacob again, nor is she ever mentioned in the text again. Her death is not noted perhaps because she deceived her husband and older son. Jacob is punished by marrying the wrong wife – Leah - before he marries his beloved Rachel. The Midrash “justified” it by his deceiving his father.¹⁵ Others have seen Jacob being in exile from his

parents for twenty years as being comparable with his losing his son Joseph for twenty-two years.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel (a prominent first century Talmudic Rabbi) said no one ever honored his father as did Esau.¹⁶ Esau honored his father (Ex. 20:12), while Jacob feared his father (Lev. 19:3). The alleged author of the Zohar (the most important book of Jewish mysticism, written in the thirteenth century), states that redemption can only come if Esau's tears are dried.¹⁷ The Rabbis of the Zohar recognize Jacob's deception and the Jewish tradition, which continues to see Esau as evil, may have been wrong. Both Rabbis were reading the literal meaning of the tale rather than commenting on the text. Some of these transposed Esau as Rome/Christianity and thus a Jewish enemy; of course, that was not true of the original son of Isaac.¹⁸ Of the patriarchs, Jacob has the most troubled and difficult life (47:9). His greatness comes when he faces his fears straight on. It is at those times he rises to become Jacob, who struggles with man and God – and reconciled with Esau. Whether his sons ever reconciled with each other is also problematic.

Endnotes

¹ Avivah Gottlieb Zorenberg, lecture on November 24, 1997; author of *Genesis, The Beginning of Desire*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1995 and *The Particulars of Rapture, Reflections on Exodus*, Doubleday, N.Y., 2001) among others.

² Who was the elder? Moreover, what does this imply in the case of Esau and Jacob? Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Isaac – 1040-1105, is the classical commentator of the Hebrew Bible and Talmud, northern France) see Rashi on Gen. 25: 26 suggesting that Jacob was in fact the elder.

³ P. Barnes, "Was Rahab's Lie a Sin?" *RTR* 54 (1995), and B. Thompson and S. Estabrook, "Rahab's Lie and Situation Ethics" *Reason and Revelation*, 19 (1999), pp. 81-84.

⁴ The debate also involves Rahab lying about the spies (Josh. 2:3-23) see also Heb.11:31 and James 2:25. Many Jewish commentators including Rashi deny that Jacob lied directly, but Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1167, Cordoba, Spain, a man of letters and writer of philosophy, astronomy, poetry and linguistics; his knowledge of Arabic allowed him to read the Greek and Latin commentaries translated into Arabic) and Maimonides (1135-1204, similarly a man of letters and physician, of Cordoba, Spain

and Cairo Egypt, who wrote the first book of Jewish law *Mishna Torah* and a book of philosophy commenting on Aristotle, in Arabic *The Guide for the Perplexed*) accept that prophets can lie. Many exegetes recognize that Jacob was punished by marrying Leah whom he hated. Some Jewish commentators also believe his sons' lying to him about Joseph dying was another punishment he suffered. That lying is a sin is clear (Ex. 20:12, 23:7 and Lev.19:11), although all these seem to be in a court of law. (In addition to 'bearing false witness' – verse 12 above –, lying in God's name is mentioned separately in the Ten commandments in Ex. 20:6). Thus, one could argue lying is noted twice in the Ten Commandments.

Marc Shapiro, Weinberg Professor of Judaic Studies - the University of Scranton, stated that lying for a greater good is an old Talmudic tradition (Babylonian Talmud Yehamoth 65b, Ketuboth 16b-17a, Baba Metzia 23b-24a and Nedarim 27b – the Babylonian Talmud was written in the third – fifth century in the common era) continuing into almost modern times; in a talk at Yarnton's Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies on April 29, 2013. He noted that preserving peace, where more harm would be come from the truth than lying, and in intimate matters and modesty are acceptable reasons. Less acceptable he noted is false attribution, noted in the Talmud as well as in medieval texts and up to modern times. Others have noted the business and ethical aspect of the problem; Shapiro's talk noted the theological aspects of the problem.

⁵ Jonathan Sacks, "Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9) Between Prophecy and Oracle," November 11, 2012, retrieved online from: <http://www.aish.com/tp/i/sacks/178620051.html>.

⁶ Author's translation. As we shall see, the face 'pna' keeps repeating itself in this short text. Perhaps he comes 'face to face' with himself. Years later, after years of mourning for his lost son - Joseph, Jacob is again revived by a face. He sees Joseph and says, 'I will die now, after I have seen your face for you are still alive' (Genesis 36:30).

⁷ H. Freedman and M. Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. (London: Soncino, 1939-1951), Vol. II, 68:17. There are many Midrash collections. The best known may be *Midrash Rabbah*, which is a commentary on the Torah and the five scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther). There are, however, many other collections, such as *Pesikta Rabbati*, *Pesikta de Rab Kabanah*, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, and so forth. Midrash is a product of the rabbis who flourished from c. 200-500 CE, but collections may have been added to and compiled centuries after that time ("Midrash is a type of literature, oral or written, which has its starting point in a fixed canonical text, considered the revealed word of God by the midrashist and his audience, and in which this original verse is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to." Gary G. Porton, "Midrash," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, Ed., New York: Doubleday, 1992, IV.819. Midrash means "to study, to search, to investigate, to go in quest of and to give account for what is written" (Gerald Bruns, "The Hermeneutics of Midrash," in Regina Schwartz, Ed., *The Book and the Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 190.) Since the "Bible is a laconic, elliptical, and at times ambiguous text; thus it is open to a variety of interpretations of any one [word, phrase, or] verse" (Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994),

xv.) Midrash is the “unconsciousness of the text”(Robert Paul, *Moses and Civilization*, (New Haven, Yale, 1996), p. 93.)

⁸ Carl Jung defined the shadow as all that lies outside the light of consciousness, and may be positive or negative. “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.” Jung, C.G. “Psychology and Religion”, In CW 11: *Psychology and Religion: West and East* 1938. P.131.

⁹ The Book of Jubilees (part of the Pseudepigrapha and Second Temple literature) was written in Hebrew, in the second century BCE; fifteen copies were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is one of the “rewritten bibles” as is Chronicles. Segal, Michael, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007). James Kugel calls it “the most interesting and important composition of the late Second Temple Judaism.” *A Walk through Jubilees: Studies in the Book of Jubilees and the World of its Creation*, (Leiden, Brill, 2012), pg. 1.

¹⁰ Endres, John C., *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* (Washington, CBQ Monograph, 1987 pgs. 51-84 and The Book of Jubilees chapters 19-35.

¹¹ Endres, pg. 49.

¹² Halpern-Amaru, Betsy, *The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 81.

¹³ Riskin, Shlomo, *Jerusalem Post*, December 1, 2000, pg. B9.

¹⁴ Hirsch, Samson Raphael, *The Pentateuch – Genesis*, (New York: Judaica Press, 1971) pp. 393- 394.

¹⁵ *Midrash Rabbah* Genesis, Vol. II, 70:19.

¹⁶ *Midrash Rabbah* Genesis, Vol. II, 65:16; and Deut. 1:15.

¹⁷ *Zohar*, translated by M. Simon and P.R. Levertoff, (Soncono Press, London, 1976) vol. 2, pg. 66.

¹⁸ These can be found in some of the latter prophets (Obad. 1:10 and Mal. 1:2-3). In latter tradition, he is the ancestor of Amalek, Agag and Haman.

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Samuel J. Youngs

Creatio Ex Amore Dei: Creation out of Nothing and God's Relational Nature

Abstract

The opinion of many feminist thinkers and process theologians has been that Christianity needs to shed its allegiance to a God conceived in terms of omnipotent sovereignty. As an alternative, many of them have envisioned God in more relational categories, focusing on the metaphysically “limited” nature of God, with the first step along this path often being a refutation of the traditional doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. This essay summarizes such critiques before proceeding to argue that a robust understanding of *creatio ex nihilo*, viewed through the lens of *kenosis*, can actually speak *more* effectively to God’s relational nature and sacrificial love.

Key Words: Creation out of nothing, kenosis, omnipotence, process theology, Jürgen Moltmann

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Introduction

A billboard down the street from where I teach recently advertised for a Christian ministry seeking to help young people understand what loving relationships ought to look like. Emblazoned in vivid typeface, the billboard asks us to consider the following question: *Is it love, or control?* It is interesting that, in a century sporting an acute resurgence of trinitarian theology, spurred by the likes of Barth and Rahner, we are consistently being pushed to consider a similar question: What is the relationship between God's ability to control the world (via his great power) and God's love for the world?

Trinitarian theology has taught us to view God more relationally and to view ourselves in relational categories as bearers of God's image. The natural sciences and quantum physics present to us a corresponding picture, that all of nature partakes of ecosystems within ecosystems, thriving and changing in the midst of other entities and phenomena. More and more as such study continues we realize that "there is no such thing as solitary life. Contrary to Leibniz's view every monad has many windows, in actual fact it consists only of windows. All living things—each in its own specific way—live in one another and with one another, from one another and for one another" (Moltmann 1985:17). This recognition has illuminated not only our study of humanity, but also of ethics.¹ "Postmodern" philosophy in particular has proclaimed a needed move away from metaphysical dogmatics and binaries, and toward a focus on the actuality of lived, communal personhood. These concerns, among many Christian scholars, have found a home as inspiration for constructive theological work.²

No system or methodology has been more enamored with this vision of an "interrelated" and "organic" reality than process theology. A.N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne championed subjective, experiential categories, presenting a relational vision of God that could operate in consonance with scientific discourse (Whitehead 1929; Hartshorne 1976,1978,1982). Process theology's rigorous focus on metaphysics make it an unlikely bedfellow for the anti-ontology strains of postmodern thought, but their mutual concern with "otherness" (alterity), plurality, and dynamism has led to an allegiance of sorts, with scholars like Catherine Keller and David Ray Griffin partaking of post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and process thought in their theological forays (Keller 2002,2011; Griffin

2003). Indeed, the champions of deconstruction and counter-metaphysical speculation—“Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze”—have now been recognized to “share many points and concerns with Alfred North Whitehead” (Griffin 2003:viii). Schubert Ogden presaged the point, referencing Heideggerian philosophy and Whitehead:

As not only Whitehead, but also Heidegger and others have made clear, the characteristics of classical philosophy all derive from its virtually exclusive orientation away from the primal phenomenon of selfhood toward the secondary phenomenon constituted by the experience of our senses... As soon as we orient our metaphysical reflection to the self as we actually experience it, as itself the primal ground of our world of perceived objects, this whole classical approach is, in the Heideggerian sense of the word, ‘dismantled’ (*destruiert*) (1977:57-58).

Process thought and postmodern theology have had parallel influences on liberation theologies, feminist varieties in particular.³ These voices, though divergent in peripherals, converge over core convictions, namely that the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition has too long been conceived in terms of unbridled power, transcendence, and sovereignty, granting humanity not only an impoverished, tyrannical view of deity, but also of that deity’s relationship to the world. God’s omnipotence, and doctrines relating to it, has come under the most strenuous of the resultant censures. To be sure, our ever-rising awareness and sensitivity to the problem of evil has exacerbated such denunciations of God’s omnipotence (often, understandably, with the intent to shield God from responsibility for the evil in the world), but from process and feminist thinkers in particular, “prevailing concepts of omnipotence are problematic in themselves, even prior to consideration of the problem of evil” (Case-Winters 1990:7).⁴ According to such theologies, this “emperor” vision of God, which Charles Hartshorne termed “classical theism,” must be done away with, along with its attendant doctrines, in particular creation out of nothing (Keller 2003:41-100; Hartshorne 1978:75-80). Indeed: “Process theology [and theologies associated with it] rejects the notion of *creatio ex nihilo*... That doctrine is part and parcel of the doctrine of God as absolute controller” (Cobb & Griffin 1976:65). David Fergusson has likewise remarked that both feminist and process theologies

tend to react directly against aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition that have over-emphasized God's transcendence (1998:2). Thus, a God whose creative act is defined by power and who creates solely out of his will for the sake of self, is reproached by these perspectives.

These introductory summations serve to ground what I now say, and that is that I *agree* with these thinkers' critique—to a certain extent. If our understanding of creation does not reflect the relational heart of our trinitarian God—in whom “we live and move and have our being”—then we might need to admit that this aspect of our theological reflection stands in need of further development.⁵

But this essay's contention is *not* that God's nature and character are better reflected by a rejection of *creatio ex nihilo*. Rather, I'd like to propose that it is through a theologically nuanced and philosophically attuned understanding of creation out of nothing that God's sacrificial and other-centered, self-giving love may be most clearly seen. Instead of the God of absolute control that process theists so fear, this traditional doctrine might actually be able to open doors for understanding God's relational nature more fully. After all, apart from the cosmological questions there is also the “theological question” of creation: “What does this creation mean for God?” (Moltmann 1985:72). It is this question that will be explored, by arguing that creation out of nothing is a *kenotic act*, and as such exemplifies an affirmation of the other, as well as self-giving love, more deeply and consistently than the alternative views offered by revisionist theologies. In order to consider what such a kenotic view of creation might mean, this paper will investigate and defend some aspects of the notions of “nothing(ness),” “freedom/power,” and “divine self-limitation.”

