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Albrecht Dürer, *Resurrection* (no. 15) 1512
New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Readers of this issue of the *Midwestern Journal of Theology* will be interested to read the transcript of a debate on the historical reliability of the New Testament accounts of the resurrection that took place between Professors Craig A. Evans and Bart D. Ehrman on 1 April 2010 in the Midwestern chapel.¹ The debate served as a kickoff event for the second annual Hastings Institute of the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Christianity Conference. During the course of the debate, Professor Ehrman likened the transmission of the early Christian tradition to a child's game of telephone. Here is what Ehrman said:

What happens when stories circulate by word of mouth, not for just a day or two, but for years? Well, your kids probably played the telephone game when they were little at a birthday party. One child tells a story to the next child, who tells it to the next child, who tells it to the next child and you go around the circle, and by the time it comes back to the first child it is a different story. If it weren't a different story it would be a very dumb game to play on your birthday. Stories change when they circulate.



What happens if you don't simply tell the story in the same living room with all kids in the socioeconomic group, who speak the same language, who are telling the story within three minutes of each other? What happens if you tell the story across the Roman Empire and you translate it into different languages and people tell the story for purposes of their own? What happens to the stories? The stories change.

Since a number of other prominent New Testament scholars were also present at the conference, I thought it might be of interest to readers to hear how they responded to his analogy. So I invited all of them to respond if they would to the following question:

¹ Photos of Craig A. Evans and Bart Ehrman (R. Huggins), those of Hurtado, Porter, Wallace, Wegner (Charis Buckland).

Ehrman’s analogy of the telephone game: Is it a historically credible way of talking about oral transmission in the ancient world and Early Christianity in particular?

Here is how they responded:²

Craig A. Evans (Acadia Divinity College)



“The analogy of the ‘telephone’ game is not helpful because it does not take into account realistically the pedagogy involved—that of Jesus teaching his disciples and that of the disciples teaching others. This teaching involves repetition, saying things over and over again, applying them in a variety of ways, and soliciting feedback from those being taught. In ‘telephone’ one hears something once and then tries to pass it on to someone who

did not hear the original form. The *didache*, or teaching, of Jesus was not handed down this way.”

Larry W. Hurtado (University of Edinburgh)

“Ehrman’s ‘telephone game’ is not a good analogy for oral transmission of sacred lore in a religious body of believers. There are concerns to preserve sayings of “the master” not found in a parlour game. But also there are needs to make the tradition meaningful in new situations, so there are adaptations too, but they



² Listed alphabetically by author’s last name. Answers by email from Evans (Sept 12, 2010), Hurtado (Sept 5, 2010), Porter (Sept 3, 2010), Wallace (Sept 11, 2010), Wegner (Sept 9, 2010).



aren't the haphazard kind in the parlour games."

Stanley E. Porter (McMaster Divinity College)

"Ehrman trivializes the process of transmission of the fundamental stories of Christianity by equating it with a contemporary children's party game. Transmitting the message of Christianity was not part of some clever diversionary entertainment, but it involved the faithful conveyance of a life-changing message. Those who

were responsible to tell and retell the story of early Christianity had been transformed by the story of Jesus, and the evidence clearly shows that they took every effort to tell this story faithfully."

**Daniel B. Wallace
(Dallas Theological Seminary)**

The major problem with Ehrman's analogy is that it is a case of *reductio ad absurdum*. The telephone game is one line, with a not-so-coherent story in the first place, intended to create confusion and result in a garbled message. The oral tradition behind the gospels is multiple lines, as Ehrman himself admits, has a remarkably coherent message, and would be disastrous for early believers if the message



became garbled. Their lives were on the line. Would they really be willing to die for a Jesus who *became* deity through a garbled transmission of the gospel? Further, there was shared memory in community, something alien to the telephone game. And the message would be repeated hundreds of times by eyewitnesses before it was written down. Just taking one feature that is different and we can see how absurd the comparison is: suspend telephone game participants over a pit of crocodiles and tell them that if they get the story wrong, they'll be

eaten alive. My guess is that their memory would be better by several magnitudes.



**Paul Wegner
(Phoenix Seminary)**

“I believe a more reasonable analogy is a child’s beloved bedtime story which the child has heard so often and loved so dearly that even the slightest variation will be noted. The Gospel stories about Jesus are not some meaningless words, but were the very events of their beloved savior and certainly they would have treated them with honor and respect.

The New Testament world was an oral society and thus memorizing wording was a way of life. Our society has largely lost the importance of spoken words, but the New Testament believers would have cherished Christ’s words and constant repetition would have kept them accurate and fresh in the minds of the disciples.”

AND THERE IS MORE

Following the Ehrman/Evans debate we continue our issue theme of the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection with three additional pieces, one by Don Veinot, President of EMNR, on Ehrman’s list of alleged discrepancies, a second by our Managing Editor on Ehrman’s flawed methodology, and a third, by Old Princeton Theologian Benjamin B. Warfield, on the resurrection as historical fact. In addition to its theme articles this issue also includes a number of other interesting contributions on a range of relevant topics.

I would like to thank my Assistant Editor, Josh Mann, for helping me at every step along the way, and Catherine Renfro, for transcribing the debate and valiantly undertaking the tedious task of proofreading the entire issue. Good Reading!

Ronald V. Huggins
Managing Editor

Are the Resurrection Accounts Historically Reliable?

**Craig A. Evan vs. Bart D. Ehrman
1 April 2010**



Left to Right: Prof. Bart D. Ehrman, MBTS Pres. R. Phil Roberts, Prof. Craig A. Evans¹

INTRODUCTION

On April 1, 2010, the second annual Hastings Institute of the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Christianity Conference at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary commenced with a debate between two well known New Testament scholars: Bart D. Ehrman (James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina) and Craig A. Evans (Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia, Canada).

¹ Unless otherwise noted, photos in this article by R. Huggins.

OPENING STATEMENTS

Prof. Ehrman:

I would like to thank Dr. Roberts and the organizers of this debate for inviting me. I would like to thank all of you for coming. How many of you were there last night at First Family Church? Good, I can repeat my jokes. How many of you here consider the Gospel accounts of the resurrection to be reliable? Right. How many of you are here to see me get creamed? Right.

Are the biblical accounts of the resurrection reliable? When I was an evangelical Bible-believing Christian, I saw this as one of the most important questions that humans can deal with. Can we trust the New Testament accounts of Jesus' resurrection? Are they historically reliable or are they filled with legendary details and stories that did not actually happen? I've changed my mind on this question over the years, but I want you to know at the outset that I did not change my mind quickly or



Bart D. Ehrman

thoughtlessly. I've put a lot of thought into it, and research and prayer and soul searching. My one goal in this entire process was to seek out the truth and to go wherever the truth led me. I hope you, too, have a commitment to the truth and are not afraid to accept the truth even if it is not what you start out thinking it will be.

I need to begin by putting the question in a broader context. Are the Gospels generally reliable when they describe the death and resurrection of Jesus? To put this into a broader context, I want to consider for a moment what it is historians look for in historical accounts when they are reconstructing the past. What would be a historian's wish list of documents in trying to know what happened? Well, historians would look for several accounts of a past event, several accounts from eyewitnesses. Historians love to have eyewitness accounts that are witnessed near the time of the events themselves, accounts that are not biased in any way. They would like these several accounts by eyewitnesses that are not biased to corroborate one another. In other words, they basically agree in what they have to say yet without

collaboration, so that one author did not get his ideas from another author, but independently they come to basically the same account. Historians prefer corroboration without collaboration. What is it that we have with the gospels? With the gospels we have none of the above. None of the gospels are eyewitness accounts. All of the gospels are written 30-60 years later by people who were not there to see these things happen. They were written to convince readers of the truth of the account. They were not written by impartial observers. Matthew and Luke certainly use Mark's account, so there was collaboration. These accounts have numerous contradictions between themselves, and they are not corroborated by outside sources.

In order to see the discrepancies among the gospels it is important to read the gospels in what I call a *horizontal* way. The way one normally reads the gospels, of course, is to read through Matthew. It is about the life, death, resurrection of Jesus. Then you read Mark; it is about the life, death, resurrection of Jesus, and it sounds a lot like Matthew. Then you read Luke from the very beginning: life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It sounds a lot like Matthew and Mark. Read John and it is a little bit different, but it is basically the same: life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That is what I call a *vertical* reading of a gospel—when you start at the beginning and you read until the end. Then you start with the next one and you read to the end *vertically*.

In order to see discrepancies among the gospels, you should not read them *vertically*; you should read them *horizontally*. That is to say, you read one story in one gospel, then read the same story in another gospel, and compare the two stories. So you are reading them *horizontally*. When you do that, you will find numerous discrepancies throughout the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, his death, and the events leading up to and including his resurrection. Many of these discrepancies may seem minor. Some of them are major. Did Jesus and his disciples, before his death, eat a Passover meal or not? Mark says yes, John says no. Was the trial of Jesus conducted in front of the Jewish authorities or not? Mark says yes, John says no. Did Jesus give extensive speeches to Pilate during his trial or not? Mark says no, John says yes. Was Jesus crucified on the afternoon before the Passover meal was eaten or in the morning after it was eaten? John says it was before, Mark says it was after, and they are both explicit. These discrepancies continue into the resurrection narratives. Who went to the tomb on the third day? Was it Mary Magdalene and another Mary? Was it the two Marys and Salome? Was it Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and another Mary? Was it Mary Magdalene by herself? It depends which Gospel you read. Was the stone already rolled away by the time they got there or did it roll away when they arrived? It depends which Gospel you read. Whom did they meet there to tell them

that Jesus was raised? Did they meet an angel? Did they meet two men? Did they meet one man? Or did they meet Jesus himself? It depends which Gospel you read. Do the women assume that Jesus has been raised, as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, because that is what they are told? Or do they assume he has been buried in some other place (i.e., the Gospel of John, since his body is not in the tomb). Who first comes to realize that Jesus has been raised? Is it the women as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Or is it Simon Peter and the beloved disciple as in John? Are the women told anything upon first finding the tomb empty? It depends which Gospel you read. What are they told? Are they told to tell the disciples to go to Galilee to meet Jesus there or are they told that Jesus told them while he was still in Galilee that he would rise? It depends which Gospel you read. Did the women tell the disciples? Mark explicitly says no. Matthew and Luke explicitly say yes.



You will find dozens of discrepancies in the details about Jesus' resurrection in the gospels. Let me stress, it is not good enough to say that these are all simply minor details, that they all basically have the same big picture. The big picture is made up of lots and lots of details. If you change all of the details, you change the big picture. If you want to say that the gospel accounts are reliable, which one? They all differ from one another. One typical response to this is that each gospel maybe gives a partial view

and you need to combine the four to get the complete view. There are two problems with that perspective. First, these gospels do not give partial views, they give different views. And the differences are not merely differences, they are discrepancies. Secondly, when you take all four Gospels and combine them into one big mega-account, you have written your own account instead of paying attention to each author's account. You have written your own gospel.

The second typical response to the discrepancies in the gospels is to try and take comfort in the fact that eyewitness reports are often at odds with one another, so that we shouldn't be put off by the fact that the Gospels are at odds with one another because eyewitnesses often have discrepancies in their reports. But this response is precisely the problem.

In any case in a court of law, attorneys will call as many eyewitnesses as they can find. They have to call numerous eyewitnesses because they cannot trust one eyewitness. If you could trust any eyewitness, you wouldn't need trials. You could just ask somebody what happened. If three people see a car accident and see it differently, you have to find out what happened. This is a very common occurrence in our experience. But if the eyewitnesses disagree with one another, it means that no one of them is accurate; so too with the gospels. No one of them can be accurate.

You may be tempted to say, "Well, yes, they disagree with the details, but all the eyewitnesses agree: there *was* a car accident." Two comments about that: First, if that is what you want to say, that the details may be at odds, but the big picture is what matters (not the details) then in effect, you need to admit that what you are saying is that the Bible has discrepancies, contradictions, and errors in one book or in another or in all of the books. So what now is your view of Scripture? A book filled with errors? If it has some errors, how do you know that it does not have a lot of errors, and if the details are in error, why not the big picture? The second comment I have is that eyewitnesses may all agree that there was a car accident but with the gospels, as I repeat, we are not dealing with eyewitnesses. We are dealing with stories that were written decades later by people who were not eyewitnesses. Jesus probably died sometime around 30 AD. Our first account of Jesus' death and resurrection is the gospel of Mark, written around the year 65 or 70 AD, 35 to 40 years later by somebody who was not from Israel the way Jesus was, who spoke a different language from Jesus (he spoke Greek rather than Aramaic), who does not claim to be an eyewitness and in fact was not an eyewitness. Matthew and Luke were written 10 or 15 years later. John was written about 10 years later than that. These are accounts written somewhere between 40 and 60 or 70 years after the events they narrated. Well, how did the gospel writers get their accounts then, if they were not eyewitnesses? Scholars are agreed on this, that Jesus lived and died and his followers who believed in him started telling stories about him. And they started converting people to believe in him. The movement started out in Jerusalem with a small group of Jesus' followers who became convinced that he was raised from the dead and then convinced other people who convinced other people who convinced other people. The movement spread from Jerusalem into the rest of Judea up into Galilee, into Syria, into Asia Minor (what we think of today as Turkey), into Greece, over to Rome, possibly as far as Spain, probably in North Africa, almost certainly in Alexandria. By the time the gospel writers are writing (40, 50, 60 years later), Christianity has spread throughout the Roman Empire to the major urban areas. And who is

telling the stories about Jesus as they are circulating? It is people who were not there to see these things happen. These stories are converting people, hundreds of people, maybe thousands of people. But the people telling the stories are not the people back in Jerusalem. It is people in Ephesus who heard the story from their wife, who heard it from their next door neighbor, who heard it from their husband, who heard it from a visitor in town, who heard it from a business associate in another town, who heard it from another person, and you don't get back to an eyewitness until you are about the twelfth or fourteenth removed from eyewitnesses. The people who are telling the stories are not the people who witnessed them, and when they write them down in the gospels they do not do it until 40, 50, 60 years later.

What happens to stories when they are told and retold? The stories change. The gospel writers have heard different stories and have written down the accounts leading to discrepancies. That is why there are these discrepancies in these accounts. Some of them are in minor details and some in major issues.

Let me give you one big issue to show you how it works. The question I'll deal with is: *What is it that the women tell the disciples, and where do the disciples go to see Jesus after the resurrection?* As I pointed out, in Mark's Gospel, we are told explicitly that the women did not tell anyone anything because they were afraid (Mark 16:8), period, end of gospel. They didn't tell anyone. In Matthew, the women do tell the disciples. They tell them that they are to go to Galilee, and the disciples go to Galilee. In Luke, we have a different story. The disciples do not go to Galilee. Explicitly, they go to Jerusalem. This is how it works in Luke's Gospel: three women go to the tomb on Sunday morning according to Luke. The women see two men there—in Luke not in the other two gospels—who tell them not to go to Galilee but that Jesus told them that he would be raised when he himself was in Galilee. That is when he told them this. The women then go tell the eleven disciples (which, again, is not what happens in Mark, they do not tell anyone in Mark). That day, according to Luke, two followers of Jesus see Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They see Jesus on the road to Emmaus the same day the women see the empty tomb. The two men who talked to Jesus on the road to Emmaus go back to Jerusalem that hour and tell the eleven. As they are telling the eleven this, Jesus appears to them. So, this is all on the day that the women saw the empty tomb. Jesus appears to them and tells them not to leave Jerusalem. In Matthew, they leave Jerusalem and see Jesus in Galilee. In Luke they do not leave Jerusalem, ever. According to Acts 1, they stay in Jerusalem for 40 and that is where they see Jesus. They never do go to Galilee. That contradicts Matthew. Well, why does it matter where they went? It matters because each

Gospel is trying to say something very specific about what it believes is significant of the resurrection. For Luke, the whole point is that salvation comes to the holy city Jerusalem but it is rejected by the Jews who lived there. Salvation then goes out from the city of Jerusalem eventually to the non-Jews. Geography is important theologically to Luke. Salvation comes to the Jews and then proceeds from the Jews to the Gentiles. You miss that point if you pretend that Matthew and Luke are saying the same thing. They are not saying the same thing. They have different stories that have contradictions between them because they are each trying to emphasize something different.

My conclusion: many agnostics would argue that the Gospel accounts are not reliable because the resurrection never happened. And if it never happened, then the reports that it did happen cannot be reliable. That is not my argument here. I want to be crystal clear what I am arguing. I, as a historian, am interested in the credibility of our surviving historical sources. In the New Testament we have four accounts of Jesus' resurrection, not counting the apostle Paul who contradicts all four on several key points. My question is, are these four sources the kind of sources that historians would normally trust when describing historical events? Are they independent accounts? No. Two of them, possibly three, use another. They are dependant accounts. Are they by eyewitnesses? No. They are by later authors who have heard stories that are in circulation year and year after year, decade after decade, that were changed in the process of retelling. Were these stories written in the process of the events that they describe happening? No. They were written 40, 50, 60 years later by people who were not there to see these things happen, living in a different country, speaking a different language than Jesus himself. Are they unbiased, objective accounts? No. They are written by Christian believers who want to convince others of the truth of the Christian belief. Are they consistent with one another? No. They contradict one another all over the map in both small details and major points. The conclusion, I think, is inevitable. The gospel reports of the resurrection of Jesus simply cannot be taken as historically accurate. Does that mean that Jesus was not raised from the dead? No. It means that if you think he was, you should think so not on the basis of some kind of infallible revelation from God in the Bible, because the Bible does not contain an infallible revelation. It contains very human reports that have been altered, changed, modified and even made up by the Christian authors who narrate them, and even more by the Christian story-tellers who passed along these accounts in the years and decades before the gospel writers heard them. In short, the question of Jesus' resurrection is the single biggest question that Christians have to ask, but they should not answer it on the basis of the reliable accounts found in

the Gospels because these accounts are not reliable. Thank you very much.

Prof. Evans:

Thank you very much. Was Jesus of Nazareth raised from the dead? The central tenet of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However this central tenet has been denied from time to time in one way or another, even by various Christians. Of course, non-Christians usually deny it, too. Almost always, rejection or radical reinterpretation of the resurrection is prompted by skepticism, sometimes supported by evidence, but sometimes not supported even by counter-evidence.



Craig A. Evans

Let me begin with the testimony of Paul the convert. Historic, biblical, Christian faith has always affirmed the resurrection. No one affirmed it more vigorously than the apostle Paul as an eyewitness. He sums up the essence of the good news in these familiar words found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

These words are important because they were written by an eyewitness. This is not a second hand account written by someone who heard Paul or heard someone else who had heard Paul. This is the objection that can be raised against apostolic testimony we find in the book of Acts. There, Peter and other followers of Jesus boldly proclaim the resurrection, but Peter did not write the book of Acts. We think Luke the physician did, but we do not know a great deal about him, and we do not know much about his sources—whether written, oral, or first hand.

So are Peter's words, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32), really Peter's words or are they the words of someone else? In my view these words do fairly sum up the preaching of Peter. However, the skeptic may insist on first hand testimony, not hearsay. So I return to Paul. This uncertainty does not apply to the letter we call First Corinthians. Almost no qualified scholar disputes its authorship. Paul wrote it. Moreover, no qualified textual critic doubts that what we read in chapter 15 represents what Paul actually wrote. We may dispute a word or two here or there, but there is no justification for wondering if the passage has been changed to say something that Paul did not say. And finally, no serious and fair-minded critic doubts that Paul is telling the truth (at least as he understands it). In short, Paul believes that God raised Jesus from the dead and that this amazing event provided hope for all of humanity.

Is it really necessary to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead? Cannot one be a Christian perhaps in the sense of admiring Jesus and following his teaching but not in terms of holding to the resurrection? Instead of Christian faith, why not Christian philosophy, ethics, and/or lifestyle? Many moderns think so, as evidently some among the Christians at Corinth also thought so as well. But for Paul, the eyewitness of the resurrection, this is not an option. Without the resurrection of Jesus there is not Christianity, no hope, and simply no point. Let us consider some of his comments and assertions. He says in verses 1 and 2:

Now I would remind you, brothers, in what terms I have preached to you the gospel, which you have received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold fast, unless you believed in vain.

Or he says in verses 12, 13, and 14 and 15:

Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised...then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

The opening verse, with its references to gospel and being saved makes clear in what follows that at the heart of the gospel, or the "good news," is the resurrection, and that receiving and believing this gospel results in salvation. If however, the central datum of the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is false, then one's faith is indeed in vain. What is hinted at in verse 1 is spelled out emphatically later in the chapter as seen

especially in verse 14: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” Paul has more to say in verses 16 through 19: “For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep [i.e., died] in Christ”—well they—“have perished.” For “If in this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all men most to be pitied.”

The problem of the Corinthians has to do with the hope of the resurrection of believers, and herein lies the skepticism which is not hard to understand. Apart from Pharisees, there were not too many in the world of late Antiquity who believed the dead would ever be raised up. If there were any sort of life beyond our physical lives, it would be spiritual or ethereal, not corporeal. In any case, Paul argued that rejection of the resurrection of believers also meant rejection of the resurrection of Jesus himself, and that if Jesus has not been raised then the faith of all believers, not just those who live in Corinth, is futile. All who have died in Christ have perished. “But in fact,” Paul declares in verse 20, “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [i.e., died].” From these categorical statements in 1 Corinthians 15, it is clear that Paul not only believed in the resurrection of Jesus, something he had experienced firsthand, he believed that the resurrection of Jesus was essential for faith and salvation: no resurrection, no hope. But exactly how did Paul understand the resurrection of Jesus? Why did Jesus’ followers speak of resurrection at all?



So now I will speak to the resurrection of Jesus and its early interpretation. There are aspects of the resurrection of Jesus that place it in a category of its own. Although in some ways it is coherent with several texts from the intertestamental period (i.e., the period between the Old and New Testaments), such as the expression of faith in the resurrection uttered by the seven martyred brothers in 2 Maccabees 7,² there are features of the resurrection of Jesus that are distinctive and quite unexpected in light of Jewish beliefs expressed in late Antiquity.

² [An apocryphal book written during the intertestamental period that can be readily consulted in Roman Catholic Bibles. ED.]

First, those who held to bodily resurrection thought of it in terms of a general resurrection. All of the Jewish texts that speak of resurrection envision the judgment of humankind as a whole, with rewards for the righteous and punishment for the wicked. This is why Paul speaks of Jesus' resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep and the Matthean evangelist or scribe feels compelled to narrate the strange story of the saints who exited their tombs the first Easter (Matthew 27).

Second, in all of the texts that speak of resurrection and vision, it is an eschatological event. Resurrection was understood to take place at the end of normal human history, not at some midpoint. This likely explains why many early Christians believed that the end times were at hand as you see hinted at in 2 Thessalonians 2 and Philippians 4.

Third, although there were some traditions, notably Isaiah 53, that may have been understood as hinting at messianic suffering, there is no text or tradition known to us that envisioned the crucifixion of the Messiah whether subsequently resurrected or not. This is precisely why Trypho, the Jew of the second century, could not be persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah. And you can see it in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* 89 and 90.³ Therefore, since although it is not wrong to see lines of continuity between the resurrection of Jesus and some antecedent eschatological texts and speculations, the actual event of Easter itself can hardly be explained as fulfillment of these texts and speculations.

The resurrection of Jesus was both unexpected and difficult to explain. In view of these issues why did Jesus' followers interpret his appearances in terms of bodily resurrection? Appearances of Jesus would not in themselves necessarily lead to conclusions that a resurrection had taken place. After all, Jewish speculation also entertained the possibility of post-mortem survival of the soul or spirit, quite apart from the question of bodily resurrection. Moreover, Jewish tradition also included belief in ghostly apparitions. Even the disciples on one occasion thought they had seen a spirit or ghost (Mark 6:49). Others later imagined that Peter, thought to be in prison or perhaps dead, but now found standing at the door, was actually Peter's angel (Acts 12).

So why did Jesus' followers feel they needed to speak of the resurrection of Jesus, instead of simply, say, a vision of Jesus, or Jesus' angel, or Jesus' spirit? The conclusion Jesus was resurrected assumed a heavy burden of proof. Jewish beliefs about resurrection envisioned a "standing up," which is the meaning of both the Hebrew and Greek words that are usually translated "resurrection." Resurrection was thought to be corporal; therefore passages sometimes refer to the

³ [Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* presents itself as a dialogue that takes place in the 130s AD in Ephesus between its author, Justin, and a young Jewish student of Greek philosophy named Trypho. ED]

“resurrection of the flesh.” Resurrection also implied exiting the tomb or place of burial. Resurrection was in effect the reversal of burial. Unless these things could be said of Jesus, his post-mortem appearance would have been more naturally explained in terms other than resurrection. What persuaded Jesus’ followers to speak of resurrection was their knowledge that Jesus had died, had been buried in a known place, and had exited that place. These facts, which were open to verification, in combination with the appearances, convinced his followers that Jesus was indeed resurrected. It is therefore essential to understand the circumstances of Jesus’ death and burial if the resurrection claims of his followers are to be properly assessed.

Much of the critical discussion of the gospel resurrection narratives suffer from a lack of adequate acquaintance with Jewish traditions of death and burial, especially with respect to the burial of executed persons or persons who in some way died dishonorable deaths. It sometimes suffers, too, from wrong inferences from archeological evidence and historical records. In a controversial book published fifteen years ago, a scholar suggested that Jesus’ body (in keeping with general Roman practice) probably was not taken down from the cross and given customary Jewish burial. It was further suggested that Jesus’ corpse was left hanging on the cross or, at best, was cast into a ditch and covered with lime—in either case, that his body was left exposed to birds and animals; Jesus was not properly buried. Therefore, this scholar argued, the story of the empty tomb was no more than theology and apologetic legend.

In contradiction of such a theory, it needs to be emphasized that in the Jewish world, burial was absolutely necessary. Burial of all persons, including executed criminals, was to take place on the day of death. No corpse was to be left unburied overnight. This was in part due to compassion, but it was primarily due to the wish to avoid defilement on the land as is expressly commanded in Scripture in Deuteronomy 21. This understanding of Scripture was still current in the time of Jesus as we see in an interesting expansion of it in a Qumran Scroll:

If a man is a traitor against his people and gives them up to a foreign nation, so doing evil to his people, *you are to hang him on a tree until dead*. On the testimony of two or three witnesses he will be put to death, and they themselves shall hang him on the tree. If a man is convicted of a capital crime and flees to the nations, cursing his people and the children of Israel, *you are to hang him, also, upon a tree until dead*. But you must not let their bodies remain on the tree overnight; you shall most certainly bury them that very day. Indeed, anyone hung on a tree is

accursed of God and men, but you are not to defile the land that I am about to give you as an inheritance [Deut 21:22–23]” (11QT 64:7–13a = 4Q524 frag. 14, lines 2–4; with emphasis added).

Whereas Deuteronomy 21:22–23 speaks of one put to death and then hanged, 11QTemple speaks of one hanged “until dead.” Most think crucifixion is in view in this latter instance (as also in 4QpNah frags. 3–4, col. i, lines 6–8, and perhaps also in 4Q282i, which refers to the hanging up [probably crucifixion] of those who lead the people astray).

The tradition is attested also in the Mishnah, a collection of older Jewish oral tradition written down at the beginning of the third century. In the section of the Mishnah where rules pertaining to execution are discussed, the sages stress that one hanged must not be left overnight lest the command of Deuteronomy be violated. The discussion continues by noting that the executed person was not to be buried in the burying place of his fathers, but in one of the places reserved for the burial of criminals (*m. Sanhedrin* 6:5; minor tractate *Semahot* 13.7). Finally, the discussion concludes by recalling that after the flesh of the executed criminal had decomposed, his bones could then be gathered and taken to the family burial place, but that no public lamentation was permitted (*m. Sanhedrin* 6:6).

Josephus, the first century Jewish apologist and historian, remarks: “Jews are so careful about funeral rights that even malefactors who have been sentenced to crucifixion are taken down and buried before sunset” (Jewish War 4.3.17). Roman authorities were expected to comply with Jewish customs (sometimes outside of the land of Israel), as, for example, the first century Jewish writer Philo, who lived in Egypt, attests. Philo gives very eloquent expression to Jewish sensitivities on this question in his imaginative recounting of Jacob’s grief over the report that his son Joseph had been killed and devoured by wild animals. The patriarch laments:

Child, it is not your death that grieves me, but the manner of it. If you had been buried [*etaphes*] in your own land, I should have been comforted and watched and nursed your sick-bed, exchanged the last farewells as you died, closed your eyes, wept over your body as it lay there, given it a costly funeral and left none of the customary rites undone” (*De Iosepho* 22–23).

The imaginative dirge goes on to speak of the importance of proper burial:

And, indeed, if you had to die by violence or through premeditation, it would have been a lighter ill to me, slain as you would have been by human beings, who would have pitied their dead victim, gathered some dust and covered the corpse. And then if they had been the cruelest of men, what more could they have done but cast it out unburied and go their way, and then perhaps some passer-by would have stayed his steps, and, as he looked, felt pity for our common nature and deemed the custom of burial to be its due (*De Iosepho* 25).

This was the practice during the time of Jesus in Palestine as well, as the skeletal remains of some fellow named Yehohanan attests. This man was crucified in the late twenties during the administration of Pontius Pilate and was buried according to Jewish customs. One year after death his bones were gathered and placed in an ossuary or bone box. We know that Yehohanan was crucified because his right heel bone was still transfixated by an iron spike that the executioners evidently had been unable to extract. The properly buried remains of one or two other persons who probably had been executed have also been discovered in Jerusalem. Only during the time of insurrection and war were Jewish burial practices and sensitivities not respected by the Roman authorities. For example, during the siege of Jerusalem in 69 and 70, the Roman General Titus crucified Jewish captives and fugitives opposite the walls of the city and left their bodies to rot in the sun to demoralize the rebels still within the city. Titus did not permit burial because he knew how important it was to the Jewish people.

In view of the evidence presented, it is virtually a certainty that arrangements would have been made to bury Jesus and the other men crucified with him. Joseph of Arimathea either volunteered or was assigned the task of seeing to the prompt and unceremonious burial of Jesus and probably the other two men as well. Jesus was not buried honorably. No executed criminal was. But he was buried properly. Jewish law required it, and in peacetime Roman authorities permitted it.

It is also highly probable that the story of the empty tomb is historical. This is so because the gospels tell us that it is the women who make the discovery. Surely a fictional account would have Peter and other disciples discover the empty tomb, not relatively unknown women. Indeed the apocryphal Gospel of Peter glosses the apologetic to the point where it is hostile witnesses who see the resurrection itself, but not so the New Testament Gospels. The women went to the tomb to mourn privately as Jewish law and custom allowed, and even more importantly to note the precise location of Jesus' tomb, so that the later gathering of his remains for reburial in his family tomb would be possible. Although

the details in the gospel accounts—the burial of Jesus and the subsequent discovery of the empty tomb—are in keeping with Jewish burial customs, the unexpected discovery of the empty tomb proved to be a major factor in the interpretation of the appearances of Jesus in terms of resurrection, even though it was not in step with current ideas.

To conclude I return to Paul. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the testimony of Paul. Not only is his testimony first hand—that is, he wrote the letter himself and several letters in which he testifies to his experience of the resurrection—it is a testimony of a man who had opposed the Christian faith. Paul was zealous for the Jewish Law. He viewed the Christian movement as a lawbreaking heresy that had to be opposed, even violently. He did not believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah, and he certainly did not believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Paul was committed to crushing the new movement for the sake of Israel. Paul traveled to Damascus with every intention of destroying the Way, as it was called in those early days. His encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus changed everything. Paul tells us he saw and heard the risen Jesus. The persecutor of the Church was now proclaiming the faith of the Church. How do we explain Paul's experience? The testimony of Paul is important and it is convincing. He opposed the Christian movement. He did not believe Jesus was resurrected and certainly did not expect to meet him on the Damascus road or anywhere else. After encountering Jesus and joining the movement he once violently opposed, Paul eventually met Peter and John, originally disciples of Jesus, as well as James, the brother of Jesus. He shared with them his understanding of the gospel which surely was centered on the resurrection, and the pillars of the church extended to Paul the right hand of fellowship, the common experience of these men, whose attitudes toward Jesus before Easter Sunday were quite diverse, supporting him, indifferent to him, or opposed to him. This diversity of testimony is important in support of the resurrection. In Peter and John we have two men who believed in Jesus before his death and resurrection. In James his brother we have indifference before the resurrection. And in Paul we have unbelief and opposition. But after Easter, these men saw the risen Jesus and came together in common faith and mission. Evidence for the truth of the resurrection is seen in the ongoing transformative power of the gospel and the lives that have been dramatically changed for the better and in the altruistic impulse to pursue righteousness and to serve humankind. Thank you.

FIRST RESPONSES**Prof. Ehrman:**

Well thank you Craig for the very interesting talk. I'm not sure I'm going to need ten minutes. The question that we are dealing with is: "Are the biblical accounts of the resurrection reliable?" And I tried to address that in my talk by talking about how in fact there are major discrepancies among the accounts. Craig has not yet dealt with these discrepancies, so it is a little bit hard for me to respond. Let me talk about a couple of things that he did talk about and sketch out a different point of view. I will focus on Paul as a potential eyewitness, but I think I will deal with that second rather than first.

The first thing I want to deal with is the question about whether there are details of the accounts of Jesus' burial and resurrection that are open to verification. You will recall that Craig made a big deal of this in the final third of his speech, that there are details that are open to verification. What exactly is open to verification of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection? We have no other accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection outside of Christian sources. We have no verification from any Jewish source other than a Jewish historian, Josephus, writing 63 years later who has apparently heard the account from Christians. We have no verification from Roman sources of any kind from the first century. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is not mentioned in any Roman account of any kind from the first century. Jesus name itself is not mentioned at all by any Roman source, so there is no verification there. Do we have verification that Jesus was taken off the cross and buried? Our only verification comes from the Gospels themselves. These accounts have discrepancies between them. Can we trust this kind of evidence? The idea that Jesus was buried, is that in theory something that can be verified? Craig says that the answer is yes because Jews always took their crucified people off the cross and gave them a decent burial. His evidence for that are two writings by Josephus and Philo from the first century. I would like to know the material evidence for that. Here is the reality that we are facing: there were thousands of people crucified in the first century. When Titus overthrew



the city of Jerusalem in the year 70, he crucified so many of the opposition that he ran out of lumber. If we have thousands and thousands of people who were crucified in the first century and they were all given decent burial, why is it that among all of the burial remains that we have today there is one person buried who is crucified? Out of the thousands? If they were all given decent burials why haven't we found them? Where is the evidence? This is what I would like to know about verification of being taken off the cross and being buried.

Can we verify that there was an empty tomb? Well, there is no other source that mentions it except for the Gospels themselves. You will notice that the apostle Paul does not mention an empty tomb, that the women went to the tomb, that they found it empty, that they talked to somebody there, either a man or two men or two angels depending which account you read. Paul does not say any such thing. Where is the verification that there is an empty tomb? Well everybody knows that the women went to the tomb on the third day and that they found it empty. Yeah, that is according to the Gospels, but what verification is there? Well they could have gone to the tomb to check for themselves. Who could have gone to the tomb? When did this account of the empty tomb originate? "Well," you might say, "it originated the third day." How do you now that? The first record of this was written 30 years later, 40 years later, 50 years later. How do you know that 3 days later this story started? What verification do you have for there being an empty tomb?

I want to talk about Paul as an eyewitness. Craig bases a good deal of his case on Paul being an eyewitness to the resurrection. But to what exactly is Paul an eyewitness? Is He an eyewitness to the trial of Jesus before Pontus Pilate? No. He does not talk about it and he certainly was not there. Is he an eyewitness to the crucifixion of Jesus? No. He was not there. Is he an eyewitness to the burial of Jesus? No. He was not there. Is he an eyewitness to the empty tomb? No. He does not mention it. Is he an eyewitness to the appearances of Jesus to the women? No. He does not mention it. To what is Paul an eyewitness? He is an eyewitness to a vision that he had. It was a vision that he had. When did he have that vision? Was it on the third day? No. The fourth day? No. Fifth day? Was it the next week? No. The next month? No. When did Paul have this vision? Well, it is very difficult to establish Pauline chronology, but usually people think Paul converted maybe a couple of years after the death of Jesus. Paul had a vision two years later. To what is he an eyewitness? He is an eyewitness to a vision that he had. Do we have any eyewitness accounts of Jesus coming out of the tomb? Do we have any eyewitness accounts of the resurrection narrative as found in the Gospels? No.

It is also worth noting that Paul, when he describes the witnesses to the resurrection, is at odds with what the Gospels themselves say. Paul says that the first person to whom Jesus appears is Cephas, as Craig pointed out. What do the Gospels say? Not Cephas. The women. Paul also indicated that Jesus appeared to people that are not mentioned in the Gospels: the five hundred brethren at one time, James the brother of Jesus. Why is it that Paul has different stories than the Gospel stories? Well obviously because Paul was writing before the Gospels and hadn't read the gospels, but also because Paul had heard different stories. This is the point in my opening speech, and I want to reemphasize it. Paul had heard about the resurrection of Jesus before he believed in the resurrection of Jesus. He had heard about the death of Jesus before he believed in the death of Jesus. He had heard stories, and who was telling the stories? He didn't hear these stories from eyewitnesses. He was living in a different country from the eyewitnesses, speaking a different language from the eyewitnesses. Jesus' followers spoke Aramaic and lived in Palestine. Paul spoke Greek and lived outside of Palestine. People started telling stories about Jesus that were in circulation year after year after year. And they converted other people who told the stories who told the stories to their neighbors, to their spouses, to their business associates. People are telling the stories about Jesus' death and resurrection, and later people like Paul hear those stories. What happens when stories circulate by word of mouth, not for just a day or two, but for years? Well, your kids probably played the telephone game when they were little at a birthday party. One child tells a story to the next child, who tells it to the next child, who tells it to the next child and you go around the circle, and by the time it comes back to the first child it is a different story. If it weren't a different story it would be a very dumb game to play on your birthday. Stories change when they circulate. What happens if you don't simply tell the story in the same living room with all kids in the socioeconomic group, who speak the same language, who are telling the story within three minutes of each other? What happens if you tell the story across the Roman Empire and you translate it into different languages and people tell the story for purposes of their own? What happens to the stories? The stories change. How do you know that the stories change? Because we have written records of people who heard the stories and wrote them down and you can compare the stories. And when you compare the stories, there are massive discrepancies. In my first talk I listed ten discrepancies among the Gospels about the resurrection of Jesus. Several of them were minor. A couple of them were major. And I want to hear how Craig explains them. Especially, how is it that Luke explicitly says that they stayed in Jerusalem and they saw Jesus there, whereas Matthew explicitly says that they did not stay in

Jerusalem but they went to Galilee and saw Jesus there? And the other nine discrepancies that I listed. Thank you very much.

Prof. Evans:

First I would say there *is* independent material in the gospels. It isn't so simple: Mark is written, and then Matthew and Luke use Mark, and then that is all there is to it. The synoptic materials are far more diverse and complicated than that. I would also insist there is eyewitness tradition in the Gospels, even if the Gospels that we have were written down decades later: eyewitness tradition, named and unnamed people, the women who go the tomb, Peter who also visits the tomb, who sees the risen Jesus, and other disciples. Paul gives us a list probably motivated apologetically and argumentatively in the context of 1 Corinthians 15 and for this reason leaves the women out. I think this is a very simplistic and reductionistic approach to say, "Oh dear, we don't have exactly the same details in this source, and not the same details in that source. These are discrepancies and I have no idea how these could possibly fit together." Sure we have discrepancies in the details that we cannot figure out and we cannot always resolve. Forty days, perhaps a biblical number rounded off. Who knows? But that is what Luke tells us in Acts, 40 days of appearances. We have only fragments, anecdotes, selected admittedly to make theological and strategic points. We do not have the whole story. We have pieces of it that have been told. And this telephone example—so-and-so tells so-and-so and so-and-so—this is *not* how the books in the New Testament came to be written. The books in the New Testament are centered in people who are connected to the original events: eyewitnesses, apostolic authorities. In some cases we do not know, but in many cases there is a strong reasons for believing this is so. To flat out deny it or to say this not possible is nothing more than bald dogmatic assertion.



Mark 16:8 ends with the women telling no one. But we have no idea if that is the way Mark originally ended. It may well have been an ongoing story. We do not know the whole of it: Jesus appearing to the disciples in Galilee, Jesus appearing to the disciples in Jerusalem. To

insist that because we are in no position to explain fully all these items and exactly how they fit together that none of it is true and none of it can be accepted is a form of reverse fundamentalism.

Thousands were crucified in 69-70. I know that. However, I had specified that in peacetime, when Jesus was crucified, Jewish burial practices would have been observed. There is no reason at all to think that the statements of Josephus or of Philo were false. It would have been inflammatory for Pilate not to permit the bodies of Jesus and the other two men to be taken down and buried properly right outside the walls of Jerusalem on the eve of Passover. To repeat my point: according to the Mishnaic laws and traditions, if the Sanhedrin condemned someone to death, it fell to them to bury that person—not with honor, not in a special place—and the bones would not be recovered for another year.

Interesting aside point: “Oh we have only found one crucified person.” John Dominic Crossan argues that. Professor Ehrman repeated it this evening. But that just reflects a lack of knowledge of the archeology, the burial practices, and also some very interesting sociological realities. The least likely to be crucified were the upper classes. So of course we do not find crucified persons, except for one that we know of. Crucifixion often times involved the binding of bodies to the crosses not just their nailing. So what would be the evidence in terms of skeletal materials and the bones that survive? The least likely after 2,000 years are these little bones in the feet and the hands, the very bones that would give us some evidence of trauma like crucifixion. The most likely to be crucified, lower classes, have the poorest forms of burial and their skeletons are least likely to survive.

This kind of evidence needs to be taken into account. And so I think you go with the sources, and if you say, “I am not prepared to go with the sources, and I do not care what several independent sources say, and I have no interest in trying to discover whether there might be eyewitness tradition embedded in the Gospels, but rather I simply assert dogmatically that there is no eyewitness tradition there, and it does not matter to me what the evidence says, even Josephus or even Philo, or anyone else, and I will not look at the archeological evidence we have,” well, then, that is fine. That is how skepticism can work: “The evidence will never convince me. I can always explain it all away. I can always just say, ‘It fails to reach my standards.’ ” So we have disparate evidence, a selection of evidence that admittedly cannot at times easily be put together, easily harmonized. But it is an interesting diversity. We also have the experience of the individuals who are converted, we have a history of the church itself, the transformative power of the good news of what God had done in Christ including the resurrection. And then you have the fruit of it as the church grows in the face of opposition and

severe persecution and the lives that have been changed down through the years.

What is the evidence, in summary, to add it all up? What is the evidence for the resurrection? Well there is some historical evidence, some textual evidence, some circumstantial evidence, and some experiential evidence. That is the way we humans are. We think with our brains and so we look for evidence and we reason, but we are also creatures of the heart and the soul and there is that subjective element, and the two go together. I find the Christian faith convincing on a variety of levels: Apologetics in the traditional sense of intellect and evidence and reasoning and arguing and so forth, but also on a more spiritual and personal level that is a lot harder to describe and quantify and to objectify. These are the things that come together. And so when we consider the message of the gospel and the proclamation of the resurrection, there are many elements that go together and at the end of the day, we never will be in a position that we can answer every kind of question or connect every dot or explain every detail. The issue is, do we have enough details?