The Nature of Nothing

As has been argued, convincingly, to my mind, creation out of nothing can be readily derived from biblical texts, conjoined sensibly with other cardinal doctrines, and perceived to underlie the thought of the most significant theological minds (Copan & Craig 2004; Peters 1988; Barth 1960:152f.; Copan 2005; Siniscalchi 2013:678-681), resonating with verve from the writings of Irenaeus, Augustine, Aquinas, and Anselm.⁶ Although the doctrine is nowhere explicitly taught within scripture—as Gerard

May states, “[creation out of nothing] was not demanded by the text of the Bible” (1994:24)— we can affirm that it is, in the words of Jürgen Moltmann, a “fitting” concept for the biblical understanding of creation (1985:74).

But as a conceptual label, the notion only takes us so far: “[It] prompts still other questions. How are we to define this *nihil*, which is supposed to deny and exclude everything that has definition?” (Moltmann 1985:74). How can we theologically render this nothingness? Does such a conception contain anything of substance *to* render? Nothingness, even as a noun, might be etymologically oxymoronic, for to assign an identity to a complete lack of identity certainly seems to be contravening the whole force of the idea. Aquinas’ conception of this nothing was so absolute that it disbarred any idea of “succession or even motion” (Richard 1997:130f.).

We must, it seems, resist the urge to see the pre-existent Godhead as anything other than the *only* thing. In the pre-creation, there was only the immanence of God with Godself—God was not previously existing *anywhere*, for there was *nowhere*, no place, no locus, no anything that was not God, in which he might have been existing. Sergius Bulgakov states of this absolute and total singularity of God’s existence, “It is not even a void, since a void is conceived as a receptacle, that is, as a bounded, concrete being. There is only God, and outside of and apart from God there is nothing, just as there is not even any “outside of” or “apart from.”... *nothing* is a relative concept; it is correlative with *something*, that is, with already existing” (2008:124-125). Fully reflecting on this notion can cause something like intellectual indigestion; it begins to disagree with us. Our words here betray our concepts. For, how can the world “come into being,” if the only being for it to come into is God’s being? If the world is going to be distinct from the creator, as indeed it must if we are going to avoid Hegelianism and process thought,⁷ then the world needs a distinct placement from the creator. Said another way, if the only “spot” for creation is “within” God, since God is all that is, then it would seem that another “spot” would need to be made for that creation to inhabit as a distinct ontological entity from its creator. To preserve the creator-creature distinction, we have to be able to say something about this, or risk total incoherence in our theology of creation—in the face of which revisionist responses may resound their defeat of the *ex nihilo* view.

Moltmann has, in the face of the foregoing dilemma, famously posited the mystical notion of *zimzum*, which he pilfers from Kabbalah as a kind of conceptual tool for understanding the metaphysics of creation. In essence, Moltmann claims that in order to “make room” for creation, God withdraws himself, fences himself off, in order to create a void, a *nihil*, into which creation can be spoken: “The existence of a world outside God is made possible by an inversion of God. This sets free a kind of ‘mystical primordial space’ into which God—issuing out of himself—can enter and in which he can manifest himself.... Creation is preceded by this self-movement of God’s part, a movement which allows creation the space for its own being. God withdraws himself in order to go out of himself” (1985:108-111).⁸

God creates a non-God space by—and here’s the key—*self-limitation*. It is in this light that we can start to perceive creation as a kenotic act on the part of God. Lucien Richard follows Moltmann’s point, saying, “Creation involves a costly process. Creation is an act of kenotic love,” (1997:136) highlighting the difference between this sort of thinking about creation and thinking which focuses solely on God’s transcendence, glory, and omnipotence.⁹ But again, and this is the point, God’s willingness (we might say “desire”) to limit himself by the establishment of an “other” (that is, the created order, an entity utterly distinct from himself) is most thoroughly exemplified by a creation *ex nihilo* perspective. After all, if God were already “one among others,” eternally existing alongside chaos or pre-existent *materia*, then there would be no metaphysical sacrifice to compromise his status as the lone-existing absolute. Indeed, Emil Brunner too recognized that “when God permitted creation, this was the first act of the divine self-humiliation which reached its profoundest point in the cross of Christ” (Moltmann 1985:87; Brunner 1952:20).¹⁰

Now, it should be noted that Moltmann’s articulations of *zimzum* have struck a few as needlessly mystical and apocryphal additions to a “rightly Christian” understanding of creation.¹¹ (I do not know that Moltmann ever expected such reflections to be taken dogmatically, but more as useful intellectual—and possibly metaphorical—tools for understanding.) We should also note that though Moltmann is a compelling theologian of great resource, it has been understood that an understanding of creation as a kenotic act does not necessarily entail his panentheism.

John Polkinghorne, who agrees strongly with the conception of creation as a kenotic act, writes, “The problem [with panentheism] then lies in the danger that such a view compromises the world’s freedom to be itself, which God has given to his creation, and also the otherness that he retains for himself.[...] There are distinctions between God and the world that Christian theology cannot afford to blur” (Polkinghorne 2005:28; also 1996:32). Such qualifications made, we should not miss the core point: a creation out of nothing, understood as power-to-create exercised in love for the sake of another reality, opens up vast theological space for us to talk about a genuine, interactive, and relational heavenly Father.

But this must be understood in its full theological range and significance. In giving rise to and creating in the midst of this *nihil*, God has brought about a not-God reality—which functions, both metaphysically and formally, as a *limitation that God has self-imposed*. Before this moment, *all that was was God*. But then, in the pulsing heart of the creative act, something (the space for creation and creation itself) is birthed which *is not God*. God is now in relationship with something beyond his Godhead; he is related externally, now looking beyond the constitutive relationships of his trinitarian glory toward something else, something *other*. This core insight can be understood as a kind of sacrifice. In engaging in this freely determined act of creating, God not only makes a space where he is not, but gifts the dignity of existence and relationship with the Almighty to another—and in so doing opens himself to the drama of human sinfulness, which eventually leads to the sacrifice of *the cross*, the apex of that sacrificial love that was begun in this primordial moment.¹²

As the apostle Paul tells us, the power of the cross is that strange power, that “foolish,” “low,” “despised,” and “weak” power (1 Corinthians 1:18-29). Indeed, God’s power is not just *exemplified* in weakness, but *made perfect* in it (2 Corinthians 12:9). Yet, as we’ve noted, creation out of nothing is often discussed in terms of exemplifying God’s omnipotence—and roundly critiqued within that light as lauding God’s controlling power at the expense of more relational understandings (Caputo 2006:80-87). As Sally McFague puts it: “Out of nothing’ (*ex nihilo*) is not in Genesis or even in the Bible... Rather, it is an invention of the early church fathers to underscore the transcendence of God. But, we might ask does it also allow for divine immanence, as an adequate model of God and the world

should?” (1993:152).¹³ Such concerns should not be brushed aside. We thus need to examine what a kenotic understanding of creation might mean for our articulations of God’s power.

The Power of God’s Freedom

Per Copan and Craig, creation *ex nihilo* safeguards and promotes three core theological convictions: namely, God’s *aseity*, God’s *freedom*, and God’s *omnipotence* (2004:25-26). All of these have been critiqued to varying degrees by postmodern and process theists, but none have been targeted so stridently as omnipotence (e.g. Hartshorne 1978; Case-Wintes 1990; Griffin 1976). Copan and Craig discuss omnipotence in not unfamiliar terms: “If God desired to create, but could only create out of preexisting matter, then this would place a *limitation* on God” (2004:25). Karl Barth made a similar point:

Creation is the freely willed and executed positing of a reality distinct from God. The question thus arises: What was and is the will of God in doing this? We may reply that he does not will to be alone in His glory; that he desires something else beside Him. But this answer cannot mean that God either willed or did it for no purpose, or that He did so to satisfy a need. Nor does it mean that He did not will to be and remain alone because He could not do so... *In constituting this [created] reality He cannot have set a limit to His glory, will and power* (1958:III.1.231-232).

Everything here from Barth resonates with our kenotic understanding of creation so far... except the last sentence. A kenosis, a sacrifice, a work of real love, would seemingly need to be defined by limitation. The whole logic of God enacting a *particular* reality, and not some other reality, and choosing to work through *certain* individuals at *specific* points in history, indicates that God is actually constantly working in the midst of self-imposed limitations. Such is the logic of any enacted choice—indeed, every freely pursued action both *empowers* in the decision for what is chosen and *limits* in the direction of that reality which is not enacted. Once something is chosen not to be done, then a limit around that action has been erected. This limit

is by no means a negative, and logically it is no diminishment of God's power. It means only that God is limited to do whatever God wants to do in any given situation—thus preventing God from having to do something other than what he wants to do. God's hand cannot be forced; divine activity is completely and utterly free from constraint: "God's almighty power is demonstrated only inasmuch as all the operations of that power are determined by his eternal nature itself. God therefore does what for him is axiomatic—what is divine. In doing this he is entirely free, and in this freedom he is entirely himself. This excludes all forms of duress. But it also does away with any apparent arbitrariness" (Moltmann 1985:76).

The notion of God self-limiting as a matter of divine prerogative is constitutive of the mainstream theological tradition of Christianity. It is even present, perhaps conflictingly, in Barth, who, as we saw, claimed that God imposes no limits on himself, and yet "resolves" to bring about a *particular* world. But this particularity, by virtue of it being a choice, excludes other possible particularities—and, in fact, this self-imposed limitation comes after another such limiting choice: the decision to create at all.¹⁴

[God] determines that he will be the world's Creator... *God* commits himself to create a world. If creation is viewed under the aspect of a divine resolve of will, God's determination that he will be the Creator of a world could already imply a self-limitation on God's part in favor of this particular one of his innumerable possibilities. The Reformed doctrine of decrees presented creation under the aspect of the creative resolve, and Karl Barth developed this (Moltmann 1985:80).

The foregoing discussion, however, is intended to prevent us from saying things like "God's omnipotence means that God is not affected by anything other than God," which contains an illogical force. Although it may strike us as a conceptual difficulty at first, relational limitations are not opposed to God's majesty. Such limitations are sacrificial, but again, a faith articulated in light of the cross would not expect a wide gulf to exist between God's glory and the notion of sacrifice; we must articulate all of our theology in light of "Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" (Hebrews 2:9-10, see also Luke 24:26; 1 Peter 1:11, 4:13). The importance of such a point can hardly be overstressed.

Now, there is an understandable and quite orthodox suspicion of anything that implies any lack or need in God that originates from outside of God's will. Process thought and related schools often posit such a needy deity: God needed the world in order to be God, or "God would not be God without the world," or sometimes it is even said that the world "completes God." Against this sort of thinking, it is instructive to note that Moltmann critiques the fact that in its rejection of *creatio ex nihilo*, process theology has collapsed the distinction between the created order and the Creator, so that "the theology of nature becomes a divinization of nature" (1985:78-79).¹⁵ Bulgakov is even clearer in his disagreement with such views: "God's freedom in the creation of the world signifies...the absence of a determinate necessity for Him as a need for Him to develop or complete Himself" (2008:120).¹⁶ God has no desperate need to be filled-up by the world—the world is "God's gift" and the universe is "absolutely dependent" on God for its existence (Richard 1997:120).¹⁷

But we can affirm the world's absolute dependence on God and God's sufficiency apart from the world without speaking of creation as a boundless exercise of power. Power of the omnipotent variety is a concept deserving of constructive analysis. For my reading on the subject, Hans Jonas is still the most instructive and challenging:

From the very concept of power, it follows that omnipotence [as traditionally construed] is self-contradictory.... Absolute, total power means power not limited by anything, not even by the mere existence of something other than the possessor of that power; for the very existence of such another would already constitute a limitation, and the one would have to annihilate it so as to save its absoluteness. Absolute power then, in its solitude, has no object on which to act. But as object-less power it is a powerless power, canceling itself out: "all" equals "zero" here.... The existence of another object limits the power of the most powerful agent at the same time that it allows it to be an agent. In brief, power as such is a *relational* concept and requires relation (1987:8).

Arguing aggressively that absolute power without any restriction whatsoever is logically untenable, Jonas claims that relationship both makes sense of

and naturally limits power. It is this truth that Bulgakov claims represents the “metaphysical kenosis” of creation (2008:128).¹⁸ The logical force of this assertion is strong, but shines through even more clearly if we grant that the image of God, not to mention the creation mandate and human responsibility in general, constitute what Terrence Fretheim calls “divine power-sharing,” wherein God’s purposes are carried out in tandem with the willing and acting of human persons (1984:75).¹⁹ God willingly shares his power; all power is God’s to give, but he has gifted his creatures with far more than just existence; he has given them power to act meaningfully within that existence, helping us make sense of St. Paul’s assurance that “we are God’s co-workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9, see also 2 Corinthians 6:1). This biblical underscoring of God’s relational stance toward us affirms that God is not unwilling to work out his purposes with this shared power and influence, granting human beings what C.S. Lewis (quoting Pascal) called “the dignity of causality” (1972:104-107). Recognized in another way by Paul Copan, God’s relational nature means that he is not afraid to work through “inefficient means,” which can be thought of as humans less-than-ideally using the power he has gifted them with (2011:69,165-167). God being entirely free, yet in that freedom choosing to limit himself exemplifies this sacrificial—or kenotic—relation to humanity. It is to this self-limiting capability of the divine freedom that we now turn.

“The Sphere Which God Does Not Overstep”: Divine Self-Limitation

The notion of divine self-limitation (DSL), presented explicitly and implicitly in my two foregoing sections on the relational nature of a kenotic creation, is not without its conceptual and logical difficulties. A robust assessment of such difficulties cannot be broached here, but I will briefly remark on some objections that have come from the revisionist philosophical theologies that have here concerned us.²⁰ Anna Case-Winters and David Ray Griffin will serve as helpful commentators here. Both have written standout works which are critical of divine omnipotence and both are at-home within more revisionist paradigms (feminist and process theology) which have always rejected *creatio ex nihilo*.

Case-Winters finds serious problems with what she calls “classical models” of divine power, for which she takes Calvin as the pre-eminent

example. Not least among her critical points is the fact that “such a[n understanding of omnipotence] makes difficult any concept of genuine *relationship* between God and the world—which in the ordinary meaning of the word would entail mutuality and reciprocity” (1990:92). These points carry considerable weight, and are the same sorts of observations that have led many thinkers (myself included) to value the notion of God’s free self-limitation, which accounts for a more genuine relate-ability to creation.

Looking then to the doctrine of omnipotence as presented by Barth, Case-Winters notes the appearance of the notion that God can limit himself without contradicting his own omnipotence. Barth holds that creation itself was a limitation (as we’ve discussed already; God creates a *particular* world and wills to be “God with us” and “God for us”) insofar as God determines to be in a certain relationship, and no other, to the created order. Case-Winters summarizes, “What this illustrates is that omnipotence, for Barth, does not exclude the possibility of a *voluntary self-limitation of power*” (1990:108). Her critique of these ideas in Barth is two-fold: (1) the notion of God’s self-determination appears to be at odds with Barth’s view of divine atemporality,²¹ and (2) self-limitation does not help with issues like evil, since God’s limitation is self-imposed and thus presumably could be withdrawn at any time in order to vanquish evil.

In David Ray Griffin’s still-definitive work *God, Power, and Evil*, the focus is still the problem of evil, but creation and DSL come up at even regular junctures. Here we will mention his critique of Emil Brunner’s version of DSL. Brunner’s position seems clear enough; God limits himself by creating: “The God of revelation is.... the God who limits Himself, in order to create room for the creature.... The two ideas, Creation and self-limitation, are correlative” (1952:172). Coming as he does from a process perspective, Griffin has obvious disagreements with Brunner. But he is sympathetic to the notion of creaturely existence causing God to limit himself. Unfortunately, Griffin’s analysis unveils in Brunner a wide-ranging and inconsistent development of DSL, so much so that Brunner can rightly be considered a continuation of the “unbridled omnipotence tradition” that only deviates from previous theologians so far as his obfuscating use of DSL rhetoric allows. Brunner is found to be less than helpful, leaving the issues of creation, creaturely freedom, and the problem of evil, looming large:

It seems evident that the only way for theology to meet its responsibility to help people reconcile their beliefs based upon revelation with the “facts which everyone can see,” as Brunner says should be done ([*Dogmatics II*] 151), is to develop or adopt an understanding of divine providential influence which is not total determination. And this means going beyond the issue of semantics (Griffin 1976:230).

In “going beyond the issue of semantics” both Griffin and Case-Winters propose process-influenced models of providence, which necessarily entail a rejection of creation out of nothing and a belief that God cannot determine anything unilaterally, but rather must work through influence and persuasion (Case-Winters 1990:206-232; Griffin 1976: 261-310).

When then is the underlying issue in these critiques of DSL? It seems that in both Barth and Brunner, process and feminist commentators have not found incoherence in the notion of DSL as such; what they have pinpointed instead is a lack of consistency within theological outlooks that lay claim to DSL. Case-Winters finds divine timelessness and DSL to be inconsistent,²² and Griffin detects too many different vocabularies at work in Brunner for DSL to truly be considered his governing paradigm.

These critiques are effective, and in both cases are so tightly bound to the texts of both Barth and Brunner that they are nigh irrefutable. But they are both addressed to doctrinal and rhetorical lynchpins, which, fortunately, do not bind our current exploration. Divine atemporality is not a necessary part of an orthodox doctrine of God, and indeed has come under critique from thoroughly orthodox philosophers like Nicholas Wolterstorff (2001:187-213) and others. In fact, and highly pertinent for our discussion here, Thomas Senor has convincingly demonstrated that a temporal conception of God meshes quite effectively with a creation *ex nihilo* framework (1993:86-92). Brunner’s issue, that of inconsistency, though always a risk when doing theology, seems well-resisted by Hans Jonas clear articulation of power-as-power-in-relation and the thoroughgoing kenotic model of Moltmann and others. Discussed apart from entangling notions like atemporality, and worked out consistently, creation out of nothing by way of God’s willing self-limitation appears to be a workable and fruitful theological expression.

Conclusion: Triune and Relational Kenosis

First John tells us “God is love” (4:8). Following from what we have said so far, it can be concluded that God would *still* be love without the created order. This is a crucial distinction between the framework advocated in this essay and process theology. The inter-trinitarian love of God has often been articulated in terms of *perichoresis*, understood commonly as that “mutual indwelling” among the persons of the Godhead which intones their unbreakable communion, fellowship, and alliance of will. God’s essence is thus both loving and other-affirming, insofar as each person of the Trinity affirms and loves the other persons. Thomas Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. write, “Few are the major statements on the Trinity today that do not find in [the statement] ‘God is love’ a most compelling description of and entrance into God’s trinitarian being and action in history” (2006:173).

Several theologians over the past century have promoted the idea that the only coherent way to articulate such an outlook on the Trinity is to understand *perichoresis* as a *kenotic* interchange among the three persons. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit embody perfect sacrifice and self-giving love, allowing each others’ will to, essentially, be their own will; the perfect example of divine power that expresses itself most clearly in loving, but limiting, relationship. “I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38)—Bulgakov very effectively highlights this example, among others, of Christ kenotically willing in tandem with the Father’s will, thus offering us a picture of the trinitarian relations (2008:283-285).

In what does the limiting love of Trinitarian relations consist? We can actually perceive them in even the most simplistic formulations of the Trinity: “God is the Father, is the Son, and is the Holy Spirit. The Father *is not* the Son, the Son *is not* the Spirit, the Spirit *is not* the Father.” Every iteration of “is not” constitutes a relational, and positive, limit. Thus the three persons of the Trinity could be said to kenotically indwell one another in the divine life, but do so by willing self-limitation.²³

This understanding of God’s immanent, relational nature helps us recognize creation out of nothing not only as a demonstration of his power, but also as a revelation of his character. Just as God the Son embraces

kenosis in his human incarnation, willingly submits himself to the will of the Father, and sacrifices himself for the sake of sinful others,²⁴ so too does the trinitarian act of creation reveal God's willingness to sacrifice, and in that sacrifice bring about true relationship.

What is thus ironic about theological critiques of *creatio ex nihilo* (whether they arise from process, feminist, or other theological outlooks) is their failure to realize that—if understood in terms of kenosis and God's free self-limitation—creation out of nothing points to a God who is more relational, more loving, more other-affirming, than what we find within the proposed alternative conceptions. We do not see in creation the tyrannical emperor God of revisionist theology's caricature; instead we see a Creator who in his very act of creating precludes the servanthood of Christ and who gives all good gifts to his creation (Moltmann 1985:78,88).²⁵

And, on the other side, rather than reducing God, making God weak, or collapsing his sovereignty, a kenotic understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* opens the door for understanding God's power as power-within-relationship, power that is gifted to God's image bearers wherein “the selflessness of love reflects vulnerability, a giving of power to the beloved” (Wisniewski 2003:11). The world in its brokenness only understands power in terms of domination and control, but God's wisdom makes this wisdom into foolishness: the sacrificial power of love serves as a basis for both the creation and redemption of the world, and this overcomes all other alleged powers (Matera 1999:93-95).

God is absolutely free, and in his freedom he willingly creates a world from nothing, and in that creative act enters into a relationship with that world. Thus, we can say that it is true, yet not enough, to say that God “created out of nothing.” And it is also true, yet not enough, to say that God “created out of freedom.” We must to both of these add: “for the sake of love.”

Endnotes

¹ Buber's *I and Thou* and Levinas' *Otherwise than Being* are representative, and now classic, articulations of the ethical imperative that is leveraged by such an understanding of self and “other.”

² For exemplary theological work being done in direct dialogue with such concerns, see the series of essays: James Smith & Henry Isaac Venema, eds. *The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004); for other examples across the theological spectrum see Amos Yong's *Hospitality and the Other* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), focusing on Christian practice and pluralism; Mary Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford, 2007), focusing on ecclesiology); Tina Beattie, *Theology after Postmodernity: Divining the Void—A Lacanian Reading of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford, forthcoming [2013]), focusing on historical theology and Thomistic themes; and Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Desire, Gift, and Recognition: Christology and Postmodern Philosophy* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2009).

³ “The widespread influence of Whitehead on feminism in North America reflects a disjunctive but analogous attraction to a language that honors its own poetic edges, where women find expressive options beyond emulation of the andromorphic subject or surrender to objectification,” in Keller, “The Process of Difference, the Difference of Process,” in Keller, *Process and Difference*, 28n.37. See also Ellen K. Feder *et al.*, eds. *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴ David Ray Griffin makes a similar point, detailing what he says as the problematic dimensions of theology articulated in light of God's omnipotence. See *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 ed. [1976]), esp. chapters 17 and 18.

⁵ This statement might be challenged by those of strongly Reformed persuasions who wish to maintain God only ever does anything for himself—or for his “glory.” To those with such objections, another full-blown essay, or perhaps a book, would be in order to make some significant counter-points. I will here broach two initial thoughts: (1) Logically, there is no contradiction between God creating “for himself” and creating “for the sake of the created”—God's creative acting is perfectly capable of shouldering both aspects; they are not in contradiction to one another, especially if one has a robust understanding of the *imago Dei* in which humanity reflects aspects of God and furthers God's own mission (and thus, God's own glory). (2) I would make reference to the following, which have done admirable jobs explicating different dimensions of God's role as generous giver for the sake of others: Terrence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Fortress Press, 1984), esp. Ch. 9; Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Broadman and Holman/Eerdmans Publishing, 2000 [1994]), 99-108. Kelly Kapic has presented an accessible (and Reformed) perspective which affirms that though God is the ultimate free cause of creation, the creation was birthed in order to allow human beings to participate in fellowship with God and to celebrate the goodness of his world. These things may glorify God, but the world was not created solely “for God”—as Kapic states, “God's ownership [of creation] is much more dynamic than we might expect... God does not own by keeping, but by giving” (*For God So Loved, He Gave: Entering the Movement of Divine Generosity* (Zondervan, 2011), 24, see further 17-29).

⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Chs. 17-18; Augustine, *City of God*, Book XI, Chs. 4-6; Anselm, *Proslogion*, Ch. 5; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 44-49. Cf. Richard, *Christ the Self-Emptying of God*, 128-132. Further, “Creation in the Judeo-Christian tradition cannot have any preceding condition; it cannot follow on anything else. In its uniqueness it is in every respect ‘for the first time’” (*ibid.*, 128-29).

⁷ And emanationism and pantheism, for good measure.

⁸ Moltmann makes this point even more succinctly and cogently in his “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 137ff., esp. 144-148.

⁹ This is not to say that all three of these more “monarchical” attributes of God cannot be understood relationally based on the biblical witness. However, the *ways* in which such things appear in traditional Christian discourse do on occasion reduce the other-affirming nature of God’s *agape* for creation.

¹⁰ See also the forceful articulation of these themes in George Hendry, “Nothing,” *Theology Today* 39.3 (1982): 287-288: “Creation...implies a certain self-limitation, or self-negation on the part of God. God as being does not wish to monopolize the whole of being, he does not regard it as an inalienable prerogative; he relinquishes some of it to another....”

¹¹ Paul R. Sponheim says that it only seems to add “another layer of mystery” with little constructive value (*The Pulse of Creation: God and the Transformation of the World* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999], 20). Chan Ho Park has recently offered some of the best examinations of Moltmann’s pantheism and related motifs, giving a thoroughgoing but fair critical evaluation in his *Transcendence and Spatiality of the Triune Creator* (Peter Lang, 2005), esp. 118-123.

¹² “Now we being to see what a large measure of self-limitation He has imposed upon Himself, and how far He has emptied Himself... [when] a creature which has misused its creaturely freedom to such an extent as to defy God. The *kenosis*, which reaches its paradoxical climax in the Cross of Christ, began with the Creation of the world” Brunner, *Dogmatics II*, 20. Moltmann builds on this notion to tie together a multitude of themes: In creating, God first creates a nothingness, a non-God space, in which creation exists. This non-God space would be completely devoid of God, and thus would be rightly considered death, hell, non-being, etc. It is in the midst of that space that God brings about creation. And after his creation falls into sin, turning toward non-God reality, it is Christ who will embrace the non-being of sin and death for the sake of that broken creation. Christ’s sacrificial plunge *back into* nothingness thus inaugurates a “new” creation, mirroring the initial kenotic act of *creatio ex nihilo* by the kenosis on the cross. (See *God in Creation*, 91-93.) Though there can be, and often are, disagreements with Moltmann’s overall program, the constructive theological horizon opened by such a formulation is fascinating.