And I'll stop with just one little interesting incident that occurred in October of 1946 relating to two brilliant Austrian thinkers named Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Popper. Wittgenstein, Popper, Bertrand Russell, all of these very intelligent men, and a few others had gathered in rooms at King's College, Cambridge, for a meeting of the Cambridge Moral Science Club. Wittgenstein and Popper got into an argument. Popper was the guest of honor and there was a sharp disagreement. Wittgenstein picked up the fireplace poker and began to wave it around. He gave an impassioned speech and flung it down into the hearth and stomped out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Quite a story. Everybody heard about it the next day and the days following. So these men, intelligent, brilliant, skeptical men, eyewitnesses to this very event, were asked about it. They couldn't get the details quite sorted out. Wait a minute. At what point did Wittgenstein pick up the poker? When did he throw it down? When did he make the speech? When did he stomp out of the room? It was interesting the discrepancies. There was no doubt at all that the impassioned speech had been given or that the fireplace poker had been waved and thrown down.

I think it is rather ironic, that little story. These skeptics themselves, so critical of these witnesses to the resurrection, the Gospels that convey these stories—"can't you get the details hammered out so that we can figure out the exact flow, the sequence? Who arrived at the tomb first?" And in this case they couldn't even a day or two later get the details straight on an incident to which they themselves with their lofty intelligence were eyewitnesses. Thank you very much.



QUESTION AND ANSWER

Pres. Roberts:

Well thank you gentleman for your contributions. We want to take a few minutes for questions, debating, and discussion of this sort. The first question I have for you, and both of you have referred to this: how would you describe how Christianity began?—Because one of the great apologetic arguments for the resurrection has always been related to how the fact and the historical reality of it changed the apostles. Did the resurrection play a direct, clear, explicit role in the rise of Christianity in the first century? Who wants to begin?

Prof. Ehrman:

I'm happy to go first. I have an assignment that I give my students at Chapel Hill which is to deal with the question, "When did Christianity begin?" Did Christianity begin with the teachings of Jesus, for example? Well, not exactly, because Christianity is much more than the teachings of Jesus. Christianity is not the religion that Jesus was propounding. It is the religion about Jesus. It is the religion about Jesus' death and resurrection. So, did Christianity begin with the death and resurrection of Jesus? Well, it didn't begin with the death of Jesus,



because if Jesus was thought to have stayed dead, then nobody would have believed in him. He would have been a prophet who was crucified like so many other prophets. So did it begin with the resurrection? Well, actually, not exactly, because Christianity is the belief *in* the resurrection. If Jesus had been raised from the dead and nobody believed it, there would be no Christianity. So, my view is you can trace the beginning of Christianity to the *belief* that Jesus was raised from the dead. That is different from saying that Christianity began with Jesus actually physically being raised from the dead. No, it began with people believing that he had been raised from the dead, and I think there is absolutely no doubt historically that there were followers of Jesus who believed that he was raised from the dead. I do not think there is good historical evidence for knowing what made them think that. Of course believers say, “Well we thought that because he was raised from the dead and they saw him.” I do not think there is good historical evidence for what they saw or when they saw it. I do not think there is good evidence that all eleven disciples converted to be believers in Jesus’ resurrection. And it is absolutely false to say, as is commonly said in Christian apologetics, that the followers of Jesus (the eleven disciples) must have believed in the resurrection because they all died for it. We do not have any evidence of that—that all of the disciples died for belief in the resurrection. In fact, there is not a scintilla of evidence for it, even though it is commonly stated by Christian apologists. The deaths of the apostles are a mystery to us. We do not know how many of them grew old and simply died. Our earliest accounts of the deaths of most of these apostles are much later, centuries later, and are found in legendary acts of the apostles, not in anything in the New Testament or in any reliable source. So my short answer to the question is that some people came to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. That changed everything and that is what started Christianity.

Prof. Evans:

I’ll build on that answer. Yes, some people believed that Jesus was resurrected. So I would ask the question, well, why did they believe that? There were plenty of revered teachers who died. There were visions, too, by the way. We actually have some stories from our sources in antiquity about a revered teacher who is seen in a vision. Nobody went around saying, “He has been resurrected.” So why was it that some believed Jesus was resurrected? And I think we should give Paul the



benefit of the doubt. I do not think he is a liar or a fool or guilty of passing along false information. He talks about 500 at one time who saw Jesus, many of whom were still living, implying that you could go talk to them if you wanted. So, what convinced them that we are speaking of resurrection? Why not just talk of a vision of some kind? A ghost story? Why do we have Easter instead of Halloween? And I think it is because we have experiences that were not just the usual dream or vision, like “I saw my late uncle So-and-So, or my dear beloved Rabbi Somebody Else.” These experiences were distinctive. They were different. There was more to it than that. There was a tactile, touchable quality, and combined with the empty tomb, I do not think for a moment that the resurrection story would have gained traction if Jesus’ corpse was in the ground awaiting bone collection, according to the Jewish custom. And the assertion that Jesus was not buried is just that, a groundless dogmatic assertion, a claim made without evidence, a claim that is contrary to everything we know about the practice during peacetimes in the 30’s. I’m not talking about the horrible war when Jerusalem was besieged in 69 and 70. So it is the combination of visions or appearances of Jesus that were qualitatively different from mere visions, combined with a corpse that disappeared, and not because it was eaten by dogs or just pitched into a hole so that we have no idea whose body was whose. That is a condescension on our part toward people in antiquity to suggest they did not know how to keep track of their own dead. They did.

Pres. Roberts:

Another question: we have heard a lot about discrepancies and verification. How do you know when something is a discrepancy? Don’t you have to know what all the facts are about any event in order to say “that is a discrepancy”? For instance, let me give you an illustration: Today somebody wrote a book about my life (highly unlikely), and they said, “On 1 April, 2010, Dr. Roberts was in Parkville, Missouri, where he lives.” Someone else wrote a book and says, “On April the first, 2010, Dr. Roberts was at Midwest Baptist Seminary in Kansas City.” Two people read that and they say, “Ah, a discrepancy. One says he was in Parkville; one says he was at Midwestern.” The fact is, I was in both places. And if you know all of the facts in a case, isn’t that the only time that you can say there is an actual discrepancy?

Prof. Ehrman:

Well I have been the one talking about discrepancies, so I see that I am debating two people.

Pres. Roberts:

I am asking a question.

Prof. Ehrman:

Right, OK. Good. Good question. I think that there are two kinds of discrepancies. One kind of discrepancy is when you have a statement that is contrary to historical reality. That would be a discrepancy. It would be a falsehood because it is at odds with historical reality. The kind of discrepancy I am talking about is when you have two accounts of an event that are talking about precisely the same thing and are at odds with one another, not with somebody in the same place on the same day, two different places on the same day. That is obviously possible. It is quite easy. That is not a discrepancy. That just means that at different times of the day he was in two different places. But if it was stated that in fact he was in Kansas City for the entire day and there was a second account that said in fact, he was in Hong Kong on that day for the entire day, that would be a discrepancy. The discrepancies I am talking about from the Gospels are that kind of discrepancy—where they are actually talking about the same thing and giving different answers to them.

Prof. Evans:

All right, let us suppose just for the sake of argument that we sift through all of the discrepancies, and we are reasonable and fair-minded about it. We are not going to be fundamentalists either on the right or on the left. We are going to be reasonable people and we are going to look as historians have to do especially when they are lucky and have multiple witnesses. It is kind of interesting here. I suppose a lot of this would not be a problem if we only had one gospel. But we are lucky. We have four. So we go through the details and we look at discrepancies. And by the way, *discrepancy* is not a bad word. It is used all of the time even in a believing context. “Discrepancy, I’m not sure how does this fit?” It leaves me with the question, “I have some doubts here, but I do not know how the lines connect.” And so let us suppose that at the end of the day (just go with the major one, the worst one that Professor Ehrman has mentioned)—we go “you know, I just don’t know. On that day were the disciples in Galilee? Or on that day did they remain in Jerusalem?” And we just don’t know. Can it be resolved? Maybe it cannot. Maybe one of the gospel writers simply got it wrong, and he was supposed to say the truth was, next week they were in Galilee. And so they were still in

Jerusalem following the Passover, following Easter, and it was later that they were in Galilee. And so they just plain got it wrong. Does this collapse everything historically speaking? Or, are we going to fall into that old “show me one mistake and the whole thing falls to pieces?” I’ve heard that from students over the years. Oh boy; I hear that story. Somebody will say, “Well a Sunday school teacher told me that.” Yikes. That scares me. We have multiple witnesses filled with stories, samples, anecdotes, pieces, fragments of a much larger picture, and no, we do not know how all of the dots can be connected in every case. And that is something we do not like to live with. We like to connect the dots. We do not like loose ends. We want to explain everything, and in a few cases, there they are; we do not know the answer. And, to play the devil’s advocate for a moment, let’s say, “You know what, maybe somebody made a mistake.” Maybe that is it. That is the big boogeyman. But does that mean then that all the witnesses, all the people who saw Jesus, all of the evidence, just goes “poof” because two of the stories cannot be reconciled? I see that as a brand of reverse fundamentalism, and I say beware of that kind of reasoning.

Pres. Roberts:

First century society: Was it a literate society? How important were written documents? What percentage of the people read? And how important was it that these Gospels were eventually written down?

Prof. Ehrman:

The most important study of literacy in the ancient world was written by William Harris in 1989, who did a thorough investigation of literacy in antiquity.⁴ He showed that in the best of times in antiquity ten percent of the population could read and write, which meant ninety percent of the population could not read and write. That was in the best of times. That was like in fourth century BC Athens when Plato and Socrates were around. There, maybe ten percent. In most times and places far fewer people would read, especially outside of major urban areas. The only people who learned how to read and write were people who could afford the education. They came from rich families. So the upper crust elite could read and write. So, literacy was very low by our standards, but that does not mean that texts were unimportant, because in the ancient world, to read a book usually meant to hear somebody else read the book out loud. Reading was a process that was done out loud and orally, so that

⁴ William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

when the gospels were written, they would have been written by very educated upper crust Christians, people who were highly educated and trained in Greek rhetorical skills. They would have had some form of advanced education which, by the way, does not apply to any of the disciples who were lower class fishermen, day workers, etc. They didn't have a high education and their language was Aramaic. These gospel writers are highly educated, Greek speaking people, trained rhetorically. They were not the disciples and do not claim to be the disciples actually. But, when they wrote their books, the way their books were communicated was not by people individually reading them. There weren't very many books available. They were read out loud in church communities. And so even though it was a written form of the religion in a sense, it was passed on orally, so people read and heard things done out loud.

Prof. Evans:

I like what professor Ehrman has said. I can elaborate on it a little bit I suppose. You know, there is an old Texan saying that "where there is smoke there is fire." And I think the smoke in this case is the early Christian movement within a generation really having all of the signs of a literate movement: writing books, and collecting books. Why? It probably originated with Jesus himself and a core of disciples. Jesus is seen debating points of Scripture. I strongly disagree with the Jesus Seminar on this point that argues that Jesus is illiterate because we do not really have any fire to go with that smoke. And so, Jesus counters with: "Is this not why you are mistaken, you do not know the Scriptures and you do not know the power of God?"—odd argument to make by an illiterate peasant. The literacy levels were probably a bit higher among Jewish men; first-born sons may have had some privilege. And of course when you get down to it, Jesus is not part of the average. He is an extraordinary individual. And then we have a movement that grew from his teaching that produces and collects books. So anyway, that is not a hard and fast proof or evidence. It is circumstantial and I think it is a reasonable inference that Jesus himself probably was literate, not in a scribal sense where he is a professional scribe. I do not mean that, but he knows the contexts of Scriptures, can argue the Scriptures, teaches his disciples. Not all twelve would have been scribes either but a few, perhaps Matthew, would have been able to write. And this is the core and the nucleus, a very important part of the movement that results in the smoke that I referred to of collecting books, writing books, and so on, and is, you know, right to the present day.

Pres. Roberts:

The telephone game; that's been mentioned. Were the gospels written to correct the telephone game? Did some people get the story wrong, and then the gospels were written to document the core of Jesus' life?

Prof. Ehrman:

My view of this is that the stories are circulating, and there are different forms of the story circulating, and that the gospel writers have a particular perspective that they want to share with their communities. So they think that their version of the story is right and the other versions that they have seen or heard are wrong. And so they do write to correct various versions. And so they themselves are participating in the telephone game. They are not only trying to correct the telephone game. It is interesting that Luke's Gospel begins in 1:1-4 with a preface in which Luke indicates that there are many people who tried to write an account of the things Jesus said and did but he is going to write an orderly account as opposed to these others. And one of the things that is interesting is because scholarship is unified in that one of his predecessors was the gospel of Mark, is Luke trying to correct Mark? If Luke is not trying to correct Mark, why, when he copied Mark in his own Gospel, did he change Mark? This is an established view among scholars, that Mark was one of Luke's sources and Luke extensively changed it. If he liked Mark the way it was, why didn't he leave it the way it was? I think it shows that Luke in fact is participating in the telephone game and trying to get the story straight.

Prof. Evans:

Luke edits Mark. No question of it. Matthew edits Mark too, not as extensively. For both Matthew and Luke, I believe, there is this common core of material we call "Q" that Matthew and Luke also made use of and no doubt did edit in a variety of ways, not just edited the wording but also the placement, the grouping, and selection. But I do not see this as declaring that somebody is wrong. There are lots of explanations. In fact it is fun. I have written a commentary on Luke and a commentary on half of Mark and I am working my way through Matthew and it is interesting to see the scribes at work. Sometimes it is "No, no, no, let's get the grammar a little smoother." Or, "This could be misunderstood. Let's clarify. Wait a minute, why didn't you mention this other thing?" I mean, there are a lot of things going on in the editing of the texts and presenting

it. What I think is so interesting is that the church, in the second century and certainly beyond, acted very wisely and kept all four. Instead of just saying, “Oh, let’s choose between the four and find out the one that is the best and so let’s just keep Luke or let’s just keep Matthew,” the church was very wise in saying, “You know what, we have these four interesting texts; there is a lot of overlap, a lot of difference too, and I think all four of them together are very, very edifying and it is early material and the church is enriched by it.” That was a smart decision. I didn’t see that rigid, brittle, fundamentalism in the first and second centuries.

Pres. Roberts:

All right, now for a couple of more personal questions for each of you. Dr. Evans, you are a scholar of first rank. You believe that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead. I want you to comment on that and your own personal convictions and how and why you hold to that position.

Prof. Evans:

Yes, I am a believer, and I agree with Paul’s discussion of it. You know you mention that Jesus was raised bodily and that is an interesting question right there. Paul wrestles with that in 1 Corinthians 15, and not in a strictly scientific way. It is somewhat anecdotal, based on his own experience. Probably based, too, on what he has learned from other Christians. And so, Jesus has been raised up. Do not ask me about the science of that. What did his molecules look like? Did his DNA change? Who knows? That is not what we are talking about. Jesus who was crucified and buried was raised up by God, was alive...*is alive*. There is no corpse in the ground, none left behind. No bones to gather a year later and place in an ossuary. And so, I do believe that but it is more than just some mental act where I can sit down with a formula or sit down with math and work out something or conduct an experiment, look into a test tube, or through a microscope, and say, “Ah ha, that is it!” No. There is evidence. There is reason. There is the intellectual dimension to be sure, but there is also the heart. There is also the Spirit of God that brings conviction and brings with it a sense of wholeness in the Hebrew sense of *Shalom*—peace, wholeness, things are right, peace with God. And so, that was my response in faith. That has been the assurance, conviction (that is how Paul speaks at times). That is what I have experienced. It does not mean that every day is a high day. It does not mean that everything is wonderful. There are peaks and there are valleys but there is that conviction and that assurance and the peace that even though I cannot explain everything that happens in the world. I do not even, as a

Scripture scholar, know everything going on in the Bible. I look at the Scriptures. They make sense. I see the truth there. I hear the voice of God speaking and if somebody else comes along and says, “Well, I don’t” or “It doesn’t resonate for me,” okay. That is a spiritual issue. You know, I believe as a Christian that it is the Spirit of God that brings conviction. But I would have to say that for somebody to say, “I don’t believe. I’m not interested because I read Dan Brown or Michael Baigent,” or “I cannot respond in faith until all of the discrepancies are put to rest.” That is the kind of thing I am seeing and trying to warn against today.

Pres. Roberts:

Dr. Ehrman, you studied with Bruce Metzger, who was sort of the crown prince of textual criticism at Princeton, very well known. You studied the same texts, did the same research, but Metzger believed in Jesus. I never met him or talked to him personally, but he believed in the resurrection of Christ. You do not. Why not?

Prof. Ehrman:

Yes, when I studied with Bruce Metzger, I, too, believed in the resurrection. I started out as a conservative, evangelical Christian. After high school I went to the Moody Bible Institute. I majored in Bible Theology. After that I went to Wheaton College and learned Greek, a good, strong evangelical college, and went from there to study with Bruce Metzger, because I was interested in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Bruce Metzger of course is not the only professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was my mentor and I loved him dearly, and I think I probably became closer to him than any of his students that he ever had in his entire distinguished career. I was his final PhD student. We had a very close relationship, but I started understanding theology and the Bible differently the more I did my research. I started seeing that in fact, the Gospels of the New Testament have a number of contradictions between them, and they say things that are historically not true—things that are dis-verified by other Roman sources. I think that I came to see that in fact the Gospels are not reliable witnesses to what they attest historically. This did not make me a non-believer. It is frequently misstated (including in one of Craig’s books—we had a little back and forth over the phone one time about this) that I became an unbeliever because I realized that there were variations in the manuscripts of the New Testament. That is absolutely false. I knew there were variations in the manuscripts of the New Testament when I was a hardcore fundamentalist. That did not shake me at all. I remained a

believer for many years. For a while I held Craig's position—that there are discrepancies but we cannot understand really why. But then I started seeing that in fact there are lots of discrepancies and not just in the minor details, in major things, that in fact, John's view of Jesus is really different from Matthew's view of Jesus. And Paul's understanding of Christ is very different from Luke's understanding of Christ, and so forth and so on. I ended up becoming a liberal Christian and I was a liberal Christian for many years. What ended up making me a non-believer is unrelated to my biblical scholarship. My understanding of the Bible is not what led me to become a Non-Christian. What led me to become an agnostic was in fact the problem with suffering in the world. I knew for years what Christians had said about why there can be so much pain and misery in the world if there is a good and all-powerful God who is in control of it. I knew what the answers were and I started studying the answers as I started teaching at Rutgers University. I read what biblical scholars said about why there can be suffering, why there can be disasters, why there are earthquakes and famines and tsunamis and hurricanes, why there is starvation, why there is war, why this world is such a mess. I read what biblical scholars said about it. I read what theologians said about it. I read what philosophers said about it. I read what popular preachers said about it, and I came to think that in fact, nobody had a good answer. I came to think that in fact, it is very hard to believe that there is a God who is active in this world, who intervenes in this world, who answers prayer, given the state of things. If everybody on the planet had my life, I would have no trouble believing in God. My life is fantastic. But the reality is, this world is a cesspool for misery for so many people that I simply came to a point that I could no longer believe in God. This was about twelve, thirteen years ago and at that point I became an agnostic and I have been a nonbeliever ever since.

Prof. Evans:

May I say something?

Pres. Roberts:

Yes, Craig, you have a comment?

Prof. Evans:

Yes, the world is a mess. That is not disputed. There used to be a "pie-in-the-sky" view, a secular view that somehow everything was getting better. And it was a denial of biblical revelation about the nature

of human beings, and not just the fallenness of human beings but the fallenness of nature itself. But I have to ask, too, if you are going to ask why all of the misery, why all of the suffering and so on . . . well, why is there beauty? Why is there grace? Why is there love? Why is there mercy? Why is there goodness? All of these things are unnecessary for survival. Why are we not just like the animals in the jungle and the survival of the fittest? There is this redundancy, this unnecessary surplus of the good and the beautiful that is within the human heart that is capable of transforming the darkness into the light. Where does that come from? And that is why I would argue, take the full biblical picture that God's love and his truth are shining in the darkness and I believe you can open up your eyes and see it and you can let that light shine into your heart and it can change and transform. And it has happened for hundreds of millions of people now around the world. Or we can just say, "No I don't see it. I see the misery and the horror and therefore I cannot see God." And I think that is very sad.

CLOSING REMARKS

Prof. Ehrman:

I would like to challenge Craig to a debate on the problem of suffering. I have written a book about it called *God's Problem* and I will be happy to discuss it with him publically as I have with other people.⁵ But for now, we are talking about the reliability of the biblical accounts of the resurrection. I have several points I want to make about some of the things that Craig has said, and then I will wrap it up. One of my major points is that these accounts that we have of the gospels have numerous discrepancies in them. I have listed ten of them, some of them major, some of them minor, and I hoped that Craig would respond to explain away these discrepancies and he has not. At one point in his ten minute response he admitted that yes, we do have discrepancies that we cannot explain. I agree with that. I have only given you ten, there are a lot more. In the back-and-forth Craig admitted that in fact, maybe one of the authors got it wrong. Not just one of the authors, possibly all of the authors, got it wrong. I object though when Craig says that this is reverse fundamentalism. This is not fundamentalism. This is historical research. This is how historians go about their business. They look at the sources and see whether we can trust them or not. We are not talking about one or two minor details that are different. We are talking about enormous

⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem* (New York: HarperOne. 2008).

differences, both minor and major, and the major really matter. These sources that we have for the resurrection of Jesus are at odds with one another up and down the line. They are not reliable sources and that is what we are supposed to be debating. One reason that they are unreliable is because of my telephone game. Crag responds to the telephone game by saying, “Well, the gospel writers were not playing the telephone game, they had authority and they were eyewitnesses.” I think that is a direct quote of what he said. I would like to know some evidence that in fact the situation is different from the way I laid it out—that one person told the story to another person who told it to another person. They are telling stories about Jesus to convert people and it goes on for year after year, decade after decade before the gospel writers wrote it down. I would like some evidence that it did not work that way and some evidence that the stories were not changed. I can give you tons of evidence that the stories were changed because we have the stories and you can compare them with one another. You do not have to take my word for it. Go home and do it yourself. You will find discrepancies up and down the map.

And the idea that they in fact are based on eyewitness testimony as Craig . . . maybe he simply misspoke, but if he is saying that, I want to know what evidence there is of that. I do not know of any evidence of that and I have studied it for thirty years.



Third point. Craig ended with a very interesting illustration involving Wittgenstein and the semi-attack, and he pointed out that these people, even the next day, cannot get the details straight. Yes! Exactly. That is with intelligent people two days later. What about people living forty or fifty years later who are telling the stories in different languages, living in a different country, in a different context, who are telling the stories? They are different. The fact is, you do not get the story straight. The Gospels are trying to tell the story, but they are telling them in such a way that they are not straight.

So let me give my final wrap up. The ultimate question we are dealing with is whether the gospels are reliable or not, in particular, their accounts of the resurrection. My view that I am trying to state as forcefully as I can is that the gospels, throughout the gospels, but

especially in the resurrection accounts, have mistakes, discrepancies, contradictions, factual errors in them. This is not simply a unique point of view that I happen to share. This is the widely shared point of view among critical scholars who study the Bible in North America and Europe. If you do not believe me let me give you the facts. I think Craig will agree with these facts. I do not think that he will deny this. This view of the gospels as having mistakes, errors, contradictions, discrepancies is the view that is shared by New Testament scholars who teach at all the major universities in our country. It is the view of New Testament professors at all of the Ivy League schools: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Brown, Colombia, Cornell, the University of Pennsylvania. It is the view of professors of New Testament of all the major state universities in the country whether in the east where I live—the University of Florida, Florida State, University of Georgia, all fourteen universities of my state, North Carolina, the University of Virginia, University of Maryland, Rutgers University. It is the view of the major state universities in the Midwest where you live—the University of Texas, University of Oklahoma, University of Kansas, University of Nebraska, University of Iowa. It is the view of professors in New Testament at every major divinity school connected with a great university in the country—Harvard, Yale, Duke, Vanderbilt, Emory, University of Chicago, as well as the mainline seminaries not connected with the universities in the country—Princeton Theological Seminary, Claremont, The Graduate Theological Union, and on and on.

This is the view that the Gospels have errors, discrepancies, and contradictions that is taught at virtually every institution of higher learning in the entire world that is not either fundamentalist or extremely conservative evangelical. Most of the people teaching this view are themselves Christian but they do not have an evangelical assumption that the Bible is without mistakes or that the accounts are completely reliable. The only ones who say otherwise are fundamentalists or conservative evangelical Christians. How can that be? Is everyone else apart from evangelicals not as intelligent? Are they blind? Are they demon inspired? Everyone else? How is it that the only ones who think differently, the only ones who think that the Bible is completely reliable are people who have a particular theological point of view that affirms that the Bible does not have any mistakes in it? This is a theological view, not a historical view, and people are welcome to have it. But the people who have it should admit that when they say the Bible is reliable they are not saying so on historical grounds for historical reasons. They are saying so because their theological views require them to say so. If they did not have these theological views, they would agree with everyone else, Christian and non-Christian alike, that the Bible does not provide a

reliable account of the historical Jesus and of the history of the early Christian church, including the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus.

Let me tell you why this matters. There are many good Bible-believing Christians who think that the Bible provides a blueprint for belief and ethics that answers all of our important moral questions. For example, questions about abortion, or gun control, or gay rights. But the point is that the Bible is not a single book. The Bible is lots of books with lots of points of view. So you should not be dogmatic in saying that the Bible teaches this in order to come down on a particular ethical issue. The Bible in fact has lots of points of view and maybe we should allow for more points of view ourselves. I once thought that the Gospels were completely reliable. Now that I am a serious scholar, I no longer think so. It is not that I decided to jump on the scholarly bandwagon and abandon my evangelical faith, as I have said. I looked long and hard at the evidence. I studied it for years. I grappled with it. I prayed over it. I talked it over with friends and loved ones and eventually I came to see the truth: the Bible does not provide a reliable account of the things Jesus said and did or about his resurrection. I know most of you will never change your mind, but I hope you realize that people like me come to this question honestly and openly, not trying to destroy the faith of others, but simply searching for the truth. I hope you, too, will be honest and open and will not be afraid to go wherever the truth seems to lead. Thank you very much.

Prof. Evans:

Well we could list universities and seminaries and go on and on. I agree with the fact that scholars recognize the discrepancies, and editorial changes and so on as we compare Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I do not deny that. The observation of the actual phenomena that are right in front of us, you can see them synoptically, different wording and so forth—I do not dispute that. What I do dispute are the inferences that the professor has made in some of his publications and some of



his comments tonight. I believe the gospels are reliable, they do get the facts straight even though we are unable in every case to say, "I know exactly how this fits together." We cannot always sort it out. Perhaps it boils down to a semantic debate over what does reliability mean? I can quote the following from Professor Ehrman and agree with it. He said, "We need to face the fact that the gospels are not what we think they are." It was a good comment. They are not what we wish they were. I agree with that. I wish they did give us more information and I wish there were not any discrepancies. I wish everything was resolved. I wish we had more details. I wish we had actually a transcription, a tape recording of Jesus' words. Wouldn't that be nice? I wish we knew every time when he said something, where he was when he said it. That would be just great and we wouldn't need two or three or four gospels. Why not just one real detailed, videotaped account? The question is, are the gospels *sufficient*? And that is what I have in mind when I ask about reliability. Do they tell us what we *need* to know? They may not tell us everything we want to know and wish to know, whether it is the layman who would like to know what Jesus' favorite color was or these kinds of trivial questions for a scholar who wants to know more precisely where Jesus was when he said a particular thing or what exactly in Aramaic were his words. Now that kind of exactitude is elusive in most cases. I do not dispute that. And so I would be in agreement with most of the lustrous scholars that have been mentioned, and the membership of the Institute for Biblical Research (the IBR) has a membership of about five hundred scholars. They are evangelical scholars. They would agree with variations here and there, but they would agree that the Gospels have the facts straight so far as what is important and what is needful. Are the Gospels sufficient in communicating the teaching of Jesus? Yes. Are the Gospels sufficient in communicating and conveying the stories of what he did? Of course they are. Is the gospel witness sufficient with respect to the resurrection? Yes, even though there are loose ends and even though not every single detail can be harmonized and put together. So, I wish they were a little different and gave us more information, but it does not come down to what I wish or what you wish. It comes down to the question, are they sufficient for what we need to know? And I believe that they are and I think that there would be a host of New Testament scholars as well as the late Professor Metzger who would agree with me on that point.

Ehrman's Alleged Discrepancies: Confirmations or Contradictions?



L. L. (DON) VEINOT JR.*

President of Midwest Christian Outreach

President of Evangelical

Ministries to New Religions (EMNR)

donveinot@midwestoutreach.org

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” 2 Peter 2:16

Is the New Testament a historical account of the life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth or a collection of stories and myths that grew and developed after He and his original disciples passed from the scene? There are several affirmations within Scripture which claim their writings are factual, reliable accounts of the events of the time they reference. Peter proclaims that they were “eyewitnesses” and didn’t follow “cunningly devised fables.” Dr. Luke opens his first account, the Gospel according to Luke, claiming the accuracy of his history to Theophilus:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses

*Don Veinot is co-author of, *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life*, contributing author of *Preserving Evangelical Unity: Welcoming Diversity in Non-Essentials*, as well as articles in the *CRI Journal*, *PFO Quarterly Journal*, *Campus Life Magazine* and other periodicals.

and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:1-4, NASB)

Luke uses language which assumes a continuation of the accuracy of his reporting as he addressed the recipient of his writings, Theophilus, in his second work, the book of Acts.

From time to time the validity of these claims and indeed the reliability of the New Testament as a whole is called into question by those who are not favorable to, or even hostile toward, Christianity. One of the most effective salvos is to simply claim the Bible has contradictions and point out a few that seem to demonstrate the contention. Many are not prepared to respond or show that the claims of seeming contradictions are only that, *seeming* contradictions. This is an issue that has been with us for a long time, causing many of the supposed biblical contradictions to be addressed and readdressed over time. Some suggested works which have been produced to help in formulating responses:

Difficulties in the Bible, R. A. Torrey

Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible, John W. Halley

When Critics Ask, Norman Geisler & Thomas Howe

The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, Gleason L. Archer

One of the newest antagonists on the scene is Bart D. Ehrman, author of a number of books such as *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* and *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*.

I had the privilege of being in the audience during a debate between Dr. Bart D. Ehrman and Dr. Craig A. Evans at the Dead Sea Scrolls/EMNR¹ Conference at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in April of 2010. Dr. Ehrman proved to be an amiable and capable debater.

¹ EMNR is Evangelical Ministries to New Religions; www.emnr.org.

His claims were simple. The gospel accounts were written 35 to 70 years after the original events, the stories had been carried over several continents and several languages during that period and were not, he contended, written by the original disciples. The stories grew, evolved, and have little similarity with the actual events surrounding the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To buttress his position he put forth examples of what he claimed were contradictions, “some major, some minor” but in his view, contradictions nonetheless and sufficient to invalidate the gospels as reliable texts.

I. WHAT OF THE SEEMING CONTRADICTIONS?

Although I think we can credibly establish that the gospel accounts were written early by followers of Jesus or others who were close to them, that would not necessarily mean the accounts are trustworthy. The claims of contradictions must be addressed. Simply because Dr. Ehrman asserts there are contradictions does not mean there are nor does my asserting there are not contradictions mean there are not.

Ehrman set this one up in an interesting way. His claim was that Evangelicals tend to read the gospels individually from beginning to end. They read them with a start, middle and conclude with the resurrection. He suggested we need to read them across by comparing each section with the same sections of the other gospels. It is there, he contends, that the contradictions surface most clearly. He went on to claim that if we try to put the stories together to answer his charges we are then creating yet another gospel or somehow changing what he calls the “Big Picture.” This is a case of special pleading or stacking the deck.²

Simply because all of the accounts do not contain the exact same details in exactly the same way does not mean nor prove there are actual

² *Fallacy of special pleading.* (a) Accepting an idea or criticism when applied to an opponent’s argument but rejecting it when applied to one’s own argument, or (b) rejecting an idea or criticism when applied to an opponent’s argument but accepting it when applied to one’s own.” Peter A. Angeles, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Barnes & Noble/Harper & Row, 1981), 99; italics and bold part of original text. Cf. Don Lindsay, “List of Fallacious Arguments,” where “special pleading” is also referred to as “stacking the deck” (<http://www.don-lindsayarchive.org/skeptic/arguments.html#special>).

contradictions.³ By assembling or comparing the accounts, as Ehrman started off challenging the audience to do, we are not by definition creating yet another gospel. This is used as a way to discourage an actual response. It might be helpful to provide a demonstration of seeming contradictions by reliable sources which in the end are only different aspects of the same story but not at all contradictory.

The late Kenneth Kantzer from time to time told a story of a personal experience where seeming contradictions turned out not to be contradictions once all of the facts were assembled and compared.⁴

One day he received a phone call from a reliable friend. He was told that a young lady they both knew had been standing on a corner waiting for the light to change and was struck by a car but was not seriously injured. A little while later he received another call from another trusted friend who communicated that the same young lady had been riding in a car which was broadsided by a truck and she was instantly killed. Both witnesses were reliable but there clearly seemed to be contradictions in their stories. Kantzer later learned that indeed the young lady had been standing on a corner waiting for the light to change when a vehicle struck her. She was injured but not seriously. The driver got her in the car and was taking her to the hospital to get her checked out. On the way to the hospital they were driving through an intersection and a truck ran the red light and broadsided the car killing the girl instantly.

Combining all of the facts of both stories did not create an entirely new story; they simply cleared up seeming inconsistencies and told the entire story. Most of Ehrman's claimed contradictions fall into this category. It seems that if we take Ehrman at his challenge, read the accounts in the same sections together, either we will see the contradictions or eliminate the seeming contradictions. I believe it will

³ Perhaps one of the most common grounds for accusing the gospels of contradicting each other has been the differing sequences in which the writers sometimes portray the events they narrate. But as a former pupil of Rudolph Bultmann, Eta Linneman, has pointed out, this objection has been answered at least as far back as the second century, when Papias (as attested by Eusebius) asserted that Mark did not intend to provide a chronologically-ordered account. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15 and Linneman, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* [trans. Robert B. Yarbrough; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992], 168).

⁴ Kenneth S. Kantzer (1917–2002), was an influential theologian and educator in the evangelical Christian tradition.

be the latter. For the remainder of this article I will list each of the discrepancies highlighted in the debate and then respond to them:

Who went to the tomb: was it Mary Magdalene and another Mary; was it the two Marys and Salome? Was it Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and another Mary? Was it Mary Magdalene by herself?⁵

Matthew 28:1 tells us it was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Mark 16:1 names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (the other Mary) and Salome. Luke informs us in Luke 23:55 that just prior to the beginning of the Sabbath the “women who had come with Him out of Galilee” had gone to the tomb to see where it was and then returned to prepare the burial spices. This would be a larger group than the three so far named but would have included them. In Luke 24:1 he references this group when he continued this account, “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb...”. The “they” here is the same “they” in the previous two verses, Luke 23:55, 56. Lastly, John 20:1 names Mary Magdalene. The problem here is not with any of the texts but with Ehrman’s theological slip. We can tell by his statement, “*Was it Mary Magdalene by herself*” that he is taking each account as though the writers are giving an exhaustive list of who came to the tomb. But that is simply not the case. Not only does John not say *only* Mary Magdalene came to the tomb, something that would have to be included in order for Ehrman’s assumption to hold any validity, but none of the writers make the claim that only those they named came to the tomb. The writers keyed in on individuals which were important to them for particular reasons. Three of the accounts name Mary Magdalene, Matthew, Mark and John. Two accounts name “the other Mary,” Matthew and Mark. One account, Mark, names Salome. Luke does not name any of the women. Using Ehrman’s methodology that would mean that Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and Salome were not there in Luke’s account, which is an absurd claim. So, the answer to the question is a simple one. It was Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Salome and the rest of the women that followed Him out of Galilee. Ehrman provided no evidence which demonstrates this is not the case, and listing all of the

⁵ Ehrman’s questions (in bold) come from the rough outline he prepared to use during the debate.

evidence from the accounts clears up and answers the supposed contradictions.

Was the stone already rolled away by the time they got there or did it roll away when they arrived?

The account in Matthew 28:2 reports that a “severe earthquake *had* occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.” The word “had” indicates something which happened earlier in time, prior to the arrival of the women. Mark describes the discussion the women were having on the way to the tomb about how to get the stone moved. The stone had been rolled away prior to their arrival (Mark 16:3-4). We find the same description on Luke 24:2. The stone had been rolled away prior to their arrival. John agrees with the other narratives in John 20:1 that, “the stone already taken away from the tomb.” Again, without changing any material facts but simply listing them together we find no contradiction. In all accounts the stone had been rolled away prior to the arrival of the women.

Whom did they meet there to tell them that Jesus was raised? An angel? A man? Two men? Or Jesus himself? (John 20:1: she saw the stone was rolled away and so ran back to tell Simon Peter; later Jesus appears to her.)

Matthew writes that the angel who had rolled away the stone told them that Jesus had risen and invited them to look inside the tomb (Matt 28:5-6). They then met Jesus (Matt. 28:9). Mark describes a “young man...wearing a white robe” sitting in the tomb who told them Jesus had risen (Mark 16:5-6). Luke's account describes two men in dazzling appearance who told them He had risen (Luke 24:4-6). In John 20:12-13 Mary Magdalene saw two angels and in 20:16 she saw Jesus. John supplied additional but not contradictory material. According to the account, this was her second trip to the tomb on that morning. She had gone there “while it was still dark” (John 20:1), saw the stone rolled away, ran to tell Peter (John 20:2) and then returned (20:11 and following).

A few things here: It is not uncommon in Scripture for angels to be referred to as “men” or “young men” in both Old and New Testaments. We find this as early as Genesis 18 where angels are referred to as “men” in verses 2, 16, 22. One of the “men” was “The Lord” or YHWH and the other two “men” are referred to as angels in 19:1. When angels or the Lord took on physical appearances in Scripture they most often looked like men. The additional information of wearing a white robe (Mark) and having a dazzling appearance (Luke) helps to clarify that the “men” were angels. When we study any document, including Scripture, it is necessary, honest and even scholarly to use the historical grammatical understanding of the text and how the culture in which the text was written and read used language. Following that injunction what we have as an answer to this question is, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb while it was dark, before morning light. She found the stone rolled away, the tomb empty and ran back to tell Peter. She then returned as morning was dawning, and the other women (all of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee) were also going to the tomb. Two angels greeted them, one sitting on the stone that had been rolled away who told them Jesus had risen. Another angel inside the tomb confirmed Jesus had risen and was then joined by the angel who had been outside the tomb. As they turned to leave, Mary Magdalene was weeping when she ran into Jesus who was indeed resurrected. Again, a careful review of the accounts in this fashion does not support the claim of contradiction but instead gives a more comprehensive BIG picture, as Ehrman refers to it.

Do the women assume Jesus has been raised (Synoptics) because that’s what they’re told, or do they assume he’s been buried in some other place (John) since his body is not in the tomb?

This one is a time question or *when* question rather than a demonstration of contradictions, for both of the above are true at different times. As previously shown, Mary Magdalene came while it was dark, saw the tomb was empty and “assumed” His body had been moved (John 20:1-2). Later, she and the all the other women were told He was raised and saw Him after they were told. These two are not contradictions but are both true at different times of the morning in question.

Who first comes to realize that Jesus has been raised? The women (the Synoptics) or Simon Peter and the beloved disciple (John)?

Again, the text, in context, answers this one without any contradiction. As Ehrman agrees, Matthew, Mark and Luke all concur that the women "realized" or knew first. John not only does not contradict this but agrees. In John 20:3-8, Peter and John ran to the tomb, saw and believed that the tomb was empty but, "...as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead" (John 20:9). So, although Peter and John saw and believed (John 20:8) the tomb was empty, they did not know what it meant at that point, whereas the women has been told by the angels and saw the risen Lord.

Are the women told anything upon first finding the tomb empty (Synoptics yes; John no)?

The answer to both is yes and no but does not result in a contradiction. Why you ask? Again, the first time Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, while it was dark, she was not told anything. When Mary Magdalene returned, and the other women arrived, they were all told that Jesus was raised.

What are they told? To tell the disciples to go to Galilee to meet Jesus there, or that Jesus told them while he was still in Galilee that he would rise?

Is there a contradiction here or are both true? Jesus' stating that He would be resurrected is not the same thing as the disciples understanding what that meant or that it registered in their thinking at the time. As early as John 2:22 we find He clearly taught the resurrection of His body (John 2:19-21) but it was not until *after* the event that the disciples understood. Then they, "...remembered that He had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." So, yes, He told them while He was still in Galilee that He would be raised and sent the women to tell the disciples to go and meet Him in Galilee. No contradiction. Both are true, one is predictive or prophetic (while He was still in Galilee) and the other confirmation of prophetic fulfillment.

Did they tell the disciples? Mark 16:8. The end. Contrast Matthew 28:8 and Luke 24:9.

The answer is... no and yes. Mary Magdalene ran and told Peter and John the tomb was empty (John 20:1-2). She returned and the other women arrived. Most of the women fled after seeing and hearing the angels and, being gripped with fear, said nothing (Mark 16:8). Mary Magdalene and some of the women met up with Jesus (Matthew 28:8-10; John 20:15-17) and then she and other women went and told the disciples (Luke 24:9-10; John 20:18). Both are true at different times of the resurrection morning and are therefore not contradictory.

Ehrman stated, "You will find dozens of discrepancies in the details. Let me stress: it's not good enough to say that these are all just minor details. The BIG picture is made up of lots and lots of details; if you change all the details, you change the BIG picture." So far he has not provided any examples of actual contradictions. None of these are minor details. He is correct: the BIG picture is made up of lots and lots of details. Cross-checking the details, the *when* and *where* of details in historical narrative is important and builds the BIG picture. Each of Ehrman's above claims demonstrates problems or perhaps biases in his research, reading and teaching on this issue. This raises a question. Is this intentional dishonesty, poor scholarship or something else? That is a question I cannot answer but is worth considering.

Bart Ehrman and the Resurrection



RONALD V. HUGGINS*
Associate Professor of NT and Greek
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
rhuggins@mbts.edu

When Jesus was born, the devils came to Satan and said, “The idols today have all bowed their heads.” Satan said, “Something has happened in your world.” Satan then flew all over the world but found nothing. At last he found the infant Jesus, surrounded by the angels. He returned to the devils and said, “A prophet was born yesterday. No female ever conceived or gave birth without my being present, except this one. Therefore, despair of idol worship after this night. Henceforth, seduce men by exploiting their hastiness and superficiality.”¹

Abu-Hamid al Ghazali (1058-1111 AD)

During the course of his Midwestern debate with Craig A. Evans over the historical reliability of the Gospel resurrection accounts Bart D. Ehrman said the following:

I listed ten discrepancies among the Gospels about the resurrection of Jesus. Several of them were minor. A couple of them were major. And I want to hear how Craig explains them. Especially, how is it that Luke explicitly says that they stayed in Jerusalem and they saw Jesus there, whereas Matthew explicitly

*Dr. Huggins is managing editor of the *Midwestern Journal of Theology*.