¹³ It should be noted that McFague is careful to use “model” as the designation for her more pantheistic view of the God-world relationship, thus sparing herself from defending any position dogmatically. She is, however, resolute in her denunciation of creation out of nothing.

¹⁴ We may balk at this “decision” or “enacting” language, and some have argued that creation is actually something intrinsic to the nature of the Creator God. Such a line of reasoning problematically, and quite directly, leads us to any number of Neo-Platonic emanationist paradigms (Moltmann offers Paul Tillich as a representative of this trajectory [*God in Creation*, 80]).

¹⁵ Admittedly, Moltmann's work presented some ambiguity on this score, see the incisive comments by Chan Ho Park, *Transcendence and Spatiality*, 108-112. Critiques of Moltmann focusing majorly on his panentheism are also informative here: see, e.g., Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross: An Analytic Look at the Problem of Pain* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994), 72-76; John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 237-258.

¹⁶ *The Lamb of God*, 120. Though he critiques Schelling's and Hegel's viewpoints here, Bulgakov goes on to argue, along a different route, that God could not have chosen not to create (120ff.). This point, similar to how it is made by Moltmann, seems to be that as Creator, God's creative love compels him to creative acts. This is not born of any need, but of an essential and voluntary movement.

¹⁷ Richard, *Christ the Self-Emptying of God*, 130-131. Language, however, might be a stumbling block here. Paul Fiddes has recently attempted to articulate how God's "needs" might be "satisfied" by a loving relationship with the world without implying any "deficiency in God" or "limit on divine freedom" ("Creation Out of Love," in Polkinghorne, 169ff.). Whether or not Fiddes' argument succeeds is an open question, but it represents an important attempt to claim such language within a more orthodox framework than process theology.

¹⁸ The full passage read: "The creation of heaven and earth...is, in relation to Divinity itself, a voluntary self-diminution, a metaphysical kenosis. Alongside His *absolute* being, God establishes a *relative* being with which he enters into an interrelation, being God and Creator for this being. The creative 'let there be,' which is the command of God's omnipotence, at the same time expresses the sacrifice of Divine love, of God's love for the world," (*The Lamb of God*, 128).

¹⁹ Further, "God's Word and action are certainly indispensable, but the future of the created order is made dependent in significant ways upon the creaturely use of power. This, of course, entails a self-limitation with respect to divine sovereignty..." (74).

²⁰ There are also notable critiques of DSL from more traditional theological perspectives; e.g. Ron Highfield, "The Function of Divine Self-Limitation in Open Theism: Great Wall or Picket Fence?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 45/2 (June 2002): 279-99; idem., "Divine Self-Limitation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Appraisal," *Christian Scholar's Review*, Vol. 32.1 (Fall 2002): 49-71. I sadly lack the space to address Highfield's brand of concerns in this essay, but hope to pursue them in future work.

²¹ She incisively asks, "*Who*, in fact, *was there* making the choice to be 'with and for' the human being? Such choice would have to have been made by some *other* nature not characterized by this limitation" (*God's Power*, 108, emphasis in original). She further notes that the determination, to be made coherent at all, must introduce a "before" and "after" into God.

²² Case-Winters, as noted above, also thinks that DSL, incoherently, could be withdrawn at any time in order to conquer evil. This is an odd critique, since the prerogative to withdraw the limitation, when exercised, would contradict the intentions of said limitation; if the limitation is real, then withdrawing it, though within the scope of divine power, would clearly not be within the scope of the divine willing. The vanquishing of evil is apparently willed by God to proceed along other

lines, rather than his unilateral annihilation of it. Furthermore, the withdrawing of DSL, if it is DSL that allows creation “to be” in the first place, would constitute not only the destruction of evil in the universe, but also the whole of the created order itself.

²³ On the notion of kenosis and love in the midst of this social perichoresis, see Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 158-176; Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 264ff. Obviously, much of this discussion will be challenged at the outset by those opposed to social trinitarian models. I have not the space to articulate a full defense of such models here, but see Thompson and Plantinga, “Trinity and Kenosis,” 172-189, see also J. Scott Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 47.3 (September 2004): 399–421; also Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000 ed.), 65-76, and Miroslav Volf *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Eerdmans, 1998), esp. 76ff.

²⁴ Kenotic christology has seen a remarkable renaissance in the last decade, and that renaissance has served as part of the impetus of this present study. Two of the most significant works demonstrating both the theological acumen of kenoticism’s supporters and the myriad fields of theology which it informs are: (1) C. Stephen Evans, ed., *Exploring Kenotic Christology* (Oxford University Press, 2006), and (2) David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis and the Construction of a Christian Theology* (Baylor University Press, 2011). See also the inter-disciplinary work by Jeffrey Keuss, *Freedom of the Self: Kenosis, Cultural Identity, and Mission at the Crossroads* (Wipf & Stock, 2010). Moltmann’s *The Crucified God* and Bulgakov’s *The Lamb of God* remain powerful contemporary interpretations with wide influence.

²⁵ I have called upon Moltmann’s thought throughout this paper, but I do so critically. Moltmann’s “broad place” in theological dialogue allows his articulate theological innovativeness to lend itself to appropriation by disparate positions, and his thought certainly morphed over time and through his interactions with various schools and thinkers.

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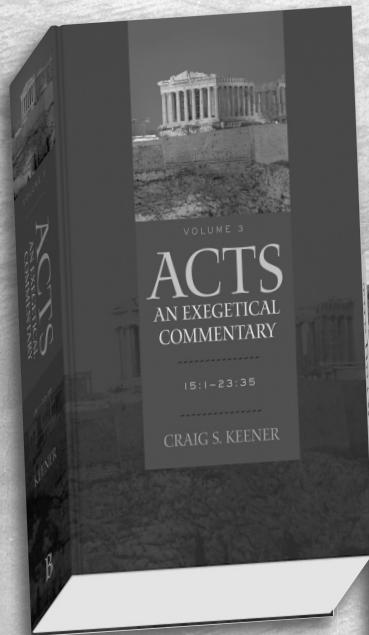
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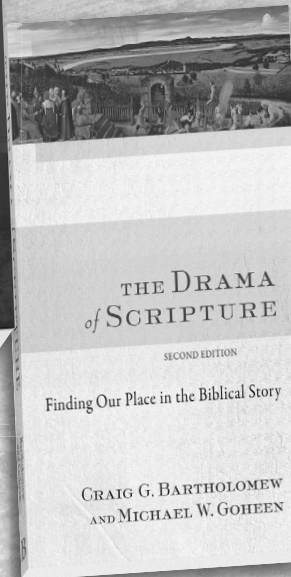


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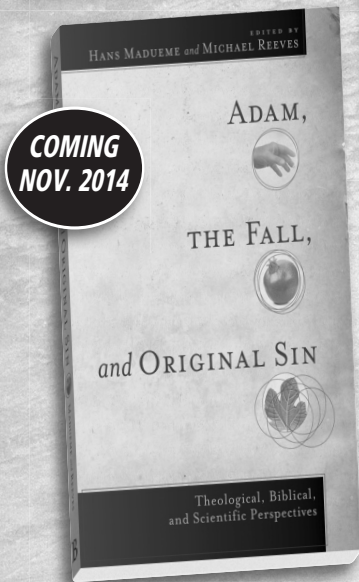


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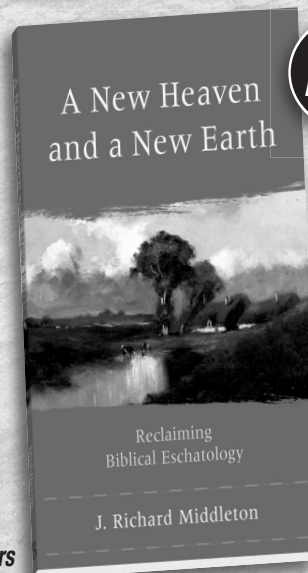
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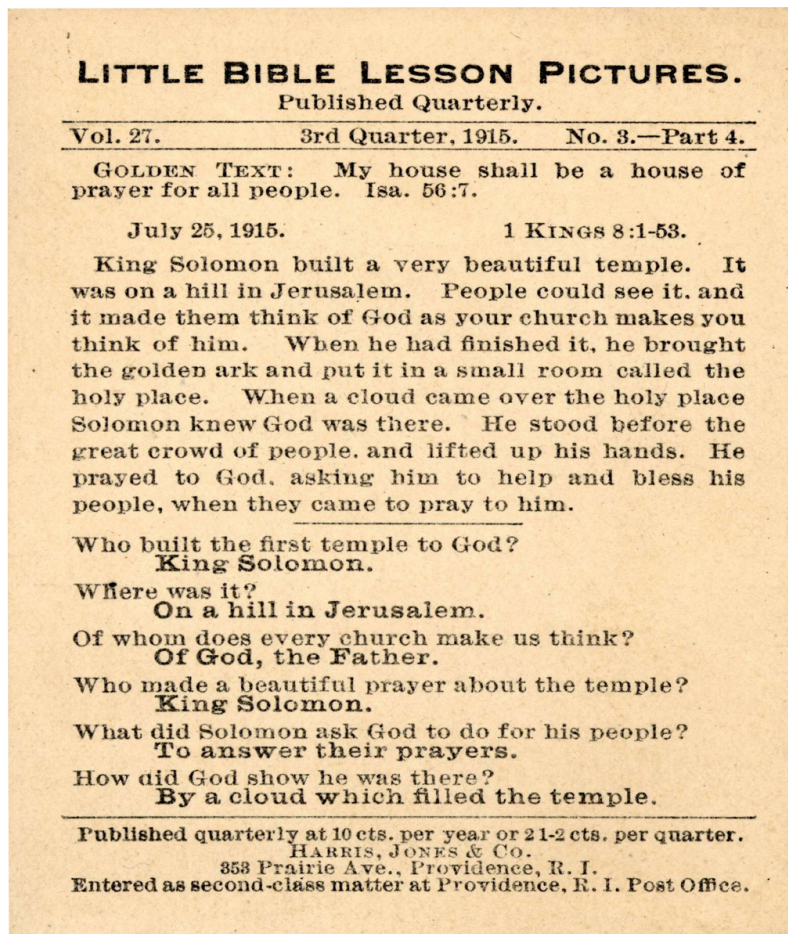
From the Archives: Sunday School Cards- An Innovation in Christian Education

Among the smaller collections in the archives of B.L. Fisher Library is a collection of Sunday school cards, graphically visual tools used in the teaching of Sunday schools in the United States from the late 1800's through the 1960's.¹ Sunday school was an innovation in Christian education proposed by Robert Raikes in England in the 1780's as a way to provide general education to children from poor backgrounds. Education was not universal or free, so Raikes envisioned teaching basic reading and writing using the Bible as the textbook on Sundays, since many children worked during the remainder of the week. The movement grew rapidly and spread to the United States by the 1790's.



Typical Sunday School Card –Front and Back

While religious images have a long history within the Roman Catholic tradition, Protestant images aimed primarily at children began in the late 1700's with the publishing of primers and early illustrated books. By 1824, American Sunday schools began using gift cards to invite children to Sunday school, which were used as admission tickets.² As early as 1850, visual images for Sunday school education began to appear (*Sabbath School Cards, or Scripture Maps, etc.* was published by A.C. Beaman in Worchester, MA in 1850). There was an explosion of illustrated books, tracts, and newspapers aimed at children during the mid to late 1800's as a theological shift began to accept the idea that children could receive salvation without waiting to attain adulthood.



Cards Were Designed to Bring the Lesson Back to the
Child's Home

Under the influence of Horace Bushnell's 1847 book *Christian Nurture*, Protestants began to tie visual images to pedagogy and also emphasize the role of religious education in the home. At the same time, a series of National Sunday School Conventions led to the planning of the international uniform lesson system at the fifth convention in 1872 by representatives of the Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Based on a seven-year schedule all Sunday schools would work through the same lessons to uniformly cover the Bible. Companies, such as the Providence Lithograph Company and David C. Cook Publishing Company had been involved in publishing Sunday school material earlier, but with the international uniform lessons and the invention of color lithography, all the pieces were in place for the development and growth of the Sunday school card.³

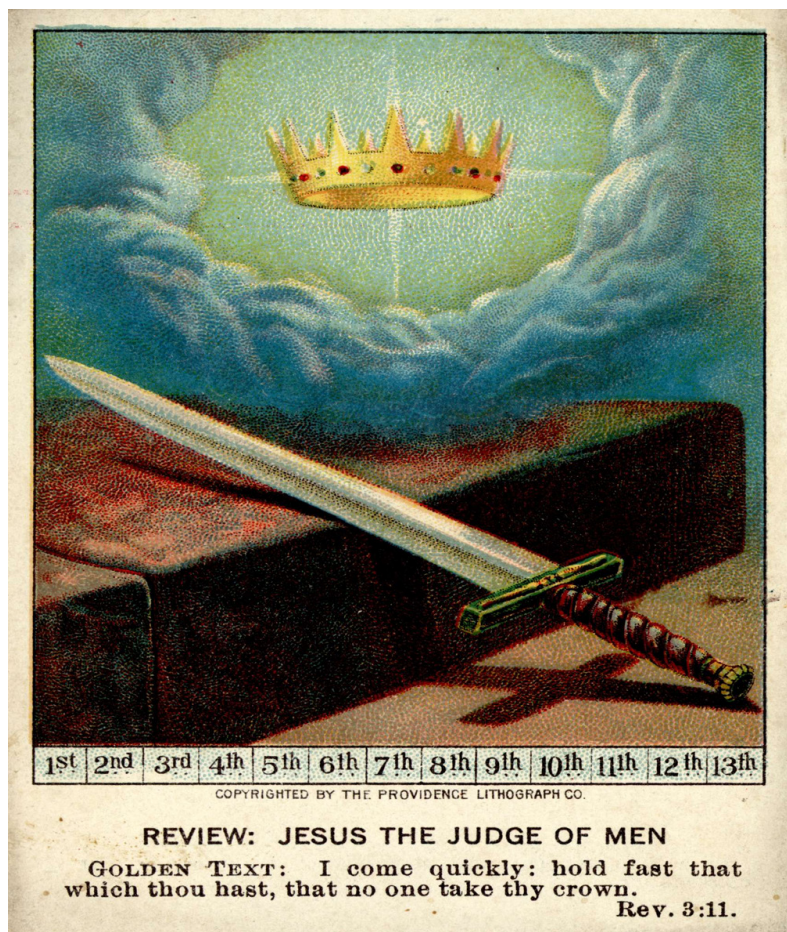


Vivid Graphics from Color Lithography Made the Cards Appealing

These cards were usually sold in quarterly sets of 13, with 12 of the cards representing individual lessons with a “Golden Verse” for memorization and questions for review at home, ideally by the mother of the child. The 13th card was a review card, which often had boxes for the teacher to check for attendance. David Morgan⁴ notes that

“Illustrated cards had been used early on by the ASSU (American Sunday School Union) and the ATS (American Tract Society), but the brilliant coloration and pictorial detail of the lithographic cards in the final decades of the nineteenth century enhanced the religious image’s capacity to compete with the rival visual culture in advertisements and nonreligious books for children that made effective use of color printing and halftone technology.”

Colleen McDannell⁵ writes, “During the first half of the twentieth century, the Sunday school was the main conduit for the movement of Protestant material culture into the home. Children made ‘art’ in Sunday school, and they brought mass-produced products home.” So, while Protestants criticized Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians for the veneration of religious images, similar images quickly became a part of Protestant life through the guise of educational tools.



A Typical End-of-Quarter Review Card

Designed to fit easily in a pocket and yet compete with advertising cards and other childhood ephemera of the time, Sunday school cards were an innovation in helping reinforce the religious lesson from Sunday school. Bright, colorful, and exciting visual images helped remind the child of the scripture for memorization, while the card itself served as a Sunday school lesson in miniature to be reviewed at home within the family context. Such items are often dismissed as trivial relics of a bygone era, but in the study of the material culture of religion this is a very superficial view. People imbue items with religious meaning as a way to make the sacred more real, to embody belief and theology in a concrete form. Gordon Lynch⁶ notes from other studies that it is similar to a child projecting love and comfort

to a special blanket or toy. Human beings in a desire to understand and make sense of God can project theological meaning onto material items, and these items then begin to take on special importance within everyday lived religion. Sunday school cards and the images they used became a means through which generations of children not only learned about God, but emotionally and spiritually connected to God through the use of their senses in a very physical and theologically significant way.

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary's mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.

Endnotes

¹ All images used courtesy of the Archives of the B.L. Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary who own all copyrights to these digital images. Please contact them directly if interested in obtaining permission to reuse these images.

² David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 206-207.

³ David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 305-310.

⁴ David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 308.

⁵ Colleen McDannell, *Material Culture: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 245.

⁶ Gordon Lynch, "Object Theory- Toward an Intersubjective, Mediated, and Dynamic Theory of Religion." In *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, edited by David Morgan. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010, p. 46.

Book Reviews

The Story of Jesus in History and Faith: An Introduction

Lee Martin McDonald

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2013, 346 pp., paper, \$29.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-3987-4

Reviewed by J. Jordan Henderson

McDonald offers the educated lay Christian reader a compelling introduction to the study of the historical Jesus and how such study relates to Christian faith. The book is divided into three parts: “History and the Historical Jesus,” “Sources for Studying the Historical Jesus,” and “The Story of Jesus in History.” McDonald faces the challenge inherent in writing any introduction to a topic such as this by striking the appropriate balance between being concise and being thorough, which he meets admirably.

Part One (3-45) introduces the reader, in less than 50 pages, to the complex topics of modern historiography, the various quests for the historical Jesus, and the criteria used to determine authenticity in historical Jesus studies. After differentiating historical from scientific inquiry and noting the subjective nature of historical investigation, he discusses four assumptions of modern historiography: autonomy (conducting historical research without fear of state or religious authority); a closed causal nexus (which comes into conflict with any view of divine intervention in history); the principle of analogy (relying on what is known to find out what is unknown); and probability (often determined based on historians’ “own experience and contemporary scientific information” [16]) (13-17). Given these assumptions, McDonald does not expect historians to draw the same conclusions as Christians whose experience “enables one to be more open

to the activity of God *in history*” (45). Historical study of Jesus and early Christianity, then, is not determinative for Christian faith, but neither is it irrelevant, due to the Judeo-Christian belief in a God who acts in history.

Part Two (49-169) provides a somewhat standard introduction to the sources used to study the life of Jesus, covering the synoptic problem, non-canonical literary sources, and a helpful section on archaeology. Particularly helpful in this section is the attention given to the Gospel of John as a source of historical information. Without glossing over differences between the synoptics and John, he joins a growing chorus of scholars “now suggesting that behind John’s interpretation of his stories about Jesus are credible historical events that cannot be ignored” (118). This is refreshing to see, as often even conservative Christian scholars confine themselves to synoptic study when discussing the historical Jesus.

He spends the remainder of the book (173-346) offering his own examination of the events of Jesus’ life, throughout remaining faithful to his stated acknowledgement of “the limitations of historical inquiry, but also the limitations of a faith perspective” (x), and commitment to utilize both perspectives in studying Jesus. Included in his conclusion is a list of 23 facts he believes historians can affirm about Jesus (334-336), similar to those of other scholars surveyed earlier in the book (see 36-38). I shall spend a bit more space on his concluding thoughts about history and faith, as this will illustrate my primary criticisms of the book.

Having acknowledged that many useful things can be known historically about Jesus, he highlights the necessity to go beyond historical inquiry to theological questions not open to the scope of the historian (337-344). Believing that “the historian, as historian, cannot reasonably answer ultimate questions about the origin of Christian faith,” he proposes a *historical-theological* approach, which “recognizes that there is something in the nature of a theological methodology that both is open to the activity of God in human affairs and also assures the inquirer that God does exist and is involved in unique events that are beyond the scope of the historian’s field of investigation” (338). While his approach is certainly more attractive than a “merely historical” or “merely faith-based” approach, I believe it could be fleshed out a bit more in the following ways.

While McDonald does give a good introduction to the problems of historical inquiry and the subjectivity inherent in such inquiry, it would have been nice to see more engagement with philosophers of history about the nature of historical knowledge. Of course, all events of the past are subject to various subjective factors in our historical reconstructions and interpretations, but once we admit this, is there anything that can be said *objectively* about history? Is there any sense in which historical knowledge really can be said to be *knowledge*? If the answer to these questions is “no,” then we run into problems, as this book is filled with historical claims, for instance about the history of biblical interpretation. Though he summarizes the thought of some major post-Enlightenment historians on the nature of history (8-13), I wish he had engaged them a bit more. For instance, R. G. Collingwood is quoted along with others on the nature of history early in the book (8-9). Towards the conclusion, McDonald writes, “Historical inquiry into a person’s unrecorded thoughts...is a dead-end street” (338). Yet Collingwood would not only disagree that such knowledge is possible, but that it is indeed the very nature of historical inquiry! (See his *The Idea of History*, where he famously states that it is not enough for the historian to note Caesar’s blood spilt on the senate floor, but wants to know *why*. Collingwood insists that the only way to account for why is to re-think the thoughts of historical personalities.)

Secondly, it would have been good to see some engagement with those scholars from Martin Kähler to Luke Timothy Johnson who argue specifically that historical inquiry is unrelated to Christian faith. Though both Kähler and Johnson are mentioned several times, this central point of their writings is not fully engaged. In fact, Kähler would have been surprised to be listed by McDonald alongside scholars who “pursued the ever-elusive historical Jesus” such as Baur, Holtzmann, and Wrede (23-24). The whole point of Kähler’s book *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* is not simply to disagree with other scholars’ historical reconstructions, but to attack the entire idea of historically reconstructing the life of Jesus. The same goes for Luke Timothy Johnson, who is listed among scholars who have given “carefully reasoned presentations of the Jesus of history” (344-345) when the whole point of Johnson’s *The Real Jesus* is that the entire quest for the historical Jesus is misguided and irrelevant to Christian faith. This is an important voice in the conversation about Jesus in history and faith that should be more fully engaged.

These criticisms notwithstanding, McDonald has offered a wonderful introduction to the problems of studying Jesus historically and how this relates to one's Christian faith. It would be a valuable contribution to any theological library.

Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory

Scott W. Sunquist

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2013, xiv, 448 pp., paper, \$34.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-3615-6

Reviewed by Jeremy B. Griffin

Understanding Christian Mission is an admirably robust introduction to missiology with Sunquist's approach to understanding mission through a tri-part paradigm. He states that mission is "held together by a cord of three strands: history, theology, and ecclesiology" (xi). The thesis of the book is that "mission is from the heart of God, to each context, and it is carried out in suffering in the world for God's eternal glory" (xii). For Sunquist, particular tasks (church planting, for example) or goals (making disciples or converts) are not the beginning points for mission, but mission is grounded in and finds its starting point from the *missio Dei*. He says, "Christian mission takes place in the world, it is for the world, but it is from God" (24).

In Part 1, the focus is on the history of mission within the preceding five hundred years while also examining a summary of mission themes from the time of Jesus Christ until 1500 A.D. More attention is given to recent mission history because Sunquist sees that the present, rapid changes in cross-cultural encounters, global technological flows, pluralism, and secularization profoundly affect Christianity today.

In Part 2, the author develops a Trinitarian, catholic, and evangelical model of missiology. This noble goal is developed by looking at the Sending Father, the Sent Son, and the Holy Spirit in mission.

Sunquist describes three overarching characteristics of this missiology: (1) the beginning point is the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus Christ, (2) mission is not a specialized task of the church, but mission is a central aspect of Christian existence, and (3) “mission is primarily a matter of spirituality” (173). This missiology, the author argues, must be relevant in today’s world yet also based on scripture and tradition.

The attention in Part 3 is on the missional DNA of the church, whereby the author answers the question, “What does it mean to live God’s mission faithfully in the twenty-first century?” (273). The missional DNA components of church that Sunquist covers are evangelism, mission and the city, partnership in mission, suffering and glory, witness, and worship. The shortcoming of the approach in the book is Sunquist’s lack of engagement with the social sciences in developing missiology, but he explains that he is seeking to define the “*missio Dei* based on historical, biblical, and theological material” (xiii). Nevertheless, Sunquist provides a comprehensive historical and theological introduction to missiology.

Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction

Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2013, 289pp., paper, \$22.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-3911-9

Reviewed by Paul L. Whalen

The authors have written a historical step-by-step approach to Christian philosophy. As seen from the contents, it is written in such a way that the reader does not need to be a philosophy major in order to enjoy and understand it. The “Introduction” to Chapter 1 (Faith and Philosophy) does an excellent job of explaining the importance of the study of philosophy within the context of being a Christian. They write, “There have been times in the history of the church when a good knowledge of philosophy was regarded as indispensable, but now it isn’t such a time. Bible study and knowing how to evangelize are indispensable, but would be regarded by

many Christians as strange indeed if their local church announced a course in philosophy as a vital part of the church's mission" (3). The purpose of philosophy is to help provide order in the world. In many ways faith can be said to be part of philosophy.

As the book is organized chronologically, it is helpful in understanding how some of the doctrines of the early church were reached. Within Part 2, *The Story of Western Philosophy*, the book spends three chapters reviewing Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and then discusses the rediscovery of Aristotle during the Middle Ages. The book does an excellent job of covering philosophers from the Middle Ages to the Modern period and does discuss Christianity. Within the discussion about the Reformation it discusses the position of Calvin and Luther against the use of philosophical concepts in theology, which might explain in part why there is a lack of interest in philosophy in most of today's Protestant congregations. As a Methodist I was disappointed that there was no mention of John Wesley and his contribution to philosophy from within the First Awakening. Specifically, the book fails to deal with, or otherwise mention Wesley's philosophy of "Christian Perfection." The doctrine of "Christian Perfection" has impacted the Holiness Movement that began in the late 18th century.

Chapter 10, *Modern Philosophy "Romanticism to Gadamer*, provides an overview of many of the popular philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries. With the exception of Marx, this reviewer does not agree with the substantiation in the conclusion of this chapter that the men covered "were not Christian or were strongly opposed to Christianity." For example, Kierkegaard "saw himself as a missionary call to reintroduce Christianity unto Christendom." Darwin is also included within this chapter. It is noted that Darwin's view as to his theory of evolution was not meant to be a threat to Christianity. It is pointed out, "Darwin himself was cautious about any atheistic conclusions from his theory."