¹ *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (ed. & trans. Tarif Khalidi; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 168-69.

says that they did not stay in Jerusalem but they went to Galilee and saw Jesus there?

Note that of the ten Ehrman considers only “a couple...major.” Then he singles out only one about whether Jesus disciples went to Galilee or stayed in Jerusalem. In answer to this I need to point out two things, one about the Gospels in general, and the other about Luke in particular. As to the Gospels, as John Calvin noted centuries ago, “the Evangelists had no intention of so putting their narrative together as always to keep an exact order of events, but to bring the whole pattern together to produce a kind of mirror or screen image of those features most useful for the understanding of Christ.”² Then as to Luke, the difficulty there appears to be here relates more to his collapsing the chronology of events than to his contradicting Matthew. We see the same thing happening in his account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which he follows immediately with the driving of the merchants and money changers out of the temple. In Mark, who is probably Luke’s source there, the cleansing of the temple does not follow immediately on the heels of the triumphal entry, but rather occurs on the following day. Luke has collapsed the chronology (compare Luke 19 [esp. v. 45] and Mark 11 [esp. v. 12]). The same thing appears to be going on in Luke’s account of the resurrection appearances where, if we did not have his own version of the rest of the story in Acts, we might be led to believe that Jesus ascended into heaven on the same day as his resurrection.³ From Acts however we learn that he appeared to his disciples “over a period of forty days” (1:3). Here is how Ehrman reads this: “According to Acts chapter one, they [the disciples] stay in Jerusalem for forty days and that is where they see Jesus. They never do go to Galilee.” But he overspecifies. Yes Luke offers no account there of the disciples going to Galilee, and yes Jesus commands them to stay in Jerusalem, but the precise chronology isn’t nailed down by Luke as to when Jesus gave that command. He only says that it happened at some point during the forty days, while Jesus and his disciples were having a meal together (1:4).

An important rhetorical strategy Ehrman pursued in the debate was to side-tract the discussion off topic at two important points. The first of these took place when he shifted focus off the question of the historicity of the resurrection (what the debate was supposedly about) and onto that of Biblical inerrancy. It was in this context that he brought up his ten discrepancies. This shift gave Ehrman an apparent on-the-spot rhetorical

² John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (2 vols.; trans. A. W. Morrison; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 139.

³ If there is a seem in Luke where there is a time change it is probably at 24:50.

advantage by effectively turning evidence that Evans could (and did) use against him into something he could try to leverage against Evans. Ehrman makes this first shift very deftly in the following statement:

You may be tempted to say, “Well, yes, they [the resurrection narrative] disagree with the details, but all the eyewitnesses agree: there *was* a car accident.” Two comments about that: First, if that is what you want to say, that the details may be at odds, but the big picture is what matters (not the details) then in effect, you need to admit that what you are saying is that the Bible has discrepancies, contradictions, and errors in one book or in another or in all of the books. So what now is your view of Scripture? A book filled with errors? If it has some errors, how do you know that it does not have a lot of errors, and if the details are in error, why not the big picture?

The reason this was a smart move strategically for Ehrman (even though perhaps not a wholly legitimate one, but then when are moves in debates ever wholly legitimate?) is that, as he himself pointed out during the debate, historians are especially happy when they have “several accounts by eyewitnesses that are not biased to corroborate one another. In other words, they basically agree in what they have to say yet without collaboration.” This, as Evans pointed out, is precisely the kind of evidence we are dealing with in the case of the resurrection accounts.

One of the evidences of a lack of collaboration is the absence of attempts by different authors to harmonize themselves with one another. Proof of this is found in the presence in varying accounts of apparent minor discrepancies that are difficult if not impossible to harmonize. This was a conspicuous feature in the sources related to the Wittgenstein poker incident Evans described during the debate and it is a conspicuous feature in the Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. Some of the discrepancies in the latter actually point to our having independent witnesses of the resurrection, and this in turn weighs heavily in favor of historicity, thus also highlighting the fact that the main problem with the resurrection is not the historical testimony underpinning it, but its character as a miraculous event. If you do not believe that miracles are possible, you are not going to believe in the resurrection, no matter how well it is attested historically.

In the context of the debate, a good response to Ehrman’s venturing off topic the first time would have been to mildly remind him, first of all, that there was scarcely a single discrepancy he could mention that was not already well known to Christian scholars, and that had not been discussed since the early centuries of the Church, by individuals like

Jerome, in the fourth century, Erasmus, Calvin and Luther, in the sixteenth, and many others since, a number of whom were not only adherents to the Church's high view of Scripture, but to some considerable extent the architects and clarifiers of that view as well. And then secondly, it would have been good to point out that the debate was not about the challenge discrepancies pose for the doctrine of inerrancy (a fine subject, perhaps, but one to pursue on another occasion), but about the historical reliability of the resurrection accounts.

As it happened, from that point on in the debate, Ehrman pursued a course of reasoning that seemed to take for granted that if he could prove that the Gospels were not inerrant, he had also undermined the historical reliability of the resurrection accounts. But that hardly follows, since virtually every other source ever deemed reliable by historians never made any claim to inerrancy. Indeed, as Murray J. Harris has aptly pointed out, "the presence of discrepancies in circumstantial details is no proof that the central fact is unhistorical."⁴ In view of the evidence the discrepancies provide to the Gospel witnesses' independence, in that their writers made little or no effort to "get their stories straight," we can actually take them as evidence of just the opposite, namely historicity.

But now a sidebar on the discrepancies. In view of its historic high view of Scripture, I have never ceased being impressed at the Church's equally historic resistance of the temptation to make adjustments in the Scriptures as a way of "cleaning up" or "clearing away" potentially embarrassing discrepancies. To be sure there have been scribes who have fallen victim to that temptation and ventured such "corrections," but on the whole the Church has carefully avoided tampering with the text of Holy Scripture. Yes they did attempt to provide explanations of how such discrepancies might be harmonized, but they cherished the text too much to physically "improve" it.⁵ In truth it might even be said that Ehrman owes the historic Church a debt of gratitude for preserving the text as carefully as it did. By letting these discrepancies stand it has provided him with the rather lucrative career path of bringing them all up again afresh to a new generation eager to see the noses of the pious tweaked in the kind of books, documentaries, and debates Ehrman

⁴ Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1983/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 68, quoted in Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic/ Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2007), 34.

⁵ The examples to the contrary identified by Ehrman in his *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) simply represent the conspicuous exceptions to the rule.

engages in. Others like him have plied that trade in the past, and still others will ply it in the future. The same point I am making was also put most eloquently 35 years ago, while Ehrman was an undergraduate at Moody Bible Institute, and while I was wandering in the darkness pursuing a degree in Fine Arts “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). It is found in Malcolm Muggeridge’s extraordinary book, *Jesus the Man Who Lives*:

One of the things that has struck me about the New Testament Gospels altogether is how very easy it would have been to sub-edit them so as to eliminate the contradictions, inconsistencies and occasional apparent absurdities which have so delighted agnostics and whose exegesis has so exercised commentators. I really believe that, given a free hand and some expert help, I could have done the job myself in quite a short time, producing a consistent story with nothing in it for critics to cavil at or sceptics to ridicule. That this was not done when the first definitive texts were prepared—it would have been so easy then—suggests strongly to me that the writers of the Gospels believed they were recording Jesus’s very words and deeds as handed down by eye-witnesses.⁶

Yet it is precisely here that Ehrman would have objected most strenuously, as he did at the debate, vigorously asserting that the Gospels most definitely—it must be nice to be so sure of oneself—did *not* contain eyewitness tradition. He made a number of arguments in that direction, two of which we will discuss here. The first had to do with the supposed distance in time between the life of Jesus and the composition of the Gospels, the second with the supposed manner in which the traditions about Jesus and his teaching were handed on.

I. IS LATENESS OF COMPOSITION AN ISSUE?

In my experience, New Testament Scholars who try to speak as historians often flounder in what they say due to the fact that they have never had to write history in any other area. They therefore really do not know how historians work, how they deal with texts, how long they consider too long in terms of expecting to still be able to find eye-witness testimony of an event, and so on. Throughout the debate Ehrman kept

⁶ Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 40.

asserting that what he was doing was simply what historians do. Thus when Evans accused him of being a reverse Fundamentalist, Ehrman responded with “This is not fundamentalism. This is historical research. This is how historians go about their business.” In that moment I was reminded of the lines in Charles Williams’s *Descent into Hell*, a novel that traces the course of the damnation of a scholar named Wentworth, who Williams describes by saying: “He raged secretly as he wrote his letters and drew up his evidence; he identified scholarship with himself, and asserted himself under the disguise of a defence of scholarship.”⁷

My own response to Ehrman’s claim that he is simply doing what historians do is that I do not accept it. In my experience credible historians, in others fields and in my own, are not as dismissive of evidence as Ehrman shows himself to be. The ax he has to grind with the Bible has been so obviously clouding his historical judgment in his popular works of late that it has resulted in a shadow being cast over his present and future ability to continue describing himself as a dispassionate historian. But however that may be, we return to the issue at hand, the inference from the lateness of the composition of the Gospels that they are unlikely to contain eyewitness testimony.

Continual reference was made by Ehrman during the debate as to the length of time that supposedly elapsed between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. Here is one of them:

Jesus probably died sometime around 30 AD. Our first account of Jesus’ death and resurrection is the gospel of Mark written around the year 65 or 70 AD, thirty-five to forty years later by somebody who was not from Israel the way Jesus was, who spoke a different language from Jesus (he spoke Greek rather than Aramaic), who does not claim to be an eyewitness and in fact was not an eyewitness. Matthew and Luke were written ten or fifteen years later. John was written about ten years later than that. These are accounts written somewhere between 40 and 60 or 70 years after the events they narrated.

There is much to be disputed in this passage, and we shall do so in due course. But for now let us focus on the time element. Although these dates for the Gospels are often repeated by scholars, they are at best guesses, and may be quite wrong. None of them can be proven, and Ehrman is irresponsible in putting them forward as hard fact. But before we pursue this let us assume for the moment that the dates Ehrman offers are correct, and then ask whether he is justified even then in his appeal to

⁷ Charles Williams, *Descent into Hell* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), 38.

them as grounds for dismissing their historicity. Is 35 to 70 years after an event too long to expect to find any credible historical or even eyewitness testimony, or is it quite normal for historians to take such late evidence seriously? Having had the opportunity to do historical research and writing in sixteenth through nineteenth century religious history and in contemporary history as well, I am aware that historians regularly rely on sources that far distant in time from the events they are attempting to describe. We will focus on nineteenth-century religious history as a way of providing examples of this.

Let us take, for example, the account of the conversion of Charles Grandison Finney, premier evangelist of the Second Great Awakening, which took place on Wednesday, October 10, 1821. Finney writes (actually dictates) his account of it probably in late 1867 or early 1868, more than 45 years after the event.⁸

Biographers of Finney rely heavily on this account in their historical reconstructions of his story. They may, for example, question Finney's own interpretation of his early experience; does he for example project his own later, more fully developed theological understandings back on his earlier self? Such questions can be checked against allusions to his conversion in his own earlier sermons, as well as in accounts left by other people who knew him. But no one so far as I am aware doubts the general accuracy of the basic facts of his account.⁹ It is, after all, direct eyewitness testimony.

Next came biographies of Finney by those who knew him, such as George Fredrick Wright (1838-1921), who published his life of the evangelist in 1891, basing his work, as the blurb on the back of my copy of the book says, on his "own experience as a student of Finney and on the memories of Finney's family, associates, converts and students."¹⁰ Now we are talking 70 years after Finney's conversion, a period equal to the largest time span Ehrman mentions.

In 1902, Aaron Merritt Hills (1848-1935), who honored the evangelist by naming his own son Charles Finney Hills, and who later wrote in the forward of his own two-volume *Fundamental Christian Theology* (1931)

⁸ Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (eds. Garth M. Rosell & Richard A. G. Dupuis; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Academie Books, 1989), xxix.

⁹ See, for example, Keith J. Hardman's treatment of Finney's conversion in his *Charles Grandison Finney: 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990 [Orig.: Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987]), 24-43, along with his comment on the possibility of Finney projecting his more fully developed theology back upon his early self (p. 45).

¹⁰ G. Frederick Wright, *Charles G. Finney* (Salem, OH: Schmul, 1996 [orig. 1891]).



Fig. 1: H. B. Hall & Sons engraving of Finney from the 1st edition of the *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney, Written by Himself* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1876). (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Library)

that “Sixty-four years ago I met the mighty Finney, a king among men, and sat four college years under his ministry,”¹¹ produced yet another biography of Finney.¹² As this was written 81 years after Finney’s conversion, and several biographical accounts had become available, Hill’s work is largely derivative. Nevertheless he did include some of his own recollections (Hills graduated from Oberlin, where Finney was, in 1871) and he was able to elicit additional testimony from living eyewitnesses who could speak first-hand about other things that had happened earlier in Finney’s career.¹³ In this case you have a person who was not born until twenty seven years after Finney’s conversion, who had still known Finney personally and had access to other people who did as well, paralleling the

¹¹ A[aron] M[erritt] Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology: A Systematic Theology* (2 vols.; Pasadena, CA: C. J. Kinne, 1931).

¹² A[aron] M[erritt] Hills, *Life of Charles G. Finney* (Cincinnati, Ohio, Office of “God’s Revivalist,” 1902).

¹³ See, e.g., Hills, *Finney*, 181-82, 229-43.

way people born at the mid-point of the first century might well have had access to people who knew and followed Jesus.

An interesting sidebar to this Finney example is that while I was putting it together, I was surprised to discover on the shelves of our own Midwestern Seminary library what by all appearances looked like first editions of both Finney's own memoirs, published 134 years ago in 1876, and A. M. Hill's biography of Finney, published 108 years ago in 1902 (fig. 1). That reminded me of the fact that once books are written they tend to get laid away on some shelf or in some library where they wait to make a reappearance when the time comes for later departures from their stories to be set straight. This is true both of books in our era and of earlier ones. So, for example, when I came across these first editions I was reminded that even in ancient times there were libraries, and there were people who troubled themselves to keep track in their minds of what was in them. We may take for example Julius Africanus Sextus (c. 160-ca. 240 AD), an early Christian historian and literary scholar from Palestine, who consulted the family of Jesus about how we should harmonize the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, and built a library for the Emperor Alexander Severus (reigned 222-235) in the Parthenon at Rome. A papyrus fragment contains an amazing remark by Africanus describing where one could find a copy of a particular book:

You will find this whole document on the shelves in the archives of our former home town, the colony of Aelia Capitolina [a later name for Jerusalem] in Palestine, and in Nysa in Caria and, up to the thirteenth verse, in Rome near the baths of Alexander in the beautiful library in the Pantheon, whose collection of books I myself built for Augustus.¹⁴

This is true even when there is a concerted effort to suppress books. Laying open on the table in front of me as I write is a book that quotes a command given in 1266 at the general chapter of the Franciscan order in Paris, that "all the *legendae* about St. Francis that had been made in the past should be destroyed." By "made in the past" was meant those biographies of St. Francis that had been written before the official version of Francis' life by Bonaventura, minister general of the Franciscan order, came out a few years before (1262 or 63). What was being commanded, in other words, was that all the sources Bonaventura

¹⁴ A passage from book 18 of Africanus's *Kestoi*, which dealt, among other things, with medicine, military art, natural history, agriculture, translated by E. N. O'Neal, from the latter part of PGM XXIII.1-70, in *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (2nd ed.; ed. by Hans Dieter Betz; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 263-64.

would have consulted in writing his biography, by friends, companions, and adult contemporaries of Francis (who died 1226, when Bonaventura was five) were to be destroyed. The ultimate ineffectiveness of this command is proved by the fact that I quote it from my copy of an edition of Thomas of Celano's writings on the life of Saint Francis, writings which were supposed to have been among those destroyed.¹⁵ Happily by the time the command was given, many of the earlier biographies had come into the hands of people outside the Franciscan order, people who were under no obligation to obey the wishes of the Franciscan hierarchy. Had earlier Gospels been suppressed when later ones were written, we should expect that the same thing would have happened. It didn't.

One of the most intriguing chronological parallels that can be called upon here is Mormonism. Ehrman placed Jesus' death around 30 AD while the publication of the Book of Mormon was in 1830 AD, the parallel year in the nineteenth century to the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the first. Joseph Smith, by the way, was murdered by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, in 1844.

Mormonism provides a great negative illustration at least in part precisely *because* eyewitnesses continued to be around to be consulted decades after the fact, with the result that there is scarcely a single fact nor doctrine relating to the founder or the founding of Mormonism that has not proved an embarrassment to the LDS Church. The problem is that Joseph Smith was a religious fraud, and the evidence of both eyewitness and documentary history proves it.¹⁶

Those who have read the Book of Mormon will remember how it includes in its front pages the so-called "Testimony of the Three Witnesses," namely Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer. All three men were later estranged from Joseph Smith, and of the three, Oliver Cowdery, who died in 1850, had the least to say about his part in the founding of Mormonism. In contrast Martin Harris was interviewed about the origins of the Book of Mormon many times between the 1820s and 1870s when he died, and numerous times even during the 1870s, right

¹⁵ Thomas of Celano, *St. Francis of Assisi: First and Second Life of St. Francis, with Selections from Treatise on the Miracles of Blessed Francis* (trans. & ed. Placid Herman O.F.M.; Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1962), lii.

¹⁶ So, for example, see the investigation of the development of the story of the recovery of the golden plates in my "From Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36.4 (Winter 2003): 17-42. See also my discussion of the inability of current historians of religion to deal with the existence of the very real historical category "religious charlatan." In "Jerald Tanner's Quest for Truth—Part III," *Salt Lake City Messenger* (Nov 2008): 13-14 (<http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no111.htm>).

up in fact until the day he died (July 5, 1875), 45 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon.¹⁷ David Whitmer actually published two booklets the year before he died, *An Address to All Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*,¹⁸ and *An Address to all Believers in the Book of Mormon*.¹⁹ This was more than 55 years after the publication for the Book of Mormon, and a full 60 years from the time Joseph Smith claimed to have gotten the plates for it from the angel. Like Harris, Whitmer had been interviewed numerous times over the years, the last time by the Chicago Tribune two days before his death, which took place on 25 January 1888.²⁰

Joseph Smith's brother William was interviewed as late as 1893, the year of his death, about the origins of the Book of Mormon,²¹ 63 years after its publication, and his sister Katherine Smith Salisbury wrote a letter about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon on 10 March 1886, 56 years after its publication.²² Joseph Smith's wife Emma was also interviewed extensively by her son Joseph Smith III in 1879, just shy of 50 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon.²³

In the case of the founding event of Mormonism I have presented only a few examples selected on the basis of their proximity to the original event. A great number of other examples might be produced, and I would simply direct any curious reader to Dan Vogel's authoritative five volume collection, *Early Mormon Documents*, where they will find many accounts by people close to Joseph Smith at the time of the publication of the Book of Mormon, including the members of Martin Harris's family and of Joseph's wife Emma's family, both groups of whom generally testified of having experiences with Smith that marked him out in their memories as a charlatan. The fact that there were still eyewitnesses ready to talk about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon near the end of the nineteenth century helps us realize that "40 and 60 or 70 years," after the crucifixion really is not that long, and as

¹⁷ See the "Martin Harris Collection," in *Early Mormon Documents* (5 vols.; ed. Dan Vogel; Salt Lake City, UT; Signature Books, 1996-2003), 2:253-393.

¹⁸ (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887).

¹⁹ (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887)

²⁰ See the "David Whitmer Collection," in *Early Mormon Documents* 5:9-227. The Chicago Tribune interview is on pp. 209-210. See also Lyndon W. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book Company, 1993).

²¹ See the "William Smith Collection," in *Early Mormon Documents* 1:475-513, with the interview in question appearing on pp. 510-13.

²² See the "Katherine Smith Collection," in *Early Mormon Documents* 1:517-26. Her 1886 letter appears on pp. 521-22.

²³ See the "Emma Hale Smith Collection," in *Early Mormon Documents* 1:1:527-47. Her interview with Joseph Smith III appears on pp. 534-43.

such we should expect that there would still have been a significant number of eyewitnesses to Jesus around. In addition, in the case of Mormonism, we see more of a concerted effort being made to interview eyewitnesses before they died. Would not the same impulse have been present at the time when the last of the eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus were coming close to passing from the scene? Certainly in recent years with the passing of the World War II generation we have witnessed a similar thing in the scramble to collect their stories, not least the victims of the Holocaust.²⁴

In his statements at the debate, Ehrman made other remarkable moves to avoid the conclusion that the New Testament writers might have come into contact with eyewitnesses to the resurrection, which we will discuss in due course. But first we must pursue him a bit further about his seeming certainty in asserting *when* the Gospels were written. We have already argued that the late dates he gives for the Gospels hardly rule out their being informed by historically reliable, and even eyewitness testimony. But even so, were the Gospels written as late as he suggests?

Certainly a large number of scholars, even Evangelical scholars, assign similar dates to the Gospels, but the question I want to pursue here is why non-evangelical scholars in particular endorse these dates. The reason often stated is that the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, which occurred in 70 AD, is predicted by Jesus in Mark (13:2). Very often this is stated very candidly, as in the case of James M. Robinson, who writes: "Since it seems to refer to the fall of Jerusalem, it probably was written shortly after 70 C.E., when the Romans destroyed the temple and the city,"²⁵ and even more firmly by Burton Mack, who insists that "Mark's fiction could not have been conceived before the war. It would not have made sense before the war had run its course and the tragic fate of the city was known."²⁶ The idea here being that prophecy isn't really possible, therefore the prediction in Mark had to have been made, up as it were, *ex eventu*, that is to say, after the event, and then placed back onto the lips of Jesus. This understanding arises from a world-view difference

²⁴ As is seen for example in the opening lines of the "Holocaust Survivors and Resource Center" page on the website for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: "The mission of the Holocaust Survivors and Victims Resource Center is to ensure that the individual experiences of survivors and victims of the Holocaust and Nazi-era persecution are collected, preserved and disseminated for future generations." (<http://www.ushmm.org>).

²⁵ James M. Robinson, *The Gospel of Jesus: In Search of the Original Good News* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 4.

²⁶ Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 152.

between believing and unbelieving scholars, since believing scholars accept not only that prophecy is possible, but that Jesus rose from the dead. Yet we still need to ask whether looking at the evidence from an unbelieving perspective really does require a post-70 date for Mark.

The answer is no, it does not. In coming to their conclusion unbelieving scholars make the very elementary error of overlooking the fact, first of all, that the evidence that Jesus *did* in fact speak of the destruction of the temple is strong, even when considered from the perspective of their own critical methodologies, and that he was not the only one making that prediction, as is clear from Josephus.²⁷

Second, even where the concept of real prophecy is not embraced it is usually admitted that there is such a thing as “reading the writing on the wall.” A pious Jew who believed in the holiness of God yet felt that God’s holy temple had been corrupted, might very easily expect God to come and vindicate himself by destroying it, as Ehrman himself admits in the 1999 book, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, “The prediction that God would enter into judgment with his people, destroying them and their sacred places, is as old as the Hebrew prophets that Jesus heard read as a child in the synagogue in Nazareth.”²⁸ People are always making predictions, and predictions have at times been known to come true. Happily in this particular case I need look no further for support than Ehrman himself, who, in the book just mentioned, also dates the four Gospels between 65 and 95, thus placing the composition of the Gospel of Mark five years *before* the destruction of the temple.²⁹ Actually he did this in the debate too.³⁰ He further explicitly affirms the that Jesus “urged...that the destruction was at hand, and that not only individuals but also social institutions and structures [what Ehrman is referring to includes the temple] would be brought low when the Son of Man arrived on the clouds of heaven with the angels of glory and the power of God.”³¹ Please take note here that Ehrman is not merely saying that some early Christians predicted the fall of the temple around 65 and then placed it back onto Jesus’ lips, but that Jesus *himself* predicted it. In granting this Ehrman undermines the central reason why unbelieving scholars have insisted on a post-70 date for Mark as the earliest Gospel,

²⁷ Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.6.3 (388), 6.5.3 (300-309).

²⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford, UK, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁰ Ehrman spoke about “Mark written around the year 65 or 70 AD, thirty-five to forty years later,” thus not insisting on a post-70 date.

³¹ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 159. Ehrman goes on to stress that the judgment would not have been limited to the temple, but would have been universal, typical of predictions made by people with apocalyptic temperaments.

and later dates for Matthew and Luke in view of their dependence on Mark. He also undermines his own point about late dates in the debate.

II. THE TELEPHONE GAME?

Another tactic that Ehrman used during the debate to facilitate his attempt to escape the Gospel authors' having had any access to reliable testimony about Jesus was his likening of the transmission of the Jesus tradition to the child's party game of telephone.

Interestingly Ehrman has been bold enough to float this comparison even in his books, thus providing other scholars opportunity to respond to it in print. Craig Blomberg, for example, has described it as "an utterly inappropriate and irrelevant analogy to what would have actually gone on among first-century Christians"³² I agree with Blomberg but would take his remark one step further to say that it is an utterly inappropriate and irrelevant analogy to what actually goes on whenever people attempt to pass something precious along orally. Darrell L. Bock and Daniel B. Wallace are exactly right when they point out in criticism of Ehrman's appeal to the telephone game what is, or ought to be obvious to everyone, namely that "The whole point of the telephone game, in fact, is to see how garbled the original message can get."³³

Here Bock and Wallace put their collaborative finger on the salient point: The whole point of the telephone game is to garble the message along the way, to have one kid change it into something funny that *sounds like* what they heard whispered to them.

"Sally's new coat looks nice" goes in at the beginning,
"Wally's blue goat has lice" comes out at the end.

This brings us to something I have long been convinced of, namely that the interpretations of theological liberalism are as much the product of a lack of imagination as they are of unbelief. Let us assume for a moment that Ehrman really does believe that the telephone game provides an apt parallel for the way things happened with the oral transmission of the Jesus tradition prior to its being written down in the Gospels. Let's take a moment to remind ourselves of how Ehrman talks about the game, this time from his most recent book, *Jesus Interrupted*:

³² Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 55.

³³ Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 44.

This is how Christianity spread, year after year, decade after decade, until eventually someone wrote down the stories. What do you suppose happened to the stories over the years, as they were told and retold, not as disinterested news stories reported by eyewitnesses but as propaganda meant to convert people to faith, told by people who had themselves heard them fifth- or sixth- or nineteenth-hand? Did you or your kids ever play the telephone game at a birthday party? The kids sit in a circle, and one child tells a story to the girl sitting next to her, who tells it to the next girl, who tells it to the next, and so on, until it comes back to the one who first told the story. And it's now a different story. (If it weren't a different story the game would be a bit pointless.) Imagine playing telephone not among a group of kids of the same socioeconomic class from the same neighborhood and same school and of the same age speaking the same language, but imagine playing it for forty or more years, in different countries, in different contexts, in different languages. What happens to the stories? They change.³⁴

Now let's pause and think about this. When Ehrman says "If it weren't a different story the game would be a bit pointless," can he really be missing the fact that the story changed because it was intentionally distorted by children trying to be clever along the way? At this point it might be helpful to try to remember the diverse assortment of kids that surrounded us during our own childhoods. There was always that kid who didn't seem to get it the way the other kids did. The other children's jokes went right over his head. It wasn't because he lacked intelligence, but perhaps he did not grasp the humor and imagination of the other children. Are we to imagine then such a kid, ten years old at a birthday party, sitting there in line playing telephone and having someone on the one side of him whisper some silly line into his ear, which he, in all seriousness, carefully repeats word for word into the ear of the child next to him on the other side of him, only to find out that it comes out totally different at the end, so that he cries in wide-eyed astonishment: "Wow, that's not what I heard! It came out totally different!" Was Ehrman that kind of kid? If so it certainly undercuts anyone's excuse for being angry with him for his appealing to the telephone game as a way of explaining

³⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 146-47.

the early transmission of the Jesus tradition. But that doesn't change the fact that it's a bad analogy.

III. REMEMBERING MEMORY

Let us start with basics. What Ehrman's analogy totally fails to do is to provide any sort of realistic account of how people through the ages have passed along cherished tradition via a disciplined process of oral transmission. It may come as a surprise to some that people have actually been known to memorize things from time to time, and in fact still do. For example, one of the professors at Midwestern, Radu Gheorghita, is an enthusiastic advocate of committing entire books of the Bible to memory. But what about long-term memory, say over 35 years, the length of time Ehrman gives as the time between the death of Jesus and the appearance of the earliest Gospel?

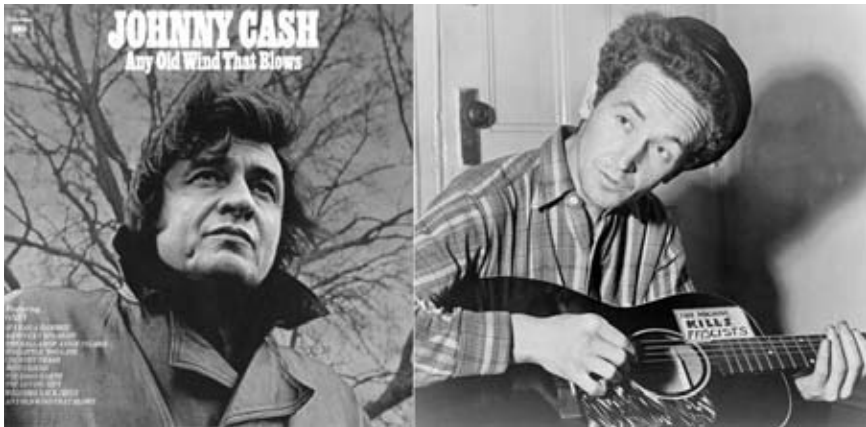


Fig. 2: Johnny Cash and Woody Guthrie

In preparation for answering this question I performed a simple experiment. I attempted to remember two songs I had not performed, nor to the best of my recollection heard, for at least 35 years. I did not insist on taking up the guitar and singing them right through all at once, rather I attempted to recall as much of them to the best of my recollection first. I then wrote them out and afterward checked what I had recovered from my memory against the originals. The songs I selected were Woody Guthrie's *Pastures of Plenty* and Johnny Cash's *Any Old Wind that Blows* (fig. 2). I did rather poorly with the first, recalling exactly one half of the song, two and a half verses, with all the words in the right order, and not able to recall the other two and a half verses at all. In contrast I got all of the Cash song right except for one line: Where I had "But when

it comes to leavin' she'll express the only reason, is she wants to," while Cash had, "Still I know the only reason that she ever has for leavin' is she wants to." Also I forgot that Johnny had repeated the last line of the chorus each time with a buffer of "Yes she will, Yes she will." Still I am convinced that with a little practice both songs could easily be brought back in their entirety.

I include this absurd little personal example to try and bring the whole question of oral transmission into an arena that most modern people will understand. One of the reasons songs are memorable is that their lines have a certain rhythm, which, when combined with the music, remind the singer not to forget something, words rhyme, verses have the same number of lines, most songs have more or less the same number of verse, etc. All of these features facilitate memory. And here the reader may pause to consider as well—provided they have logged in as many years as I have—what *they* can remember from 35 years ago. Let us suppose for example that we speak not of remembering entire songs, but one or more lines from songs, even songs we hated when we were young, but heard a lot on the radio. Or again, how about lines from television advertisements going back many years. The Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act passed in 1970 (i.e., 40 years ago) banning cigarette advertisements from American radio and television.³⁵ And yet I find I can easily finish out the lines "You can take Salem out of the country, but..." and "Winston tastes good, like a..." and "You've come a long way baby..." with 100 percent accuracy, which is most remarkable in connection with the last ad, since it did not target my gender and ran a full 26 words. There is a body of memorized information that simply comes with living in a given cultural context.

These examples are offered to show that despite the fact that we live in a literate culture that is much less dependent on memorization than cultures at other places and in other times where literacy was less prevalent we all have nevertheless memorized a great deal without even trying. Nor are most of us total strangers to the process of intentional memorization either. As a child I memorized the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and my children memorized Bible verses in AWANA. Still when confronted with the accomplishment of disciplined memorization in less literate or illiterate settings we are often astonished, as the following examples, I think, will show.

We are all familiar with actors memorizing their parts for a play, usually imagining them with script in hand, reading and rehearsing their

³⁵ William G. Rothstein, *Public Health and the Risk Factor: A History of an Uneven Medical Revolution* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 253.

lines. But what about situations where many if not most of the players are illiterate or at best only marginally literate. A good example to think of here is the Passion Play performed by the residence of the Bavarian village of Oberammergau. In 1633 during an outbreak of the plague the citizens of Oberammergau vowed that if their village was spared they would perform a Passion Play unto perpetuity. Since then they have performed it roughly once every ten years (with only a few exceptions). On the chosen year, they perform it many times over a period of months. As I write they are in the midst of their forty-first season. This year they are putting on more than 100 performances between May and October.³⁶ Today, no doubt, most if not all of the participants in the play are literate, and so will have had no problem practicing their lines from a script. But imagine the task of producing the play back in 1662,³⁷ the date of the earliest surviving manuscript of the play, when many of the citizens might not have been able to read and therefore had to be taught their share of the play's 5,402 lines some other way.³⁸ Despite such difficulties a new, much longer, version of the play was written in 1750 that ran 8,457 lines.³⁹ Seems like a daunting task, does it not, pulling together a village full of illiterate and/or semi-literate amateur citizen actors to perform a play as long as Hamlet done twice over.⁴⁰ No doubt the use of the music and the structuring of the play in "six sets of three tableaux in succession," helped, but still! Yet they did pull it off, and with something like 11,000 people seeing it that year.⁴¹ And yet if this sounds impressive consider the remarks of Montrose J. Moses on the relative brevity of the Oberammergau play:

Unlike the large medieval dramas in their prime, the Oberammergau production occupies only one day, during which time, between the hours of eight and five, but one intermission is allowed. The seventeen acts form a play about four times the length of an ordinary four-act modern drama. Formerly the

³⁶ See appropriate section at www.oberammergau-passion.com.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See Utz Maas, "Literacy in Germany" in *The Making of Literate Societies* (eds. David R. Olson & Nancy Torrance; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001), 82-100, esp. 85-86. In his section on Germany in entry "Medieval Drama in Europe," in *The Cambridge Guide to Theater* (rev. ed.; ed. Martin Banham; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Peter Meredith refers to Oberammergau in connection with "subliterary folk theater" (p. 706).

³⁹ See www.oberammergau-passion.com.

⁴⁰ James Shapiro, *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Passion Play* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000), 61.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

mysteries and passion plays stretched over a period of several days in performing. The *Actes des Apôtres* contained 61,908 lines, while a mystery of the *New Testament* exceeded 180,000 verses.⁴²

Only now are we beginning to approach the potential size of feats of disciplined memory that were not only possible, but frequently attested in illiterate and semi-literate oral cultures.

We should perhaps note before we proceed another assertion Ehrman made in print about oral transmission.

Until recently it has been commonly thought (again, even among scholars) that oral cultures could be counted on to preserve their traditions reliably, that people in such societies were diligent in remembering what they heard and could reproduce it accurately when asked about it. This, however, is another myth that has been exploded by recent studies of literacy. We have now come to see that people in oral cultures typically do not share the modern concern for preserving traditions intact, and do not repeat them exactly the same way every time.⁴³

I wonder who Ehrman is referring to when he prefaces his remarkable final statement in the above paragraph with “we have now come to see.” Scholars actually are not finding that oral cultures don’t care about preserving traditions intact. But to give him the benefit of the doubt perhaps Ehrman is only paraphrasing very clumsily what he says immediately after about how oral cultures “do not repeat them [i.e., their traditions] exactly the same way every time.” Whatever the case, what Ehrman says is not true. In the first place different kinds of transmission require different levels of precision in repetition. So let’s look at some of ways cultures have preserved cherished texts orally from this perspective. In order to challenge the basic accuracy of Ehrman’s statement head on, let us begin with cases (from both oral and literate cultures) where scholars believe the intention of memorization is to be able to repeat the material “exactly the same way every time.” An obvious place to start for the former is with Homer. Craig S. Keener notes:

⁴² *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (trans. & intro. Moses J. Montrose; New York: Duffield, 1910), xvii-xviii.

⁴³ Bart D. Ehrman, *A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (3rd ed.; New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54.

Centuries before the Gospels, the best professional reciters could recite all of Homer by heart; in the general era of the Gospels, Dio Chrysostom [d. after 110 AD] even claims a people who no longer were able to speak Greek well but most of whom knew “the *Illiad* by heart.” Many poems remained fluid, but the *Illiad* remained textually constant, because it became canonical for Greek culture.⁴⁴

Another example, more immediately accessible to modern scholars, is the sacred texts of India known as the Vedas. There are four of these: the *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. As for all of these, Brockington and Brockington tell us, “They were handed down verbatim over the centuries without variation, and the reciter’s or hearer’s understanding of them—or lack of it—was immaterial.”⁴⁵ In her magisterial work *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (2009), Wendy Doniger, Marcea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Chicago, sheds further light on this in her discussion of the *Rig Veda* (c.1500 BC), the earliest and most important of the four Vedas, which consists of 1,028 poems or mantras:

The *Rig Veda* was preserved orally even when the Indians had used writing for centuries, for everyday things like laundry lists and love letters and gambling IOUs. But they refused to preserve the *Rig Veda* in writing...The *Mahabharata* (13.24.70) groups people who read and recite the Veda from a written text (rather than memorize it and keep it only in their heads) with corrupters and sellers of the Veda as people heading for hell...The oral text of the *Rig Veda* was therefore memorized in such a way that no physical traces of it could be found...⁴⁶

Remarkably a bit later in her discussion Doniger makes reference in this connection to the telephone game:

Now, one might suppose that a text preserved orally in this way would be subject to steadily encroaching inaccuracy and

⁴⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: MI / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2006), 141. The passage from Dio Chrysostom is from *Orations* 36.9.

⁴⁵ Vālmīki, *Rāma the Steadfast: An Early Form of the Rāmāyaṇa* (trans. & intro. John Brockington and Mary Brockington; London: Penguin Classics, 2006), 23.

⁴⁶ Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 105.

unreliability. That the message would become increasingly garbled like the message in a game of telephone, but one would be wrong. For the very same sacredness that made it necessary to preserve the *Rig Veda* orally rather than in writing also demanded that it be preserved with meticulous accuracy.⁴⁷

It is good to keep in mind that Doniger is talking about the verbatim oral transmission of a very large text not merely over decades (cf., Ehrman's "between 40 and 60 or 70 years"), but over centuries.

What Doniger says also provides an interesting backdrop when considering the credibility of claims that "many rabbis had the entire Old Testament and much of the oral law committed to memory."⁴⁸ It should never be forgotten that Jesus and his first disciples lived and breathed in the same cultural air that gave birth to Rabbinic Judaism, where, as Berger Gerhardsson has pointed out, "The pupil ... is duty bound to maintain his teacher's exact words. But the Teacher is also responsible for seeing that the exact wording is preserved."⁴⁹

So now let us look at another example from India where we have a very disciplined practice of oral transmission, yet one which does not require verbatim repetition of words each time, but which is nevertheless in dead earnest in its "concern for preserving tradition intact."⁵⁰ We are talking about the great Indian epic tradition, most famously represented by the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Brockington and Brockington, in contrasting the transmission of the epics to the verbatim oral passing on of the Vedas write:

The case of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* has been completely the opposite. They were heroic tales, narratives conceived as entertainment ... Meaning, as opposed to sound, has been crucial, and additions and modifications have been freely made. All living languages evolve, and the important point here is that later material, naturally, was composed in the diction

⁴⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁸ Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 55.

⁴⁹ Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (ASNU 22; trans. Eric J. Sharpe; Uppsala: Gleerup/Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1961), 133. That Gerhardsson and his associates in the "Scandinavian school," have been criticized for too readily projecting a slightly later Rabbinic Judaism back onto the early Jesus movement, does not change the fact that both arose in a religious culture where memorization played a big part in the preservation and transmission of sacred teaching.

⁵⁰ Again, Ehrman, *Historical Introduction*, 54.

and style of the teller's own day, alongside the earlier material that they felt unable to omit.⁵¹

Such modifications over the centuries did not, however, result in anything like a wholesale departure from, or replacement of, the original. Instead numerous strategies were in place to aid in the effective memorization of the core epic. Robert Goldman has noted:

[I]n a social milieu where the vast majority of the audience of traditional literatures are not literate, traditional texts must make heavy use of devices that maximize memorability. Among these devices are iteration, formulaic composition, simple metrical forms preferably subject to musical or quasi-musical recitation, copiousness, heavy use of epigrams and sententia, hyperbole and tales of wonder.⁵²

Hence despite variations scholars have still been able to attempt, for example, to create an edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in its early form, without access to early manuscripts. It is thought that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was written between 750 and 500 BC. Yet the earliest *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript comes from the eleventh century AD.⁵³ Nevertheless reconstruction of an early version of the epic was what Brockington and Brockington were attempting in their popular *Rāma the Steadfast: An Early Form of the Rāmāyaṇa*, as they write in their introduction: "This volume is based on a rigorous linguistic analysis of [the] five core Books, which has identified the passages preserved in the earlier diction."⁵⁴

In India *bhopas*, or singers of epics, are often illiterate individuals belonging to families in which the career of memorizing, reciting, and performing particular epics is hereditary, passed down from father to son over many generations. What dumbfounds the literate westerner, shaped by his or her near complete dependence on written or printed text is the breathtaking size of some of these epics. The *Mahābhārata*, which runs five million words formed into seventy-five thousand verses, is said to be fifteen times the length of the Bible and seven times the length of *Illiad*

⁵¹ Vālmīki, *Rāma the Steadfast*, xxiv.

⁵² Robert Goldman in "Structure, Substance and Function in the Great Sanskrit Epics," (Paper delivered at the Festival of India Conference on Indian Literatures at the University of Chicago, April, 1986), 7-8, quoted in Vālmīki, *The Rāmāyaṇa* (abr. & trans., Arshia Sattar; New Dehli: Penguin Books, 1996), xlv-xlv.

⁵³ *Rāmāyaṇa* (ed. of Arshia Sattar), il-1.

⁵⁴ *Rāmāyaṇa* (ed. of John & Mary Brockington), xxiv.

and the *Odyessy* combined.⁵⁵ And yet Doniger insists that, “the bards really did memorize all of it. The literate too knew the texts by heart and wrote commentaries on written versions of them.”⁵⁶ Presently the era of the illiterate Indian bard with his or her vast feats of memorization is quickly passing away. Many reasons why this is the case can be imagined, including the rise of a global culture with its new range of opportunities. Yet many suspect the main culprit is the advance of literacy itself. “Just as the blind can develop a heightened sense of hearing, smell and touch to compensate for their loss of vision,” writes William Dalrymple in reference to the Indian context, “so it seems that the illiterate have a capacity to remember in a way that the literate simply do not. It was not lack of interest, but literacy itself, that was killing the oral epic.”⁵⁷

Nevertheless there *are* still some active *reciters* and *even* those who were able to recite the largest epics are still a part of a living memory. Dalrymple, for example, recalls an anthropologist friend telling him about an encounter he had with an itinerate storyteller he had met in South India in the late 1970s who could recite the entire *Mahābhārata*. When asked how he managed it, the bard replied that, “in his mind, each stanza was written on a pebble. The pile of pebbles lay before him always; all he had to do was remember the order in which they were arranged and to ‘read’ from one pebble after another.”⁵⁸



Fig. 3: Detail from a *Phad* illustrating the Rajisthani *Epic of Pabuji* (Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam)⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Doneger, *The Hindus*, 263. Sometimes the *Mahābhārata* is said to run 100,000 verses, e.g., William Dalrymple, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 88.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁵⁷ Dalrymple, *Nine Lives*, 92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵⁹ Photograph part of the “Wiki Loves Art Netherlands” project (photographer not identified).