The charts contained in Chapter 13, *Reformed Epistemology* regarding "Classical Foundationalism" and "Foundationalism" should be reviewed by modern church leaders of all faiths. A review of the information contained in each can assist in understanding how and why people have a certain belief system. Overall, the book does a good job

bringing to the reader the importance of philosophy in understanding faith and its contribution to faith. In addition to understanding, the study of philosophy can provide insights on working with others in the mission field.

Deuteronomy: A Commentary

Jack R. Lundbom

Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

2013, 1064 pp., hardcover, \$80.00

ISBN: 978-0-8028-2614-5

Reviewed by Jeremiah K Garrett

The book of Deuteronomy is one of the most influential books in Judeo-Christian history. From before the Babylonian Exile biblical writers, redactors, and readers have used Deuteronomy as an inspirational link between the events of the Pentateuch and the formation and reformation of the people of God. Not simply a collection of rules, Deuteronomy serves to give its readers guidance on how to live a life of spiritual prosperity. It links its readers to the foundations of the covenant relationship between God and the people of God. It includes the Ten Commandments and the *Shema*, the central Jewish creed that includes Jesus' "greatest commandment." Ultimately, Deuteronomy is a book that combines all the rhetorical forces of law, prophecy, and wisdom literature into one book regarding how a covenant community is to live as the people of God.

Deuteronomy: A Commentary, by Jack R. Lundbom, was originally solicited by the late David Noel Freedman for the Eerdmans Critical Commentary Series. Although Friedman only lived to edit approximately one-third of the book, Lundbom carried out Freedman's vision by employing rhetorical criticism to write a translation of and commentary on the book of Deuteronomy intended for "any and all readers who want to better know and understand the book of Deuteronomy." To this end, Lundbom structured his translation and commentary section of his book into four main parts: 1) a translation of each passage, 2) commentary regarding the composition of the passage and the intended rhetorical effect, 3) general notes on individual phrases throughout the passage, and

4) how the intended audience would have received the message. Combined, these sections comprise the vast majority of his book, filling nearly 800 pages.

Lundbom's translations intentionally follow the Hebrew in terms of language, grammar, and style. The intermediate graduate student with a working knowledge of Hebrew poetic prose will find the repetitions, parallelisms, myriad dependent clauses, Hebrew idioms, and inverted word order useful in discerning the emphasis that pervades the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy, which is often lost in translation. For laity and students or members of church leadership who have not attained intermediate competency in Biblical Hebrew, the translations will prove more laborious than aptly nuanced. Only through much dedication would such a person come to appreciate the foreign and rigid style of English writing present in the translations.

For most open-minded or critically minded individuals (not to equate the two), Lundbom's "Rhetoric and Composition" sections and "Message and Audience" sections may prove the most helpful in understanding the thorough introductory claims he advances regarding the date, composition, and authorship of Deuteronomy, as well as its rhetorical purpose. It remains difficult to discern whether Lundbom's commentary in these sections is the inductive evidence for his claims regarding a *circa* seventh century BCE composition, or if his commentary is the result of deductively applying the thesis of his book to the biblical text. The fact that these sections can be viewed both as valid supporting data for his claims and as legitimate results of his approach to the text demonstrates the high caliber research and revisions that went into the writing of the commentary.

Lundbom's "Notes" sections comprise the majority of his commentary. The information in these sections demonstrates an adept use of rhetorical criticism, but it additionally demonstrates a thorough familiarity with other historical and linguistic methods of biblical study. In these sections, Lundbom draws from multiple types of sources, including archaeology, comparative ancient literature, rabbinical traditions, and modern historical scholarship. His sources also include a variety of traditions: Jewish and Christian; Catholic and Protestant; American, British, and German, among others. In his notes, he does not limit himself to a

single view, but rather at times presents conflicting information to allow the reader to weigh the evidence.

Prior to his commentary and translation, Lundbom includes a thorough, 98-page introduction to his book. In addition to the aforementioned “Date, Composition, and Authorship” section, he also includes thorough sections on ancient Hebrew rhetoric, theological ideas in Deuteronomy, the structure of the book of Deuteronomy, and the relationship between Deuteronomy and Law, Prophecy, and Wisdom Literature, among other introductory matters. The relationship between Deuteronomy and the New Testament receives both its own introductory section and a separate appendix. Although these sections are labeled as introductory, they are thoroughly researched and include data helpful for the beginning and advanced scholar alike.

Although the stated target audience was “any and all” who want a better understanding of Deuteronomy, the 1034-page book consistently contains style, grammar, and vocabulary (sometimes foreign) that would be difficult even for a beginning graduate student. The actual audience who will read this book is further limited by Lundbom’s overarching emphasis on seventh century BCE rhetoric. Although many critical scholars accept such a theory, many other scholars prefer an early first millennium or even late second millennium date of authorship. While Lundbom presents his views well, these views remain unorthodox in certain sects. Strong adherents to such sects of the Christian faith may be included in the target audience, but they will unlikely include themselves in the actual audience.

Lundbom has written an excellent, scholarly commentary on the book of Deuteronomy. The reservations expressed above do not affect its endorsement to those scholars who share a similar view of the text. Nor do they affect its endorsement to those scholars who are open to exploring such a view or his correlated ideas. In fact, for these types of scholars, Lundbom’s book is highly recommended. This recommendation may also extend unto laity who do not strictly adhere to the so-called traditional dating or similar notions.

In contrast, scholars who do not agree with his views and who are unwilling to entertain correlated ideas will only find fodder for a heated

debate. For such scholars, this book is not recommended. Such controversy does little to promote a better understanding of scripture, and in many cases detracts from understanding it. Additionally, this book is not recommended for those in the non-scholarly community who hold similar views. Without a more gradual introduction than what is available in this book, such laity may find it a stumbling block to their faith rather than a stepping-stone.

Arts Ministry: Nurturing the Creative Life of God's People

Michael J. Bauer

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Series

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

2013, 352 pp. paper, \$29.99

ISBN: 978-0-8028-6928-9

Reviewed by Benjamin D. Espinoza

Michael J. Bauer has authored an in-depth volume advocating for broad use of the arts as a significant ministry of the local church. For Bauer, arts ministry “fosters the creative and artistic dimension of the life of God’s people, who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to manifest the full meaning of their creation in the image of God (the *Imago Dei*)” (25). Bauer’s intended audience is the church, though his arguments are historically and theologically grounded (16). His vision is one where the entire church--professional artists, clergy, and laity alike--cultivate their creative gifts in service to God, the church, and the world.

Bauer opens his volume by offering examples of churches and ministries that already have thriving arts ministries, demonstrating the power arts can have in Christian formation. For those unfamiliar with arts ministry and the possibilities of such a pursuit, this section will be particularly eye opening. Anticipating objections, Bauer examines the various arguments against arts ministry in the church, which allows Bauer to thoroughly construct a positive case for arts ministry in the rest of the volume. The book then moves to articulate how the arts enable us to

encounter a God who is both transcendent *and* immanent. For Bauer, “All arts ministry begins and ends with God...it has the potential to speak the truth to human beings” (90).

Taking a more anthropological perspective, Bauer demonstrates the role of the arts in shaping human formation and identity, leading him to suggest that a strong arts ministry attends to the “life of the mind, the spirit, and the body,” all of which are crucial pieces in forming a “fully-functional disciple of Jesus Christ” (119). Helpfully, Bauer widens the reach of arts ministry, arguing that such a ministry has the potential to play a significant role in evangelism, social justice, mission, community development, and breaks down intergenerational barriers. Bauer includes a chapter that masterfully cultivates a rich theology of arts ministry and human creativity with a theologian’s mind and an artist’s imagination. Bauer’s final few chapters explore the use of the arts in worship and offer an extraordinarily helpful guide to building an arts ministry that will assist “arts ministers” in this needed task.

Bauer succeeds in putting forth a volume that gives historical, theological, and practical arguments in favor of arts ministry. At a point in the history of the church where artistic imagination and creativity are experiencing increased hospitality as valid forms of worship and Christian expression, Bauer’s case is a welcome one. His survey of arts ministries in various Christian communities provides just a glimpse into this aesthetic renaissance that is happening in local churches across the nation, and will be inspiring to aspiring arts ministers. Moreover, Bauer’s insights into the theological dimensions of creativity and arts ministry are quite rigorous. While Bauer is thorough in his argument, the volume could be strengthened through the inclusion of research on the effect of the arts and creativity on neural function as well as the role of human emotion in the conception and construction of art. Probing the literature on these topics would add a deeper and possibly more significant dimension to Bauer’s case, though space is always limited in introductory texts such as this one.

A prime book for the thoughtful practitioner, *Arts Ministry* challenges the church to embrace the arts as a powerful catalyst for encountering God and bearing witness to God’s reign. Even the most aesthetically-challenged ministers and laypeople will find themselves moved

to explore the creative gifts God has given them for service in and outside the church.

The Bible's Prophets: An Introduction for Christians and Jews

David J. Zucker

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub.

2013, 264 pp., paper, \$29.00

ISBN: 978-1-6203-2737-1

The Bible's Writings: An Introduction for Christians and Jews

David J. Zucker

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub.

2013, 248 pp., paper, \$27.00

ISBN: 978-1-6203-2738-8

Reviewed by Michael Shire

Here are two books that feature a comprehensive and sensitive approach to the shared sacred writings of Christians and Jews. David Zucker's ability to accommodate the common and distinctive approaches to reading the biblical texts has been amply demonstrated in his book on the Pentateuch (*The Torah: An Introduction for Christians and Jews* – Paulist Press). In these books that continue the series, he covers the lives, writings and messages of the Hebrew Prophets, and then the parallel writings and messages found in the third section of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings. Each book is handled in at least three ways. First comes a scholarly description of the text material dealing with its context and literary style and form. Using contemporary scholarship, Zucker is able to provide an accurate and critically analysed description of each book in just a few pages. This is, however followed by the distinctive readings of the two faith traditions in which layers of biblical commentary and interpretation are summarised and clearly delineated. One can see how both traditions read their texts separately in many cases and in parallel in others. Helpfully these faith-based commentaries are all accompanied by their citations in the literature enabling any reader to go back to the original sources for more! Thirdly,

Zucker provides some selected texts from each book in question for mutual study and reflection. These passages have been carefully chosen to illustrate the very points elaborated in the first two sections.

Same faith, as well as interfaith study groups will benefit from engaging with these wonderful and comprehensive books. It will aid them in their search for meaning from religious texts as they seek to understand different readings of the prophetic literature as well as those books called the writings. Zucker ensures that the Hebrew Bible is authentically described and explained within its Jewish setting and language in the land of Israel and its neighbouring countries and that study of the Bible is well grounded in the layers of biblical commentary accumulated by rabbinic and medieval commentators through the ages. He also is able to accommodate Christians who would want to understand the Bible through the lens of the New Testament and the nature of how the New emerged from the Old as well as the settings in which Jesus and his disciples lived and worked. In Judaism there is a tradition of publishing separate liturgies for multiple occasions in the year. One that brings them all together is called a *kol bo*. This book by Zucker is a *kol bo* – everything is in it!

Zucker enriches the current spiritual practice of scriptural reasoning commonly practiced by interfaith groups. There, selected passages of Tanakh (the Jewish Bible) and New Testament are studied in parallel facilitated by members of each faith. Zucker's work enables scriptural reasoning groups to deepen their appreciation and insight into each other's scriptural readings.

Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church

Markus Bockmuehl

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2012, xi, 223 pp. paper, \$24.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-4864-7

Reviewed by Brian C. Small

In recent years there appears to be a growing interest among scholars in the biblical figure of Simon Peter. In fact, this is Markus Bockmuehl's second book on the figure of Peter. His earlier book, *The Remembered Peter in Ancient Reception and Modern Debate*, published with Mohr Siebeck in 2010, is oriented more towards the scholarly community. In this second volume he attempts to make his scholarship more accessible for graduate and upper-level undergraduate students, although it still retains a good amount of academic substance.

The book is organized into three parts containing two chapters each. Chapter 1 lays the philosophical and methodological groundwork for his project. Given modern biblical scholarship's inability to recover the real facts of the first-century world underlying the layers of tradition and interpretation of the biblical text, Bockmuehl instead proposes to use social memory theory and the tools of reception history in order to trace the living memory about the historical Peter through the first two centuries of the Christian era. While he realizes that such a procedure cannot produce assured results, it may uncover persistent memories that were preserved through the traditioning process. In chapter 2 Bockmuehl surveys the evidence for Peter in the New Testament writings (i.e. the gospels, Acts, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and the Petrine Epistles). He notes that there is surprisingly very little biographical information about Peter in the New Testament. The New Testament portrays Peter as Jesus' foremost disciple and a prominent figure in the early church and its missionary outreach, but it is reticent about Peter's fate.

Part 2 constitutes the bulk of Bockmuehl's study. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the living memory about Peter respectively in the Eastern and Western traditions of the first two centuries of the Christian era. In both chapters, he begins with the most recent traditions and works backwards to the earliest traditions as represented in the New Testament writings. He is tantalizingly selective about the material he chooses to comment on, but he directs the reader to a companion website containing a listing of all of the sources relevant for the study of Petrine memory. In my opinion, it would have been useful to include these sources in an appendix at the back of the book. Chapter 3 assesses numerous Eastern (primarily Syrian) traditions concerning Peter: Serapion, Justin Martyr, Ignatius, Apocalypse of Peter, Gospel of Peter, the Pseudo-Clementines, and various other apocalypses

and noncanonical gospels. Bockmuehl includes the gospels of Matthew and John, and the epistles of 2 Peter and Galatians, among these Eastern traditions. Chapter 4 investigates the Western (primarily Roman) traditions concerning Peter: Dionysius of Corinth, Marcion, Phlegon of Tralles, and Clement of Rome. He includes Luke-Acts, Mark, 1 Peter, Romans, and 1 Corinthians among the Western traditions. The Eastern and Western traditions emerge with a consistent portrait of Peter: he is a leading apostle, a spokesperson for the disciples, a faithful witness of the Jesus tradition, and a defender against false teachings. Bockmuehl's distinction between Eastern and Western traditions is somewhat artificial since the provenance and destination of many of these writings are disputed and uncertain. Nevertheless, an important insight arises from his analysis. The West is replete with localized traditions about Peter, that is, there are localities that are associated with Peter's life, such as his conflict with Simon Magus, his crucifixion, his imprisonment, his burial, and so forth. By contrast, the localized traditions about Peter are surprisingly sparse in the East, only identifying his house in Capernaum.

Part 3 contains two "case studies" that attempt to illustrate how reception history may illuminate "the relationship between the historical Peter of critical reconstruction and the historic Peter of memory" (153). Chapter 5 attempts an exegetical study of Peter's conversion. Luke 22:32 appears to anticipate Peter's conversion, but by the beginning of Acts, Peter has already been converted. Bockmuehl finds clues in early Christian art, the Acts of Peter, 1 Peter, and John 21 to suggest that the moment of Peter's turning began when Jesus gazed at him after he denied Jesus thrice and the rooster crowed. Chapter 6 attempts an archaeological study of Peter's birthplace Bethsaida. Archaeology suggests that Bethsaida was a fully Hellenized village. Peter later moved to Capernaum, which had a much stronger Jewish orientation. Bockmuehl suggests that there are signs in the earliest Christian sources that Peter had sympathies both towards nationalistic Judaism and towards a "global and multicultural articulation of faithful Jewishness" (176). Peter's beginnings may help to explain his later role as a bridge-builder between Jews and Gentiles and his willingness to extend the gospel to the Gentiles.

The book closes with some concluding observations, a bibliography, and helpful indices for ancient sources, authors, and subjects.

Bockmuehl's book is an interesting and insightful study on how reception history can shed light on understanding an important biblical figure.

The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context

Myron Bradley Penner

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2013, 180 pp., paper, \$19.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-3598-2

Reviewed by Andrew D. Kinsey

Is it still possible, in a postmodern context, to engage in the practice of apologetics? If so, how may the church both “defend and commend” the faith without needlessly offending in the process? Myron Penner seeks to answer as well as reframe these questions by building on John Stackhouse’s *Humble Apologetics*. Penner writes that not only can the “modern apologetic enterprise” (MAE) curse, but the MAE *is* a curse (7). Current apologetic debates, whether in conservative and liberal forms, only serve to underwrite the fragmentary nature of modernity, taking the church’s witness off course. Another way forward is needed. The MAE is no longer works. What to do? Utilizing Alistair MacIntyre’s analysis of modernity in *After Virtue* and incorporating the works of Soren Kierkegaard, Penner supplies a way to move beyond the present modern/postmodern impasse. In Kierkegaard there are theological resources available to engage Nietzsche’s critique of modernity while grounding Christian confession in Aristotle’s tradition-centered form of practical reasoning as rooted in narrative and identifiable in the virtues (10). Kierkegaard, as Penner contends, offers a “middle way” with Christian categories, which can bring an “end” to the MAE as presently conceived and practiced, and open the way toward a new postmodern paradigm (12).

Penner divides his book into five chapters. Chapter 1 traces the way modern apologetics imagines itself as a “rational and objective discourse” untainted by political power. Here, Penner takes particular aim at apologists like William Craig and J.P. Moreland as exemplifying the “amnesic” impulse

in much of modern apologetics (38). In Chapter 2, Penner outlines Kierkegaard's creative distinction between the "genius" and the "apostle": rather than become bogged down in endless epistemological justifications of religious belief, which end in nihilism, Christians need to be concerned with a hermeneutic that can help to understand the life of faith as witness, which can lead to hope (58). Chapter 3 explores the deeper journey into the "poetics of truth," noting how irony can serve as a prophetic strategy to edify while avoiding the pitfalls of defending faith propositionally; such a strategy, while critical of modern notions of absolute Truth, really can help to open up spaces to *be* that truth (101). Chapter 4 continues this line of argument clarifying Kierkegaard's concept of truth as subjectivity (129), while Chapter 5 brings Gabriel Marcel's concept of sympathy to the surface to reveal how it can preserve the importance of the human person, arguing how the MAE can so easily perpetuate violence, especially among those who may not believe in the gospel (150).

Penner's book will undoubtedly provoke many who work in apologetics, evangelism, and missiology. First, Penner's text provides a creative way to conceive of apologetics in a postmodern context. The fruitful engagement with Kierkegaard can only help reorient what apologetics is. To be sure, more work is necessary here, but Penner's reframing of apologetics in light of the modernity's questionable past and postmodernity's confusing present is certainly welcomed. Second, Penner's research dovetails nicely with proposals being currently done in religious epistemology. No longer does the church need to take a back seat to modern or postmodern "experts" (geniuses) but can engage creatively, if not evangelistically, with all newcomers in the struggles for truth. Penner's arguments allow the church to wrestle with the kinds of faithful witness and vocabulary that will sustain discipleship over time.

But Penner's work may also disturb. With moral relativism and religious pluralism center stage, persons will most assuredly ask questions about what truth is, both as absolute and as relative, and about the ways truth is known. In addition, they will ask about strategies utilizing irony. Indeed, irony can take many forms, but irony, at least in its Rortyan version, can end in nothingness. Penner, to his credit, notes this, but others will certainly raise objections (97).

And lastly, with respect to church's witness in a pluralistic context, it is curious why Penner did not reference the work of Leslie Newbigin, or did not ground his arguments on personhood more within the doctrine of the Trinity. With regards to developing the "hermeneutics of the gospel" as visibly practiced in the community of God's people, we may question the omission. Perhaps Penner will draw on these resources in the days ahead. We can surely hope so. Until then, we will enjoy Penner's work on the end of apologetics and seek to see where the journey goes next.

Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith From the Ground Up

Simon Chan

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic

2014, 217 pp., paper, \$22.00

ISBN: 978-0-8308-4048-9

Reviewed by Moe Moe Nyunt

A number of Asian scholars have attempted to construct a Christian theology in the rich and diverse Asian context. In Western academia, India Dalit, Korea Minjung and Asian liberation theologies as well as the works of M. M. Thomas, Raimon Panikkar, Stanley J. Smartha, Kosuke Koyama, and C. S. Song are discussed as Asian theologies. Inopportunately, none of them are really qualified to be authentic Asian theologies. In his book, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith From the Ground Up*, Simon Chan, the Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology, argues that these theologies are articulations by intellectuals intended for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized in Asia.

What is more, in this volume, Chan makes significant contributions to the scholarship of contextual theology by means of providing a realistic approach in doing theology, as well as demonstrating how grassroots Asian theology is constructed. Chan's mastery in doing contextual theology can be seen from the beginning chapter and methodological questions, through the rest of the five chapters. I, as a student of contextual theology, realized several new ideas from Chan's work on *Grassroots Asian Theology*.

Chan highlights the critical role of church and tradition in the development of contextual theology, in addition to scripture and dogma. He argues that church doctrines are not the result of what conservative Christians' believe about scripture alone. More to the point, Chan articulates that the roles that scripture and dogma play need to be more carefully spelled out in relation to the church and tradition. On this point, I totally agree with him. Scripture is but one of the channels of God's revelation to his people, so it is necessary for a theologian to dialogue with the church in history as well.

Chan draws attention to the essentials of ecclesial experience, rather than human or cultural experience in the socio-politico-economic context or the religio-cultural context in which previous contextualizers have constructed local theologies. Chan's rationale is that "local cultures do shape the way the faith is received and expressed, but for a local theology to be authentically Christian, it must have substantial continuity with the larger Christian tradition." Chan's grassroots Asian theology runs through diverse Christian traditions. He creatively engages Evangelical and Pentecostal theologies with vast sources from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches considering that these two traditional churches offer a broader and more solid basis for constructing contextual theologies.

Chan redirects us to focus on the experiences, beliefs, and practices of the grassroots instead of depending on elitist theologies. His argument is that authentic theology should be shaped and directed by the experiences of the people of God (*laos*). He insists that theologians must endeavor with utmost seriousness to listen to what God by his Spirit is saying through the laity. Chan's *Grassroots Asian theology* emerges as a result of discussions with the creative theologies of Asian popular spiritual leaders such as Watchmen Nee, Wang Ming Dao, David Yonggi Cho, and Sadhu Sundar Singh, located in sermons, devotional works, testimonies, and other popular writings.

Even though Chan focuses on Christianity in Asia, this excellent book is also a landmark for contextualizers whose interest is beyond Asia. I believe that this book is essential for contextual theology classes.

Organizational Leadership: Foundations & Practices for Christians

Edited by John S. Burns, John R. Shoup and Donald C. Simmons Jr.

Downers Grove, IL : InterVarsity Press

2014, 286 pp. paper, \$25.00

ISBN 978-0-8308-4050-2

Reviewed by Paul A. Tippet

This book consists of ten essays, which weaves scripture, leadership history and theory, and personal experiences throughout the work. The three editors divided the present book into three sections to meet the challenge of combining the Christian worldview with organizational leadership. The first and second sections provide the theological and theoretical foundations for constructing a model of Christian leadership. In the first section, a guide of important themes that emerge from scriptural teachings is provided:

Leading is normal human activity. We are ordained and equipped by God to lead relative to the rest of created order and in a wide variety of settings. At times, for some people, this includes the leading of other people in order to accomplish divinely ordained purposes.

Filling the role of leader always depends on God's delegated authority. There is no authority for a leader that does not derive from God's providential appointment. All those who serve as leaders should view themselves as holding their positions by the grace of God, and should be aware that God can change or remove a leader at any time.

Human leadership is not just management task; it is often a transformative task. The creation was immature, so to speak, and part of the human function was to facilitate its growth. Human leaders and followers are often sent to change or alter conditions that are not pleasing to God—be that slavery in Egypt or slothfulness in Crete (1 Titus 1:5, 12-13).

While granting that leadership is often transformative, there is a very substantial place for managerial functions in kingdom work. All well-run organizations require management skills. Through history, those who performed these management tasks were always faithful and accountable stewards of what was entrusted to their care (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Leaders do not lead independently of followers. Both are divinely appointed to their place in an organization. Both are divinely equipped and gifted. Successful completion of God-given mission defines Christian leadership. It will always be a joint effort of gifted leaders, gifted followers, and divine provision (p. 77-79).

The second section, *Theoretical Foundations*, explains “Christian leadership facilitates the transforming and sanctifying journey of organizations from X1 to X2 in both material and spiritual ways” (p. 139). The third section outlines specific skills and practices for conducting Christian leadership, such as: communication, conflict and negotiation, decision-making, Christian leadership and financial integrity, and sustaining the leader.

In our rapidly changing environment, we have the challenge to understand or not to understand, to see something as meaningful or meaningless. Throughout the book, three reasons are provided for why this book is unique and a critical asset for those wishing to improve their understanding of Christian leadership. The first reason is that the book contributes to the lack of a systematic theology of Christian leadership within the leadership literature. The second reason is that the book highlights the importance of general revelation and the leadership truths that have been revealed which can enhance Christian and non-Christian leadership practices. The third reason given is that though not all Christians are necessarily leaders, all Christians are called to serve in different leadership capacities at different times during their life.

The book is a helpful guide for students providing a much-needed practical theology on organizational leadership, and I would recommend it for a variety of introductory courses concerning organizational leadership.

Pastors who are interested in organizational leadership may also find this book helpful. This book provides a tool for leaders (Christian and Non-Christian) that may be helpful to guide conversations in the area of Christian leadership, especially as leadership continues to be a topic of interest for a wide variety of scholars.

Longing for Jesus. Worship at a Black Holiness Church in Mississippi, 1895-1913

Lester Ruth

The Church at Worship: Case Studies from Christian History

Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

2013, 173 pp., paper, \$24.00

ISBN: 978-0-8028-6949-4

Reviewed by David Bundy

This volume is an important addition to the scholarship on Charles Price Jones (1865-1949). Jones was the progenitor of at least two major denominations: the Church of God (Holiness) and the Church of God in Christ, which split off from Jones' movement when many congregations adopted Pentecostal theology and experience under the leadership of Charles H. Mason. This volume focuses on the period of Jones' pastoral work in Jackson, Mississippi. It covers the years between 1895 (when Jones accepted the pastorate of Mt. Helm Baptist Church) and ostensibly 1913, although many of the texts included in the anthology were published after that date. The church split during Jones' pastorate and many parishioners followed Jones to a new congregation, Christ's Temple, on contiguous property in Jackson.