This is not to say, however, that the illiterate story tellers necessarily avoided using memory aids. The traditional Rajsthani poem, *The Epic of Pabuji*, for example, was performed in front of a *phad*, a seventeen-foot cloth containing a narrative painting that “serves as both an illustration of the highlights of the story and a portable temple of Pabuji the god” (fig. 3).⁶⁰

This narrative painting is a grand-scale parallel of the “story stick,” referred to in connection with story tellers in Africa, where “carvings and symbols on the stick provide a rough outline, or sequence of episodes, which the tribal shaman or storyteller then retells orally using both the older versions and his own improvisations.”⁶¹

Such memory aids stand in fact on a trajectory that culminates in the creation of written language; and to the extent that they serve to relieve a person of the task of having to remember everything they actually weaken memory. Such a thought occurred to me very vividly as I reflected on the two Potawatomi Prescription Sticks now housed in Kansas City’s American Indian Collection (fig. 4), accompanied by the following description:

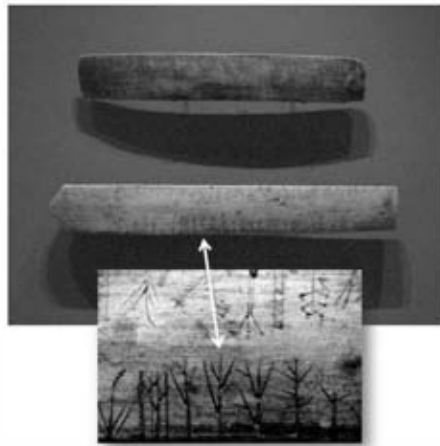


Fig. 4: Potawatomi Prescription Sticks, Wisconsin or Kansas (c. 1850), Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, MO (Photo: R. Huggins)

⁶⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁶¹ L. Michael White, *Scripting Jesus: The Gospels in Rewrite* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 98. In the context where he describes this memory aid and its use, White misstates the situation with oral storytellers by asserting that “The bard did not memorize the whole poem.”

A healer...consulted these prescriptions sticks as memory aids in preparing herbal medicines. The edges of both sides of each flat panel are delicately incised with linear pictographs that represent distinct plant species. While not a formal written language, the images were clearly understood by the maker or others taught to interpret them. Groups of plants that would have been combined in complex formulas are separated by either incised dots or rectangular, X-filled bars.

Once the recipe is on the stick, there is a danger that you will let off keeping it in your head. But then what happens when you lose the stick? That literacy can represent a crutch that weakens the memory is something understood even in ancient times. Plato's *Phaedrus*, for example, relates a conversation between the Egyptian god Thamus (or Ammon), who was said to rule Egypt at the time from Thebes, and Theuth, the inventor of arithmetic, calculation, geometry, astronomy, and especially, letters or writing. Theuth came to Thamus one day to display his inventions in hopes of getting permission for them to be used by the Egyptians. Thamus liked some of them and disliked others, but when they came to writing Thamus said to Theuth: "this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves."⁶²

Similarly, Julius Caesar, commenting on the Druids' practice of memorizing rather than writing down their lore, wrote:

[I]n the schools of the Druids they learn by heart a great number of verses, and therefore some persons remain twenty years under training. And they do not think it proper to commit these utterances to writing, although in almost all other matters, and in their public and private accounts, they make use of Greek letters. I believe that they have adopted the practice for two reasons—that they do not wish the rule to become common property, nor those who learn the rule to rely on writing and so neglect the cultivation of the memory; and, in fact, it does usually happen that the assistance of writing tends to relax the diligence of the student and the action of the memory.⁶³

Windy Doniger relates this confirmatory story from India:

⁶² Plato, *Phaedrus* 274c-275a (ET: Benjamin Jowett).

⁶³ Julius Caesar, *Gallic War* 6.14 (ET: H. J. Edwards).

In the 1950s, Kamal Kothari sent one of his best singers, from the Langa caste, to adult education classes. He learned to read, but from then on he needed to consult his notes before he sang. As Kothari remarked, "It seems that the illiterate have a capacity to remember in a way that the literate simply do not."⁶⁴

Ehrman's appeal to the telephone game reveals two anachronistic features relating to his way of conceptualizing the situation in the early Christian world. First he wants, on the one hand, to say that most of Jesus' early followers across the Roman Empire were illiterate,⁶⁵ but on the other that they were all endowed with the weak memories characteristic of highly literate societies.

Secondly, he wants to assume that the more a particular teaching is held to be sacred, the more quickly those who regard it as such will rush to distort it, so much so in fact, in the case of Christianity, that within a mere 35 to 40 years, we are to believe that the original sense of its teaching, and the correct recollection of the central events relating to its founding had already been substantially forgotten. What I have been trying to show here is that just the opposite is the case, (1) that a mere 35 to 40 years is too short a time to entirely lose connection with the memory of even unremarkable things, never mind something as drop-dead, earthquake, world-view-changing as the life, teaching, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and (2) that when humans want to orally preserve something sacred to them, they can do it with great efficiency and over a very long period of time.

IV. INTO THE TEETH OF THE EVIDENCE

Having addressed, then, the issue of the distance in time between the death of Jesus and the composition of the Gospels, and the supposed parallel to the manner of transmission in the telephone game, we may now turn our attention directly to the more central question of eyewitness testimony in the New Testament. Ehrman talked as if all of the testimony about Jesus' resurrection found in the New Testament stands at several steps removed from anyone who actually remembered it. Is it? Let us begin by recalling first of all that during the debate Ehrman introduced the analogy of the telephone game immediately after making this comment about how the Apostle Paul was supposed to have first heard stories about the resurrection:

⁶⁴ Doniger, *The Hindus*, 220, nt.

⁶⁵ Although he does grant that Jesus himself could read (Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 105).

He had heard stories, and who was telling the stories? He didn't hear these stories from eyewitnesses. He was living in a different country from the eyewitnesses, speaking a different language from the eyewitnesses. Jesus' followers spoke Aramaic and lived in Palestine. Paul spoke Greek and lived outside of Palestine. People started telling stories about Jesus that were in circulation year after year after year. And they converted other people who told the stories, who told the stories to their neighbors, to their spouses, to their business associates. People are telling the stories about Jesus' death and resurrection, and later people like Paul hear those stories. What happens when stories circulate by word of mouth? Not for just a day or two, but for years?

When he says "year after year after year," he simply contradicts what he had said earlier about Paul's being converted "maybe a couple of years after the death of Jesus" (which, if true, would undermine his entire claim about the story of the resurrection being something we have evidence for only many decades after the fact), while in the above paragraph he seems to imply instead that Paul only heard the message at a remote location, in another language, years after the event. Given the setting in which statements like this occurred, *viz.*, in the heat of debate, such mistakes are probably inevitable, and as such needn't really be regarded as blameworthy. This does not mean that such lapses do not adversely affect the credibility of the arguments of debaters who makes them. However, a more serious problem is found in the methodology underpinning Ehrman's entire approach during the debate. Let me sum it up as it appears to me. I understand that Ehrman would not appreciate this portrayal of his approach, but as an observer of the debate with some knowledge of the subject under discussion, it seems to me that this is exactly what he was doing. Anyway, here is a summary of his methodology as I see it:

1. I will treat primary sources (e.g., Paul's own words about Paul's own experience) as valid, except where they don't agree with me or serve my argument, in which case I will find some pretext to dismiss them.
2. I will treat secondary sources (e.g., the Book of Acts talking about Paul and the other disciples of Jesus) as invalid, except where they agree with me or serve my argument, in which case I shall find some pretext to accept them.

3. In cases where I have simply dismissed the evidence that *is* there, I will feel free to assert its exact opposite without owning any obligation to support myself with evidence.

Let me illustrate how Ehrman actually exploited this methodology in framing his statements during the debate. Our first example is found in the preceding comment that Ehrman made about Paul. His argument there hinges on the claim that Paul spoke a different language than Jesus and his followers and that he lived in a different country from them.

However, Acts 22 contradicts this. There Paul describes himself (speaking in Aramaic) as “a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city [i.e., Jerusalem],” and he says that, “Under Gamaliel [a famous Jewish teacher in Jerusalem] I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God” (Acts 22:1-2, cf. 21:40, 22:2, 26:14). Indeed Paul is first introduced in Acts as a Jew in Jerusalem who goes by the name Saul (Acts 7:58). It is only later on that we discover he is from Tarsus (Acts 9:1, 21:39, 22:3). In addition there is an incidental reference as well to Paul having a nephew living in Jerusalem at the time of his arrest there (Acts 23:16).

“Ah yes,” says Ehrman, “but that is a secondary source. Therefore, according to the principle 2, I can ignore it entirely if it suits my purposes, and according to principle 3, assert my own alternative scenario without evidence. Since a secondary source affirms that Paul spoke Aramaic and lived in Jerusalem, that gives me a free hand to assert the exact opposite, namely that Paul did not live and study in Jerusalem, that he did not have family there, and that he did not speak Aramaic.”

In response we need only say, “Yes Professor Ehrman, you are free to say anything you like—’tis a free country—but as you say it without evidence, we are equally free to ignore you.” In point of fact, Ehrman does not know where Paul lived during the time in which the crucial events relating to Jesus’ death and resurrection occurred, nor does he know from whom Paul first heard at least a basic outline of the Gospel, nor whether or not he spoke Aramaic. The book of Acts tells us that as an unbeliever he heard the Christian preaching at the very farthest remove only one step away from the eyewitnesses, namely from Stephen (7:58 and 8:1).⁶⁶ Acts does not claim however that that was the first time Paul heard the Christian preaching. If Ehrman chooses to reject the

⁶⁶ Although one could try to make the case that Paul was only present at the site of Stephen’s stoning, after they had dragged Stephen out of the city (Acts 7:58) but had not been present at the place where his speech was given (7:58 and 8:1). But if that were the case, on what basis was Paul “giving approval of his death?”

evidence of Acts, that only means he has less evidence to work with than the rest of us, not more.

Ehrman is sure that Paul did not hear the gospel from an eyewitness prior to conversion. Such an idea might be derived from Paul's claim in Galatians 1:12 that he "did not receive it from any man. Nor was I taught it, rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." However, the fact, attested in his letters (Gal 1:13, 23, 1 Cor 15:9), that prior to his conversion Paul had persecuted the Church, implies that he must have known something of the content of the Church's preaching. Prior to his conversion he was not formally acquainted with the members of Jesus' inner circle (Gal 1:18), although it may be, we have no way of knowing for sure, that he had encountered previously one or more of them in some sort of personal yet hostile way. Still we do know that according to Paul's own testimony he did eventually come to know at least some of the key eyewitnesses, e.g., Peter (Gal. 1:18, 2:11), and John (probably Zebedee), and even more remarkably, Jesus' own brother in the flesh, James (Gal 1:19). These three intimates of Jesus extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul (Gal 2:9), in effect placing their seal of approval on both his own account of his apostolic ministry and message. Clearly this fact must have some bearing on our understanding of their acceptance as well as of Paul's claim to have seen the Lord (1 Cor 9:1) and gotten his gospel from him (Gal 1:1). So in the end the question whether Paul knew the eyewitnesses before he was converted becomes moot in light of the fact that by the time he wrote his earliest epistle (which is, in my view, Galatians) he already knew the eyewitnesses Peter, James, and John.

Can Ehrman without the witness of Acts firmly assert that Paul only saw Jesus in a vision, as he asserted in the debate? Can he really be sure that Paul didn't see the Lord tangibly before him, as it was in the case of doubting Thomas and the other disciples (John 20:26-28, Luke 24:39)?

Ehrman's assertion also does not represent the evidence of Acts adequately, since in the accounts given there of Paul's conversion it was not merely a vision, namely not something experienced only by Paul say in the privacy of his prayer closet. It was an event which left him blind, and which those with him experienced as well at different levels (Acts 9:3-8, 22:6-9, 26:12-14). And so once again we seem to detect principles 2 and 3 at work once again.

Our second example of Ehrman's dubious methodology is his treatment of Mark, as the author of the first Gospel, which parallels closely the way he treated Paul. Here is what Ehrman said:

Our first account of Jesus' death and resurrection is the Gospel of Mark written around the year 65 or 70 AD, thirty-five to forty

years later by somebody who was not from Israel the way Jesus was, who spoke a different language from Jesus (he spoke Greek rather than Aramaic), who does not claim to be an eyewitness and in fact was not an eyewitness.

Again we have Ehrman flatly asserting the opposite of the testimony of Acts, which connects Mark with the eyewitnesses and with Jerusalem at several different points. In Acts 12:12, after Peter escapes from prison, he goes directly to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. It appears to have been a considerable household, insofar as it retained servants and was chosen as a place of corporate prayer. Mark also went along with Paul on his first missionary journey (12:25), accompanied by Barnabas, a Jew from Cyprus and another intimate of the apostolic circle at Jerusalem (Acts 4:36, 11:22). Then he accompanied Barnabas on a second missionary journey (15:39). In this case, however, several of the links are also attested in Paul, where we read that Mark is the cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10). We also find him mentioned in Philemon 1:24, and 2 Timothy 4:11. Next, although its meaning is not entirely clear, there is 1 Peter 1:3, which states “She who is in Babylon [Rome? Jerusalem?], chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.” The dominant view in the early Church was that Mark was a disciple of Peter and derived his Gospel from him. The earliest statement to this effect comes from a work composed in the opening decades of the second century by Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis. Papias writes:

And the elder used to say this: ‘Mark having become Peter’s interpreter, wrote down accurately everything he remembered, though not in order of the things either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterwards, as I said, followed Peter, who adapted his teachings as needed but had no intention of giving an ordered account of the Lord’s sayings.’⁶⁷

When Ehrman asserts that Mark “in fact was not an eyewitness” we are left to wonder if he does so in reliance on Papias, a rather remote witness whose historical value Ehrman himself dismisses in his most recent popular book.⁶⁸

As to the language of Mark, it is true that he wrote in Greek, but it isn’t very polished Greek. He also pauses occasionally to use and define Aramaic words (Mark 3:17, 5:41, 7:11, 7:34, 10:46, 14:36, 15:22, 15:34). The simple fact is, again, Ehrman does not know whether Mark could

⁶⁷ Frag. 3, from Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.15 (ET: Michael Holmes).

⁶⁸ Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 108.

speaking Aramaic or not. The fact that I write this in English does not reveal with certainty what my competency level is in other languages. In any case the whole point of who knew which language as a criterion for separating people from the possibility of having had contact with Jesus and his disciples, might well be moot, because, while it is probable that Jesus and his disciples spoke mainly Aramaic, they may have known some Greek as well. Ehrman does not know, he cannot know, one way or the other.

So then, as the evidence stands, Mark is from Jerusalem and very possibly an intimate of the apostles. And yet we can easily imagine Ehrman dismissively ticking away each piece of evidence: 1 Peter isn't authentic, Paul doesn't connect Mark with Jerusalem, how do we know whether *that* Mark was *the* Mark that wrote Mark, and so on. Ehrman can doubt whatever evidence he likes, but historians usually weigh evidence. Evidence is the *given*. You can't simply adopt a posture of unpersuadability in relation to whichever bits of it you don't happen to like, and still expect to be regarded as a dispassionate, credible historian. But here again the point is that in the case of Mark as with Paul, Ehrman dismisses the evidence that is there and asserts its exact opposite.

But let us take a more positive approach to the whole question of indications of eyewitness testimony, or at least only-one-step-removed testimony in the New Testament. Is the situation really as bleak as Ehrman paints it? Yet again the answer is no. From the evidence already presented it is also clear, for example, that everyone who heard the gospel from Barnabas heard it from an only-one-step-removed witness. If Mark, whose connections have already been described, is the author of the gospel of Mark then we have the testimony of an early associate of the apostles and especially Peter, whose interpreter the early church pretty much uniformly believed him to be.

As for Paul, we have already shown that he personally knew some of the key associates of Jesus. Further, Paul's incidental statements in his letters also imply that the churches he was connected with had knowledge and contact with eyewitnesses as well. We may think for example of the Church of Antioch, who had direct contact with Peter (Gal 2:11), and at least once-removed contact with James (Gal 2:12). At Corinth there was a group who held out that they were especially devoted to Peter (1 Cor. 1:12). Later in the same epistle, Paul remarks, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas" (1 Cor 9:4). Such a comment reflects not only Paul's personal knowledge of the marital status and travel habits of Peter and the other Apostles, of James the brother of the Lord, and of some of the other brothers of the Lord. The

fact that he makes this unelaborated reference may imply that the Corinthians had received visits from these individuals.

The author of the book of Hebrews does not claim to be an eyewitness but represents himself and his readers as standing *only one step* away from them, this when he speaks of “salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him” (Heb 2:3). He and his audience also had a connection with Timothy (13:23).

The author of the Gospel of Luke is another interesting case in point at a number of levels. A man named Luke shows up in Paul’s letters (Col 4:14, 2 Tim 4:14, Phlm 1:24). Then in the book of Acts, traditionally understood as having been written by Luke, we encounter what are called the “we-sections,” i.e., places in which the description of the movements of Paul and his traveling companions are framed in the first person plural (Acts 16:10-17, 20:3-21:18, and 27:1-28:16). One very obvious way of explaining this, is to say that the author of the book of Acts accompanied Paul at those times. Another explanation is that the author of Acts has incorporated a travel account by an associate of Paul’s in those places. In either case it amounts to contact with eyewitnesses, since in that stretch of Acts, where Paul goes up to Jerusalem, it is a “we” section. Especially significant in this regard is Acts 21:17-18: “When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.” In other words, whoever “we” was, whoever wrote that part of the narrative, met James and the other elders in Jerusalem. This dove-tails as well with what Paul was planning in relation to the delivery of the collection in 1 Corinthians 16:3-4: “when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.” As to the author of the Gospel of Luke, he claims to rely on materials handed down from eyewitnesses (1:2). Twice in connection with the story of Jesus’ birth and childhood Luke refers to Mary in a way that sounds very much like he is attributing her as the source: “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19) and “Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). Finally there is the author of the Gospel of John, who also wrote 1 John, where he represents himself not only as an eyewitness, but as an ear and hand witness as well:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of

life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us (1 Jn 1:1-3).

It has been for a long time standard procedure among liberal biblical scholars to rule out the value of the Gospel of John as having any credible contribution to our understanding of the historical Jesus. Hence Schweitzer, “[t]hat even to the present day there are to be found defenders of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel proves nothing against the facts that are clearly evident to every critical investigator,”⁶⁹ and Bultmann, “[t]he Gospel of John cannot be taken into account at all as a source for the teaching of Jesus,”⁷⁰ and James M. Robinson, “the Gospel of John is the latest of the four, from the last decade of the first century, and reflects more of the church’s gospel about Jesus than it does the gospel of Jesus himself. It is the most important Gospel for the history of theology, but the least important for the quest of the historical Jesus.”⁷¹ The reason no doubt is the high theology expressed by John, the portrayal of Jesus as the cosmic Word, who was with God and who was God (John 1:1). Those who think this however seem to have forgotten other fairly early expressions of high Christology, such as the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11.

As for myself, I have no particular stake in insisting that the Gospel of John is by an eyewitness, but I have never been able to persuade myself that, apart primarily from the epilogue (John 21:24-25) the entire work is the product of a single mind, that of a person who takes various evasive steps throughout his work to avoid naming himself directly. His favorite name for himself is “the disciple Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). He represents himself as being present at the end of the story, after the resurrection when Peter is reinstated (John 21:7). He heard Mary Magdalene’s testimony and went to the empty tomb (20:2-3), he stood at the foot of the cross as Jesus was dying, and was entrusted by Jesus to take Jesus’ mother into his home (19:25-27). It was probably he as well who accompanied Jesus to his trial on the night he was betrayed, this because he was “known to the high priest” (18:15). He was reclining next to Jesus on the night he was betrayed (13:23), which also places him within Jesus’ most intimate circle. He may also have been the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist, who, along with Peter’s brother Andrew, had followed Jesus when they both heard John

⁶⁹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus* (trans. Charles R. Joy; Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 45.

⁷⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (trans. by Louise Pettibone Smith & Erminie Huntress Lantero; New York: Charles Scribner’s 1958), 12.

⁷¹ Robinson, *Gospel of Jesus*, 4.

the Baptist say, “look the lamb of God.”(John 1:35-40). For all those who more recently got it wrong, I still think Schleiermacher got it right when he said that the Gospel of John “is an account by an eyewitness, and the whole Gospel is written by one man.”⁷²

Ehrman takes another view. Taking his cue from the use of “we” in John 21:24, he says that the book “doesn’t claim that the author of the Fourth Gospel *himself* was an eyewitness; it claims that the book was based on the report of a different person.”⁷³ That’s as may be. But if Ehrman is correct, the worst case scenario in that case is that the Fourth Gospel was written by someone in intimate collaboration with a person who had been a member of Jesus’ most intimate circle, and that from the beginning.

Now how about that elusive source that is generally believed to have been used as a source (along with Mark) by the gospels of Matthew and Luke? The so-called Q document. It is often argued (I’m not sure persuasively) that Q had no account of the death and resurrection of Jesus. I am gratified to read James D. G. Dunn affirm something that has seemed obvious to me for a long time, namely that “[t]he most obvious explanation...is that the Q material was given its lasting shape...*prior to Jesus’s death* in Jerusalem.”⁷⁴ This does not help us directly with the question of the historicity of the resurrection, but it does speak to the inclusion of eyewitness testimony in the Gospels.

V. WOULD EHRMAN’S CASE PERSUADE EHRMAN?

At the beginning of the present article we pointed out that during the debate Ehrman wrested the discussion off course twice. The first time he abandoned the question of the historicity of the resurrection to attack the Bible’s inerrancy, the second time he shifted his ground from inerrancy to the problem of suffering in the world. He said basically that he did not lose his faith in Christianity because of the variants he had discovered in the Bible but because of the problem of suffering, again this may be a fine subject for a debate but it was not the one slated for that evening.

But as he was making this second shift I was arrested in my thinking: “Now hold on a minute! Did Ehrman just say what I thought he said? Did he just admit that all the discrepancies he had been listing all

⁷² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus* (ed. and intro. By Jack C. Verheyden; trans. by S. MacLean Gilmore; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975 [1832]), 433.

⁷³ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 42.

⁷⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2005), 40-41. Dunn’s italics.

evening didn't even persuade *him* that the resurrection wasn't historical? I don't know what Ehrman might say to this question if it were to put it to him now, but let us examine carefully what he actually said at the debate:

It is frequently misstated (including in one of Craig's books—we had a little back and forth over the phone one time about this) that I became an unbeliever because I realized that there were variations in the manuscripts of the New Testament. That is absolutely false. I knew there were variations in the manuscripts of the New Testament when I was a hardcore fundamentalist. That did not shake me at all. I remained a believer for many years. For a while I held Craig's position—that there are discrepancies but we cannot understand really why. But then I started seeing that in fact there are lots of discrepancies and not just in the minor details, in major things, that in fact, John's view of Jesus is really different from Matthew's view of Jesus. And Paul's understanding of Christ is very different from Luke's understanding of Christ, and so forth and so on. I ended up becoming a Liberal Christian and I was a Liberal Christian for many years. What ended up making me a non-believer is unrelated to my biblical Scholarship. My understanding of the Bible is not what led me to become a non-Christian. What led me to become an agnostic was in fact the problem with suffering in the world.

Here Ehrman describes his journey away from faith in four steps: (1) "hardcore Fundamentalist," (2) holder of Craig Evan's current position, (3) liberal Christian who recognized that the various New Testament writers had really different views of Jesus" and (4) Agnostic due to the problem of evil expressed in human suffering. If Ehrman had said (which might be his actual view) that he had become a liberal when he came to believe that the resurrection wasn't real, that it was merely something symbolic, something peripheral to the Christian faith, nothing like someone actually vacating a tomb, that would have been one thing. But that is not what he said. Rather, he said that he became a liberal because he came to understand that the different New Testament writers saw Jesus in very different ways. O.K.? Fair enough. So, then, did the New Testament writers view the resurrection in very different ways? Did some believe in it while others did not? Did some view it in a way that was radically different from the way other New Testament authors understood it? As we seek to answer that question let us deal with it expansively by granting (for the sake of argument) the liberal position

that there were more authors in the New Testament than the traditional titles suggest, since Ehrman, as a liberal Christian and even now, assumes that. Let us also consider that the New Testament authors used sources. What then did the New Testament writers think about the resurrection? Let's begin with the Gospels: Mark, Luke, Matthew, John. Did these authors believe in the resurrection?

It is often noted that Mark ends without anyone actually encountering the resurrected Jesus. The likely cause of this is that the original ending was lost, being replaced by another ending that now appears in most Bibles as Mark 16:9-20. Some however argue to the contrary that Mark intentionally ended his Gospel at 16:8.

In either case it is clear that Mark believed in the resurrection since the "young man" who meets the women at the tomb, declares in Mark 16:6: "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here." So there it is, empty tomb, risen Jesus. Then there are also the three passion predictions at Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33, all of which say basically the same thing as the first, which predicts that "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." Luke (9:22, 9:44, 18:31) and Matthew (16:21, 17:22, 20:18-19) both take these three passion predictions over into their Gospels.

If we suppose that the end of Mark (i.e., 16:9-20) was written by someone else, then he (or she) too was a believer in the resurrection, since they begin their added section with the words "When Jesus rose...."

Both Luke and Matthew also have well known accounts of the resurrection; each with their own unique presentation and material. At the debate Ehrman asserted that there was a discrepancy about whether the resurrected Jesus met the disciples in Galilee or Jerusalem. We discussed that at the beginning of this essay. In either case it was the *resurrected* Jesus meeting them. Luke's account includes several interesting features of the resurrected body of the Lord, some of which are attested elsewhere in the New Testament as well, especially in John. Jesus appears without being immediately recognized (Luke 24:16, cf. John 20:15-17, 21:12), he could even disappear (Luke 24:31) or appear (Luke 26:36), even when the doors were locked (see John 20:19, 26). Yet he was tangible. He could be touched (John 20:19-20, 26-7) and seen by groups of people (Luke 26:39, John 21:19-20, Matt 28:18, 1 Cor 15:6), and he could eat (Luke 26:43, John 21:15 [?], Acts 1:4)

In addition to the places where Matthew has parallel material to Mark, Luke, and John, he also includes a few details relating to the resurrection not in their Gospels. All four Gospels make reference to the

fact that the tomb was empty (Mark 16:5-6, Luke 24:3, John 20:6). But Matthew alone reports the circulation of the story about the disciples stealing the body (Matt 28:11-15). John alone reports how Jesus said, when he was cleansing the temple, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (2:19), and explains it by saying that “the temple he had spoken of was his body” (2:20).

In the book of Acts, attributed to Luke, the resurrection is repeatedly affirmed, as in Peter’s Pentecost sermon: “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact” (Acts 2:32).

As for Paul, we needn’t discuss all his letters since he makes himself clear enough in 1 Corinthians 15:17-19: “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” However there are certain passages that scholars from time to time point to as possibly representing pre-Pauline hymns and creed fragments quoted by Paul, as for example the statement in one of his earliest letters, 1 Thessalonians 4:14: “We believe that Jesus died and rose.”⁷⁵ Then again there is the famous Christological hymn at Philippians 2:8-9 “He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place.” Although this latter passage does not speak explicitly of resurrection, but rather of exaltation, the two ideas are compatible, and appear together, as for example in the book of Hebrews (10:12, 12:2 with 13:20). Various scholars, including Ehrman, have from time to time doubted the authenticity of some of the epistles of Paul. Ehrman offers the following list of disputed epistles in one of his books: 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus.”⁷⁶

Very well, then, do these alleged first-century Christian pseudepigraphists affirm the resurrection or not? Some do, some don’t. Second Thessalonians speaks of Christ’s future coming (2:1), but it does not explicitly mention the resurrection. Ephesians (1:20, 2:6) and Colossians (2:12, 3:1) clearly affirm the resurrection. Of the pastoral epistles (the two Timothies and Titus) only 2 Timothy clearly affirms the resurrection (2:8,11,18). 1 Timothy mentions Jesus (1) giving himself as a ransom (2:5, cf. Tit 2:14), (2) being exalted (3:16), and appearing when he returns (6:14, cf. 2 Tim 4:7, Tit 2:13). Some scholars treat the three pastoral epistles as coming from a single author, in which case the

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, “The Nature of Paul’s Earliest Eschatology,” *NTS* 31 (1985), 90, F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (WBC 45; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 97.

⁷⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 155-56.

explicit affirmation of the resurrection in 2 Timothy would, as it were, count for all three.

Hebrews 13:20 affirms that author's belief in the resurrection, as does 1 Peter at 1:3, 21 and 3:18, 21. The three Johannine epistles do not mention the resurrection, but we know what the view of that author is from the Gospel he left. Second Peter, James, and Jude make no reference to the resurrection. *None of the books* that fail to mention the resurrection explicitly repudiate it, nor do they provide alternative accounts of how Jesus' story ended.

Finally, Revelation provides a somewhat difficult case because of its symbolic presentation. Nevertheless, we do have Jesus being referred to as "the firstborn from the dead" (1:5), and the one who was "slain" and yet lives (5:6, 9, 12, 6:9, 13:18), who says "I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever" (1:18).

So where does this leave us? In his 1999 book, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, Ehrman spoke of the importance of multiple, or independent, attestation as an important criterion for determining the historicity of an event. "A strong case," Ehrman wrote, "will be supported by several witnesses who independently agree on a point at issue."⁷⁷ What our survey has revealed is that there is perhaps no event as widely and as independently attested by evidence distributed throughout the New Testament as the resurrection of Jesus. You want independent attestation? You got it! Is Ehrman really willing to operate according to his own stated principles in relation to the criterion of multiple attestation? His appeal to the great perspectival differences between the various New Testament authors' view of Jesus, as well as his multiplication of alleged pseudepigraphical authors (people writing in other people names), only results in a greater range of diversity and independence among them. By pushing these writers apart and multiplying their testimonies Ehrman merely increases their value as witnesses to the historicity of the resurrection. Given this line of historical reasoning Ehrman should by now have more real confidence in the historicity of the resurrection than he ever did in the old days, when as a "hardcore fundamentalist," he would have assumed a greater unity of perspective and paradigm on the part of the New Testament witnesses. If that isn't the case, we can only pause, scratch our heads, and wonder why.

⁷⁷ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 90.

Theme Classic: The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Fact (1884)¹



BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD
Old Princeton Theologian
(1851-1951)

It is a somewhat difficult matter to distinguish between Christian doctrines and facts. The doctrines of Christianity are doctrines only because they are facts; and the facts of Christianity become its most indispensable doctrines. The Incarnation of the eternal God is necessarily a dogma: no human eye could witness his stooping to man's estate, no human tongue could bear witness to it as a fact. And yet, if it be not a fact, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins. On the other hand, the Resurrection of Christ is a fact, an external occurrence within the cognizance of men to be established by their testimony. And yet, it is the cardinal doctrine of our system: on it all other doctrines hang.

There have been some, indeed, who have refused to admit the essential importance of this fact to our system; and even so considerable a critic as Keim has announced himself as occupying this standpoint. Strauss saw, however, with more unclouded eye, truly declaring the fact of Christ's resurrection to be "the center of the center, the real heart of Christianity," on which its truth stands or falls. To this, indeed, an older and deeper thinker than Strauss had long ago abundantly witnessed. The modern sceptic does but echo the words of the apostle Paul. Come what may, therefore, modern scepticism must be rid of the resurrection of Christ. It has recognized the necessity and has bent all its energies to the endeavor.

But the early followers of the Savior also themselves recognized the paramount importance of this fact; and the records of Christianity contain a mass of proof for it, of such cogent variety and convincing power, that

¹ This article originally appeared in *The Journal of Christian Philosophy* 3 (1884): 305-318.

Hume's famous dilemma² recoils on his own head. It is more impossible that the laws of testimony should be so far set aside, that such witness should be mistaken, than that the laws of nature should be so far set aside that a man should rise from the dead. The opponents of revelation themselves being witnesses, the testimony of the historical books of the New Testament if the testimony of eyewitnesses is amply sufficient to establish this, to them, absolutely crushing fact. It is admitted well-nigh universally that the Gospels contain testimony for the resurrection of Christ, which, if it stand, proves that fact; and that if Christ rose from the dead all motive for, and all possibility of, denial of any supernatural fact of Christianity is forever removed.

Of course, it has become necessary, then, for the deniers of a supernatural origin to Christianity to impeach the credibility of these witnesses. It is admitted that if the Gospel account be truly the testimony of eye-witnesses, then Christ did rise from the dead; but it is immediately added that the Gospels are late compositions which first saw the light in the second century—that they represent, not the testimony of eye-witnesses, but the wild dreams of a mythological fancy or the wilder inventions of unscrupulous forgery; and that, therefore, they are unworthy of credit and valueless as witnesses to fact. Thus, it is proclaimed, this alleged occurrence of the rising of Jesus from the dead, is stripped of all the pretended testimony of eye-witnesses; and all discussion of the question whether it be fact or not is forever set aside—the only question remaining being that which concerns itself with the origin and propagation of this fanatical belief.

It is in this position that we find scepticism entrenched—a strong position assuredly and chosen with consummate skill. It is not, however, impregnable. There are at least two courses open to us in attacking it. We may either directly storm the works, or, turning their flank, bring our weapons to bear on them from the rear. The authenticity of our Gospels is denied. We may either prove their authenticity and hence the autoptic character of the testimony they contain; or, we may waive all question of the books attacked, and, using only those which are by the sceptics themselves acknowledged to be genuine, prove from them that the resurrection of Christ actually occurred.³

² *Enquiry Concerning Human Understandings*, sec. 10 (1894, p. 115f.). "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish."

³ Still a third method of procedure would be to waive all questions of the authenticity of the Gospels, and examine into the origin and trustworthiness of the triple or double *tradition* embodied in the three Synoptists or any two of them. Satisfactory results may be reached thus.

The first course, as being the most direct, is the one usually adopted. Here the battle is intense; but the issue is not doubtful. Internally, those books evince themselves as genuine. Not only do they proclaim a teaching absolutely original and patently divine, but they have presented a biography to the world such as no man or body of men could have concocted. No mythologists could have invented a divine-human Personality—assigned the exact proportions in which his divinity and humanity should be exhibited in his life, and then dramatized this character through so long a course of teaching and action without a single contradiction or inconsistency. That simple peasants have succeeded in a task wherein a body of philosophers would have assuredly hopelessly failed, can be accounted for only on the hypothesis that they were simply detailing actual facts.

Again, there are numerous evidently undesigned coincidences in minute points to be observed between the book of Acts and those Epistles of Paul acknowledged to be genuine, which prove beyond a peradventure that book to be authentic history. The authenticity of Acts carries that of the Gospel of Luke with it; and the witness of these two establishes the Resurrection.

But, aside from all internal evidence, the external evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament historical books is irrefragable. The immediate successors of the apostles possessed them all and esteemed them as the authoritative documents of their religion. One of the writers of this age (placed by Hilgenfeld in the first century) quotes Matthew as Scripture: another explicitly places Acts among the “Holy Books,” a collection containing on common terms the Old Testament and at least a large part of the New: all quote these historical books with respect and reverence. There is on external, historical grounds no room left for denying the genuineness of the Gospels and Acts; and hence, no room left for denying the fact of the Resurrection. The result of a half-century’s conflict on this line of attack has resulted in the triumphant vindication of the credibility of the Christian records.

We do not propose, however, to fight this battle over again at this time. The second of the courses above pointed out has been less commonly adopted, but leads to equally satisfactory results. To exhibit this is our present object. The most extreme schools of scepticism admit that the book of Revelation is by St. John; and that Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians are genuine letters of St. Paul.⁴ Most leaders

⁴ Such individual extremists as Bruno Bauer, Pierson, and Loman need not be here taken into account.

of anti-Christian thought admit other epistles also; but we wish to confine ourselves to the narrowest ground. Our present task, then, is, waiving all reference to disputed books, to show that the testimony of these confessedly genuine writings of the apostles is enough to establish the fact of the Resurrection. We are even willing to assume narrower ground. The Revelation is admitted to be written by an eye-witness of the death of Christ and the subsequent transactions; and the Book of Revelation testifies to Christ's resurrection. In it he is described as One who was dead and yet came to life (2:8), and as the first-begotten of the dead (1:5). Here, then, is one admitted to have been an eye-witness testifying of the Resurrection. For the sake of simplifying our argument, however, we will omit the testimony of Revelation and ask only what witness the four acknowledged Epistles of Paul—Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians bear to the fact that Christ rose from the dead.

It is plain on the very first glance into these Epistles that they have a great deal to say about this Resurrection. Our task is to draw out the evidential value of their references.

We would note, then, in the first place, that *Paul claims to be himself an eye-witness of a risen Christ*. After stating as a fact that Christ rose from the dead and enumerating his various appearances to his followers, he adds: "And last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also" (1 Cor 15:8). And again, he bases his apostleship on this sight, saying (1 Cor 9:1), "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" His "sight" of the Lord Jesus was, therefore of such a kind that it constituted a call to the apostleship. It was not, then, a simple sight of Jesus before his crucifixion: as is also proved from the fact that it was after all the appearances which he vouchsafed after his resurrection to his other followers, that Paul saw him (1 Cor 15:8). It remains true, then, that Paul claims to be an eye-witness of the fact that Christ had risen. It will not do to say that Paul claims only to have had a "theophany" as it were—a "sight" of Christ's *spirit* living, which would not imply the resurrection of his body. As Beyschlag has long ago pointed out, the whole argument in 1 Cor 15 being meant to prove the bodily resurrection of believers from the resurrection of Christ, necessitates the sense that Paul, like the other witnesses there adduced, saw Christ in the body. Nor is it difficult to determine *when* Paul claims to have seen Christ: it is admitted by all that it was this "sight" that produced his conversion and called him to the apostleship. According to Gal 1:19 both calls were simultaneous.

Tracing his conversion thus to, and basing his apostleship on, the resurrection of Christ, it is not strange that Paul has not been able to keep his Epistles from bristling with marks of his intense conviction of the fact of the Resurrection. Compare, e.g., Romans 1:4; 4:24, 25; 5:10; 6:4, 5, 8,

9, 10, 11, 13; 7:4; 8:11, 34; 10:7, 9; 14:9. We cannot, therefore, without stultification deny that Paul was thoroughly convinced that he had seen the risen Jesus; and the sceptics themselves feel forced to admit this fact.

What, then, shall we do with this claim of Paul to be an eye-witness? Shall we declare his "sight" to have been no true sight, but a deceiving vision? Paul certainly thought it bodily and a sight. But we are told that Paul was given to seeing visions—that he was in fact of that enthusiastic spiritual temperament—like Francis of Assisi for instance—which fails to distinguish between vivid subjective ideas and external facts. But, while it must be admitted that Paul did see visions, all sober criticism must wholly deny that he was a visionary. Waiving the fact that even Paul's visions were externally communicated to him and not the projections of a diseased imagination, as well as all general discussion of the elements of Paul's character, this visionary hypothesis is shattered on the simple fact that Paul knew the difference between this "sight" of Jesus and his visions, and draws the distinction sharply between them. This "sight" was, as he himself tells us, the *last of all*; and the only vision which on our opponents' principles can be attributed to him, that recorded in 2 Cor 12 is described by Paul in such a manner as to draw the contrast very strongly between his confidence in this "sight" and his uncertainty as to what had happened to him then. Of course, no appeal can be properly made to the "false" history of the Acts; but, if attempted, it is sufficient to say that according to Acts Paul saw Jesus after this sight of 1 Cor 15; but that this was in a trance (Acts 22:18ff.), and in spite of it the sight of 1 Cor 15 was the "last" time Jesus was seen. In other words, Paul once more draws a strict distinction between his "visions" and this "sight."

It is instructive to note the methods by which it is attempted to make this visionary hypothesis more credible. A graphic picture is drawn by Baur, Strauss, and Renan, of the physical and psychological condition of St. Paul. He had been touched by the steadfastness of the Christians; he was deeply moved by the grandeur of Stephen's death; had begun to doubt within himself whether the resurrection of Christ had not really occurred; and, sick in body and distracted in mind, smitten by the sun or the lightning of some sudden storm, was prostrated on his way to Damascus and saw in his delirium his awful self-imagined vision. It would be easy to show that the important points of this picture are contradicted by Paul himself: he knows nothing of distraction of mind or of opening doubts before the coming of the catastrophe (cf. Gal 1:13ff.). It would be easy, again, to show that, brilliant as it is, this picture fails to account for the facts, notably for the immense moral change (recognized by Paul himself) by which he was transformed from the most bloodthirsty of fanatics to the tenderest of saints. But, it will be sufficient

for our present purpose to note only that all that renders it plausible is its connection with certain facts recorded only in that “unbelievable” history, the Acts. We find ourselves, then, in this dilemma: if Acts be no true history, then these facts cannot be so used; if Acts be true history, then Paul’s conversion occurred quite otherwise; and again, if Acts be true, then so is Luke’s Gospel; and Acts and Luke are enough to authenticate the resurrection of Christ. In either case, our cause is won.

In regard to this whole visionary scheme we have one further remark to make: it is to be noted that even were it much more plausible than it is, it still would not be worth further consideration. For, Paul believed in the fact of the resurrection of Christ not only because *he* had seen the Lord, *but also* on the testimony of *others*. For, we would note in the second place that *Paul introduces us to other eye-witnesses of the resurrection of Christ*. He founded his gospel on this fact; and in Gal 2:6ff. he tells us his gospel was the same as was preached by Peter, James, and John. Peter, James, and John, then, believed with the same intensity that Christ rose from the dead. We have already seen that this testimony as to John at least, is supported by what he himself has written in the Apocalypse. In consistency with the inference, again, Paul explicitly declares in 1 Cor 15:3ff., that the risen Christ was seen not only by himself but by Cephas, James, and indeed all the apostles; and that, more than once. Even more: he states that he was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, the most of whom were still living when Paul wrote this letter, and whose witness-bearing he invokes. Here, Paul brings before us a cloud of witnesses.

In respect to them the following facts are worth pointing out. These witnesses were numerous; there were at least five hundred of them. They were not a mere unknown mob: we know somewhat of several of them and know them as practical men. The most of them were still living when Paul wrote, and he could appeal to them to bear testimony to the Corinthians. The result of all of which is that this notice in 1 Cor *is equivalent to their individual testimony*. Paul is admitted to be a sober and trustworthy writer; this Epistle is admitted to be genuinely his; and he here in a contemporary document challenges an appeal to living eye-witnesses. He could not have made this confident appeal had not these men really professed, soberly and earnestly, to have seen the risen Christ. We have, then, not only Paul claiming to be an eye-witness of the Resurrection; but a large number of men, over two hundred and fifty of whom were known to be still living when he wrote. We have to account not for the claim of one man that he had seen Jesus alive after he had died, but for the same claim put in by a multitude. Will any arguing that Paul sometimes saw visions serve our purpose here? And there is still another point which is worth remarking. The witnesses here appealed to are the original disciples and apostles of our Lord. From this, two facts

follow: the one, the *original disciples* believed they had seen the risen Lord; and the other, they claimed to have seen him on *the third day* after his burial (1 Cor 15:4). This, according to Paul, is certain fact.

Then note once more, in the third place, that this testimony (as already pointed out) was not only absolutely convincing to the Apostle Paul, but it was so also to the whole body of Christians. Not only did Paul base the truth of all Christianity on the truth of this testimony, and found his conversion on it; but so did all Christians. He could count on all his readers being just as firmly persuaded of this fact as he was. To the Corinthians, Galatians, Romans—this is *the* dogma of Christianity. When Paul wishes to prove his apostleship to the Corinthians or Galatians he is not afraid to base it on the therefore admitted fact of the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Gal 1:1): when he wishes to make our justification seem sure to the Romans, he appeals to Christ's resurrection in its proof (Rom 6:24, 25). These are but specimens of his practice. Both purposed and incidental allusions are made to the Resurrection through all four of these Epistles of such character as to prove that it was felt by Paul that he could count on it above all other facts as the starting-point of Christianity in the minds of his readers. Whether he is writing to Corinthians, Galatians, or Romans, this is alike true. Now, consider the force of this. In some of these churches, it is to be remembered, there were dissensions, divisions, parties arrayed in bitter hostility against one another, parties with contumely denying the apostleship, or discarding the leadership of Paul. Yet all these parties believe in the resurrection of Christ: Paul can appeal to all alike to accept a doctrine based on that. It is to his bitterest opponents that he will prove his apostleship by claiming to have seen the risen Lord. It is plain, then, that the resurrection of Christ was in Paul's day deemed a primordial, universal, and essential doctrine of Christianity.

Again, some of Paul's readers were far removed from credulous simplicity. There was a party in the Corinthian Church, for instance, who, with all the instincts of modern philosophical criticism, claimed the right to try at the bar of reason the doctrines submitted to their acceptance. They could not accept such an absurdity as the resurrection of the bodies of those who slept in the Lord: "If the dead be raised, With what body do they come?" was but one of their argumentative queries. The same class of difficulties in regard to the resurrection of men, as would in modern times start up in the minds of scientific inquirers, was evidently before their minds. Yet they believed firmly in the resurrection of Christ. When Paul wishes to argue with them in regard to *our* resurrection, he bases his argument on the therefore common ground of the resurrection of Christ. It is plain, then, that unthinking credulity will not account for the universal acceptance of this doctrine: men able and

more than willing to apply critical tests to evidence were firm believers in it.

And still again, one of these letters is addressed to a church with which Paul had no personal connection. It was not founded by him; it had never been visited by him; it had not before been addressed by him. There were those in it who were opposed to his dearest teachings: there were those in it who had been humble followers of Christ while he was still raging against his Church. Yet, they all believed as firmly as he did in the resurrection of Christ. He could prove his doctrines to them best by basing on this common faith. It is plain, then, that this doctrine was not of late growth in the Church; nor had its origin from Paul. It had always been the universal belief in the Church: men did not believe it because Paul preached it only, but they and Paul alike believed it from the convincing character of the evidence. When had a belief, thus universally accepted as a part of aboriginal Christianity in A.D. 58, had an opportunity to mythically grow into being? And, if it grew, what of the testimony of those over two hundred and fifty still living eye-witnesses to the fact?

Here we may fitly pause to gather up results. It seems indisputably evident from these four Epistles of Paul: *First*, That the resurrection of Christ was universally believed in the Christian Church when these Epistles were written: whatever party lines there were, however near they came, yet did they not cut through this dogma. *Second*, That the original followers of Christ, including his apostles, claimed to be eye-witnesses of the fact of his resurrection; and, therefore, from the beginning (third day) the whole Church had been convinced of its truth. Over two hundred and fifty of these eye-witnesses were living when Paul wrote. *Third*, That the Church believed universally that it owed its life, as it certainly owed its continued existence and growth, to its firm belief in this dogma. What has to be accounted for, then, is: 1. Not the belief of one man that he had seen the Lord, but of something over five hundred. 2. Not the conviction of a party, and that after some time, that the Lord had risen, but the universal and immediate belief of the whole Church. 3. The effect of this faith in absolutely changing the characters and filling with enthusiasm its first possessors. And 4. Their power in propagating their faith, in building up on this strange dogma a large and fast-growing communion, all devoted to it as the first and ground element of their faith.

There are only three theories which can be possibly stated to account for these facts. Either, the original disciples of Christ were deceivers and deliberately concocted the story of the Resurrection; or, they were woefully deluded; or the Resurrection was a fact.

I. The first of these theories, old as it is (Matt 28:11ff.), is now admitted on all sides to be ridiculous. Strauss and Volkmar, for example, both scorn it as an impossible explanation. We may, therefore, pass it over in few words. The dead body of Christ lying in his grave ready to be produced by the Jews at any moment, of itself destroys this theory. For we must remember that the belief in the Resurrection dates from the third day. Or, if the body no longer lay in the grave, where was it? It must have been either removed by their enemies, in which case it would have been produced in disproof of the Resurrection; or stolen by the disciples themselves. We are shut up to these two hypotheses, for the only possible third one (that the body had never been buried but thrown upon the dunghill) is out of the question, eye-witnesses expressly witnessing, according to Paul, that it was *buried* (1 Cor 15:4 f.). No one will so stultify himself in this age as to seriously contend that the disciples stole the body. Not only is it certain that they could not possibly have summoned courage to make the attempt; but the very idea of Christianity owing its life to such an act is worse than absurd. Imagine, if one can, this band of disheartened disciples assembled and coolly plotting to conquer the world to themselves by proclaiming what must have been seen to be the absurd promise of everlasting life through One who had himself died—had died and had *not* risen again. Imagine them not expecting a resurrection nor dreaming of its possibility, determining to steal the body of their dead Lord, pretend that he had risen, and, then, to found on their falsehood a system of the most marvelous truth—on this act of rapine a system of the most perfect morals. Imagine the body stolen and brought into their midst—who can think they could be stirred up to noble endeavor by the sight? “Can a more appalling spectacle be imagined,” exclaims Dr. Nott, “than that of a dead Christ stolen from his sepulcher and surrounded by his hopeless, heaven-deserted followers? And was it here, think you, in this cadaverous chamber . . . in this haunt of sin, of falsehood, of misery, and of putrefaction, that the transcendent and immortal system of Christian faith and morals was adopted? Was this stolen, mangled, lifeless corpse the only rallying point of Christians? Was it the sight of this that . . . fortified, and filled with the most daring courage, the most deathless hopes, the whole body of the disciples?” Well have our opponents declared this supposition absurd. Christ rose from the dead, or else his disciples were a body of woefully deluded men.

II. Then, will this second theory meet the case? Is the admitted fact that Christ’s earliest followers were all convinced that he rose from the dead, adequately explained by the supposition that they were the victims of a delusion? We must remember that the testimony of eye-witnesses declares that Christ rose on the third day; and that we have thus to

account for immediate faith. But, then, there is the dead body of Jesus lying in the grave! How could the whole body of those men be so deceived in so momentous a matter with the means of testing its truth ready at their hand? Hence, it is commonly admitted that the grave was now empty. Strauss alone resorts to the sorry hypothesis that the appearances of the risen Christ were all in Galilee, and that before the forty days which intervened before the disciples returned to Jerusalem had passed, the site of the grave (or dunghill) had been wholly forgotten by friend and foe alike. But, there is that unimpeachable testimony of eye-witnesses that the appearances began on the third day; and the equally assured fact (Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 15:4), that the body was not thrown on a dunghill but that there was a veritable grave. So that the empty grave stares us still in the face. If Christ did not rise, how came the grave empty? Here is the crowning difficulty which all the ingenuity of the whole modern critical school has not been able to lay aside. Was it emptied by Christ's own followers? That would have been imposture, and the sceptics scorn such a resort: moreover, the hypothesis that the apostles were impostors has been laid aside already (in the preceding paragraph). Was it, then, emptied by his enemies? How soon would the body have been produced, then, to confront and confound the so rapidly growing heresy! Or, if this were not possible, how soon would overwhelming proof of the removal of the body have been brought forward! Then, how was that grave emptied? Shall we say that Jesus was not really dead, and reviving from the swoon, himself crept from the tomb? This was the hypothesis of Schleiermacher. But not only is it in direct contradiction with the eye-witness testimony (1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:15; Rom 16:9, *et saepe* [and frequently]), which is explicit that Christ died; but it has been felt by all the leaders of sceptical thought to be inadequate as an explanation. Strauss has himself executed justice on it. It not only casts a stigma on the moral character of our Lord; but it is itself laden with absurdity. "It would have been impossible thus to mistake a wounded man, dying from exhaustion, for the Messiah of Jewish expectations, or then to magnify this into a resurrection from the dead." A dying man in hiding, the center of Christianity's life! This fill with enthusiasm and death-defying courage the founders of the Church! Besides all which, the hypothesis makes the apostles either knaves or fools, neither of which, as the sceptics admit, is possible truth. Hence, they themselves unite with us in rejecting as wholly absurd this dream of Schleiermacher. Once more, then, how can we account for the empty grave? We hazard nothing in asserting that this one fact is destructive to all the theories of Christ's resurrection which have been started in the nervous effort to be rid of its reality. That empty grave is alone enough to found all Christianity upon.

But, suppose for a moment, we assume the impossible, and allow to Strauss that the site of the grave was already lost. What then? The disciples were still convinced that Christ had risen. How shall we account for this invincible conviction? The only possible resort is to the worn-out vision-hypothesis. Renan draws a beautiful picture of Mary Magdalene in her love and grief fancying she saw her longed-for Lord; and a not so beautiful one of the abject and idiotic credulity of the disciples who believed her, and then, because they believed her, fancied they had seen him themselves. But will all this fine picturing of what might have been, stand the test of facts? That grave stares us in the face again: if the body was still in it, there was no place left for visions of it as living and out of it; if not in it, how came it out?

But laying aside this final argument as premised, even then the theory cannot stand. 1. There was no expectation of a resurrection, and hence no ground for visions. So far we can go here. Could we appeal to the Gospels we could go farther and show that the disciples had lost all heart and “so far was their imagination from creating the sensible presence of Jesus, that at the first they did not recognize him.” Renan gains all the facts on which he founds his theory from the Gospels: let him be refuted from the same records. How could Mary Magdalene’s own mind have created the vision of Jesus when she did not recognize him as Jesus when he appeared? 2. There was no time for belief in the Resurrection to mythically grow. That well-established third day meets us here. And within forty days the whole Christian community, over five hundred in number, not only firmly believed in the Resurrection, but believed, each man of them, that he had himself seen the Lord. We must account for this. 3. These five hundred are too many visionaries to create. Was all Palestine inhabited by Francises of Assisi? What might be plausibly urged of Paul or Mary loses all plausibility when urged of all their contemporaries. And thus we cannot but conclude that all attempts to explain the belief of the early followers of Christ in his resurrection as a delusion, utterly fail. If it was not founded on fraud or delusion, then, was it not on fact? There seems no other alternative: eye-witnesses in abundance witness to the fact; if they were neither deceivers nor deceived, then Christ did rise from the dead.

We must not imagine, however, that this is all the proof we have of that great fact. We have been only very inadequately working one single vein. There is another very convincing course of argumentation which might be based on the *results* of the resurrection of Christ—in transforming those who believed in it—in founding a Church. And, then, there is that other form of argument already pointed out which consists in the not very difficult task of vindicating the authority of our Gospels and Acts, or of the account included in them. Taking all lines of proof

together, it is by no means extravagant to assert that no fact in the history of the world is so well authenticated as the fact of Christ's resurrection. And that established, all Christianity is established too. Its supernatural element is vindicated: its supernatural origin evinced. Then, our faith is not in vain, and we are not still in our sins. Then, the world has been redeemed unto our God, and all flesh can see his salvation. Then, the All-Wise is the All-Loving, too, and has vindicated his love forever. Then, the supreme song of heaven may be fitly repeated on earth: "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Then, we can know that nothing can separate us from his love—that even death has failed in the attempt; and that it is thus given to mortals to utter in triumph the immortal cry, "Death is swallowed up in victory!"

Can You Worship Anyplace? Reflections on how the New Testament Answers the Question



WILLIAM W. KLEIN
Professor of New Testament
Chair: Division of Biblical Studies
Denver Seminary
Littleton, CO 80120

Of course, one can think about the issue of worship in the New Testament (NT) from many different perspectives. What options might lie before us? We could focus on definitions: what, truly, *is* worship—especially with the range of expressions that claim to be worship? Many contemporary discussions of worship center, rightly, on the “nature” of the worship we creatures owe to the omnipotent, triune, Creator God. *How* should we do it?¹ Or, I suppose, we could ask the temporal question: “when” ought God’s creatures worship? Is worship time-bound or timeless? “Why worship?” is another crucial question certainly worthy of careful thought and exegesis. What should prompt people to worship? “Who” is another central object of inquiry. In a world where there are so many competing deities, who is worthy of worship? Jesus said that people cannot serve God and mammon. So, whom should they serve and why?

But in this article I wish to reflect on the “where” question—location. Where is it appropriate to worship? In what *places*, if you will, should God’s people engage in worship? I hope you will come to agree that I am not simply forcing the NT texts into an alien straightjacket. In

¹ I think many discussions about worship get bogged down here. The words “worship styles” engender endless conferences and debates. Then enter terms such as “traditional,” “contemporary,” or “emerging.” It may be that some of *these concerns are beside the main point.*

fact I think the NT writers, following the lead of their Lord Jesus himself, put the “place” category at the forefront in their discussions of worship. If we will see *where* Jesus and the NT writers intended God’s people to worship, it is my hope that we will be better motivated to worship well and in a full-orbed fashion, and in the process find some likely avenues through which to answer some of those other important questions.

I. IN CHRIST

First, we worship in the *place* that Christ secured for us in the past and in which we now live. We worship “in Christ.” In the letter called Ephesians, the author² affirms that Christ has secured his people’s salvation as the result of his redemptive work on the cross (Eph 1:7). This is a past event. But because of their faith in him, believers are now “included in Christ” (1:13)³ and marked with a seal as God’s possession (1:14). They possess this in the present. Consequently, the variegated blessings that accrue as a result of God’s pleasurable will (Eph 1:5, 9, 11) come to those “in Christ” (1: 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), all to the praise of God’s glory (1:6, 12, 14). Their existence or location in Christ elicits praise to the God and Father of Jesus Christ the Lord. That they are in Christ precipitates worship and God receives glory. Those whom God has brought into salvation participate in the worship of the redeemer God simply because of where they are: in Christ.

Thanksgiving also accrues to God “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:20). This may well be an expansion of the prevalent “in Christ” formula in Ephesians and, if so, draws special attention to the two words “name” and “Lord.” The *name* of Jesus surely signifies his authority (e.g., Matt 7:22; Mark 9:39) or his person (e.g., Matt 10:22; 18:5, 20). Prayer offered *in* Jesus’ name will be effective (cf., John 15:16; 16:23). *Lord* affirms Jesus’ sovereignty. Believers give thanks to God, for they have access to all these “blessings” only in (and through)

² I happen to believe that the traditional view that Paul is the author is correct, but I will not defend that position here. It is not crucial to the larger purposes of the article.

³ Lincoln puts it succinctly: “. . . believers experience the blessings of the heavenly realms not only through Christ’s agency but also because they are incorporated into the exalted Christ as their representative, who is himself in the heavenly realms” (A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* [WBC 42; Dallas, TX: Word, 1990], 22. H. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002], 173-174, catalogs all the occurrences of “in Christ” and its parallels in the letter).

Christ. God has given us all things “in Christ” (Eph 1:22), for which God’s people are profoundly grateful. They give thanks as servants of the Lord and as those dependent upon him for all spiritual blessings *in him*.

Of course scholars have long debated whether “in Christ” is strictly locative, as I am mostly taking it, or also instrumental. That is, do we have all these blessings *in* Christ, or *through* Christ, i.e., by means of what he has accomplished? I do not wish to deny any instrumental significance but would simply insist that it is not a case of either/or but of both/and. *Through* what Christ has done, believers possess their new position *in* Christ. Now in corporate solidarity with Christ they worship God.

Assuming they are “in Christ,” where do Christians worship? We will find several “locations” for worship in the present.

II. IN YOUR HEART

The *heart* is the present location where Christians must engage in worship that pleases God. In Hebrews 3:10, in a quotation from Psalm 95, Yahweh says, “Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.’” Jesus criticized some Pharisees for their hypocrisy citing Isaiah’s words: “This people honors me with their lips, but their *hearts* are far from me” (Matt 15:8; cf. Isa 29:13).⁴ If our hearts are not in the right place, then the other elements that are often considered part of worship—whether music, incense, or ritual—turn out to be meaningless and useless as far as God is concerned.

The “heart” (καρδία) in biblical usage refers to the seat of the physical, spiritual, or mental life.⁵ It represents the hub of a person’s being, the foundation of understanding and will, the center of personality. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul prays for his readers that the eyes of their heart would be enlightened. Paul prays that God might shine a light into the command center of their lives so they would have true spiritual understanding. Later he prays “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). Jesus assured his disciples that the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8); that where your treasure is, there will be your heart (Matt 6:21); and that as his followers they were to love God with all [their] heart (Matt 22:37).

This sets the stage for our reading of a crucial text from Ephesians—one that we will come back to later. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul urges his readers to allow the Spirit to fill them with Christ, God’s love—indeed,

⁴ Unless identified otherwise, all Biblical citations are taken from the NRSV.

⁵ BDAG: 508.

all God's fullness.⁶ True worship occurs when believers open their hearts to the Spirit's work so that the Spirit can produce in them worship that brings God praise. As the hub of a person's existence, the heart's focus or bent, if you will, will reflect what occupies that central place. If Christ is there, worship will emerge.

Paul in fact describes some of the outcomes of this filling work of the Spirit. As he puts it, "as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord *in your hearts*" (emphasis added; Eph 5:19). When the Spirit fills the church and its members, singing and melody-making fill the hearts and then the mouths of the worshipers. And unless Spirit-inspired singing occurs "in your hearts," such activities like music, as technically excellent as they may be, risk being only that—excellent music—not worship.

The crucial point here seems irrefutable: genuine worship must occur in the heart; this worship alone is acceptable to God.

III. IN THE SPIRIT AND TRUTH

If we were to cast about in our minds for another phrase that connects worship with the preposition "in," most would readily identify John 4:24. Jesus asserts that God's true worshipers (ἀληθίνοι προσκυνῆται) "must worship *in spirit and in truth*."⁷ John 4:4-26 is a central text in the NT on the topic of worship—John's record of a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. When she referred to the debate between the Samaritans and the Jews about the proper location for worship, Jesus made this crucial assertion. First, he made a chronological point (4:23): the *time* is coming. What time? In John's Gospel the Greek word ὥρα (translated "hour" or "time") pinpoints the salvific events Jesus' arrival will bring (cf. 16:32; cf. 2:4). Here is Jesus'

⁶ For this interpretation see W. W. Klein, "Ephesians," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary 12* (rev. ed.; eds. T. Longman III & D. E. Garland; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 142-44. See also H. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 702-05; T. G. Gombis, "Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in Its Epistolary Setting," *TynBul* 53 (2002): 259-271.

⁷ Emphasis added. The word for "worship" here (proskune,w) occurs in other texts where Jesus receives the homage usually reserved for Yahweh (e.g., Matt 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; Heb 1:6; Rev 5:14; cf. LXX: Gen 22:5; 24:26, 48, 52; 27:29; Exod 4:31; 12:27; 24:1; 34:8, 14; Deut 32:43; 1 Sam 1:3; et al.). For a superb explication of how this devotion to Jesus emerged within a few decades of Jesus' life see Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), or his more exhaustive treatment: *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

bold point: the results of his death, resurrection, and exaltation, though events still in the future while he and the woman were conversing, were available already. Carson put it this way: "... this period of true worship is already proleptically present in the person and ministry of Jesus before the cross."⁸ Now this hour has arrived, so all the old religious debates between the Jews and Samaritans about places to worship are obsolete. Jerusalem may have been the center of worship as far as the Jews were concerned and Mt. Gerizim for the Samaritans, but now the Great High Priest has come directing people to worship God in a new *place*. Because of Jesus' coming now worshipers are able worship God in the true place. What is that place?

So, second, Jesus explains the significance of the arrival of this time: there is a new location for worship: "in spirit and truth." This place of worship is predicated on the reality, Jesus insists, that God is spirit, perhaps meaning non-corporeal, invisible, and certainly nonhuman. The designation "God is spirit" also defines how God works in this world—in a spiritual way, or through the realm of the Spirit, parallel to statements "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and "God is love" (1 John 4:8).⁹ Worshipers must no longer think of worship in terms of *physical* places. Jesus, the incarnate Word baptizes his people in the Holy Spirit (John 1:33), for without the new birth in water and Spirit, people cannot see the kingdom of God (3:5) and so worship God correctly. So, what does "in Spirit and truth" mean? To grasp Jesus' point we must employ a capital 'S' for Spirit.

God is, of course, the object of worship, but the place in which his people come to worship is the Spirit of truth who testifies to Jesus as Messiah and Lord. R. E. Brown suggested, and he may have a point here, that the phrase "Spirit and truth" functions as a kind of hendiadys equivalent to the "Spirit of truth."¹⁰ But surely "truth" also points to Jesus himself, the one who is truth. True worship of which God approved was neither on Mt. Gerizim nor in Jerusalem but in the place that the Spirit has provided in and through Jesus. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6). John's gospel repeatedly highlights the role of the Spirit

⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Leicester, UK: InterVarsity/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 224.

⁹ See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; 2nd ed.; Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1999), 62.

¹⁰ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB 29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 180. Carson, *The Gospel*, unpacks "in spirit and truth" as, "... essentially God-centered, made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in personal knowledge of and conformity to God's Word-made-flesh, the one who is God's 'truth' ..." (225).

in pointing to Jesus as the object of God's redemptive activity. For example:

- And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God" (1:32-34).
- Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:5-8).
- "It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (6:63).
- "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you" (14:17).
- "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf" (15:26).
- "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (16:13-15).

So we see that for John, in the Spirit's identification of Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life, God's true worshipers will be able to worship the Father. Now people can worship God in the only location that worship can be true worship. Bricks-and-mortar places of worship lose their significance once the eschatological new age has dawned—the age of the Spirit. Mt. Gerizim, Jerusalem, the Vatican, First Baptist, or some

storefront on Colfax Avenue in Denver, all lose their focus as the *places* of worship. True worship is constituted by and located in the Spirit, and in the worship that the Spirit engenders. The Spirit points to Jesus, the only one in whom God's redemptive truth becomes available to people. To worship in truth is to be set free (John 8:32) to know the only true God who reveals himself alone in Jesus (John 17:3). Thus those who worship *in the Spirit and truth* have arrived at that place; they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks (John 4:23).

Paul also alludes to this when he writes to the Philippians. Among his concerns in the middle of the letter are those who put their confidence in σάρξ, often translated "the flesh"—in this instance, their own accomplishments—to curry favor with God. These Judaizers brought to their worship of God all the restrictions of the laws, rites, and performance of the Jewish cultus. Not us, Paul insists. Our worship is different, for it finds its location in a different arena. He speaks of Christians in this way: "For it is we who are the circumcision, *who worship in the Spirit of God* and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh" (emphasis added; Phil 3:3). Worship *in the Spirit*¹¹ relegates all other means of coming to God as misguided and futile. As we will unpack in more detail below, Paul's word for "worship" here (λατρεύω) could also be translated "service." He makes clear that worship is not an internal versus an external matter: it is both. When one worships in the Spirit, the Spirit accomplishes nothing less than a total renovation and produces the kinds of actions that please God. Another present-time place for worship is:

IV. IN THE GATHERED ASSEMBLY

While the earliest adherents to the Messianic movement continued to consider themselves Jews and so maintained their faithful worship in the Temple precincts, from the very beginning they also joined together for their own fellowship (that eventually included Gentiles). While true worship was a matter of the individual's heart, their new relationship with the risen Lord required that they celebrate together. Initially, the apostles' teachings were of central concern; they also met together in the Temple courts; they broke bread in their homes; they met for fellowship; they prayed; and with glad and sincere *hearts* they praised God (Acts 2:42-47). Certainly a new locale for worship for these new Christians was **the gathered assembly**. Of course, this does not mean that they met

¹¹ The NRSV has rendered the dative πνεύματι with the preposition "in." Other versions use "by" to show instrumentality. As observed above, this may also be an instance of both/and.

in church buildings; there were none. Often their own homes served as the location for their gatherings as the following texts show:

- “The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, greet you warmly in the Lord” (1 Cor 16:19).
- “Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, ... Greet also the church in their house” (Rom 16:3, 5).
- “Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Col 4:15).
- “Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46).

Granting that most early Christian worship was conducted in homes or apartments, what was appropriate for worship in this location? What did worship in the gathered assembly look like? In what activities did worshippers engage when they assembled together?

Here we will mine the NT epistles for communal worship activities. While we cannot be certain that what occurred in one or several places characterized all communal worship, we can get a general sense of the kinds of activities in which these early believers engaged while joined in community together. And while we will list these practices, we must resist imposing what we currently know about them—for their modern practice may differ greatly from the earliest instances. If Corinth was at all typical, though we can't say it was, whatever fixed forms existed, worship was also relatively free and unstructured several decades into the church's history.

First we encounter two rituals that express the essential *identity* of the gathered community. Who or what is this new worshipping community? Baptism and the Eucharist graphically portray its identity. If being “in Christ” is the spiritual location of God's true worshipers, then *in* baptism and *in* the Eucharist believers portray concretely and physically that fundamental identity.

1. Baptism. Transliterated from the Greek term βάπτισμα that means dipping or immersion, baptism was the central initiatory rite that portrayed who these Christians were. Growing out of Jewish *mikvah* washings during the Hellenistic period, John the Baptist and then Jesus brought the practice to Jesus' followers. At his departure Jesus insisted

that baptism be a central element of what constituted disciple-making, along with teaching all else that Jesus commanded (Matt 28:19-20). On the day of Pentecost Peter insisted that new followers of Messiah Jesus repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38), and about 3,000 followed on that very day (2:41)! Subsequent chapters in the Acts show that the expanding church took Jesus' instructions seriously.

Paul theologized a bit about baptism's significance for the assembly. Two texts must suffice here.

- “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Cor 12:13-14).

Baptism was a rite of the community that initiated the members into one organism that fused each individual member into the totality that comprised the body.

- “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4).

Paul goes on to base his appeals that Christians live transformed lives on the fact that they were joined to Christ via baptism to the complex of events of Easter weekend—Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. If Christ is raised, then those who were baptized into Christ have also been raised to a new kind of life. Baptism joins all believers to Christ so that the church is the corporate Christ. They join the worshipping community of those who are *in Christ*.

2. Eucharist. The other ritual central to the church's identity was the Lord's Supper or Communion. It portrays the church's unity; though consisting of many members, the church is one body. While each of the synoptic gospels record parallel accounts of the institution of the ritual during Jesus' final Passover meal with his disciples (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:16-29; Luke 22:15-20), Paul again provides his theological perspective in 1 Corinthians.

- “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17).

To eat and drink of the Eucharist is to eat and drink Christ. Since all the bits of bread are broken from one loaf, all the individual believers constitute one organism. Again, the church is the corporate Christ. In this event it celebrates its existence; it worships.

In a second text from this letter Paul preserves what is the earliest account of the institution of the Lord's Supper (ca. AD 54):

- “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:23-25).

The central elements of the ritual portray Christ's body and the new covenant God enacted with his people, the church. Again, in this event the church celebrates what Christ has done in securing its salvation. It worships.

In both these rituals we see the focus on the gathered assembly. To my thinking, it would be rather incongruous for an individual believer to engage in either of these alone or in the company of only one or two others—unless, of course, those two or three constituted the entirety of the local church at that place, or the circumstances were unusual and necessitated an unusual celebration. They are corporate rites; they picture that faith in Jesus establishes an organism.

Beyond these two central identity rituals the NT evidences other worship activities within the gathered community of believers that help us understand what practices are appropriate in worship.

3. Bowing down. This expresses a posture of prostration or obeisance. In 1 Corinthians 14:25 Paul writes, “After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will *bow down* before God and worship him, declaring, “God is really among you.’ ” The word Paul employs here, προσκυνέω, is translated in various ways: to worship; fall down and worship, kneel, bow low, fall at another's feet. In the physical posture (this space or place) of bowing down, we worship—acknowledging God's lordship over his people.

4. Holy Kiss. Paul concludes four of his letters by urging his readers to greet each other with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). Peter ends his first letter with a similar instruction (1 Pet 5:14). Certainly a familial and intimate gesture, it portrays the close bonds that members of the Christian body share with

one another and ought to express to one another. Unless you're a Judas, you can't attack someone you have kissed! The holy kiss identifies others as members of Christ's worshipping body. Christians worship *in* this family.

5. Laying on of Hands. This corporate rite grows out of the practices of Israel (e.g., Lev 8:14, 18, 22; Num 27:23; Deut 34:9). A ceremonial gesture, it expresses a kind of solidarity between the recipient and those who lay their hands on her or him. Jesus made a special point of touching or putting his hands on people, especially during his ministries of healing (e.g., Matt 19:13; Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32). The early church continued this practice (Heb 6:2). Laying on hands (sometimes along with anointing with oil; James 5:14) put the sick person into contact with the risen Lord through the direct mediation of his body on earth—his disciples (Acts 9:12). But beyond healing, laying on hands was regularly practiced to express connections between members to convey special authority (akin to ordination: Acts 6:6; 13:3), other extraordinary powers or gifts (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), or the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17; 19:6). It stresses connectivity. Like the holy kiss, in the laying on of hands we celebrate our joint membership *in* that body Christ has saved.

6. Prayers. How natural that the assembled community would engage in corporate prayers. Daily and communal prayers characterized Jewish worship. Jesus set the example for his disciples by his personal praying as well as giving the “Lord’s Prayer” (Luke 11:2-4; Matt 6:9-13). In this prayer Jesus employed corporate language (“Our Father”) to set the pattern for his followers’ communal praying. The Acts chronology shows that prayer became a central group activity for the fledgling church (emphasis added):

- “All these were *constantly devoting* themselves to *prayer*, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers” (Acts 1:14).
- “They *devoted* themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the *prayers*” (Acts 2:42).

See also Acts 4:23-31 for an example of their prayers. The epistles also give ample evidence that prayer was a central and important component of the early churches’ corporate experiences.¹² In prayer the

¹² See, e.g., Rom 8:26; 1 Cor 11:13; 2 Cor 9:14; Eph 6:18-20; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:17, 25; 2 Thess 3:1; 1 Tim 2:8; Heb 13:18; Jas 5:13f, 16; 1 John 5:16; Jude 1:20.

body expressed its vital connection with God to whom they were dependent for life and salvation. *In* praying they worshiped.

7. **Hymns.** Several epistles show that singing or chanting psalms or hymns was a normal part of early Christian corporate worship. Again it would be natural for the Jewish Christians since music in worship was an important element in the worship of ancient Israel and the synagogue. Several texts will suffice to make the points:

- “What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up” (1 Cor 14:26).

Evidently, individuals were encouraged to come to the church services expecting to contribute to the corporate worship, and that included hymns. Other parallel texts confirm this judgment (emphases added):

- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* to God” (Col 3:16).
- “... as you sing *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts” (Eph 5:19).

As we know from Ephesians 5:18, Paul insisted that rather than being inebriated, Christians should allow the Spirit to fill them. Among the results of the Spirit-filled body would be psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and to repeat, singing and making melody to the Lord.

If prayer represents a vertical dimension to worship, here is a *horizontal* dimension: speaking “to one another,” affirming in the congregation God’s mighty acts and his presence. Can we distinguish among the three types of “singing” in Colossians and Ephesians?

(1) The designation “psalms” in the NT refers to both OT book of Psalms (Luke 24:44; 20:42; Acts 1:20; 13:33) and Christian songs of praise (1 Cor 14:26—often translated “hymns” in English versions).

(2) “Hymns” refer to religious songs or songs of praise (only in Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).

(3) “Songs,” described here as spiritual, denote sacred songs (also see Rev 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). More pointedly, “spiritual” songs are ones energized by the Holy Spirit.

Overall, the three terms are roughly synonymous for Christian songs of praise to God, incorporating, as seems natural, appropriate entries

from the OT Psalter. We have no warrant to limit this singing *either* to preexisting songs *or* to spontaneous ones composed on the spot under the inspiration of the Spirit. Probably both are in view. Many scholars are convinced that Paul incorporated a hymn in his letter to the Philippians 2:6-11.¹³ An attempt to versify this so that it looks to us more like a hymn, at least in English, might be:

“Who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
 but emptied himself,
 taking form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.
 Therefore God also exalted him
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.”

Another example is Colossians 1:15-20.¹⁴

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;
 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,
 –things now visible and invisible,
 whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers–

¹³ Peter O’Brien rightly reminds us, “In describing the passage as a ‘hymn’ it should be noted that the term is not being employed in the modern sense of what we understand by congregational hymns with metrical verses.” For discussion of the literary form of this “hymn” see P. T. O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 188-93; I. H. Marshall, “The Christ-Hymn in Philippians 2:5–11,” *TynBul* 19 (1968): 104-27; R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1967; rev. ed. 1983; 3d ed. published as *A Hymn of Christ*, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1997]); and R. P. Martin and G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC 43; rev. ed.; Dallas: Word, 2004), 99-104.

¹⁴ For further discussion of the hymnic nature of this passage see, J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 83-87; and P. T. O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon* (WBC 44; Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 32-37.

all things have been created through him and for him.
 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
 He is the head of the body, the church;
 He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
 so that he might come to have first place in everything.
 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things,
 whether on earth or in heaven,
 by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Such “singing” and “praising” must be performed “in your heart to the Lord.” First, the “heart” must be engaged, as we saw above. That is, singing that results from the filling of the Spirit will engage the core of the singers’ beings, their essential inner selves. Singing will involve the worshipers’ minds, they will be fully engaged, and they will sing with conviction.

Yet such worship singing is not without a *vertical* dimension as well. Spirit-filled music is done “to the Lord,” for Christ is the object of the singers’ devotion. Spiritual music involves the congregation’s attribution of Christ as Lord; its goal is not to entertain the saints. If church music does not meet these qualifications—edifying each other and honoring the Lord—it is not spiritual music and risks being harmful when it replaces a counterfeit for the genuine.

8. Creeds and Confessions. Though we don’t find an abundance of examples, most scholars agree that there are in the epistles evidences of some early Christian confessions or creeds that were, presumably, uttered in the churches at some points. Certainly, after they appear in epistles, they would find regular expression in the churches’ worship. Again, the OT shows that ancient Israel employed some fixed expressions of their devotion and beliefs (e.g., Deut 6:4-5; 1 Kgs 18:39). Two examples of possible such fixed formulas in the NT include:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received:

 that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,
 and that he was buried,
 and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,
 and that he appeared to Cephas,
 then to the twelve.

 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles (1 Cor 15:3-7).

And then as well:

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great:
 He was revealed in flesh,
 vindicated in spirit,
 seen by angels,
 proclaimed among Gentiles,
 believed in throughout the world,
 taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

Such relatively fixed kinds of statements express in compressed formulas the content of early Christian belief and became the precursors of later so-called ecumenical creeds such as the Apostles’ or Nicene Creeds. Of course we cannot know with certainty whether or how often congregations recited the creeds. Clearly they served catechetical purposes and were perhaps deployed in the liturgy of the churches. Is the repetition of creeds necessarily worship? The answer must be No. Creeds, like prayers, can be repeated by rote, with little value. But when the recitation of creeds engages the hearts of the worshipers, like songs, they can help them put into words the most magnificent truths which they affirm and hold dear.

9. Spiritual Gifts. From 1 Corinthians 12-14 we discover that in the assembled body there were manifestations of what Paul calls pneumatikoi, usually translated as “spiritual gifts” or “spiritualities.”¹⁵ When we investigate further into what items were included under this category, we can list what appear both natural and supernatural capacities.

- In 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 we find this list: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy,

¹⁵ BDAG: 387. Other texts mentioning these include: Rom 1:11; 15:27; 1 Cor 9:11; 12:1; 14:1; 1 Pet 2:5 (note the connection to sacrifices here). While a few commentators translate this as “spiritual persons” here, this is highly unlikely and no versions take that position. See P. Ellingworth and H. Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians* (New York: UBS, 1995), 272-73.

to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”

Clearly this is not the place for an explication of the uses of spiritual gifts in the early church, but we do get further insight about their uses in the assembly in 1 Corinthians 14. First we note what Paul says in these verses:

- “If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all” (1 Cor 14:23-24).
- “What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged” (1 Cor 14:26-31).

We may conclude, at least with respect to the churches in Corinth, that many members of the assembled community (no hints that such practices were limited to the elders or overseers) contributed significantly to their common experience as a corporate body. In this horizontal dimension of worship the believers served one another through these “spiritualities.” People came expecting to contribute to their common experience so that through their expression of these spiritual gifts the entire body would be built up or edified, since, as 1 Cor 12:7 made clear: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

10. Scripture Reading. Jesus’ so-called “Sermon at Nazareth,” recorded in Luke 4:16-27, points out the place of the public reading of the Bible in the synagogues of his day.¹⁶ Other sources confirm this synagogue practice (Luke mentions it in passing when Paul visits a

¹⁶ See W. W. Klein, “The Sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:14-22),” in *Christian Freedom: Essays in Honor of Vernon C. Grounds* (ed. K. W. M. Wozniak & S. J. Grenz; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 153-72.

synagogue in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:15). The church continued this practice. As with some of the previous elements, we might question whether the mere reading of Scripture is always worship, or whether it supplies the theological framework in which true worship can occur. If Scripture is viewed as divine revelation, then to read with the heart and to listen so attentively as to hear from God is true worship. In this vein Paul urges his protégé Timothy: “Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). Paul thought it imperative that the reading of Scripture have a prominent place in the corporate experience of the church.

11. Preaching/teaching. Also based in synagogue practice (again see Luke 4 and Acts 13:15), the church incorporated sermons or homilies to explain God’s will and to instruct God’s people. By the way, often epistles themselves served the same exhortatory function—as written sermons: Acts 15:31; Heb 13:22. Paul also urged Timothy to keep up this practice (1 Tim 4:13). Appropriate response to such exhortation is an act of worship. The explication of this comes in our next major section.

We next come to the fifth place where Christians are to worship. This new covenant community goes out from its gathered worship to become the scattered community that worships *in the world*. How does that occur?

V. WORSHIP IN LIFE AND SERVICE

We take as our point of departure the extended homily found in the book of Hebrews. We go first to the final verses of chapter 12:

- “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, *by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe*; for indeed our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28-29; emphasis added).

What follows immediately in chapter 13 are acts of worship. True worship is not restricted to the gathered community and the elements listed in the previous section; it takes in all of life. As if to underscore the point, in the middle of Hebrews 13 the author adds:

- “Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the *fruit* of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb 13:15-16; emphasis added).

Rooted in the Hebrew view of worship as embodied in life, the Greek version of Psalm 96:9 (95:9 LXX) employs the verb λατρεύω (to

serve) to point to worship: “Worship the LORD in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.” The use of this Greek word translates a common Hebrew word for worship that grows out of the root *’ebed*, meaning “servant.”¹⁷ Such service occurs in a great many ways, from mundane duties to great acts of devotion (Exod. 3:12; 20:5; Deut. 6:13; 10:12; Josh. 24:15; 2 Kgs 21:3; Psa. 2:11). The NT writers follow the lead of the LXX in often using *λατρεύω* (to serve) or its cognate noun *λατρεία* (service) to denote worship. Another related word used for worship is *λειτουργία* (from which we get the English word “liturgy”) used again for common tasks or for acts of devotion or worship (see Luke 1:23; 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:17; Heb 8:6; 9:21). An important implication is that Christian worship and service are closely linked.¹⁸

The OT was clear that God alone is worthy of worship and service (Exod 20:2-5). God deserves his creatures’ wholehearted devotion (Deut 6:5; cf. Luke 10:27). The final book in the Bible pictures God’s people as serving God in perpetuity: “and [Jesus] made us to be a kingdom, priests *servi*ng his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:6).

How Christians live their lives with each other and in service to the world constitutes an important expression of (or location for) their sacrificial devotion to God—of worship. We worship *in* our service. Strathmann states that worship boils down to, “A manner of life which is pleasing to God, and which is sustained both by gratitude and by a serious sense of responsibility—this is Christian τῷ θεῷ λατρεύειν” [service to God].¹⁹

The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to “worship,” connecting it to the sacrificial system under the old covenant (Heb 8:5; 9:9; 10:2; 13:10). Let us trace how that works.

As is well known, the writer of Hebrews interprets the OT “... according to a creative exegetical principle,”²⁰ with some recent

¹⁷ See E. Jenni and C. Westermann. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 829-31; and, R. Laird Harris, et al., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 639-41.

¹⁸ The Greek NT employs other words that are translated into various English versions as “worship” including: *προσκυνέω* (worship; to prostrate); *σέβω* (worship); *σέβασμα* (object of worship); *προσκυνητής* (worshiper); *θεοσεβής* (god-fearing, devout); *εὐσεβέω* (show deep respect for); *σεβάζομαι* (worship); and *θρησκεία* (worship).

¹⁹ H. Strathmann, “*λατρεύω* and *λατρεία* in the New Testament,” *TDNT* 4:64.

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), xlii.

commentators using words such as midrash, homiletical midrash, or typology to characterize the method the author employs.²¹ Primarily, he mines the OT for ways of understanding the significance of Jesus' sacrifice in the new covenant. So, if we look to Hebrews 10:19-25, we see the call to persevere in the way of Christ based on a typological reading of effects of the OT sacrificial system. He urges his readers: "let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, *with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*" (Heb 10:22; emphasis added). What shortly follows is this appeal: "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (10:24-25). The typological reading of the Day of Atonement and the sin offering—central elements in the worship of Israel—provides the imperative for Christians to live lives occupied with doing good. Thus when we come to Hebrews 13 we find a similar pattern unpacked in more detail. The sin offering of the Day of Atonement (Heb 13:11-12; cf. Lev 4:12, 21; 16:27) that Jesus has accomplished in his death "outside the camp" leads to the offering of the sacrifice of praise (13:15), which in turn leads to service to others (13:16). Observe the progression in these texts:

- "For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood" (Heb 13:11-12).
- "Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the *fruit* of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15).
- "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13:16).

Doing good and serving others describe the worship of those under the new covenant. The sacrifices of the OT cultus find their equivalents

²¹ On these various interpretive methods and a discussion of how the writer of Hebrews uses and interprets the OT text see, e.g., W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC 47A; Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), cxii-cxxiv; P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans/Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1993), 37-42. D. A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 32-35; and L. T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 21-28.

in doing good and sharing with others. These are the “fruit of lips” that confess Jesus’ name. Hebrews 13 catalogs examples of what doing good means. Some examples occur within the community of believers; most occur in the daily routines of life. It is instructive to ponder the types of activities that the writer lists:

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Mutual love | (13:1) |
| 2. Hospitality to strangers | (13:2) |
| 3. Empathy to prisoners, sufferers | (13:3) |
| 4. Sex only within marriage; no immorality | (13:4) |
| 5. Contentment not greed | (13:5-6) |
| 6. Imitate Godly church leaders | (13:7-8) |
| 7. Avoid false teaching | (13:9-10) |
| 8. Accept persecution as did Jesus | (13:11-14) |
| 9. Praise God | (13:15) |
| 10. Do good and be generous | (13:16) |
| 11. Obey church leaders | (13:17) |
| 12. Pray | (13:18-19) |

In other words, these activities constitute worship. In these acts and attitudes we discover *where* Christians worship. Worship is conducted in faithful living according to the commands of righteousness that characterize Jesus’ followers.