The volume is intended for an educated lay audience but will also be helpful, and occasionally frustrating, to scholars. The volume is divided into three parts. The first, "Locating the Worshipping Community" (pp. 3-21), deals with issues of context and historiography. It contains a well-conceived time-line (pp. 6-10) that provides a glimpse of the context of Jones and the congregations in Jackson. Even more useful is the "Cautions

for Studying Christ's Temple Worship History" (pp. 16-17) that presents historiographical issues in succinct summary form. There is a period map of Jackson with some important sites located.

The second part "Exploring the Worshipping Community" (25-151) begins with a short history of Jones' experience at Jackson, the terrible with the good (pp. 25-39). This is followed by an anthology of texts published by and about Jones as well as documents (usually by Jones) from the church. The texts are well selected to demonstrate Jones' theology and his understanding of worship. They include creedal statements, liturgical texts, sermons, theological essays as well as explanations by Jones of the community's practices. Especially helpful are the descriptions of the community's worship written, and reprinted here, by those on the edge of the community or from outside it. These demonstrate the stature in which Jones was held by his contemporaries, even those who disagreed with him. Unfortunately it was absolutely necessary to devote significant space to the dispute between Jones and his former colleague, C. H. Mason, because the struggle was primarily about the nature of worship, especially the role of glossolalia and Pentecost worship styles, both in congregational worship and in the life of Christian piety. This part of the volume provides easy access to Jones materials that are difficult to find. Here one gains partial access to the creative processes of an incisive theological mind as well as to Jones' erudition, attachment to the Radical Holiness Movement, and his biblicism.

The first two sections are greatly enhanced by a large number of well-reproduced photographs, most from private collections. The final section, "Assisting the Investigation" is a study guide for groups and individuals who would struggle with the question "Why Study Christ's Temple." It will be helpful to those using the volume in university classes and with groups of laypersons.

The pitfalls are many for anyone who would study the African-American Holiness and Pentecostal traditions. Ruth has skillfully negotiated these; he was aware of the historiographical problems. One problem that persists, perhaps, is that of Jones' relation to the Radical Holiness tradition that was fermenting in the same region and across the nation. Those familiar with the work of his contemporaries in that tradition, including for

example, Martin Wells Knapp (Cincinnati), J. O. McClurkan (Nashville), F. M. Messenger (Providence and Chicago), and Charles F. Parham (Topeka, Houston), William and Mary Boardman (London), Jonathan Paul (Berlin), Theodore Monod (Paris) and T. B. Barratt (Oslo), among many, will see commonalities of themes and concerns with those of C. P. Jones. To suggest this is crucial to understanding Jones is not to cast aspersions on Ruth's work, nor to cast doubt on the originality of Jones. It is a careful study. As it is, the work of Ruth on Jones is a remarkable book, and bodes well for the usefulness of the series. It is to be hoped that it finds its way into scholarly libraries as well as into the hands of informed laypersons across the English reading world.

Core Biblical Studies: The Apocrypha

David A. deSilva

Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press

2012, 160 pp., paper, \$15.99

ISBN: 978-1426-742354

Reviewed by Benjamin J. Snyder

In line with the stated goals of the Core Biblical Studies series, deSilva delivers a “brief, substantive, yet highly accessible introduction” to the Apocrypha. There are eight chapters, all informative and easy to read. Chapter 1 provides a concise overview of each Apocryphal work (Tobit, Judith, Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Ben Sira or Sirach, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Greek Daniel, 1 and 2 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, 3 Maccabees, 2 Esdras, and 4 Maccabees in that order). Approximately one page is devoted to each, including a brief quote. As to why would anyone want to read the Apocrypha, deSilva persuasively states that in doing so, “we are reading the literature of pious Jews trying to make sense of their changing circumstances in light of the unchanging revelation of their sacred texts” (2).

The historical context of the Apocrypha is covered in chapter 2, “The World of the Apocrypha.” The expected topics are addressed under the following subtitles: Judea Under Hellenistic Rule, The Hellenizing

“Reform,” The Maccabean Revolt, The Rise and Fall of the Hasmonean Dynasty, and Jews in the Diaspora. This tumultuous history (events of 175 - 164 BCE) is important because it is “of special importance for the formation of Jewish consciousness in the time of Jesus” (21), which was celebrated at Hanukkah. Despite the preponderance of the influence of Hellenism among the Jews, deSilva correctly points out that acceptance of Greek culture did not necessarily equal being an unfaithful Jew (33).

In Chapter 3, deSilva shows the foundational role that “God, the Law, and the Covenant” played in the minds of the Apocryphal authors. These are the theological and ideological “keys” to its logic. He does an admirable job revealing the diverse spectrum of thought within Jewish understanding of the sin-nature, collective vs. individual righteousness, election, the Law as grace and not an oppressive burden, the importance of Deuteronomy (covenant), and the potential role that martyrology played in atonement (as well as interpreting Jesus’ death).

The Apocrypha and things Jewish forms the focus of chapters 4 - 6. Ethics (ch. 4) were ultimately related not to what one believed was “right” or “wrong,” but how one lived (actions). Hence, charity, care of family, and protecting kinship through endogamy was praised. This, however, does not imply that beliefs were secondary. Not all modern readers find the ethics reflected in the Apocrypha as something praiseworthy as he demonstrates with Judith (use of deceit). However, his placing her actions in cultural context should not be overlooked (75-6). Spirituality (ch. 5) is discussed under the topics of Petition, Penitence, Praise, Calendar (Sabbath and festivals), and Temple and Liturgy. Ethnicity (ch. 6), as guarded by circumcision, food laws, Sabbath, and monotheism, set observant Jews ostensibly apart from their neighbors. These issues, not surprisingly, also form the basis of debate surrounding Jesus and the Jesus movement, especially with Paul.

In chapters 7 - 8 he turns to the Apocrypha and Christianity. The amount of influence of the Apocrypha on the teachings of Jesus, James, and other NT authors may be surprising to some readers unfamiliar with the Apocrypha (ch. 7). Although the NT never quotes the Apocrypha, its shared thought world is manifestly evident. This reviewer is in agreement with deSilva that Jesus does not have to be original to be profound. Finally,

deSilva discusses in chapter 8 the Apocrypha's reception in church history, i.e. its canonical status and attitudes toward it. It is immediately clear that he is in favor of ending its neglect among Protestants, a point with which we are also in agreement.

Despite the fact that it is a “popular” level book, apart from fewer endnotes, his analysis of the Apocrypha in its historical, social, and cultural context does not differ substantially from his earlier academic title on the same topic (*Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). In fact, he seems to expand the discussion in this most recent title. However, if the reader is looking for more substantial treatment of the actual contents of the Apocrypha, he or she is advised to turn to his academic title. The value of this introduction is betrayed by its small size.

The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today

Anthony Thiselton

Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

2013, 579 pp., paper, \$46.00

ISBN: 978-0-8028-6875-6

Review by Isaiah Allen

Anthony Thiselton's *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Eerdmans, 2013) is a substantial survey of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, tracing its development in terms of continuity and discontinuity from the Hebrew Bible through to contemporary discussions, in penetrating dialogue with the widespread Pentecostal and Renewal movements. Thiselton has published significant works on hermeneutics, theology, and biblical studies. He is skilled in practicing the distinct disciplines of these related fields, and this current book demonstrates his thoroughness in examining the evidence and precision in drawing relevant inferences.

Though not clear from the title, one of Thiselton's key concerns in this book is to include Pentecostals and Renewal advocates in the dialogue at every point, even when those advancing their positions do not have scholarly credentials. His Preface touches upon the legitimacy of this concern. The movements in question are so widespread within and alongside the global church that ignoring their teachings would exclude a major component of historical theology and biblical interpretation. Further, though the majority of material in the book is of a descriptive nature, its most compelling contribution is probably its incisive final chapter (468-500), where Thiselton provides a cogent summary of his entire survey, presents illuminating conclusions, and prescribes specific areas for mutual dialogue across traditions and disciplines. His generous, 442-page survey of the evidence might, at those points where one is already acquainted with the literature, seem tedious; but, cumulatively, it strongly reinforces his conclusions.

As a widely respected scholar and an elder in the Church of England, Thiselton approaches dialogue with key voices in the Pentecostal and Renewal movement respectfully and sensitively, but not without incisive criticism. He puts forward representative Pentecostal and Renewal scholars (e.g. Gordon Fee, Max Turner, Robert Menzies, etc.) alongside more mainline writers (e.g. C. K. Barrett, L. T. Johnson, James Dunn) in shared dialogue with the history of teaching on the Holy Spirit.

Primarily a large survey, the book has three main sections that lead to a vivid, precise, and fresh conclusion. "The Holy Spirit in Biblical Teaching" (1-162) presents a relatively uncontroversial survey of biblical material on the Holy Spirit. Thiselton systematically discusses the major considerations (e.g. personhood, ambiguity of some texts, role of inspiration, etc.) that reemerge (with continuity and discontinuity) throughout the book, interacting with some major interpreters. This section is not strictly exegetical but is rather a survey of biblical interpretations. Appropriately, the organization of this section is corpus-based (e.g. Old Testament, Synoptics, Paul, John, etc.), the greater number of pages being devoted to the New Testament, as might be expected. This survey is set apart from most others in that Thiselton critically engages, throughout, the interpretations of major Pentecostal and Renewal thinkers.

The second section, “The Holy Spirit through the Centuries” (163-292), considers the doctrine of the Holy Spirit historically. Thiselton’s survey representatively covers a wide time period, giving audience to major interpreters such as Ignatius and Clement, Tertullian and Augustine, Hildegard and Aquinas, Catherine of Sienna and John Wesley (Some Wesley scholars might argue that Thiselton misses the mark in his assessment both of John Wesley’s teachings and his influence. Some may also judge that he tends to caricaturize “Holiness” traditions.). As the historical material allows, his survey is broad, including the insights of men and women, the Eastern and Western church, mystics, scholars, and pastors (though the same level of and attempt at inclusion does not seem to be present when discussing modern thinkers). The downside of this truly impressive survey is that the contributions of even the most significant writers can only be afforded a few pages of summary. This section, by nature, was far less engaged with Pentecostal and Renewal thinkers – partly because these movements had not begun yet (though Thiselton is conscious of their earlier corollaries), and partly because of a dearth of historical theologians and scholars from these more recent traditions.

The final section, “The Holy Spirit in Modern Theology and Today” (293-467), brings the discussion into the modern era. Commensurate with Thiselton’s career-long interest in hermeneutical clarity, he rightly engages key philosophical voices of the modern era – e.g. F. Schleiermacher, J. Newman (with a careful critique of the Pentecostal tendency to embrace postmodernism). The eight chapters of this third section might represent his most lively (and timely) work. When the non-routine question, “What does this person have to say about the Holy Spirit?” is asked of such iconic figures as Schleiermacher, for instance, the answers are illuminating. This is the section Thiselton presents and critiques the ideas of key Pentecostal and Renewal leaders directly in the light of the groundwork laid in previous chapters. Thiselton is reasonable and judicious, appreciative of what these traditions bring to the church, but not reluctant to expose their flaws in the interest of integrity.

A longer Preface, explicating his motives and his criteria for engaging Pentecostal and Renewal writers would be helpful. Back matter includes a bibliography, so teachers and students will stay abreast of works

on this topic; an index of modern authors; an index of subjects, under which Thiselton places pre-modern and ancient authors; and an index of scripture and other ancient sources cited.

A theology course that seeks to give primary or significant attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit should now consider this book either as a required text or as essential background research. Not only is it a thorough and up-to-date volume on the topic, it also presents fresh and engaging, even provocative, conclusions that urge action. Pentecostals and Renewal advocates, who have special interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and who desire a strengthened connection with the historic and global church will find this book to be an excellent, sympathetic, but challenging resource.

Books Received

The following books were received by the editor's office since the last issue of *The Asbury Journal*. The editor is seeking people interested in writing book reviews on these or other relevant books for publication in future issues of *The Asbury Journal*. Please contact the editor (Robert.danielson@asburyseminary.edu) if you are interested in reviewing a particular title. Reviews will be assigned on a first come basis.

Acolatse, Esther E.

2014 *For Freedom or Bondage? A Critique of African Pastoral Practices*.
Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Co. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6989-0. Price: \$35.00.

Anderson, Gary A. and Joel S. Kaminsky, eds.

2013 *The Call of Abraham: Essays on the Election of Israel in Honor of
Jon D. Levenson*. Notre Dame, IN: University of
Notre Dame Press. ISBN: 978-0-268-02043-9. Price: \$64.00.

Arnold, Bill T.

2014 *Introduction to the Old Testament*. New York, NY: Cambridge
University Press. ISBN: 978-0-521-70547-9.
Price: \$53.99.

Bartholomew, Craig G. and Michael W. Goheen

2014 *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*.
Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-4956-9. Price: \$22.99.

Brueggemann, Walter

2014 *Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*. Grand Rapids,
MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. ISBN:
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