Worship portrayed as service to others is not limited to the culmination of the letter to the Hebrews. A survey of the uses of the verb *λατρεύω* in the Gospels, Acts, and several epistles also witnesses to the connection (e.g., Matt 4:10; Luke 1:74; 2:37; 4:8; Acts 24:14; 27:23; Rom 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:3). A corresponding search on uses of the noun *λατρεία* in the NT reveal a similar close connection (e.g., John 16:2; Rom 9:4; 12:1; Heb 9:1, 6). We can consider only a few representative uses. In a well-known text in Romans 12:1-2 Paul writes:

- “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *worship* [latreia; service]. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Paul defines appropriate worship as using our bodies to honor God, to so allow God to renew our minds that we accomplish his will rather than what the world dictates.

- In 2 Corinthians 9:12 Paul writes, “for the rendering of this *ministry* not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.”

The same word the NRSV translates as “worship” in Rom 12:1 it renders “ministry” here.²² When brothers or sisters give of their resources to meet the needs of fellow church members, they engage in worship. Such ministry is worship. God receives praise for putting it into the hearts of his people to be so generous. Service or ministry that meets the needs of the saints is what worship entails.

The same phenomenon occurs in Philippians 2:30 where speaking of Epaphroditus Paul says, “because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those *services* [λειτουργίας] that you could not give me.” Again, worship is service.

And while not employing either of these central terms Peter emphasizes the same point: “Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:11).

The impact of what Peter implies here is telling. Whether inside or outside the gathered assembly, the very *speech* of the Christians is to convey the very words of God. *Service* to others is energized by God who alone supplies the necessary strength. All such speaking and doing—and whatever else these bookends encompass—are acts of worship that bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.

Worship surely ought to occur in the gathered community when, for example, the church body celebrates the Eucharist or meditates on the reading of Scripture. But worship in the NT occurs every bit as significantly in their homes and out in the world when God’s people serve each other and do good to those in the world. Where do Christians worship? These texts answer the question very pointedly: in their serving.

For our final entry, we find what I think is a realized eschatological “already/not yet” *place* in which Christians worship, I will combine two very graphic images in the NT, for I think they both get at similar ideas—and are sufficiently related for our purposes. These images conjure up “heavenly places” and “Mount Zion.” We focus attention primarily on two epistles: Hebrews and Ephesians.

²² Another translation puts it this way: “ministry of this service” (ESV). Worship is serving others.

VI. IN MOUNT ZION OR THE HEAVENLIES

We must start with some background from the OT prophet Isaiah. In an early section of his prophecy he points to a place of worship that Christians understand will be fulfilled by Jesus.

Listen to Isaiah's words (2:2-4):²³

“In days to come
 the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest
 of the mountains,
 and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.
 Many peoples shall come and say,
 ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
 to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways
 and that we may walk in his paths.’
 For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord
 from Jerusalem.
 He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many
 peoples;
 they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into
 pruning hooks;
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn
 war any more.”

What is clear from Isaiah's words here? Though the kingdoms of the earth will be defeated, the city of Jerusalem, Zion, will be redeemed and will flourish. As John Watts says, “The important thing about Zion is her reputation as Yahweh's dwelling. It is *Yahweh's house*, the temple, which stands out. And that is important because he is present and active

²³ This poem appears in essentially the same form in Micah 4:1-4. The question of who borrowed from whom—or whether they both employed some other source—need not detain us as it has no impact on our discussion here. In Isaiah's context, Isaiah witnessed the fulfillment of his prophecy that Zion would not fall to Assyria. Perhaps that resulted in the confidence expressed in this poem that the promises concerning Zion would also find fulfillment.

there.”²⁴ Justice, righteousness, and peace will prevail. It points to the end when God will make all things right.²⁵

Now when we turn to the epistle of Hebrews we discover a writer who picks up this image of Zion, the city of God and gives it a significant standing for his readers. But instead of relegating it solely to the eschatological future, he suggests that the eschaton has already arrived; it has overlapped the present. He says,

- “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24).

Christians *already* experience the blessings of the age to come in the present. In Hebrews 11:16 the writer speaks of a “better country—a heavenly one” and a city that God has prepared for his people. We are receiving a “kingdom that cannot be shaken” (12:28). These seem to be objective realities that, while awaiting their full realization in the age to come as Isaiah prophesied, are already experienced by those who follow the way of *faith* outlined in Hebrews.

This is not to diminish or discount the perpetual worship in heaven; in fact it complements it. In the vision of Revelation 14:1 John depicts Jesus’ presence on *Mount Zion*. He writes, “Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.” Harps play and the 144,000 sing a new song before the throne on which God sits. Earlier chapters (viz., Rev 4:6-11; 5:6-14; 7:9-12) provide more insight into the nature of the ongoing worship in heaven. Surely these are the redeemed with Jesus. There will be endless worship in the Mount Zion to come. The writer of Hebrews suggests that this eternal worship that will engage the people of God in the eschaton *has already begun by faith now*. We have come to Mount Zion to worship. This is the *place* in which Christians worship now.

²⁴ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Dallas: Word, 2002), 31.

²⁵ The future reality is elaborated in more detail at the end of the book—Isa 65:17-25.

Perhaps somewhat parallel to this is Paul's use of the location "heavenly places," also translated "heavenlies" or "heavenly realms" in various English versions. We can cite only a few of Paul's uses of this heavenly image:

- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:3).
- "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:20).
- "and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6).
- "As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:48-49).

Paul asserted that Christians are *now* seated in the heavens where Christ is seated. That heavenly session occurred at Jesus' resurrection. In other words, when we entered into Christ, recall our earlier point, we entered this heavenly place where he is. While space precludes a thorough analysis of all the options for understanding this image, whatever Paul meant it can't be understood physically. The Christians to whom he wrote were very physically in various towns in Asia Minor. Yet, evil forces were also in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12), and the church required God's armor to fight against them.

So rather than presenting some arcane cosmology or topography of the heavenly spheres, Paul's reference is more likely soteriological and eschatological. Though believers are not literally yet resurrected and seated with Christ (1:20; 2:6), the spiritual transaction that will eventuate in those realities has occurred. Through what Christ has accomplished in his resurrection and exaltation, the 'age to come' has overlapped the present so that those 'in Christ' in this age experience the spiritual benefits that will be consummated in the next age. And

because believers are still in ‘this age,’ they continue to contend with their and God’s enemies until the end. We referred to this earlier as realized eschatology.²⁶

And what do they do “in these heavenly realms?” Among other things, and no doubt most importantly, they worship. Because of the certainty of their standing “in Christ,” they engage in thanks and praise for what they experience. Such worshipers share in the grand doxology that begins this profound epistle. Here are the words of worship:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:3-10).

Because of the overlap of the ages the redeemed worship *now* in the heavenly realms. They have obtained in the present their true identity as worshipers of God—a task and privilege they will continue to pursue through endless ages. Paul insists that this fulfills God’s eternal plan, namely, “so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). The church will display to all the powers that God is wise. If this is where Christians now reside, no wonder Paul concludes this section of Ephesians with this prayer:

²⁶ W. Klein, “Ephesians,” 48.

- “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:18-21).

VII. CONCLUSION

So, according to the NT writers, where should Christians worship? They worship “in Christ”; they worship in their hearts. But not merely as isolated individuals, they worship in community and in service to others—both inside and outside the church body. In so doing, they worship in the Spirit and truth. And their worship takes on an eternal and supernatural character, for they worship on Mt. Zion, in the heavenly realms with Christ who sits at the right hand of God.

Freed Slaves and Enslaved Sons: Sacral Manumission Formulae and Servile Metaphors in Galatians 5



DANIEL BRADLEY*

Fredonia, KS

bradleydaniel@yahoo.com

I. INTRODUCTION

As many major works and commentaries on the Epistle to the Galatians have generally noted, this letter is pervaded not only with Paul's biting rhetoric, but also with a preponderance of servile language and imagery.¹ Given the reputation of Galatia in this regard, one can easily understand why Paul appealed to such terminology and metaphors

*Daniel Bradley was, until recently, a doctoral student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is currently in the process of applying to a doctoral program at the University of Manchester, England.

¹ See John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in early Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 2/162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Robert A. Bryant, *The Risen Crucified Christ in Galatians* (SBLDS; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2001); Justin K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult* (WUNT 2/237; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998); Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002); Sam Tsang, *A New Rhetoric Analysis on Paul's Slave Metaphors in His Letter to the Galatians* (Studies in Biblical Literature 81; New York: Peter Lang, 2005); G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994); J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (AB 33A; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997); Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier Books, 2007); Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996).

in his epistle (e.g., 4:8-11, 30-31; 5:2-4).² In fact, John Byron notes that “Galatians contains the second highest occurrence of slave terms in the Pauline corpus.”³

Concerning current scholarship on Galatians, Byron and others’ works contain a great amount of information on general slave metaphors and language in the epistle. However, this is also precisely the problem: most of these treatments operate according to *generalized* slave terminology, and consequently overlook the finer and weightier nuances of the underlying servile metaphors and formulae within this letter. For instance, in his dissertation, Sam Tsang examined servile metaphors which occur in nearly every chapter of Galatians; however, Tsang did not give any true attention to Galatians 5.⁴ Such a practice is only symptomatic of much research on Galatians that has not realized the specific servile language at work in a great part of this chapter.

What follows in this article is a comparative examination of Galatians 5 in light of sacral manumission practices and servile metaphors in the ancient world. This investigator contends that Paul portrays the life of believers as one that expresses the dual notions of full emancipation from the “Law” as well as complete enslavement to God. In doing so, the apostle combines both sacral manumission formulae and servile language to establish a paradoxically mixed metaphor that is unparalleled in ancient Greco-Roman texts.

First, the writer will explore the context leading up to Galatians 5. Second, the language of emancipation in the chapter shall be investigated, with special emphasis on the term “ἐλευθερία” and its utilization in slave manumission texts. Next, terms and idioms connoting slavery in the chapter will be examined, with special consideration given to their correlation with emancipation language. Finally, a concluding synthesis will be offered.

II. GALATIANS 5 IN CONTEXT

In the material preceding chapter 5, Paul heavily emphasizes the superiority of faith over law-keeping, which is couched within the larger argument concerning true sonship and inheritance rights.⁵ In 3:1-5:6, he

² Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 399; Susan Elliot, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul’s Letter to the Galatians in its Anatolian Cultic Context* (JSNTSup 248; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2003), 159-229.

³ Byron, *Slavery*, 181.

⁴ Tsang, *Slaves to Sons*, 63-131.

⁵ Cf. especially Betz, *Galatians*, 28-33; Bruce, *Galatians*, 147-229; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 98-219.

repeatedly makes the case that the status, freedom, and blessings of sonship only come through the Spirit to the ones who have faith in Christ (3:2, 6-7, 9, 14, 26-29; 4:6-11, 30-31; 5:5-6). On the contrary, Paul states “those under law” do not have the Spirit, are not true sons of Abraham, have no inheritance rights, and are slaves (4:8-11, 30-31; 5:2-4).⁶ Thus the apostle erects a dichotomy: those who exercise faith and have the Spirit of genuine sonship versus the ones under law (4:21) who practice legal works (2:16). From the context we may conjecture that Paul is seeking to answer the underlying but crucial question, “Who is a true son/heir of Abraham?”⁷

Within the immediate context of Galatians 5, Paul also utilizes a noteworthy rhetorical feature, which begins in 4:20 and carries over into 5:2f. This device not only establishes a connection between chapter 5 and what precedes, but also illuminates the specific issue Paul desires to address. The apostle wishes to hold a conversation with the Galatians, or, as he puts it, “exchange my voice” (ἀλλάξαι τὴν φωνήν μου)⁸ (4:20). Hence, in 4:21, he (in rhetorical fashion) poses his question and demands a response concerning the role of the law: “Tell me, you who desire to be under law (ὑπὸ νόμον), do you not hear the law?” In 5:2, however, Paul forcefully retorts, “Behold, I Paul say to you....” In this manner the apostle has an exchange of voices with the Galatian believers.

Surrounding the retort of 5:2 is the climax of the apostle’s discussion regarding sonship (5:1-6), where the reader is also first informed of exactly how the Galatians “desire to be under law” (4:21). In Paul’s estimation, such a submission to law involves nothing less than returning to a “yoke of slavery” (5:1) by receiving circumcision. Although scholars debate the precise meaning of the phrase “yoke of slavery,” the above rhetorical feature, in tandem with the fact that Paul explicitly cites circumcision in the context, seem to indicate that the apostle’s line of reasoning specifically focuses on submission to Mosaic law as submission to slavery.⁹ “Here,” as Susan Elliot notes, “Paul paints a

⁶ See especially Longenecker, *Triumph*; Tsang, *Slaves to Sons*, 105-143.

⁷ For a brief but informative extrapolation of this major theme, refer to Longenecker, *Triumph*, 128-142.

⁸ See *BDAG*, s.v. “ἀλλάσσω,” for this nuance of the term.

⁹ For instance Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians* (Interpretation; Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 111, suggests “the phrase ‘yoke of slavery’ may reflect a common rabbinic expression ‘yoke of Torah,’ used of proselytes as they assumed the responsibility of Judaism...” Contra Wayne Coppins, *The Interpretation of Freedom in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT 2/261; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 115, who holds that the “yoke of slavery” refers not to the Jewish law exclusively, but rather more generally to the “elements of the world”

picture of the consequences of circumcision for the audience's status: inheritance of a relationship of slavery."¹⁰ Therefore, the language of slavery in the immediate context comes into sharp focus. If the apostle's comments in the body of the letter are any indication of the situation at Galatia, it would be safe to assume that circumcision was being hailed by his opponents as a critical marker of Abrahamic sonship and legitimate inheritance rights. However, it was nothing of the sort; it was, in fact, submitting to a relentless slave master summed up by Paul under the name "Law."

III. GALATIANS 5 AND THE LANGUAGE OF FREEDOM

To counteract what he views as the Galatians' desire to be "under law," the apostle, in 5:1, employs a very telling phrase, which is closely akin to slave manumission texts: Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ. Although the exact phrase in manumission is ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ, the fact that Paul links it with "emancipation" and "slavery" in this passage, plus the realization of the actual usage of the phrase ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ itself in 5:13, lend themselves to the phrase's probable manumission connotations. Galatians 5:1 seems to imply as much: "Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε" ("For freedom Christ emancipated us; therefore stand firm and do not again be subject to a yoke of slavery"). The import of Paul's use of this expression, however, needs to be supported by an analysis of ancient slave manumission.

IV. SLAVE MANUMISSION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Various contemporary works on slavery have noted that the freeing of slaves was one of the most socially significant regulations in the ancient world.¹¹ However, an adequate accounting of the diverse types of

(Gal. 4:3, 9), thereby rendering the "yoke of slavery" applicable to both Jew and Gentile.

¹⁰ Elliot, *Cutting*, 279.

¹¹ See B. H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.-A.D.337)* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 289-299; M. I. Finley, *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversy* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1974), 27-8; T. E. J. Wiedemann, *Slavery* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 45-60; Michael Grant, *A Social History of Greece and Rome* (New York, NY: Scribner's 1992), 121; Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, 187ff; K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press: 1987), 81-112; Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

manumission is necessary for the present study, given that the forms and degrees of the practice continued to evolve from ancient Greece through the Late Roman Empire.¹² In an effort to efficiently categorize the process, Bradley McLean has noted two principle kinds of manumission: formal and informal.¹³ In this scheme, a slave could be *formally* freed by his master's last will and testament, dedication to a god, a fictive sale to a third party (e.g. a deity), or sacral manumission (a variation of the fictive sale).¹⁴ However, the slave could also be manumitted by *informal* means, such as a simple, public declaration of freedom by the master.¹⁵

The manumission process was further complicated by the fact that, many times, the slave's freedom was granted with certain stipulations. Often the manumitted slave would be brought into a "staying agreement," overwhelmingly denoted in manumission texts by forms of the Greek verb παραμεινῶ ("remain/stay") and codified by the technical term *paramone*.¹⁶ Such agreements delineated a certain length of time in which the freed slave would "remain" and "serve" either his former master or else a deity (or deities).¹⁷ In many cases, this staying arrangement only lasted a few years; however, in some circumstances, the staying could last for the remainder of the freed slave's life. For instance, an inscription from Pisidian Antioch (Galatia) records the following: "Ἀὐρ(ηλία) Μαρκία Δημητρίου θυγάτηρ. Ὀλυμπιάς εἰς παραμονὴν ἵνα [[Μητρί]· και μηδενὶ ἐξέσται καταδουλώσαι αὐτὴν ἄλλα εἶναι αὐτὴν ἐλυθέραν." The ruling concerning this woman clearly stipulates that *paramone* ("staying") is to be rendered; however the account also records that "it is not lawful for anyone to enslave her, but she is to be free [i.e. emancipated]."¹⁸ From this we notice that the language of freedom (ἐλυθέραν) is utilized; however, it is mitigated by the *paramone* arrangement, since service to the master continued to be

1996), 97-102; J. A. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (HUT 32; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 1-67.

¹² On the difficulty of reconstructing these procedures, see Harrill, *Manumission*, 53-56.

¹³ McLean, *Epigraphy*, 291.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 292-97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 291; Finley, *Slavery*, 27-28.

¹⁶ See B. Adams, *Paramone und verwandte Texte* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964); A. M. Duff, *Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 12-21. This arrangement is similar, but quite distinct from the Roman *operae libertorum*.

¹⁷ See Finley, *Slavery*, 28.

¹⁸ *AE* 1997: 1484D; see also *GDI* II/2, 2143; *Fouilles de Delphes*, Vol. 3, 2.47; *SEG* 42.703.

rendered. Thus, *paramone* was commonly employed as a type of transitional feature in the slave's quest for complete freedom.

V. EP' ELEUTHERIA IN SLAVE MANUMISSION

As common as *paramone* arrangements were, the practice was certainly not universal. Obviously, many slaves were never freed (to any degree) by their masters. On the contrary, in certain contexts a slave was emancipated “ἐπ’ ἐλευθερία,” translated as “for freedom” or, to put it another way, “on condition of freedom.” The utilization of this phrase occurs in numerous sacral manumission texts which contain both the presence and absence of the *paramone* clause. Interestingly, these types of texts represent a fictitious sale of the slave to the deity or the dedication of the slave to the god.

One lengthy example of ἐπ’ ἐλευθερία with *paramone* stipulations occurs at Delphi in 45-51 A.D. The text reads:¹⁹

Ἀγαθῆ Τύχα ἄρχοντος ἐν Δελφοῖς Τιμαγένους τοῦ Νικάνδρου, μητρὸς Ἀμαλίου, βουλευόντων δὲ Καλλιστράτου τοῦ Νικάνδρου καὶ Σωτῆ τοῦ Εὐκλίδου, Εἰρανίων Μενάνδρου, γόνου δὲ Σωσικράτους, Δελφός, ἀπέδοτο τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι τῷ Πυθίῳ σῶμα γυναικῆον ἃ ὄνομα Συμφέρουσα, τιμᾶς ἀργυρίου μνᾶν τριῶν καὶ τὰν τιμᾶν ἀπέχω πᾶσαν, ἀπέδομ<έν>αν δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖσδε ὥστε ἴμεν τὸ προγεγραμμένον σῶμα ἐλευθερον παραμεινάτω δὲ τὸ προγεγραμμένον σῶμα Εἰρανίῳν πάντα τὸν τοῦ ζῆν αὐτῷ χρόνον, ποιούσα τὸ ἐπιτασσόμενον ἀνεγκλήτως εἰ δὲ μὴ παραμῖνοι ἢ μὴ ποιῆ τὸ ἐπιτασσόμενον, ἐξουσίαν [ἐχέ]τω Εἰρανίων ἐπιτιμέων τρόπῳ ᾧ κα θέλη. . . . ἐπὶ καταδουλισμῷ, βέβαιον παρεχέτω τῷ θεῷ τὰν ὄνᾶν ὃ τε ἀποδόμενος καὶ ὁ βεβαιωτὴρ ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ παρατυχῶν κύριος ἔστω συλέων καὶ ἀφαιρούμενος Συνφέρουσαν ἐπ’ ἐλευθερία, ἀζάμιος ὢν καὶ ἀνυπεύθυνος πάσας δίκας καὶ ζαμίας τίθεμαι τὴν ὄνῃν, τὴν μὲν ἰς τὸ ἱερόν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος. . .

This account concerns a female slave (σῶμα γυναικῆον) who was (fictively) purchased by the Pythian Apollo. Subsequently, although released ἐπ’ ἐλευθερία, she was bound to *paramone* “all the time of her life, doing that which is ordered.”²⁰

¹⁹ SEG 51:605.

²⁰ For Jewish inscriptions, with the conjoining of “freedom” and “staying,” in manumission texts concerning the Pythian Apollo, see Harry M. Orlinsky,

Although certain texts contain the pairing of these two elements (freedom and staying), others do not. For instance, an early 2nd century inscription reads as follows:²¹

ἄρχον[τος ἐν μὲ]γ Χαλείωι Ἀλεξίνου, μηνὸς Καρείου, ἐν δὲ
 Ἀμφίσσαι ἄρχοντο[ς] [Ἀριστά]ρχου, μηνὸς Ἀ[γρ]αστυῶνος,
 ἀπέδοτο Κλεογένης Ἀνδρονίκου Ἀλεῖος ἐν Ἀμ[φί]σαι
 ἐνεργα[ς]όμενος σῶμα ἀνδρείον, ᾧ ὄνομα Δημήτριος, τὸ γένος
 Λαοδικῆ, ἐπ' [ἐλευ]θερίαι τῶι Ἀπόλλωνι τῶι Νασιώται τιμᾶς
 ἀργυρίου δραχμῶν χιλιάων τὸν τιμὴν ἀπέχει πᾶσαν.

Here a male slave (σῶμα ἀνδρείον) by the name of Demetrius from Laodicea was purchased by Apollo ἐπ' ἐλευθερίαι (“on condition of freedom”) for “the price of one thousand silver drachmas. All the price was received.” Consider also a text presented by Deissmann, which states that the “Pythian Apollo bought from Sosibios of Amphissa, on condition of freedom (ἐπ' ἐλευθερία), a woman by the name of Nicaia, of Roman descent, for the price of 3 ½ silver minas.”²²

The main points in citing such texts as these are to demonstrate (1) that the phrase commonly occurs in sacral manumission, in which a slave was dedicated to or purchased by a god; and (2) that, no matter whether the slave was fully emancipated by the god or rendered consequent *paramone* to the deity, one fact is certain: when ἐπ' ἐλευθερία is employed in sacral manumission, the *former* master had no authority over the (former) slave (e.g. to mandate *paramone*). So certain is McLean, that he notes the following:

However, in most cases, the dedication was simply a way of stating that the master no longer had any claim on the slave, often explicitly expressed by the phrase “for freedom” (ἐπ' ἐλευθερία). Through this act of dedication, the god not only witnessed the transaction but served as its guarantor: any violation of the slave's new freedom was a violation of the rights of the god himself and constituted an act of sacrilege.²³

Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Vol. 1 (New York, NY: Ktav, 1975), 512-514.

²¹ *SIG* 1205. See also *GDI* II/2, 2097 & 2172.

²² Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient Near East* (rev. ed.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 323.

²³ McLean, *Epigraphy*, 292-93.

VI. FREED SLAVES, SONSHIP, AND GALATIANS 5

Returning to the biblical passage at hand, the import of this expression becomes clear: a likely reason Paul utilizes the expression is as an allusion to sacral manumission practices. However, one must be careful not to press the allusion too far, as did Deissmann when he understood all of Paul's references to emancipation and "slave of Christ" primarily in light of sacral manumission.²⁴ Nevertheless, in the case of Galatians 5, this investigator believes that sacral manumission is precisely what is in view. In light of the fact that sacral manumission was commonly practiced among both Gentiles and Jews,²⁵ and especially the fact that this phrase is most commonly employed in these types of texts, support the position that ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ was most likely employed by Paul with these connotations in mind. In fact, the slavery-freedom imagery utilized by the apostle elsewhere in the epistle coheres with such an idea in Galatians 5.

One instance where Paul utilizes the imagery of slavery is 4:3-5. Here the Apostle affirms that "we were once enslaved to the elementary principles of the world," being "under the law" (4:3, 5). Of note is that Paul unites slavery with the law. However, in 4:5 Paul states that Christ came to "redeem" (ἐξαγοράζω) (cf. 3:13) "those who were under law so that we might receive the adoption."²⁶ This language of "redeeming" was very common in the ancient world for redeeming or buying a slave, but may also refer back to Exodus 6:6, where God says that he will redeem (קָדַם) His people from slavery to the Egyptians.²⁷

In 4:6-9, the apostle reminds them that they are no longer slaves but sons. Yet, at the same time they have come to know God, or rather, to be known by God, they are desiring to once again be enslaved by returning to law. Hence, the apostle connects their freedom from slavery (and consequent sonship) with the divine agency of God through Christ crucified. The Galatians should realize that their emancipation from the master, "Law," came by virtue of God in Christ; they now belong to Him as children.

²⁴ Deissmann, *Light*, 318-30.

²⁵ See B. Nadel, "Actes d'affranchissement des esclaves du royaume du Bosphore et les origines de la manumission ecclesia" in *Vortrage zur griechischen und hellenistischen Reschtsgeschichte*, (ed. Hans Julius Wolff (Cologne: Bohlau, 1975), 265-291, who records Jewish manumission with consequent *paramone* rendered to τῆ προσευχῆ.

²⁶ Interestingly, the word ἐξαγοράζω is only used twice in Galatians (3:13; 4:5), and both times with reference to being "redeemed" from the law.

²⁷ On the possible connection of Galatians with the Exodus account, see Byron, *Slavery*, 187-99.

In this manner, the freedom (cf. 5:1-13) into which the Galatians were brought can be directly attributed to divine means. This would explain why Paul employs the language of sacramental mission in Galatians 5:1 and 5:13. The Galatians have been freed “for freedom” (ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ), and Paul urges them to stand fast and not be subject to the yoke of slavery—which, in the context of Galatians, is adherence to the law.²⁸

Before delving into the text of Galatians 5, it is important to reiterate that 5:1-6 is couched in Paul’s argument that the Galatians are no longer slaves, but sons. Here, the apostle unites their freedom from slavery with their sonship—which is another way of saying that the Galatians were emancipated to be sons. As such, Paul issues the stern warning to those who would be circumcised that “Christ will be of no benefit” to them (5:2), they will be “a debtor to practice the whole law” (5:3), will be “annulled (κατηργήθητε) from Christ” (5:4),²⁹ and will “have fallen from grace” (5:4). Conversely, he states in 5:5, “For we, through the Spirit by faith, anxiously await the ‘hope’³⁰ brought about by righteousness.”³¹ By mentioning “Spirit” and “faith” once more, Paul seems to be harkening back to those concepts mentioned in the letter’s body (cf. 3:1-9, 14; 4:6-7) that denote true sonship. Only those in the Spirit-faith realm, that is, the legitimate son/heirs, can eagerly await such a “hope.”

The apostle’s grand pronouncement concerning sonship, however, comes in 5:6: “For (γὰρ)³² in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor

²⁸ See fn. 10.

²⁹ Given the sonship and inheritance themes that pervade the letter, it is probable that *κατηργήθητε* carries the connotation of being “voided” or “annulled” as a son/heir in this context, which implies that one’s claim to sonship was illegitimate. For the idea of this verb as “legally invalidate,” see *BDAG*, s.v. “καταργέω.”

³⁰ ἐλπίδα most likely connotes “that for which one hopes” (Cf. *BDAG*, s.v. “ἐλπίς”). Furthermore, although the point cannot be pressed, the term does appear to be connected with the ideas of inheritance and sonship in some other NT instances. See Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:5-12; Heb. 6:17-18; & 1 Pet. 1:3-4.

³¹ δικαιοσύνης is taken as a “genitive of producer.” Understanding the genitive in this manner highlights the distinction between those seeking to be “justified by law” (5:4) and those who, “through the Spirit by faith” possess (true) righteousness and its consequent hope. For a discussion of this syntactical category, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 104-106.

³² The γὰρ is almost certainly “explanatory,” thereby linking “the hope brought about by righteousness” (5:5) to the sphere of Christ Jesus.

foreskin has any validity (τι ἰσχύει),³³ but (what has validity is)³⁴ faith operating through love.” At this point Paul undermines the whole paradigm by which his opponents are operating, and demonstrates that the circumcision-foreskin dichotomy is false and valid for nothing in the Christ-sphere (5:6). On the contrary, he maintains that “in Christ Jesus” the only true validity (i.e. legitimacy as son/heirs in the context of Galatians) consists in “faith expressing itself (ἐνεργουμένη)³⁵ through love” (5:6). Hence, Longenecker is only partially correct to assume that Paul includes this phrase simply because “he needs to emphasize more directly the ethical dynamic inherent in the relationship of being ‘in Christ Jesus’.”³⁶ More likely is the thesis that Paul specifically cites “faith” in this passage because it is an indicator of genuine sonship (cf. 3:6-9, 26) vis-à-vis those seeking to validate sonship and obtain inheritance through circumcision. Additionally, this faith of true sonship expresses itself through the one virtue that fulfills the law: love.³⁷ In short, the apostle still has sonship and law-keeping in mind when making the claim that the Galatians have been emancipated ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ. The force of such an assertion in 5:1-6 serves to identify three key elements: (1) the valid locus of sonship is only in the Christ-sphere by means of faith; (2) that only through emancipation from Law can true sonship and its expression emerge; and (3) the fulfilling of law by believers only comes through love. Such is the hallmark of true sons/heirs, that is, those who have been fully emancipated by Christ from slavery to the law.

As a consequence, the necessity of law-keeping, especially circumcision, for the sake of sonship becomes invalid. Such a notion is in perfect keeping with the phrase ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ, which implies that any and

³³ In view of the forensic language in the immediate context (i.e. “annulled,” “justify” [5:4] and “righteousness” [5:5]) and the previous discussion concerning sonship and inheritance rights, τι ἰσχύει is best rendered in this context as “has any validity.” The sense here is “validity” concerning claims to sonship. See also *BDAG*, s.v. “ἰσχύω,” and Dunn, *Galatians*, 220.

³⁴ Since this is a likely case of an elided verb, the closest verb in the context has been utilized.

³⁵ Here ἐνεργουμένη is understood as a reflexive middle, and carries the notion of “power.” Cf. Betz, *Galatians*, 263.

³⁶ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 229. This, however, does not negate the ethical implications. See also Martyn, *Galatians*, 474-475, for a similar understanding.

³⁷ The assertion that Paul specifically has love “as the law’s fulfillment” in focus here is derived by viewing “love” in 5:6 cataphorically in light of its reappearance in 5:13-14 as such. The justification for doing so lies in the fact that 5:7-12 is part of a framing device utilized by Paul (having its counterpart in 1:5-10), and should be understood as a subsection of the letter itself. Moreover, given the likelihood that γὰρ in 5:13 is resumptive, Paul is probably continuing the thought unit of 5:1-6.

all authority of the former master (in this case, the Law) over the slave becomes legally voided. Thus, it is probable that, in Galatians 5, Paul weaves the imagery of sacral manumission of slaves and the language of sonship into a beautiful tapestry—one which turns the argument of his opponents on its head. However, the Apostle does not end the discussion there; he furthers his argument by maintaining that this freedom and sonship find true expression in the realm of a newly-instituted slavery.

VII. GALATIANS 5 AND THE LANGUAGE OF SLAVERY

This section picks up in Galatians 5:13, where Paul states, “For you were called on condition of freedom, brothers, only not the freedom for an occasion to the flesh; but rather, through love slave for one another.” While Paul laid heavy emphasis on the fact that the Galatians have been fully emancipated from the Law and are sons, he now states that this emancipation is not a license to self-vindicate by works of the flesh (i.e. going back to the practices under law). Moreover, slave imagery is yet again employed, but this time with a new master in view.

In this chapter, Paul progresses from full emancipation to full slavery—a combination which, at first, seems odd. To be sure, many instances exist in sacral manumission texts where a slave is emancipated but yet renders *paramone* to the deity.³⁸ However, to this writer’s knowledge, no sacral manumission text pairs the technical phrase ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ with consequent δουλεία (“slavery”); the thought is simply unheard of in the ancient world. Yet, the apostle unites this duality with utmost ease to establish the fact that the true sons/heirs of Abraham are those who possess true freedom in Christ and are yet slaves (5:1-13). This begs the question of how such a seemingly strange combination can exist.

Outside its affinity with yet distinction from sacral manumission, a more lucid understanding of this amalgamation comes from a cursory glance at the Old Testament evidence. Repeatedly, the people of God are referred to as God’s servants, God’s slaves. Passages such as Exod 16:3, 17:3; Num 11:4-18, 14:4; 2 Chron 12:8; and Jer 3:22 (LXX) demonstrate this fact. In the ancient Jewish mind, the idea of serving YHWH and his people are as ancient as the day God chose a people for Himself. Moreover, the Old Testament also witnesses to the fact that God’s people were freed *in order to* serve Him. Proof of this is to be found in Exod 4:23, 19:4-6, 20:1-6; and Lev 25:42. Thus, the idea of being emancipated to serve has a firm grounding within ancient Jewish culture, and no doubt

³⁸ See B. Adams, *Paramone*; and W. L. Westermann, “Enslaved Persons Who are Free” (AJP 59; 1938).

serves to bolster Paul's argument that, in light of the New Covenant, an adherence to Mosaic law via circumcision presupposes no freedom at all.

With both the Old Testament and ancient sacral manumission in view, we come to Galatians 5:17: "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, but (δὲ) the Spirit (sets its desire)³⁹ against the flesh; for these are opposed to one another so that you cannot do the things you desire." This paper posits that here Paul views the Spirit as the new master of the Christian slave (in contrast to self-vindicating, law-keeping flesh). Consider the phrase μή ἂ ἐάν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε ("you cannot do the things you desire") in the passage. Noteworthy is that, in the Greco-Roman world, freedom was understood most generally over against the idea of slavery. For this reason the great Roman writer Epictetus defined the free man in this fashion: "He is free who lives as he wills, who is subject neither to compulsion, nor hindrance, nor force, whose choices are unhampered, whose desires attain their end."⁴⁰ On the contrary, a slave, as was seen in the above manumission texts, was to be occupied *ποιοῦσα τὸ ἐπιτασόμενον* ("performing that which is commanded"). Simply put, a slave does what the master desires and not what he or she desires. The idiom is also reminiscent of Romans 7:14-23, where Paul is a slave to sin, and states "For the thing I desire I do not do" (Rom. 7:15). The phrase under consideration in Galatians would strike any Roman citizen as uncharacteristic of a free person, since it is more descriptive of servility. Thus, in light of the preceding slave imagery, the expression might very well have been understood in this manner by the Galatians, and would serve in this passage to highlight the existence of two competing authorities: Spirit and flesh (which Paul uses virtually interchangeably with "Law" in the epistle as its embodiment).

If the above considerations are correct, the phrase "you cannot do the things you desire" seems to be a double entendre utilized by Paul. On one hand, the idiom refers to the fact that the Galatians who possess the Spirit will not "do what they desire," namely be under law by means of circumcision (which they were allegedly "desiring" to do in 4:21). In short, if they have the Spirit, the Spirit will not allow this to take place. On the other hand, the passage speaks to the fact that they are now slaves to the Spirit of God, and consequently "do not do what they desire," since they are now slaves under His rulership.

³⁹ The elided ἐπιθυμῆι has been provided for clarity.

⁴⁰ Epictetus, *Discourses as reported by Arrian*. (trans. W. A. Oldfather; 2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1925-28), 4.1.1. See also Philo, "Every Good Man is Free (Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit)," (*Philo IX*, trans. F. H. Colson; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1941), 22, who describes freedom as operating according to one's own desire.

The Apostle continues in 5:18 to state “But if you are led (ἄγεσθε)⁴¹ by the Spirit, you are not under law (ὑπὸ νόμον).”⁴² Of great significance is that ὑπὸ νόμον (“under law”) is actually a phrase that was employed in slave manumission. For instance, the noted Greek epigraphist Bruno Helly remarked that ὑπὸ νόμον was used in various manumission texts to refer precisely to the *paramone* agreement. In other words, when the phrase was employed, *paramone* was in play. In like manner, Helly maintains that to *not* be ὑπὸ νόμον implied full emancipation for a slave.⁴³ Hence, when applied to the text of Galatians 5:18, two interrelated facets come into focus: (1) the phrase would imply that if one is led by the Spirit, that person is not under any obligation to render *paramone* to the old master (i.e. the law); and (2) it presses the idea that the authority of the law over the Galatian believers is permanently voided. To buttress this idea, it is noteworthy that in 5:13f Paul affirms love as the fulfilling of the law, and in 5:22—which begins his list of the fruit of the Spirit—love takes pride of place on the list. More to the point, slavery to the Spirit inherently produces that which fulfills the law (i.e. love), and hence the Christian slave has no further obligation to it. It’s authority has been voided and its demands have been fulfilled.

This thought may also extend to 5:23, where Paul ends his list on the fruit of the Spirit by noting κατὰ τῶν τοιοῦτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος (“against such things there is no law”). The phrase has often confused scholars as to its meaning. Both Longenecker and Witherington assert

⁴¹ This verb may be a reference back to the sonship discussed earlier in the passage—especially in light of Romans 8:14 (“Who as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”). However, although this point is rather minute, it is interesting that the verb ἄγω is often coupled with situations where a person or group of persons is “led” in some form of slavery/captivity. As examples, consider Matt 10:18, Acts 9:2, 1 Cor 12:2, 2 Tim 3:6, which support that the verb either connotes being led in captivity or occurs in such situations. See H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), 10, and *BDAG*, 16, which both note that the verb, in certain contexts, denotes leading away in captivity/slavery.

⁴² Space does not permit for a detailed study of the various theories concerning the meaning of “Law” in Galatians. One formidable proposal, however, comes from Todd Wilson, who wishes to understand this phrase as a reference to not being under “the curse” of the law, and appeals to Gal. 3:13 for support. However, Wilson does not give due credit to the fact that in 3:13 as well as 4:4-5, the language used is that of a slave being “redeemed” from a master. Therefore, a more proper understanding of ὑπὸ νόμον should take this into consideration. See Todd A. Wilson, *The Curse of the Law and the Crisis in Galatia* (WUNT 2/225; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 119-20.

⁴³ Bruno Helly, “Lois sur les affranchissements dans les inscriptions thessaliennes,” *Phoenix* 30 (1976): 143-58.

that it is perhaps an early Christian proverb, meant to spur the Galatians toward ethical Christian living.⁴⁴ Wilson, who acknowledges the puzzling nature of this comment, is still more adventuresome, and chooses to render the phrase as “The Law is not against such things.” His aim in doing so is to demonstrate that the Mosaic code is not counter to the Spirit’s fruit.⁴⁵ However, such a translation does justice neither to the Greek word order of the passage nor to Paul’s rhetoric concerning the law in the epistle. Therefore, it seems better to maintain the more accepted translation (i.e. “against such things there is no law”), yet to place this phrase within the above servile-emancipation matrix. The understanding achieved by this maneuver is simply that the negation of law (i.e. οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος) would suggest, *ipso facto*, that the function of the “fruit” in the life of the Galatian believers occurs within the realm of the Spirit, and thereby connotes and expresses the complete manumission/emancipation from νόμος.

VIII. CONCLUDING SYNTHESIS

This brief contribution has sought to demonstrate that Galatians 5 operates in keeping with the dual notions of slavery and sonship within the wider context of the epistle. The apostle utilizes both emancipatory and servile language taken from sacral manumission texts to create a paradoxically mixed metaphor (i.e. full emancipation-total slavery) which runs against the common grain of slave manumission in the ancient world. However, such a notion is certainly present and finds a bedrock within Old Testament theology. Equally important, it has been noted that the phrase ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ marginalizes any notion that the Galatian believers are to continue in any type of *paramone* service to the law, which, in the context of Galatians, is the reception of circumcision. Therefore, whatever scholars may debate concerning the precise meaning and role of the law in Galatians, this much is sure: that those who are in Christ fulfill law by the Spirit’s leading through love, and owe no further allegiance to it because they have been emancipated by and have come under the authority of a new Master. Such a new slavery, in the words of John Byron, “is manifested through love and enslavement to one another and not through enslavement to the law. In Paul’s mind, believers...have been freed from one enslavement in order to enter another, that of Christ.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 263-64; Witherington, *Galatians*, 411-12.

⁴⁵ Wilson, *Curse*, 120-25.

⁴⁶ Byron, *Slavery*, 199.

Grant Palmer's Mormon Piece: Why We Printed It.



JERRY A. JOHNSON*
Academic Editor
Midwestern Journal of Theology

I. A VERY TYPICAL ENCOUNTER

Lori played the trump card. She challenged me to read the Book of Mormon and to pray for the “spirit” to give me a feeling of assurance that it was true.

She had just heard me preach a biblical sermon about the Trinity, or the tri-unity of God, among other things. After the sermon, some Christian friends of hers brought Lori to me so that I might explain the biblical teaching about Jesus and salvation, in contrast to Mormon beliefs. I tried this for about half an hour. She responded with a vague appeal to the Book of Mormon and to Joseph Smith as a prophet. Then I noted historical, archaeological, and doctrinal problems with Mormonism and Smith. I also argued that the Bible and the Book of Mormon are not compatible in their teachings and she would have to choose. But none of this mattered. In her mind she had the winning hand. Lori had received the “burning bosom” from the “spirit” that gave her a feeling of assurance that the Book of Mormon was true and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet—case closed!

Some might assume that this Mormon was not a thinking scholar, hence the retreat to an apologetic based on feelings instead of facts. To the contrary, she was a highly educated participant in a conference made up of political conservatives. Her job, and her cause, was to head a pro-

*On behalf of the Editors, with the assistance of the Managing Editor.

ject to identify and preserve (online) early source documents essential to the founding of the United States. Her passion entailed the historical accuracy of primary documents. What an opening! I simply challenged her to apply the same rigor to the historical accuracy of the Book of Mormon that she applied to the founding documents and hoped she would see that my criticisms of Smith and his book were valid. But she would have nothing of it. She already knew Mormonism to be true, she felt it so from the “spirit.” Instead, it was I who needed merely to read the Book of Mormon and pray for that same existential confirmation that it was true.

This personal story illustrates why Grant Palmer’s piece is so important and why we included it in our last journal. If there were such a thing as an Official Mormon Playbook, we can be sure that under “Apologetics,” tactic A1, we would find: “Play the burning bosom card when confronted with challenges to Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon.”

II. WHAT WERE WE THINKING?

So what were we thinking? Why would a Southern Baptist theological journal print an article penned by a Mormon? We have been asked this question about our Spring 2010 issue of the *Midwestern Journal of Theology* (see “Religious Feeling and Truth” by Grant H. Palmer). It is a good question. It must be answered. In one sense the above should be enough. But some readers want more, so here it is.

The *Midwestern Journal of Theology* is an academic journal, which by its very nature, will occasionally contain lines, paragraphs, and even articles that do not reflect the theology of Midwestern, Southern Baptists, or even Christians. For instance, see Bart Erhman’s material in the current issue. But when this happens, it is the duty of the editors to provide context, and rebuttal, when needed. Of course, we provide both in the current journal regarding Ehrman. This back and forth is essential if we are going to address the great debates of our time.

For Palmer’s piece we originally provided context in the opening “Editorial” (p. vii). Here, the editor qualified the piece in several ways. First, he noted it was of “special interest” as opposed to a general article that would represent Midwestern. Second, he noted “Palmer is not a Southern Baptist, indeed he still considers himself a Mormon.” Third, and most important for the discerning reader, he limited the purpose of printing the Palmer piece to *one* specific point:

Even so, we will find it informative to look over his shoulder as he challenges a teaching central to Mormon belief and epistemology, namely the idea that the best, perhaps even the only, way to be sure that the Book of Mormon is true or that Joseph Smith really was a prophet of God is to pray to get a confirmatory testimony, or “burning of the bosom.” Every Christian who has had any sort of extended interactions with Mormons will appreciate the importance of Palmer’s discussion.

There it is. We thought it would be “interesting” to “look over his shoulder” and see how Palmer rejects the oft-spouted “proof” given by so many Mormons as to how they know that the Book of Mormon is true—the “burning in the bosom.”

As if this general introduction was not clear enough, a second editorial in italics was placed immediately prior to Palmer’s piece (p. 115). Some of the same disclaimers were made, especially that *the point* of his piece in the MBTS journal was “how he came to the conclusion that one must not ultimately base the acceptance or rejection of religious truth on feelings.” Again, the motivation in publishing Palmer is expressed in a slightly different way:

In making his case, Palmer challenges the central Mormon belief that the best (perhaps the only) way to be sure that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith is really a prophet is to pray to receive a testimony, or “burning bosom,” providing assurance that they are.

So let us be clear again, to the extent of belaboring of the point, just in case some of our readers are still missing our rationale. The reason behind printing Palmer’s article was to call attention to the fact that he, as a Mormon, is removing one of the most significant weapons in the Mormon arsenal. This Mormon at least does *not* accept “the burning in the bosom” argument. We do believe this is an interesting development, indeed. It is worth reading and passing on to other readers. Should the same kind of development occur in the writing of say a Muslim or Jehovah’s Witness apologist, we would cover that in the journal as well.

III. LIMITATIONS

So Palmer’s article was published as a point of interest for its negative dimension—what he was saying against the typical Mormon apologetic. Having said all of this, we acknowledge that Palmer’s piece has serious limitations as to its positive dimensions. What he asserts as a

replacement is not clear and at some points misguided. The main confusion arises from the fact that Palmer still counts himself a Mormon and one cannot be sure what he means when he uses terms like God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit. As one of our readers, our good friend Fred Wheeler, asked:

Which God, which Jesus and which Holy Spirit is Mr. Palmer really talking about? Latter-day Saints (LDS) use the same words as Christian orthodoxy, however, they have a totally different meaning.

The point is well taken, while Mormonism and Orthodox Christianity use the same vocabulary, they follow a different dictionary. Wheeler develops this challenge using a Palmer quote:

What does Grant Palmer really think truth is? Is his first paragraph he states, "For the Christian, Christ is religious truth." That statement seems unclear. Does he believe that Christians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witness and even Muslims believe in the same Jesus?

Wheeler puts his finger on an important point. The Jesus of Mormonism, like the Jesus of Jehovah's Witness, or Islam, is not the Jesus of the Bible and Christianity. But neither is he the Jesus of the Book of Mormon, which is much closer to the Christian Jesus than the Jesus of contemporary Mormonism. Current Mormonism teaches a plurality of Gods, rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity held by all Christians. Consider for example the following remark by LDS writer Gary J. Colman, who declared in 2007 that "false doctrines about the Godhead were fashioned out of the Nicene Creed and Constantinople councils, where men declared that instead of three separate beings, the Godhead was three persons in one God, or the Trinity."¹ Near the end of his life the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith said, "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods."² It has long been recognized that Smith's statement here is not entirely true, that the doctrine of God in the Book of Mormon reflects a more or less traditional doctrine of the Trinity, but one that has been

¹ Gary J. Colman, "Mom, Are We Christians?" *Ensign* (May 2007): 92.

² From a sermon preached 11 June 1843, quoted here in *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 41-2.

tainted by modalism.³ Modalism is a view that describes the Trinity not as three persons in one God but as one person in three different roles or expressions. A number of passages in the Book of Mormon seem to reflect a modalistic doctrine of God, such as, for example, Ether 3:14: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son,” and 3 Nephi 1:14: “Behold, I come unto my own . . . to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh” (cf. Alma 11:26–29, 38–39; Mosiah 3:5, 8). The idea seems to be, in the second passage at least, that the spirit of Jesus is the Father and the body of Jesus is the Son. Traditional Trinitarianism accepts neither modalism nor the idea of a plurality of gods, but steers a course between the two. The Athanasian Creed, for example, put it this way:

We worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity, *neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance*. For the person of the Father is one; of the Son, another; of the Holy Spirit, another. But the divinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one. (italics added)

The Book of Mormon falls to one side of the orthodox Trinitarian position by “confounding the persons” (only one person in the godhead) while contemporary Mormonism falls to the other by “dividing the substance” (ending up with more than one God). In addition the Book of Mormon represents Jesus as the eternal, omnipotent God as is seen for example in Mosiah 3:5: “For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men.” The question of the extent to which Palmer’s own views might fall along this continuum or where they depart from it altogether is an interesting question and one that can be pursued in a book he wrote on the subject entitled *The Incomparable Jesus*.⁴ As to Palmer’s statement “for the Christian, Christ is religious

³ Two key early studies on this issue are Dan Vogel, “The Earliest Mormon Doctrine of God,” in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine* (ed. Gary James Bergera; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1989), 17-33, and Melodie Moench Charles, “Book of Mormon Christology,” in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodologies* (ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1993), 81-114. See further, Ronald V. Huggins, “Joseph Smith’s Modalism: Sabellian Sequentialism or Swedenborgian Expansionism?” (2006) (<http://www.irr.org/mit/modalism.html>).

⁴ Grant H. Palmer, *The Incomparable Christ* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2005).

truth,” it was our understanding that he was merely trying to represent what he believed to be generally true of all Christians. In letting Palmer express his own ideas in his own words we in no way intended to minimize the difference between the Christ of the Bible and the Christ of Mormonism, even if such a distinction might not be as clear in Palmer's mind as it is in ours.

The Palmer piece also runs into trouble in relation to the doctrine of inspiration. While invoking the “Christ” test for truth, Palmer makes another problematic statement, “The Holy Spirit may well tell a person the Book of Mormon is true because it testifies and brings a person to Christ, who is the Truth, but not whether the Book of Mormon’s theological doctrines are true.” Again, the second half of the sentence was our main interest; i.e., the “spirit” test is not the winning argument on whether or not Mormon books are true. To be fair to Palmer, this half of the sentence is the main point.

However we would certainly agree with friends of *Midwestern* who took issue with the first part of the sentence, “The Holy Spirit may well tell a person the Book of Mormon is true because it testifies and brings a person to Christ, who is the Truth.” That would be tantamount to saying that in the process of the affirming Jesus, the Holy Spirit might lead us also to embrace the Book of Mormon, a false book of “Scripture” fabricated by an unscrupulous nineteenth-century religious charlatan! Yet the fact is that the Jesus of the Book of Mormon is closer to the Biblical Jesus than the Jesus of current Mormonism. This is partly due to the fact that much of the language of the Book of Mormon was plagiarized directly out of the King James Bible, sometimes for chapters on end, as when Joseph Smith copied pretty much the whole of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount out of the King James Bible and into 3 Nephi 12-14.⁵ The result is that much of what you read in the Book of Mormon *is* the Bible. But then long stretches of it are not, but rather are Joseph Smith’s tedious bible-flavored ramblings. The latter part drew forth Mark Twain’s famous description of the Book of Mormon as

⁵ See Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith’s Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon* (rev. ed.; Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2010). For a discussion of Joseph Smith’s plagiarism of the Sermon on the Mount, see Ronald V. Huggins, “Did the Author of 3 Nephi Know the Gospel of Matthew,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3.3 (Fall 1997): 137-148; Stan Larson, “The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses Concerning the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” *Trinity Journal* 7 (Spring 1986): 23-45, and idem, “The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi,” in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 115-163.

“chloroform in print.”⁶ The Book of Mormon author, Twain goes on to say,

“labored to give his words and phrases the quaint, old-fashioned sound and structure of our King James’s translation of the Scriptures; and the result is a mongrel—half modern glibness, and half ancient simplicity and gravity. The latter is awkward and constrained; the former natural, but grotesque by the contrast. Whenever he found his speech growing too modern—which was about every sentence or two—he ladled in a few such Scriptural phrases as ‘exceeding sore,’ ‘and it came to pass,’ etc., and made things satisfactory again.”

Mormons do not usually read the Book of Mormon in the same way Christians read the Bible. They are never encouraged nor even allowed to pit the doctrine of the Book of Mormon against current Church, despite the fact that the two contradict each other at many crucial points. When they say that it is true, they do not usually mean that its doctrines and teachings are true, indeed the vast majority of Mormons who affirm that it is “true” have no real idea what it teaches. Rather what they mean is that the story about its coming forth—about the first vision, about the angel Moroni and the finding and supernatural translation of the Golden plates—really happened. The Book of Mormon is presented by the current LDS Church as providing the *object* not the *content* of faith, i.e., a physical artifact of the divine encounter Joseph Smith supposedly had with the Angel Moroni.

However, occasionally some Mormon will somehow or other get it into his head to actually take the next logical step of seriously trying to understand what the Book of Mormon actually says about Jesus, and comes to understand where that differs from official Mormonism and agrees with the Bible. Sometimes this leads to their leaving the LDS Church while still clinging to the Book of Mormon and occasionally it results in people finding more of what they like about the Book of Mormon in the Bible than in the Book of Mormon, letting the Book of Mormon go, and becoming Christians. That was the story of some of the most effective Christ missionaries to Mormons of the present generation, Jerald and Sandra Tanner. Who first gave up Mormonism, and only later gave up the Book of Mormon. (See Sandra’s article in the present issue). What man intended for evil, God once again uses for good!

⁶ Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1891), 127.

The friend who made the point that one might equally be drawn to Jesus through truths about him in places like the Koran, *Newsweek*, *Sports Illustrated*, or “even a Marvel Comic book” is perfectly right. If God uses any part of any book to draw someone to Christ, that in and of itself is not the test of a “scriptural” level of inspiration or truth. The truth of any book is true. Yet we would insist that any attempt to compare Grant Palmer’s (or anyone’s) view of the inspiration of the Book of Mormon to *Midwestern Journal’s* view of the inspiration of the Bible really amounts to a comparison of apples and oranges.

Certain Evangelicals and Mormons have been known to get together and celebrate “how much they have common” because they both hold to a high view of the inspiration of their respective Books of Scriptures. The reality is that when the Mormon makes the same kind of affirmations about the Book of Mormon that the Christian makes about the Bible he is doing something very different than what the Christian is doing.

When the Mormon, for example, insists that the events described in the book of Mormon were real historical events he does so in the teeth of all the evidence. When the Christian makes the same claim about the Bible he is to a considerable extent confirmed in what he says even by many secular historians. Even secular scholars who do not allow for the possibility of miracles still venture to write about Biblical people and places. An example of this is the classicist Michael Grant, who, in addition to his writings on the ancient Roman world and the Caesars, has also attempted biographies of Jesus, Peter and Paul. No secular scholar would seriously undertake to write biographies of Book of Mormon figures like Nephi, Laman, or Moroni. They didn’t exist, and a considerable body of evidence confirms that the story of the Book of Mormon fails to jibe with the real history of ancient America.⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

Noting or even applauding Palmer’s movement in the right direction on a single issue, does not mean we endorse him or his piece at other points, especially where he remains sympathetic to Mormon thought. Perhaps we should have published more stage instructions and disclaimers along this line with Palmer’s original article. However, we took for granted our readers knew our position on Mormonism. Our

⁷ On the seriousness of the problems see Stan Larson, *Thomas Stuart Ferguson’s Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: UT: Freethinkers Press, in assoc. with Smith Research Associates, 2004); Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1969).

seminary president and executive editor of this journal, Dr. R. Philip Roberts, has written a well known book on Mormonism whose title leaves no doubt as to its author's perspective: *Mormonism Unmasked: Confronting the Contradictions between Mormon Beliefs and True Christianity* (1998).⁸ He also contributed to a second book entitled *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism: The Great Divide Between Mormonism and Christianity* (1998).⁹ Dr. Roberts was also featured extensively explaining the differences between Mormonism and Christianity in the SBC North American Mission Board video project *The Mormon Puzzle: Understanding and Witnessing to Latter-day Saints* (1997).

As recently as last month Midwestern Seminary held a conference that featured critical presentations on Mormonism, in which all four presenters drew attention to the importance of understanding Mormonism's roots in the occult. One of the presenters was Sandra Tanner, who, as we have already noted, has contributed an article to this issue of our journal. Are we compromising here? Certainly not! Our stand on Mormonism is clear and well known. MBTS considers it a given that our readers know our position is that official Mormon doctrine falls outside the bounds of Christianity on many important topics, including Christ, Scripture, salvation, and heaven.

But again, that is not why we published the article. The article was printed to show a significant fault line, among Mormon ranks, that could lead to an earthquake if followed to its logical conclusion. If feelings and a burning in the bosom cannot settle the issue, how can one assess the *Book of Mormon*? As the former Mormon James Walker pointed out to me recently, he prayed for this confirmation when he read the *Book of Mormon*, but the Spirit showed him that it was a *false* book and that Smith was a *false* prophet. Given that Lori, who we mentioned at the beginning, felt sure that the Spirit told her that the Book of Mormon was *true*, but James that the Spirit told him that it was *false*, it seems clear we need a different test for knowing which of them is right. When all the facts are known, we are confident of where this will lead every time.

Jerry A. Johnson
Academic Editor

⁸R. Philip Roberts, with Tal Davis and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism Unmasked: Confronting the Contradictions between Mormon Beliefs and True Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998).

⁹Francis J. Beckwith, Norman L. Geisler, Ron Rhodes, Phil Roberts, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism: The Great Divide Between Mormonism and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998).

The Role of “Prophet, Seer and Revelator” in Mormonism



SANDRA TANNER*
Utah Lighthouse Ministries
Salt Lake City, Utah,
info@utlm.org

*For false christs and false prophets will rise
and show great signs and wonders to deceive,
if possible, even the elect.
(Matthew 24:24 NKJ)*

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are
of God; because
many false prophets have gone out into the world.
(I John 4:1 NKJ)*

At the April, 2009 annual conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Thomas Monson was formally set apart as the “Prophet, Seer and Revelator” of the church.¹

*Sandra Tanner and her late husband Jerald Tanner (both ex-Mormons) are founders of Utah Lighthouse Ministries, an Evangelical ministry to Mormons. Together and separately they have written numerous books on Mormon history and Doctrine.

¹ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Sustaining of Church Officers,” *Ensign* (May 2009): 27.



Fig. 1: LDS President Thomas Monson

But what does this title mean and how does it function in Mormonism? Do the LDS leaders claim their revelatory process is distinct from the spiritual guidance received by a minister in answer to his prayers?

Joseph Smith founded his church on April 6, 1830. However, at that time it was called the Church of Christ, not receiving its current name until 1838. On that spring day in 1830 Smith announced that through revelation he had been designated as God’s prophet, seer, translator, revelator, and apostle.² Today Mormon literature usually shortens those titles to simply “prophet, seer and revelator.” Verse five of that early revelation instructed Smith’s followers to accept his words as if from God’s “own mouth.”

Today I want to focus on each of the three designations given to the president of the LDS Church.

I. PROPHET

First, let us look at the claim of Prophet. Throughout the Old Testament we see prophets called by God to declare His will, to call Israel to repentance, and to warn of God’s judgment. They were usually not very popular and were often opposed by the leaders and people. These men were forerunners to the final prophet, the Messiah as mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:15. Moses declared:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear. (NKJ)

² *Doctrine & Covenants* (hereafter D&C) 21:1; 124:125 (1981 ed.).

Peter makes mention of the Deuteronomy passage in Acts 3:19-26, identifying the prophet who would be like Moses as Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews explained that the Old Testament role of prophet was fulfilled in Christ:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son....³

While there are men in the New Testament who are referred to as prophets they were not prophets in the same sense as those of the Old Testament. Also, they were not the top leaders in the Christian church, but part of local congregations, as seen in Acts 13.

Mormons will often appeal to Ephesians 4:11 in support of their office of prophet at the head of the church. But this passage says nothing about priesthood offices but is referring to various ministries within the church.

Speaks for God

When Mormons are asked to enumerate the doctrines that set their church apart from all others they usually mention that they have a living prophet. They believe that this gives their church a solid foundation that is lacking in others. Mormons do not hold their scriptures as the final authority on doctrine but instead they look to the teachings of the current president.

As a young person attending LDS meetings I often sang the song "We Thank Thee o God for a Prophet to guide us in these latter days."⁴ In fact, the Ward Teachers' message for June 1945 instructed members that "when the prophet speaks the thinking has been done."⁵ This attitude is currently promoted in the LDS book, *True to the Faith*. In it members are taught that "you can always trust the living prophets. ... Your greatest safety lies in strictly following the word of the Lord given through His prophets, particularly the current President of the Church."⁶

When someone points out that this sounds like blind obedience, Mormons will often respond that the members are to pray for themselves

³ Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 10:43 (New King James Version).

⁴ *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 19.

⁵ "Ward Teaching, Conducted under the Supervision of the Presiding Bishopric," *The Improvement Era* (June 1945): 354.

⁶ "Prophets," in *True to the Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 129-30.

to know the truth. They fail to see the circular reasoning behind these two concepts:

1. The prophet will never lead you astray.
2. You are to pray to know that he is speaking for God.

Of course, if you don't get a confirmation that he speaks for God then you are the one with the problem, not the prophet, because the prophet will never lead you astray.

When I tell Mormons I prayed about Joseph Smith and God showed me that he was not a prophet, they say I must not have prayed sincerely. The only answer that is acceptable to them is that the president of the church is God's prophet. Thus the answer is predetermined

Speaking in 1994, Apostle L. Tom Perry explained:

What a comfort it is to know that the Lord keeps a channel of communication open to His children through the prophet. ... The Lord surely understood the need to keep His doctrines pure and to trust its interpretation to only one source. ... In this way, conflict and confusion and differing opinions are eliminated.

Mr. Perry went on to quote from the second president of the LDS Church:

President Brigham Young has assured us we can have complete confidence in the prophets. He said: "The Lord Almighty leads this Church, and he will never suffer you to be led astray...."⁷

Those who study the history of Mormon doctrinal development are left to wonder about such a statement. Given the fact that President Brigham Young taught doctrines contrary to what is taught today, it is amazing to see Mr. Perry appeal to Brigham Young in affirming that the prophet will never lead you astray.

We will now look at three problem areas associated with LDS prophetic utterances.

Adam-God

The first one relates to Brigham Young's famous teaching that Adam is our Father and God, a view not endorsed today.

⁷ *Journal of Discourses* (hereafter: D&C) 9:289, quoted in L. Tom Perry, "Heed the Prophet's Voice," *Ensign* (Nov 1994): 17.



Fig. 2: LDS President Brigham Young

In 1873 Young claimed that God had revealed that doctrine to him:

How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me—namely that Adam is our Father and God.⁸

Further on in his sermon he identified Adam as the father of our spirits, which contradicts current LDS teaching. Brigham Young repeatedly taught that there was a hierarchy of gods and that the god over our earth is Adam. Brigham Young certainly believed that his sermons were true. Speaking in 1870 Young proclaimed:

I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture.⁹

However, in 1976 President Spencer W. Kimball stated:

We warn you against the dissemination of doctrines which are not according to the scriptures and which are alleged to have been taught by some of the General Authorities of past generations. Such for instance is the Adam-god theory.

We denounce that theory and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of false doctrine.¹⁰

⁸ “Discourse by President Brigham Young,” *Deseret News* (June 18, 1873): 308.

⁹ “Remarks by President Brigham Young, “Latter-day Saint Families, Etc.,” (Jan. 2, 1870), JD13:95.

¹⁰ Spencer W. Kimball, “Our Own Liahona,” *Ensign* (Nov 1976): 77.

But this seems to contradict a statement by President Joseph Fielding Smith:

Neither the President of the Church, nor the First Presidency, nor the united voice of the First Presidency and the Twelve will ever lead the Saints astray or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord.¹¹

If one prophet claims a doctrinal revelation and then a later prophet denounces the teaching, which one is right? What are we to make of the Mormon claim that having a prophet somehow guards the church against false teaching? In a January 2002 interview, the *New Yorker* reported Gordon B. Hinckley as saying:

Brigham Young said if you went to Heaven and saw God it would be Adam and Eve. I don't know what he meant by that. ... I'm not going to worry about what he said about those things.¹²

In 1986 Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley gave instruction on how to deal with contradictory statements by their prophets:

We have critics who appear to cull out of a vast panorama of information those items which demean and belittle some men and women of the past who worked so hard in laying the foundation of this great cause. . . .

We recognize that our forebears were human. They doubtless made mistakes.¹³

But if Brigham Young's Adam-god doctrine is false, why is that not proof that he is a false prophet? Can twenty-five years of sermons on Adam-God be dismissed as simply a "mistake" or just Young's personal opinion?

¹¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, "Eternal Keys and the Right to Preside," *Ensign* (July 1972): 88, see also the same statement quoted by L. Aldin Porter, in "Search the Prophets," *Ensign* (Apr 2002): 30.

¹² Lawrence Wright, "Lives of the Saints," *The New Yorker* (Jan 21, 2002) (online).

¹³ Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Continuous Pursuit of Truth," *Ensign* (Apr 1986): 5.

God Was Once A Man?

Another concern with the claim of prophetic teaching is Joseph Smith's doctrine of God.

The cornerstone of Christian doctrine is that there is only one eternal God. The importance of this truth is seen in Deuteronomy 13 which specifies that a prophet can not lead you after a false god. Also, God instructed Isaiah: "I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." Further on Isaiah recorded: "Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any."¹⁴

All Christian doctrine flows from this concept. Yet Joseph Smith taught that "it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea...."¹⁵

Apostle James E. Talmage discussed Joseph Smith's teaching in his book, *Articles of Faith*:

We believe in a God who is Himself progressive ... In spite of the opposition of the sects, in the face of direct charges of blasphemy, the Church proclaims the eternal truth: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be."¹⁶

If Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and James E. Talmage were prophets of God how are we to reconcile their doctrines with Isaiah's proclamation of one eternal God? They can't all be right. LDS Apostle Harold B. Lee declared:

I bear you my solemn witness that we have a living prophet, seer, and revelator. We are not dependent only upon the revelations given in the past . . . we have a mouthpiece to whom God is revealing his mind and will. God will never permit him to lead us astray. As has been said, God would remove us out of our place if we should attempt to do it.¹⁷

¹⁴ Isa 43:10; 44:6, 8; 46:5,9.

¹⁵ *Joseph Smith's History of the Church* (=JS-H) 6:305.

¹⁶ James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1981), 390 (1899 ed., p. 442).

¹⁷ *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual* (Religion 333; Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 33 (3-7).

Joseph Smith was killed at the age of 38, a month after teaching his most famous sermon on the plurality of gods.¹⁸ Brigham Young, on the other hand, lived to be 76 and taught many doctrines not embraced by the LDS Church today.¹⁹ Why didn't God remove him for teaching false doctrine?

Mormon leaders undercut the authority of scripture and past prophets by pointing everyone to the current prophet to determine truth. But this leads to the question, how can we be sure the prophet is speaking an eternal truth? As with Brigham Young's Adam-god doctrine, is today's teaching going to become tomorrow's false doctrine?

Prophecy

Another problem with the claim that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God is that the majority of his prophecies failed. In 1832 he dictated section 84 of the *Doctrine and Covenants* in which God reportedly told the saints to gather to Independence, Missouri, build a temple and the city of New Jerusalem. However, the Mormons were driven out of the area the next year and the temple still has not been built.

In verses 114-115 of section 84 Bishop Newel K. Whitney was instructed by God to travel through the cities of New York, Albany and Boston warning the people that if they rejected the message of Mormonism, God's judgment was at the door and they would face "desolation and utter abolishment." This prophecy was obviously a failure.

In 1838 Smith tried again to gather the church, but this time to Far West, Missouri. Section 115 states that God called the church to build a temple in Far West but this failed as well. The Mormons were driven out of that area and no temple has been built on the site.

Keep in mind that these revelations had a direct impact on people's lives. Mormon families repeatedly moved, many losing their lands and possessions, following these instructions.²⁰

While Deuteronomy 18:22 declares that if a prophet's words fail he is to be judged a false prophet, Mormons have no such standard. There seems to be an unending stream of rationalizations as to why Smith's prophecies failed.²¹ Mormons say Christians have an unrealistic view of

¹⁸ For more on Smith's doctrine of God, see <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/josephsmithasprophetinviewofkingfollettdiscourse.htm>.

¹⁹ See <http://www.carm.org/religious-movements/mormonism/interesting-quotes-brigham-young-second-prophet-mormon-church>.

²⁰ For other examples of false prophecies, see our web site: www.utlm.org/onlineresources/falseprophecies.htm.

²¹ <http://www.fairlds.org/apol/ai065.html>.

testing prophets, insisting that prophets can make mistakes the same as anyone. Mormon apologist Jeff Lindsey defended Smith's prophetic track record in these words:

... many critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including some members, have unreasonable expectations of Church leaders. ... In spite of his mistakes and errors in judgment, Joseph Smith was a prophet of God—... His divine calling as prophet was not based on his error-free track record or supernatural judgment, but was based on the fact that God made him prophet and put him in that office of the Church.²²

But why should anyone accept the claim that “God made him prophet”? What is the standard? Since it is the leaders who continually insist that the prophet cannot lead them astray, why is it unrealistic to hold him to that standard? One is left to wonder where to draw the line between false and true prophets? At what point would Mormons concede that their prophet crossed the line?

I once asked a Mormon how many failed prophecies it would take to determine that a man was a false prophet. Since he was already aware of many of Smith's failed prophecies he had to give Smith wide leeway. He finally said if 80 percent of his prophecies failed he could be judged a false prophet.

He felt that the December 25, 1832 prophecy about the civil war was one of the best examples of Smith's prophetic gift. I pointed out to him that it didn't require a revelation for Smith to predict the civil war in section 87, as both North and South Carolina had just threatened to leave the union.²³ That would be like me prophesying that there will be new eruptions of violence in the Middle East in the next 5 years. Some future events are pretty easy to guess.

Also the Mormons did not put that revelation into the *Doctrine and Covenants* until 1876. The fact that it wasn't put in earlier editions makes it look like they were waiting to see if there was a civil war before canonizing the prophecy.

II. SEER

Now we move to the second title given to the Mormon president, that of seer. Smith was probably influenced by such passages as 1 Samuel 9:9 where the Biblical view of “seer” is synonymous with “prophet” and

²² <http://www.jefflindsay.com/fallible.shtml>

²³ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 190-191, 195H.

refers to one who speaks for God. But Joseph Smith connected the seer's power with the use of an object sometimes referred to as "Urim and Thummim," "interpreters," or a "seer stone."



Fig. 3: Illustration from LDS.net

Joseph Smith claimed that when he retrieved the ancient record preserved on gold plates from their hiding place in a hill outside Palmyra, New York, in 1827 he also took away an object later referred to as the "Urim and Thummim" which was supposedly prepared by God to aid in the translation of the record.²⁴ This was described as two crystals set in silver bows, like large eyeglasses.²⁵

By the way, LDS Church illustrations of Smith translating never depict him using these large spectacles. He is usually shown sitting at a desk and simply looking at the plates.

Joseph borrowed the phrase "Urim and Thummim" from the Old Testament objects used by the High Priest to determine God's will.²⁶ These were possibly small pieces of stone or wood and kept in the priest's vestments. There does not seem to be any case in which they were used to translate a document.

The Book of Mormon has several references to these objects and associates them with the ability to translate unknown languages.

²⁴ Book of Mormon, Ether 3:22-28.

²⁵ *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, (ed. Scott H. Faulring; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1989), 7.

²⁶ "Urim and Thummim," *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).

In Mosiah 8, we read of some records that were found but were in an unknown script so they were taken to the king,

for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters ... And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer.²⁷

Even though God had reportedly preserved the Urim and Thummim, or interpreters, for centuries and had them buried with the plates to insure their translation, Joseph only used them for the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon, which were lost by Martin Harris. All of the present Book of Mormon was evidently translated by use of a seer stone Smith found in a neighbor's well. Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer described the process as follows:

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat ... A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing.²⁸

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Fig. 4 Illustration of Joseph Smith translating

²⁷ Book of Mormon, Mosiah 8:10-13.

²⁸ David Whitmer, *An Address To All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 12.

But if God is responsible for the English text one wonders why there would have been the need for thousands of corrections to the various editions of the Book of Mormon?²⁹

Whitmer also discussed a failed revelation that came through Smith's stone. Martin Harris was having trouble selling a portion of his farm to help pay for the printing of the Book of Mormon. Joseph's brother, Hyrum, suggested that the copyright to the book could be sold in Canada to help cover the debt. Whitmer wrote:

Joseph looked into the hat in which he placed the stone, and received a revelation that some of the brethren should go to Toronto, Canada, and that they would sell the copy-right of the Book of Mormon ... but they failed entirely to sell the copy-right, returning without any money . . . Well, we were all in great trouble; and we asked Joseph how it was that he had received a revelation from the Lord for some brethren to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right, and the brethren had utterly failed in their undertaking. Joseph did not know how it was, so he enquired of the Lord about it, and behold the following revelation came through the stone: "Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil." So we see that the revelation to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right was not of God, but was of the devil or of the heart of man.³⁰

If Smith could give false revelations through the stone, why should we trust his Book of Mormon translation through that object?

As a point of interest, Smith's seer stone is preserved in the LDS Church First Presidency's vault but we have never seen any reference to its use in recent times.³¹ Why wouldn't the church leaders be proud of the object used to produce one of their books of scripture? Is it possible that they also know that it is simply a piece of folk magic?

Without the Book of Mormon plates scholars are unable to test Smith's translation. However, we can examine other instances of failed seership in Mormonism.

²⁹ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *3913 Changes in the Book of Mormon* (2nd ed.; Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1996), Intro. (http://utlm.org/online_books/3913intro.htm).

³⁰ David Whitmer, *An Address to all Believers*, 31.

³¹ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1998), 245-246.

Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible

Shortly after Smith published the Book of Mormon he began working on a corrected version of the Bible. Numerous sections of the *Doctrine and Covenants* refer to this work.³² While the LDS Church only prints extracts from Smith's revision in the back of their Bible, LDS apostle Bruce R. McConkie maintained that Smith's version is "one of the great evidences of the divine mission of Joseph Smith."³³ However, Smith was not translating from any ancient text, but simply revising the verses as he felt led. Consequently his work is not accepted by Bible scholars. One example of the way he expanded the text can be seen in John 1:1. The King James Version reads:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Joseph Smith, however, changed this verse to read:

In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.³⁴

To our knowledge Joseph Smith's rendition of this verse is not supported by any evidence. In fact, an early Greek manuscript of John 1:1, known as Papyrus Bodmer II, Papyrus 66, is dated about 200 AD and translates like the King James Version.³⁵ Another interesting change is Smith's expansion of chapter 50 of Genesis, where he inserts a prophecy about himself. In his expanded text we read:

And again, a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins,...
And that seer will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded...and his name shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father...³⁶

Again, there is no textual evidence for his expansion of Genesis. Mormons will often challenge a Christian on the reliability of the Bible,

³² D&C 35:20; 42:56; 45:60-61; 73:3-4; 93:53; 94:10; 104:58; 124:89.

³³ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), 384.

³⁴ Holy Bible, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), 807.

³⁵ Tanner & Tanner, *Shadow or Reality?*, 381.

³⁶ LDS Published Bible, p. 799.

insisting that it has had numerous revisions. When they are asked about Joseph Smith's Inspired Version they will usually respond that he never completed the project, even though he stated in his history that he had done so.³⁷

Even if Smith did not complete the work, why hasn't any succeeding president taken up the project? Why was God so insistent that Smith work on this project, even commanding him to publish the work only to let it languish in some drawer for years? If each succeeding president has been a seer in the same sense as they claim for Joseph Smith, one of them should have been able to finish the Inspired Version. Researcher Ed Ashment concluded:

Shortly after publication of the Book of Mormon in March 1830, Smith's second canonical project was to correct errors and omissions in the Bible...

Smith declared that many more ancient records would come to light as part of the "restoration of all things." ... The belief that more books could be added to the canon has continued in Mormonism and become one of its most exciting and controversial calling cards. Since Joseph Smith's death, however, the opening in the heavens has become more restricted. While the Reorganized LDS church [now Community of Christ] has continued to add revelations to its Doctrine and Covenants, only four revelations and two "Official Declarations" produced since Smith's lifetime have been canonized by the Utah church.³⁸

Not only were there no new books added to Joseph Smith's Bible revision, he even left one out, the Song of Solomon.

Book of Abraham

A second area where Joseph Smith's gift of translating can be put to the test is the Book of Abraham. In 1835 a man named Michael Chandler came to the Mormon community in Kirtland, Ohio to show Smith his collection of Egyptian mummies and scrolls.

³⁷ Tanner and Tanner, *Shadow or Reality?*, 386-387.

³⁸ Ed Ashment, "Historiography of the Canon," in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (ed. George D. Smith; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1992), 282.

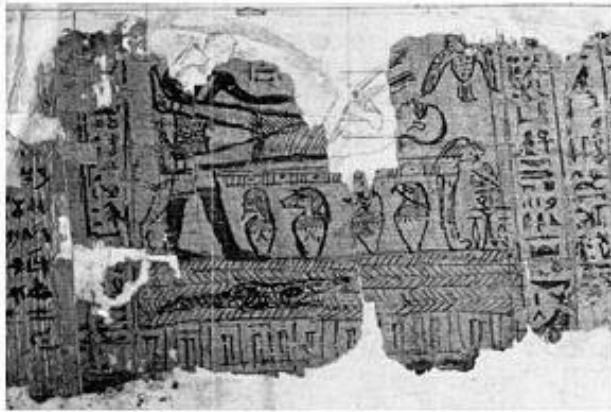


Fig. 5 Original Papyrus of Fac. No. 1, Book of Abraham

The Mormons then bought the collection for \$2400 and Smith began his work of translation. In his *History of the Church* we read:

...I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt...³⁹

This culminated in the Book of Abraham, which is part of the *Pearl of Great Price*. The heading for that work specifically claims that it is a translation of the Egyptian scrolls:

A Translation of some ancient Records, that have fallen into our hands from the catacombs of Egypt.—The writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus.

Joseph Smith's translation was made at a time when Egyptian hieroglyphics were just beginning to be understood. LDS apostle Orson Pratt boasted:

The Prophet translated the part of these writings which, as I have said is contained in the *Pearl of Great Price*, and known as the Book of Abraham. Thus you see one of the first gifts bestowed by the Lord for the benefit of His people, was that of revelation—the gift to translate...ancient records. Have any of

³⁹ JS-H 2:236.

the other denominations got this gift among them? Go and inquire through all of Christendom and do not miss one denomination. Go and ask ... “Can you translate ancient records written in a language that is lost to the knowledge of man?” “No,” he would say, “we cannot, it is out of my power to do it.”⁴⁰

However, by the end of Smith’s life scholars were able to translate many of the hieroglyphics. Egyptologists have now translated the papyri owned by Joseph Smith and they are simply part of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and have no relationship to Abraham.⁴¹

Mormon scholars try to dismiss this problem by either claiming that the particular piece of papyri dealing with Abraham has been lost or that Smith’s rendition doesn’t need to directly correspond to the hieroglyphics as it could be a revelation, as opposed to a literal translation. But this explanation would run counter to the specific claim made in the heading to the Book of Abraham that it is a translation from the papyrus. Smith’s claims of translating the papyri can now be put to the test and he fails.

Kinderhook Plates

Another test came to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois. On May 1, 1843, the Mormon publication, *Times and Seasons*, announced that six ancient brass plates had been found in Kinderhook, Illinois.⁴²



Fig. 6 One of the Kinderhook Plates

⁴⁰ Orson Pratt, “The Book of Mormon, Etc,” (Aug 25, 1878), JD 20:65.

⁴¹ Tanner and Tanner, *Shadow or Reality?*, 294-369D.

⁴² *Times and Seasons*, 4.12 (May 1, 1843): 185-186.

The plates were then brought to Nauvoo for Joseph Smith's inspection. William Clayton, Joseph Smith's private secretary, recorded the event:

I have seen 6 brass plates... covered with ancient characters of language containing from 30 to 40 on each side of the plates. Prest J[oseph Smith] has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found and he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth.⁴³

The problem is that the plates were later proven to be forgeries.⁴⁴ If Smith were truly a prophet with the gift of seership he would have known that these were fakes. Instead, he claimed that they contained the history of a descendant of Ham. How could Smith retrieve any information from fraudulent plates?

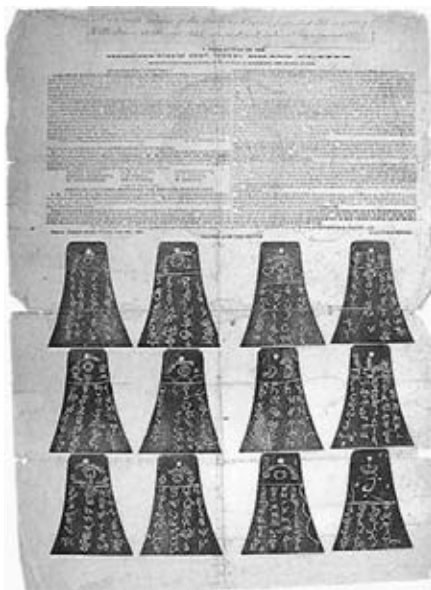


Fig. 7 Early LDS Publication showing the Kinderhook Plates

⁴³ William Clayton's Journal, May 1, 1843, as cited in James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship — The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 117. This later became the basis of the account in the JS-H 5: 372.

⁴⁴ <http://www.utlm.org/topicalindexb.htm#Kinderhook%20Plates>

Hofmann's Documents

This leads us to the modern day test of the Mormon president and his claim of being a seer; the Mark Hofmann documents. The May 3, 1980, *Deseret News* announced that document dealer Mark Hofmann had discovered “A hand-written sheet of paper with characters supposedly copied directly from the gold plates in 1828, and also bearing other writing and the signature of Joseph Smith...”. The paper went on to state “This would make it the oldest known Mormon document as well as the earliest sample of the Prophets handwriting.”

The article was accompanied by a photograph showing Mark Hofmann and the LDS First Presidency examining the document referred to as the Anthon transcript.⁴⁵



Fig. 8 *Deseret News* Photo, May 3, 1980, of Hofmann with LDS First Presidency Examining his document

⁴⁵ *Deseret News*, Church News Section (May 3, 1980): 3.

Unfortunately, this was the beginning of the greatest fraud scheme to hit the LDS Church, which would end with many investors losing their money and the murder of two Mormons by Mr. Hofmann. If President Kimball was truly a “prophet, seer and revelator” one wonders why he was not able to discern that the document was a forgery.

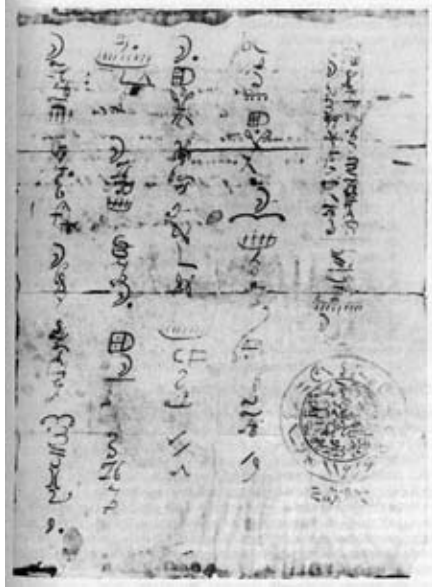


Fig. 9 Hofmann's Fake Anthon Document



Fig. 10 Original Anthon Document Owned by the RLDS Church

Had Mr. Hofmann been exposed at that time two Mormons would not have been killed.

Less than a year after the LDS Church leaders met with Hofmann regarding the Anthon transcript, the church bought a copy of a revelation

given to Joseph Smith designating his son as his successor.⁴⁶ The document even carried the wording “thus saith the Lord.” This too turned out to be a forgery of Mr. Hofmann’s and an embarrassment to the LDS Church leaders’ claim of prophetic discernment. Whatever gift of translating that Smith possessed it evidently doesn’t function in the LDS Church today.

III. REVELATOR

The third title given to the LDS president is that of Revelator. Apostle Bruce R. McConkie declared that “the Lord’s Church must be guided by continuous revelation. ...The presence of revelation in the Church is positive proof that it is the kingdom of God on earth.”⁴⁷ However, the number of “Thus Saith the Lord’s” has certainly diminished since Joseph Smith’s day.

Even before he established the Mormon Church in April of 1830, Smith had received numerous revelations. Over one hundred of his revelations are canonized in the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

By the way, not all of his revelations have been placed in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. For instance, the LDS Church has a copy of the failed Canadian revelation, but is only now preparing to make it public in their new series, *The Joseph Smith Papers*.

If revelations came so plentifully to Joseph Smith, why has there been such a dearth of published revelation since his death? Bruce R. McConkie admitted that,

It is true that not many revelations containing doctrinal principles are now being written, because all we are as yet capable and worthy to receive has already been written. But the Spirit is giving direct and daily revelation to the presiding Brethren in the administration of the affairs of the Church.⁴⁸

First, by using McConkie’s reasoning, one could argue there was no need for Joseph Smith’s revelations as we are still not able to live up to the teachings in the Bible.

Second, if revelation now comes through the less spectacular means of inner conviction, how is this any different from a Christian pastor praying about an issue and feeling the Holy Spirit leading in a particular direction? In fact, when their sixth prophet, Joseph F. Smith was

⁴⁶ *Deseret News* (March 19, 1981).

⁴⁷ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 650 (1979 ed.).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

questioned in 1904 during the Reed Smoot Senate hearings, regarding the revelatory process in Mormonism he answered “I have never pretended to nor do I profess to have received revelations.” He went on to state:

I am susceptible, I think, of the impressions of the Spirit of the Lord upon my mind at any time, just as any good Methodist or any other good church member might be. And so far as that is concerned, I say yes; I have had impressions of the Spirit upon my mind very frequently, but they are not in the sense of revelations.⁴⁹

If Joseph F. Smith was only susceptible to the impressions of the Spirit of the Lord as “any good Methodist,” then why should his word be trusted above that of any other good minister?

In 2002 a reporter for the *New Yorker* asked President Gordon B. Hinckley if he had any communications from God:

When I asked him to describe his own revelations, Hinckley demurred. “They’re very sacred to me. They’re the kind of things you don’t want to put before the world,” he said. But he added, “There’s no doubt in my mind we’ve experienced a tremendous undertaking in the building of temples across the world, having just dedicated the hundred-and-second working temple of the Church. I believe the inspiration to move that work forward came from the Almighty.”⁵⁰

Notice that he used the word “inspiration,” not “revelation.” Since Joseph Smith published accounts of his visions and revelations, one is left to wonder why President Hinckley would not do the same if he had received any revelations.

Book of Commandments

While the Mormons continually criticize the preservation of the Bible, it is the LDS scriptures that have sustained deliberate alterations.

⁴⁹ Proceedings Before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Protests Against the Right of Honorable Reed Smoot, a Senator from the State of Utah, to Hold His Seat. [Commonly referred to as the Reed Smoot Case] (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904) 1:99, 483-84.

⁵⁰ Wright, “Lives of the Saints.”

Joseph Smith's revelations were first compiled in a book in 1833, under the title *Book of Commandments*. In the first revelation in that book God is reported as saying "Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them, shall all be fulfilled."⁵¹

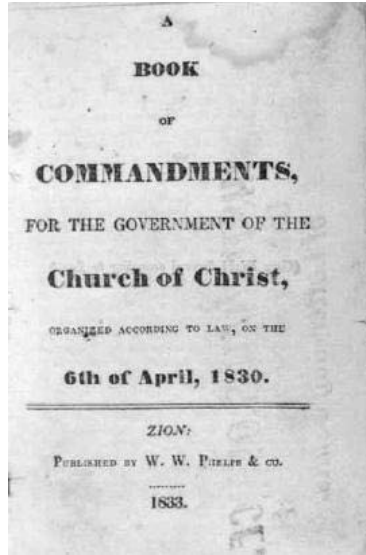


Fig. 11 Title Page of 1833 *Book of Commandments*

However, just two years later a new edition was printed, called the *Doctrine and Covenants*, where dozens of words were changed in the revelations. David Whitmer, one of the Book of Mormon witnesses, objected to the revisions:

Some of the revelations as they now appear in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants have been changed and added to. Some of the changes being of the greatest importance as the meaning is entirely changed on some very important matters; as if the Lord had changed his mind a few years after he give [sic] the revelations, and after having commanded his servants (as they claim) to print them.⁵²

⁵¹ *Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Zion [Independence, MO]: W. W. Phelps, 1833), 6 (chap. 1).

⁵² Letter of David Whitmer, *Saints' Herald* (Feb. 5, 1887).

Chapter four of the *Book of Commandments* specifically stated that the only gift God had given Joseph Smith was to translate the plates of the Book of Mormon. Yet two years later this revelation was reworded to state that translating the plates was only Joseph’s first gift, thus reversing the original statement. If we are to believe that the revelations were from God and printed in 1833 by His direction, why would there be a need to rewrite many of the revelations just two years later?



Fig. 12 Book of Commandments, chapter 4, showing the additions that have been made to the text

Besides the changes in Joseph Smith’s revelations, textual revisions have been made in the Book of Mormon, Book of Moses and Book of Abraham. Each of these books is claimed to have come through divine revelation.

Plural Marriage

Our next example of changing revelations is the LDS doctrine on marriage. Section 101 of the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants* stated that the LDS Church denounced polygamy and believed a man should have only one wife. However, Joseph Smith was secretly teaching that God revealed to him the doctrine of plural marriage, even sending an angel

with a drawn sword to press him into obedience to the command.⁵³ This doctrine was considered so important that Smith secretly married thirty-seven women in this new order.⁵⁴

His revelation on plural marriage is printed in the current *Doctrine and Covenants* as section 132. In it God instructs Smith that once this doctrine is revealed to a man he must live it or be damned.⁵⁵

Smith soon introduced the doctrine to his close associates and by the time the Mormons left Nauvoo in 1846 there were 196 men and 719 women secretly living in polygamy.⁵⁶ The fact that plural marriage was illegal in Illinois shows how important the practice must have been to the early Mormons. They considered it a command of God. Yet today the LDS Church has changed the emphasis of section 132 and teaches that only temple marriage, not polygamy, is necessary for eternal life. In fact, references to Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's plural wives are carefully edited out of current LDS teaching manuals. Brigham Young took this doctrine so seriously that he eventually married fifty-five women in plural marriage.⁵⁷ After the Mormons settled in Utah territory Brigham Young proclaimed, "The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy."⁵⁸ In response to the growing pressure from the government to abandon polygamy in 1865 the LDS magazine *Millennial Star* proclaimed:

We have shown that in requiring the relinquishment of polygamy, they [the US Government] ask the renunciation of the entire faith of this people. . . . There is no half way house. The childish babble about another revelation is only an evidence how half informed men can talk.⁵⁹

This was the position of the LDS Church up until 1890. After federal laws had been enacted against polygamy, years of arrests and resisting the government's demand that the practice be stopped, the president of the LDS Church issued the 1890 Manifesto instructing the Mormons to cease entering into plural marriages.⁶⁰ When one reads

⁵³ Joseph F. Smith "Plural Marriage, Etc." (July 7, 1878), JD 20:29.

⁵⁴ George Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2008), 621-623.

⁵⁵ D&C 132:3-4.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 310.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 635.

⁵⁸ Brigham Young, "Beneficial Effects of Polygamy," (Aug 19, 1866), JD 11:269.

⁵⁹ *Millennial Star* (Oct. 28, 1865): 27:675-676.

⁶⁰ D&C, *Official Declaration 1*.

Declaration-1, in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, it comes across as a decision made to keep the leaders of the church out of jail.

Even though the suspension was claimed to come by way of revelation, no such document has been published, only a statement that such a revelation was given. Evidently the top church leaders didn't feel bound by the Manifesto as at least 220 of them secretly took additional wives after 1890. It wasn't until the Smoot hearings that the church genuinely made an effort to end plural marriage.⁶¹

But how does one reconcile the change? Section 132 is presented as a revelation from God on the "new and everlasting covenant" which included plural marriage. Then how can the church change it? Does God bow to political pressure? If baptism were outlawed would the Mormons give that up as well? How could both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young declare that polygamy was necessary for eternal life only to have a later prophet state just the opposite? How does this give a person a firm foundation regarding doctrine?

Blacks

Another problem in relation to LDS revelatory claims is their changing position on blacks. Even though a few blacks were allowed to be ordained to the priesthood during Joseph Smith's life-time, there was no clear teaching regarding their ordination. Smith's writings gradually moved toward viewing blacks as unqualified.

The Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham carry statements relating to those who are black and who can't hold the priesthood.⁶² From these Brigham Young concluded that all blacks were to be denied the priesthood until the return of Christ. In 1854 Young preached:

When all the other children of Adam have had the privilege of receiving the Priesthood...and have received their resurrection from the dead, then it will be time enough to remove the curse from Cain and his posterity. ...he is the last to share the joys of the kingdom of God.⁶³

This was the church position for over one hundred years. Now there is a division among Mormon apologists as to whether the restriction on blacks was a matter of doctrine or a practice.

⁶¹ B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 130, 169, 182, 206, 251, 260, and Appendix 2.

⁶² *Pearl of Great Price*, Abr. 1:20-27; Moses 5:16-41; 7:8, 22.

⁶³ Brigham Young, "Spiritual Gifts, Etc.," (Dec 3, 1854), JD 2:143.

In a 1954 interview with Dr. Sterling M. McMurrin, of the University of Utah, President David O. McKay stated:

There is not now, and there never has been a doctrine in this Church that the Negroes are under a divine curse.⁶⁴

However no such public statement was issued and the rank and file of the church continued to believe the ban was based on revelation. For instance, in the 1966 edition of *Mormon Doctrine*, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Negroes in this life are denied the Priesthood;... It is the Lord's doing, is based on his eternal laws of justice, and grows out of the lack of Spiritual valiance of those concerned in their first estate.⁶⁵

Then, in June of 1978, President Spencer W. Kimball issued what is now referred to as Declaration-2 in the *Doctrine and Covenants* lifting the ban.

In September of 1978, three months after the ban was lifted, McConkie made this explanation about the contradiction between prior statements by LDS prophets and the new position on blacks:

There are statements in our literature by the early Brethren which we have interpreted to mean that the Negroes would not receive the priesthood in mortality. ...Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world. ...It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June of this year, 1978.⁶⁶

If past prophets could speak from "limited understanding" and without "light and knowledge," couldn't this apply to the president of the church today? By this reasoning a future prophet could conceivably

⁶⁴ Gregory A. Prince and W. R. Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Early Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2005), 79.

⁶⁵ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 527-528 (1966 ed.).

⁶⁶ Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike Unto God," *CES Religious Educators Symposium* (BYU, Aug 18, 1978) (<http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=11017>).

reverse the whole position and go back to restricting blacks from holding the priesthood or reinstitute plural marriage.

But if the restriction against blacks was a practice, and not a doctrine, why did it take a revelation to change it? And why didn't God give the revelation during Brigham Young's era? Why wait until after the civil rights movement had gained popularity and civil rights legislation had been passed?

President Spencer W. Kimball announced that a revelation had been received to end the ban but didn't publish the actual revelation, just a statement about a revelation. But the actual process seems to have been more a matter of the top leadership having countless meetings to discuss and pray about the possibility of a change.

When they finally gained unanimous consensus among the First Presidency and the entire Twelve Apostles, they formulated the statement printed in the *Doctrine and Covenants* as Declaration-2.⁶⁷ Their statement reads in part:

...we have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.

This whole process seems to put the burden of prejudice on God with the lofty-thinking brethren pleading with God to change His mind.

Modern Day Revelation

Since 1876, revelation seems to be more a matter of modifying past revelation than giving new instruction. In 1876 the church removed from the *Doctrine and Covenants* the section on marriage that denounced polygamy, replacing it with section 132 commanding polygamy. Then in 1890 the church reversed its stand on polygamy, and issued the Manifesto. However, section 132 remains in the *D&C* to this day.

Then in 1921 they removed the Lectures on Faith from the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which were first added in 1835. It was evidently decided that they contained defective teaching on the nature of the Godhead. Throughout the twentieth century the temple ceremony, supposedly given by revelation, was modified. Then in 1978 the priesthood ban on blacks was reversed. But these all seem to be reversing past doctrine, not giving further light.

⁶⁷ D. Michael Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1997), 15-16.

If revelation today is more a matter of spiritual impressions not needing canonization, how does that differ from any pastor seeking divine guidance for his congregation?

In Declaration-1 President Wilford Woodruff is quoted as saying:

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray...If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place...

If the brethren cannot lead us astray, how could Joseph Smith have been wrong about selling the Book of Mormon copyright? How could Brigham Young have taught false doctrine? How could Spencer W. Kimball be fooled by Mark Hofmann?

As a Mormon I often heard people refer to 2 Nephi 4:34 in admonishing someone not to put their trust in the arm of flesh. Yet the brethren continually tell the Mormons to trust them, they will not lead them astray. How is unquestioning obedience not trusting in the arm of flesh?

Christians test doctrine on the basis of its agreement with the Bible, not man. Once I put the Bible before the words of men, I realized that I must reject the Mormon prophets.

As we have the opportunity, let us reach out in love to our LDS friends and neighbors, sharing with them the good news that Christ is the only prophet we need today. He, alone, is the one who will never lead us astray.

Reflections on Joseph Haydn's Creation Oratorio



Fig. 1: Portrait of Joseph Hayden by Thomas Hardy, 1791.

RADU GHEORGHITA

*Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
rgheorghita@mbs.edu*

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”

There are few phrases in the history of civilization that can match the impact of the first stitch of the Hebrew Scriptures. The entirety of Judeo-Christian belief, practice, and values has its origin in and foundation on this axiomatic statement that stands as an imposing gateway to the Scriptures. These words had been so deeply etched in the mindset of Second Temple Judaism, especially in the thought of the New Testament writers, that John the Evangelist even borrowed them for the opening statement of his Gospel. *ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.* (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God) is an unmistakable echo of the Septuagintal form of Genesis 1:1,

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. It would have been difficult to find a more suitable parallel by which the Evangelist could have pointed out that the new Creation he was to herald in his Gospel was meant to redeem and restore the first Creation through the life and work of Jesus, the One and Only Son of God.

An echo of this millenary phrase, this time in a different language, “*Am Anfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde,*” and, indeed, employing a different medium of communication—music—can be clearly heard in “*Die Schöpfung*” (The Creation), the Oratorio of Joseph Haydn, whose life and work was commemorated in 2009, the bicentennial of Haydn's death.

The Creation narrative of Genesis 1—the primary source for the Oratorio—reveals a message of such profundity that generation after generation has been challenged to grasp its meaning and explore its significance. The idea of a magnificent and fascinating universe created by God is repeated numerous times in the canonical writings of the Jewish Scriptures. It is developed along liturgical lines in the book of the Psalms—the second major source of inspiration for the Oratorio—to be used in the prayers and praise of God's people. Furthermore, it is explored as a major theme in the corpus of wisdom literature, especially in the books of Proverbs and Job. Prophetic literature continues to sound the creation account, often alluding to it as the legitimate and logical foundation on which the legal disputes between God, as the creator and the covenant giver, and the people of Judah and Israel, the two kingdoms marred by moral decline and apostasy, must be settled.

The theme of Creation emerges again under various facets in the vast treasure of Judaic extracanonical writings and Western literature. Its footprints can be found anywhere, from the Targumic literature, the paraphrased translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in Aramaic, through the riches of the reflections on creation found in the Jewish Writings of the Second Temple, including, but not limited to Philo, Josephus, the Book of Jubilees, to the various treatments in the literature of the Western Civilization, such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*—the third major source of inspiration for the text of the Oratorio.

The Creation Oratorio, which Haydn composed between 1796 and 1798, offers the audience a masterpiece “in the image and after the likeness” of the Creation narrative in the book of Genesis.¹ It is a

¹ Needless to say, there are scores of exceptional recordings of the Creation Oratorio. While no recording can match the impact of a good live performance,

musical icon that reflects the majesty and the grandeur of the creator God and of His Creation. Just as “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1), a verse taken up in perhaps the most well-known chorus of the Oratorio, *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes* (The heavens declare the glory of God), Haydn offered his contemporaries the words and sounds they can employ in their own act of glorifying God. They are summoned to stand in awe and to voice their gratitude for God’s handiwork, an invitation extended nowhere more incisively than in the lively chorus of the tenth movement, *Stimmt an die Saiten!* (Awake the harp!).

The Oratorio has so many memorable movements that to mention just a few of them would do great injustice to the masterpiece as a whole. Consideration of space, however, leaves no other option than to focus on a representative selection. After the daunting overture, *Die Vorstellung des Chaos* (The Representation of Chaos) the first movement depicts the very moment in which God created the light, with an impact on the audience unsurpassed by any other passage in the annals of classical music. When the choir’s fortissimo on “*Licht*” (Light) erupts into the hitherto pianissimo “*Und der Geist Gottes schwebte auf der Fläche der Wasser,*” (And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters), no listener can be left unstirred. Similarly, the creation of the sun and the moon, the twelfth movement *In vollem Glanze steigt jetzt die Sonne* (In full splendor the sun is now rising), juxtaposes the radiant sunrise with the gentle moonrise, proving again that music can create by its own language the same awe-inspiring experience as the visual splendor of a beautiful sunrise or moonlight. The twenty-fourth movement, *Mit Würd' und Hoheit angetan* (In native worth and honor clad), the aria dedicated to the creation of man and woman, marks another highlight of the Oratorio and continues to be a cherished treasure of any tenor’s repertoire.

The Oratorio discloses a God full of majesty, glory, power and wisdom, perhaps best depicted by the chorus at the end of Day Five, *Der Herr ist groß in seiner Macht* (The Lord is great in his might). This is the God before whom the only appropriate answer from his creatures is one of praise, adoration, exultation, trust and obedience, summed up beautifully in the pair of choruses marking the end of Creation, the closing movements of Part Two, *Vollendet ist das große Werk* (The great work is complete).

there are several classic interpretations that deserve attention. Among them, my personal favorites are those of John Eliot Gardiner, with the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists, and of Herbert von Karajan, with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, both of them released under the Deutsche Grammophon label.

The Genesis narrative of Creation, which provides the content and the form for the Oratorio, was born in a context of ideological crises similar to those that confront modern man. The Jewish people, newly redeemed from Egyptian slavery, found themselves in the wilderness where their character and allegiance to God would be tested and tried. These experiences were intended to forge in them the qualities, both individually and communally, needed not only to enter the Promised Land, but also to survive there. Both the land of Egypt, which they were leaving behind, as well as the land of Canaan, the place waiting to be conquered, were quintessentially pagan contexts. The cultures were infused with beliefs and myths of Creation that were in direct conflict with the worldview God would shape for his people, Israel. In order to survive as a nation, the political liberation just achieved had to be founded on a cosmogony decontaminated by the cosmologies of the Egyptian or Canaanite pantheons. A people's cosmogony ultimately embodies the central tenet around which the entirety of their religious life will gravitate. As Bruce Waltke contends,

At the heart of Moses' creation theology lies this revolutionary message: One personal, benevolent God overcomes a primordial chaos of an abyss blanketed in darkness to create a habitable world and its inhabitants. ... He creates and sustains it all by the power of his own being. This assertion that God is the Creator of all that is good and Ruler of the universe is the ultimate statement of the creation narrative. He is just, righteous, and faithful on behalf of what is good.²

In a very profound way, the message of the Creation narrative in Genesis, echoed by Haydn's Oratorio, is every bit as actual and necessary now during Haydn's memorial year, as it has always been, not least because 2009 happened to be Charles Darwin's commemorative year as well. The Austrian composer died in the same year that the father of the theory of evolution, Charles Darwin, was born.

The Oratorio in its own way can very effectively reclaim lost ground in the dispute between the biblical worldview described in Genesis and the worldview based on the theory, or more precisely, the philosophy of evolution. This philosophy, atheistic to its core, has been aggressively and systematically pushed as the norm in all walks of life. It completely eliminates God from all considerations: he is neither the creator nor

²Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 176.

sustainer of his creation. Those who embrace it are offered instead a world and a universe conducted by impersonal and random laws, with no absolutes, moral or otherwise, with neither origin nor destiny. Its so-called good news cannot amount to more than the depressing message that we are simply a rearrangement of ever-present matter, not qualitatively different than the essential elements that characterized the chaos at the moment God's active word brings forth his creation according to his divine purpose.

It is surprising that Haydn stopped after the first two chapters of Genesis, and gave no thought to the fateful chapter three. He restrained his perspective to present a world "that was very good," one in which the reality of sin was completely absent, although faintly anticipated in the last, deeply wistful recitative:

*O glücklich Paar, und glücklich immerfort,
Wenn falscher Wahn euch nicht verführt,
Noch mehr zu wünschen als ihr habt,
Und mehr zu wissen als ihr sollt!*

Oh, happy pair! and happy evermore
if false conceit will not tempt you
to desire more than what you already have
and to know more than what you should.

This conditional promise made to Adam and Eve was left unfulfilled due to their disobedience. Thus the world that was repeatedly declared to be "very good" in Genesis 1 becomes, after only three chapters, a world blighted by curse, pain, suffering, and death.

In Christian Theology, the undoing of this archetypical disobedience of Genesis 3 was entrusted to Christ. In Him and through Him, the God of the First Creation has engaged unequivocally all the malefic forces that have marred it and has decreed to redeem it as his New Creation. The reality of this new Creation is amply described in John's Apocalypse, the closing book of the Christian canon. The message with which the book ends, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth..." (Rev 21:1), depend heavily on the Genesis 1-3, which are now read from a distinctly Christian perspective. The whole of Creation that was systematically and profusely tainted by sin will once and for all be redeemed from sin, decay, and death. In the new heaven and new earth, the curse will be replaced with blessing, death with life, tears with joy, and foremost the sun and moon and the Temple itself will be replaced with the very presence of God in the midst of his redeemed people, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place

of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God' ” (Rev. 21:3, ESV).

It would be an unpardonable mistake to end these reflections without mentioning the third remarkable personality commemorated in 2009, the French Reformer Jean Calvin, born in 1509. From his thinking emerged one of the most memorable formulas describing the destiny of humankind, echoed in the Westminster shorter catechism. The first question in the catechism “What is the destiny of man? receives its answer “to praise God and enjoy him forever.” That is precisely the theme and purpose of the last chorus in the Oratorio, *Singt dem Herren alle Stimmen!* (Sing the Lord, all you voices), ending in a double fugue on the words “*Des Herren Ruhm, er bleibt in Ewigkeit*” (The Lord's praise will endure forever).

A thoughtful engagement with Haydn's Oratorio will help the audience to embrace this truth. When it does so, the musical heritage left by Haydn climaxed in his Creation Oratorio would most certainly have found its *raison d'être*.



Dr. Georghita punting in front of King's College, Cambridge

The Ox and the Donkey

O lux beata Trinitas!
He lay between an ox and ass,
Thou mother and maiden free;
Gloria tibi, Domine.¹



**Fig. 1: Gherardo di Jacopo Sarna, “Adoration of the Magi,” c. 1405
(Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Photo: R. Huggins)**

RONALD V. HUGGINS
*Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118 rhuggins@mbts.edu*

The woman kitty-corner me across the table asked: “But where are the ox and the ass?” We were reading Matthew’s infancy narrative in Schuyler Brown’s doctoral seminar at Saint Michael’s College, Toronto. The questioner was doing her doctorate in Karl Barth. “That’s not Matthew, lady, that’s Luke!” I had felt like saying. But had I done so, had I given way to the impulse, I would have been putting my own

¹Anonymous fifteenth century English carol *We Make Joy Now In This Fest*.

ignorance on display alongside hers. Ever afterwards not *one* but *two* former doctoral candidates would have to look back on that day with a blush tinged round the gills with the ruddy hew of embarrassment. Luke does reference a manger, but says nothing about any ox or ass.

Nevertheless from the earliest times artistic representations of the nativity have invariably included both animals faithfully attending the crib of the Christ child. These go back to the first half of the 4th century, roughly the same moment as our earliest literary reference to the celebration of Christmas on December 25, which comes from Rome in 336 AD. Gertrude Schiller remarks:

[W]e are struck by the fact that in the fourth century Joseph does not appear, even Mary may not appear, while the ox and the ass, which are not mentioned in the biblical text, are always in evidence.²

It is already there, in the fourth century, that we begin to find the two animals dotting over the Christ child on early Christian Sarcophagi,³ just as they continue to do right down to the present, when they keeping time with the Little Drummer Boy in the carol, although some versions, such as the one on Bob Dylan's 2009 Christmas album, now say, "ox and lamb," instead of the more traditional "ox and ass," perhaps in deference to people who don't remember that an ass is a donkey.

However that may be, how, given that they are not mentioned in the New Testament, did the ox and ass become such a regular feature of the nativity scene, and why are they represented the way they are? Popular mythologist Joseph Campbell felt sure he knew. Describing an early depiction of the nativity scene Campbell writes that,

the ass, at that time, was the symbolic animal of Set, and the ox was the symbolic animal of Osiris. We recall the conflict of the Egyptian gods Set and Osiris and that Set killed his brother, Osiris.

There we see the animals of Set and Osiris, reconciled in the Christchild. These two powers, one of the light and one the dark, are united in him. They are giving Him their breath, just as God breathed His spirit. The older hero figures thereby concede their power to the younger...In that little Christmas scene, one

²Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (2 vols.; trans. Janet Seligman; Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971-72), 1:60.

³Bruce M. Metzger, "A Lexicon of Christian Iconography," *Church History* 45.1 (March, 1976): 9.

reads the statement that the older savior figures, Osiris and his brother, Set...are recognizing Christ for who He is.⁴

Despite the fact that Campbell claimed, in another work, that his identification of the ox and the ass would have been “perfectly obvious to all,”⁵ there is really no chance whatever that he is correct.



Fig. 2: Detail of the nativity scene from the 4th cent. Sarcophagus at the Lateran Museum in Rome reproduced by Joseph Campbell in *The Mythic Image* (p. 33), illustrating his claim that the ox and the ass represent the Egyptian gods Set and Osiris.

As interesting and imaginative as Campbell’s interpretation is, it founders on the elementary methodological flaw of seeking more remote and dubious explanations when near-at-hand, more immediately plausible ones are ready to hand. Is Campbell really so clumsy a historian as to miss the fact that the iconography of the incarnation took shape against the backdrop of Christian theology not Egyptian mythology? The real reason for the presence of the ox and the ass at the nativity is to call to mind the prophetic words of Isaiah the Prophet: The ox and the ass reference what the early Church read as prophecy in the first chapter of Isaiah: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his

⁴Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (ed. Eugene Kennedy; Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001), 65-66.

⁵*The Mythic Image* (Bollingen Series C; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 33. Campbell, describing the images he was referring to in *Thou Art That*, writes: “The first carvings of the nativity scene are found on the sarcophagi of the second and third centuries. One of the earliest shows the little child in the crib, surrounded by the ass, the ox, and the Magi” (p. 65). Probably, however, Campbell has in mind the nativity scene on the fourth-century sarcophagus at the Lateran Museum in Rome discussed in *The Mythic Image* (pp. 32-33).

master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:3 KJV).⁶

Nor is our understanding of the symbolic meaning of these animals dependent on pictorial representations alone. Coterminal with the appearance of the earliest representations of the ox and the ass in nativity scenes come Christian theologians writing about them as well. "Isaiah calls to you to know your owner, like the ox," writes fourth-century Christian theologian Gregory of Nazianzus in his thirty-eighth Oration, "and to know the manger of your Lord, like the donkey."⁷

However, the early Church also added an additional symbolic embellishment that is much less obvious, but that has continued to be mentioned in scholarly discussions, sometimes even to the exclusion of the Isaiah reference. We see this for example in Alfredo Tradigo's *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, where it is stated without further explanation or elaboration that "the donkey and ox represent the Jews and pagans."⁸

The suggestion immediately raises sinister suspicions given ancient slanderous whisperings about how Jews, and later Christians, supposedly worshipped a god with the head of an ass: "...you have dreamed that our God is an ass's head," wrote the early third-century theologian Tertullian,

This sort of notion Cornelius Tacitus ... He tells how the Jews, liberated from Egypt, or, as he thought, exiled, were in the wilderness of Arabia utterly barren of water; and how, dying of thirst, they saw wild asses, which chanced to be returning from their pasture (it was thought) to slake their thirst; how they used them as guides to a fountain, and out of gratitude consecrated the likeness of a beast of the kind. Thence came, I think, the assumption that we too, standing so near Jewish religion, are devoted to worship of the same image.⁹

⁶ Bruce M. Metzger writes: "Old Testament derivation of the motif is certainly far more probable than the theory proposed by Joseph Campbell in his recently published *mélange* of art and Jungian depth psychology ... according to which the ass and the ox in such scenes represent the contending brothers [Set] and Osiris of ancient Egyptian mythology." (Metzger, "Lexicon," 9, n 2). (Brackets Metzger's)

⁷ Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 38.17, in *Isaiah 1-39* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT X; ed. Steven A. McKinion; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 5.

⁸ Alfredo Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Greek Orthodox Church* (trans. Stephan Sartarelli; Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 105.

⁹ Tertullian, *Apology* 16: 1-3 (ET: T. R. Glover, LCL); cf. Tacitus, *History* 5:3; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9:3, 28; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.10.6.

But such would be a wrong impression arising from the fact that Tradigo got the identification of the two animals turned around. It's not the donkey that the early Christians identified as the Jews, but the ox. The logic of it is given already in the early Christian reference to the ox and the ass at the manger of Jesus, which appears in the third-century theologian Origen of Alexandria (d. 251). Speaking of our Lord's manger, Origen exultantly writes:¹⁰

That was the manger of which the inspired prophet said, "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's manger." The ox is a clean animal, the ass an unclean animal. The ass knows his master's manger." The people of Israel did not know their Lord's manger, but an unclean animal from among the Gentiles did. Scripture says, "Israel, indeed, did not know me, and my people did not understand me." Let us understand this manger. Let us endeavor to recognize the Lord and to be worthy of knowing him, and of taking on not only his birth and the resurrection of his flesh, but also his celebrated second coming in majesty, to whom is glory and power for ages and ages. Amen.

This understanding of the significance of the animals and their association with Isaiah 1:3 became standard in the iconography of the Eastern Church, and continue to be so right down to the present time. "Their place in the very center of the icon points to the importance given by the Church to this detail." Writes Russian Orthodox iconographer Léonide Ouspensky, "It is nothing less than the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah (i, 3) ... By the presence of the animals, the icon reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy and calls us to the knowledge and understanding of the mystery of the Divine Dispensation."¹¹

Here as well Christian Iconography in the Western Church is influenced by the iconographic models of the East, but follows them more loosely.

Yet another powerful influence that would come into play in the way the Western Church represented the Nativity is the relatively late (8th or 9th cent.?)¹² apocryphal gospel, *Pseudo-Matthew*, which again interprets

¹⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 13.17 (ET: Origen, *Homilies on Luke, Fragments on Luke* [FC 94; trans.; Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J.; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996], 55).

¹¹ Léonide Ouspensky & Vladimir Lossky *The Meaning of Icons* (rev. ed.; Crestwood, NJ: St Vladimir's Seminary Press: 1982), 159.

¹² Date suggested by J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based*

their presence as a fulfillment of Isaiah 1:3, but sees an allusion as well to the Greek Septuagint's version of Habakkuk 3:2, a mistranslation of which was carried over into the Old Latin version of the Old Testament, from whence it influenced Western exegesis, liturgy, iconography, and hymnology:¹³

And on the third day after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary went out of the cave and, entering a stable, placed the child in the manger, and an ox and an ass adored him. Then was fulfilled that which was said by Isaiah the prophet, 'The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib [Isa. 3:1]' Therefore, the animals, the ox and the ass, with him in their midst, incessantly adored him. Then was fulfilled that which was said by Habakkuk the prophet, saying, 'Between two animals you are made manifest [Hab. 3:2 LXX].'¹⁴

The mistranslated line "between two animals you are made manifest"—in the Old Latin "In medio duorum animalium innotesceris"—is easily recognized in early depictions of the nativity where Christ's crib is placed between the ox on the ass, as in the detail from the 4th century sarcophagus now part of the pulpit in the Sant' Ambrogio Basilica in Milan (fig. 3) the early 6th century ivory now in the British Museum (fig. 4).

Iconographically depicting the crib *between* the ox and the ass is cumbersome, however, in that effectively blocks crib-side access to other, more important, players in the nativity scene such as Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, angels, and Magi. We see this already in the ivory from the British Museum, where Mary herself is separated from the child by the ox.

on *M. R. James* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 86; with the caveat pointing out that the oldest extant manuscript of the work comes from the eleventh century.

¹³ Pseudo-Matthew 14 (ET: Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 94).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* An interesting side feature of this account is its attempts to harmonize the difference between the ancient tradition that Jesus was born in a cave (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 78; *Proto-Gospel of James* 18:1, 19:1-3; 21:3; Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.51, and Jerome, *Epistle* 108.10), and the later view that it took place in the sort of free standing stable arrangement we see depicted even today on Christmas cards. In this Pseudo-Matthew conflicts with Eastern depictions, which retain the cave as the birthplace of Jesus, and depict the ox and the ass *in* the cave with him.



Fig 3: "Sarcophago di Stilicone" (detail), 4th cent., Sant' Ambrogio Basilica, Milan, Italy. (Photo: © Giovanni Dall' Orto)



Fig. 4: "Ivory Plaque With the Adoration of the Magi," (detail) Early Byzantine, Eastern Mediterranean, (early 6th cent.) (Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

Attempts to compensate for this naturally become awkward. How cramped things can become when trying to bring these other figures closer to the crib while still placing it in some sense between the ox and the ass is seen in a 15th century window from the church at Loisy-en-Brie in north-east France (fig. 5).

This iconographic problem is resolved by adopting the convention of moving the two animals back behind the crib, as we see occurring already, for example, in the 4th century Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus in Rome's Museo Nazionale Romano, which also appears to be our very earliest surviving depiction not only of the ox and the ass, but of the Nativity as such.



Fig. 5: "The Nativity" 1460-80 (detail), Church at Loisy-en-Brie, north-eastern France, Nelson Atkins Museum (Photo: R. Huggins)



Fig. 6: Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus (detail), c. 330-40, (Photo: Courtesy of Richard Stracke)

Placing the ox and ass behind the crib allows a the great compactness of composition, seen in the following delightful examples, one from a 13th/14th century early Gothic stained glass window from Maria am Leech Church in Graz, Austria (fig. 7), and the other a diminutive ivory relief from an 11th century postable altar.

Fig.7: "Nativity," 13th/14th cent. Stained Glass, Leech Church, Graz, Austria (Photo: R. Huggins)

Fig. 8: "Swanhilde's Portable Altar," Mid-11th cent., Melk Abbey, Lower Austria (Photo: R. Huggins)



But to return once again to the subject of the identification of the ox with Israel (clean animal) and the ass with gentiles (unclean animal), as I thought of this I began to wonder whether this dual identification had in any way influenced the way these two animals were portrayed in paintings of the nativity. In connection with this question two nativity scenes in particular arrested my attention recently while I was making my way through the Alte Galerie in Eggenburg Castle in Graz, Austria, both of which contained features that might seem related to my question. The first was a very charming little nativity scene that was part of a 15th century altarpiece featuring the legend of St. Florian (fig. 9).



Fig. 7: "Legend of St. Florian and Childhood of Christ Altarpiece" (detail), Styrian Master (?), c. 1490. Alte Galerie, Schloss Eggenburg, Graz, Austria (Photo: R. Huggins)

Here the presentation is Bridgittine, that is to say, it follows the influential vision of Saint Bridget of Sweden (c. 1303-1373) by having the baby Jesus lying naked on the ground in front of a kneeling, worshipping Mary, rather than in his traditional crib. This new way of depicting the nativity scene apparently make's its first appearance in art history in Naples just before 1380.¹⁵

In this particular painting we are struck by the fact that although the ass stands over the Christ child, immediately behind Mary, the ox looks on from behind a wall, actually outside the building. Is this to be regarded as simply a compositional decision, or did the artist intend something more, did he have in mind, for example, the “dividing wall of hostility” that Paul spoke about, which separated Jew and Gentile, but which was done away in Christ? If he did have this in mind, he certainly does not include any obvious additional pictorial clues in that direction, nothing that could be read as in any way disparaging toward the Jews. Both the ass and the ox look upon the child Jesus in quiet adoration. In addition, one is hard pressed to find an example of a more charmingly and affectionately rendered ox.

The situation is different with a nativity (again in the Bridgittine style) on the opposite wall of the same room in the Alte Galerie. In this second painting, also produced in Styria, and only a decade or two earlier than the one just discussed, the animals are rendered in a striking way I had never encountered before. In this picture neither animal has its gaze focused on the Christ child, a fact that by itself is scarcely unprecedented. Commonly, in more realistic representations, the animals *are* often present naturalistically, and as such we see them staring dumbly and happily into space in a way we expect a real ox and ass might do (fig. 10).

Fig. 10: Martin Johann Schmidt , (Kremser Schmidt), “Adoration of the Shepherds,” 1790, Graz, Austria, Diözesanmuseum (Photo: R. Huggins)

This is not the case here, however, where each of the animals has its gaze fixed somewhere, just not on Christ.



¹⁵*Bridget of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations* (Classics of Western Spirituality; ed. Marguerite Tjader Harris, trans. Albert Ryle Kezel, intro, Tore Nyberg; New York, NY, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press), 306, nt. 779. The text of the vision itself (Revelations 7.21.8-13) is found in the same volume on p. 203.

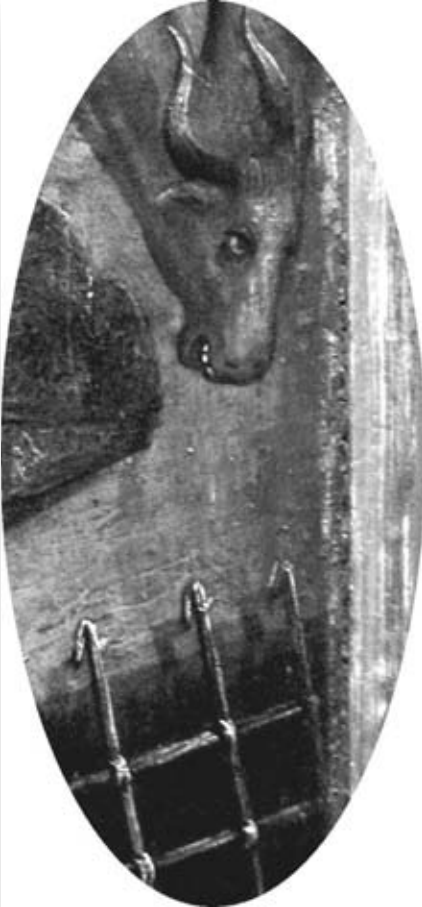


Fig. 11: Master of the Divisio Apostolorum, "Adoration of the Child" (1470-80), Styrian, from Admont Monastery, now in the Altes Gallerie, Schloss Eggenberg (Photo R. Huggins)

The donkey is looking up at Mary, while the ox cranes its neck to look down into a grate of sorts (a barred window?) in the floor of the stable. The significance of the donkey's gaze seems clear enough, simply another example of the medieval tendency to exalt Mary to a point that is

theologically problematic, as in this case, where it could only be accomplished by having the ass take its eyes *off* Jesus! (fig. 11)

More strikingly disturbing is the gaze of the ox down the hole. How is one to understand the symbolism there? Does the grate depict the hole down which manure is shoveled, in order to be removed later from below? Are we to look for an allusion here to Paul's description of all his former advantages as a Jew as "dung" in Philippians 3:8.



Certainly such an interpretation is possible, given the fact that the Latin Vulgate translation of the Greek *skybala* is the Latin *stercora* which was understood in the sense of dung, or excrement. That such identifications were around at roughly the time this painting was produced can be seen as well in a work on the New Testament written toward the end of the 15th century at the Monastery of San Benedetto Po, and used by the monks of Santa Giustina at Padua. We read in its preface to the book of Philippians that Paul "showed the Law to be as dung [*stecora*] and no value to salvation."¹⁶

Or is it intended suggest a dungeon, perhaps hell itself? In either case given the

¹⁶ Bibl. Comunale, Mantua, MS 280, fol. 63^v quoted in Barry Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: The Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua* (Oxford Historical Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 46.

traditional identification of the ox with Israel, one is hard pressed to imagine how either of the options mentioned can be construed as anything but disparaging towards Judaism.

On a more positive note, a final motif that invites our attention is one that represents a peculiar but theologically significant variant of the motif of the ox and/or ass eating the straw from the manger in which the baby Jesus lay, illustrated with considerable delicacy, for example, in a 15th century terra cotta by Italian artist Luca della Robbia, entitled *Nativity with Gloria in Excelsis* (fig. 12). This motif is extremely common and echoed perhaps in the famous line from the familiar carol *What Child is This?*: “Why lies he in such low estate where *ox and ass are feeding?*”



Fig. 12: Luca Della Robbia, Italian, “Nativity with Gloria in Excelsis,” 1470 Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Photo: R. Huggins)

In some nativity scenes, however, it is not the straw under Christ child upon which the ox and ass are feeding, but the Christ child himself, thus bringing to mind John 6, where Jesus calls himself the “bread of life” and promises that anyone who eats of this bread will live forever (6:35, 48, 51).

Two particularly charming examples of this come from twelfth-century illuminated manuscripts. The first originating in Germany, but presently in the British Library (fig. 13).



Fig 13: “Miniature of the Nativity, prefacing the reading for Christmas” (detail), Gospel Lectionary, Imperfect, Germany, S. (Swabia, possibly Hirsau); 1st quarter of the 12th cent. (Photo © The British Library Board) (Egerton 809 f. 1v)

The second, my favorite, comes from the Albani Psalter (St. Alban’s Psalter), also known as the “Psalter of Christina of Markyate,” which now belonging to the Cathedral library at Hildesheim, Germany..



Fig. 14. “The Birth of Christ, “Psalter of Christina of Markyate,” (St Albans Cathedral Psalter” 12th cent. (Photo: Courtesy the Cathedral library of Hildesheim, Germany).

For me one of the most moving exposition of the role of the ox and the ass at the manger of Jesus comes from a sermon the great Latin Father Augustine of Hippo preached on the Feast of Epiphany, the day on which the arrival of the Magi was celebrated:

In the persons of the shepherds and of the Magi, the ox began to recognize his owner and the ass his Master's crib. From the Jews came the horned ox, since among them the horns of the cross were prepared for Christ; from the Gentiles came the long-eared ass, since it was concerning them that the prophecy had been made: "A people, which I knew not, hath served me: at the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me." For the Owner of the ox and the Master of the ass lay in a manger, yet He was furnishing common sustenance to both creatures. Therefore, because peace had come to those who were afar and to those who were near, Israelite shepherds, as those found nearby, came to Christ on the day of His birth, saw Him, and rejoiced; but the Magi Gentiles, as those found at a distance, came at an interval of several days after His birth, found, and adored Him on this day. It was quite appropriate, then, that we, the Church made up of converts gathered from the Gentiles, should join the celebration of this day on which Christ was manifested to the first-fruits of the Gentiles to the observance of that day on which Christ was born of the Jewish race, and that we should preserve the memory of so great a mystery by a twofold solemnity.¹⁷

Let us, then, like the ox, know that God is our maker and our owner—recognizing that we are not our own, but were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20)—and, like the "long-eared" ass, hear and receive the Gospel from afar, and come and feed on Jesus., "the living bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51). Amen.

¹⁷Augustine, *Sermon 204* (ET: Saint Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* [FC 38; trans. Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney, R. S. M.; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959], 79-80).

BOOK REVIEWS

***The Power of Images in Paul.* By Raymond F. Collins. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008, 307 pp., \$49.95, Paperback. ISBN-10: 0814659632.**

Paul employed numerous metaphors to engage the minds of those who heard or read his letters. The significance of these word pictures is often missed by modern readers. While Paul utilized images that were vivid to his Jewish and Greco-Roman addressees, the depth of the meaning of these metaphors is often lost in translation when delivered to contemporary recipients. In *The Power of Images in Paul*, Raymond Collins endeavors to restore the lost depth and clarity of Paul's verbal imagery. Collins is qualified for the task. As a New Testament scholar in the Catholic tradition, he has published works on several of Paul's epistles. Collins brings not only his scholarship to the present work, but also his heart that others would "appreciate more fully the love of God and his Christ" (viii).

In the first chapter, Collins explains the significant role that metaphors played in Hellenistic rhetoric. Briefly noting Paul's Jewish background, Collins moves on to discuss three major contributors to the Greco-Roman mindset of the first century C.E. Collins targets Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. He points out that these rhetoricians understood verbal images as fundamental in the development of rhetorical arguments. Collins also explains how these individuals outlined the proper use of metaphors within sound arguments. Collins sees their impact as being so widespread, that even if Paul did not study or read their works (as would certainly be the case with Quintilian who did not publish his great work, *Institutio oratoria*, until ca. 95 C.E.) he was still unavoidably influenced by their thoughts.

Chapters 2 through 8 are devoted to images found in the writings of Paul. In each chapter, Collins studies an undisputed Pauline epistle which includes 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Philemon, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans. Generally, Collins makes his way through each of the letters, addressing the metaphors as they are presented. If the imagery appears again later in the text, he discusses it with the first usage. With each metaphor, Collins explains how it is being employed by Paul as well as its significance and meaning for Paul's audience. Collins clarifies whether the pictures being developed are drawn from Paul's Jewish background, the Hellenistic world in which he lived, or both. Collins supports his conclusions with documentation from a wide range of contemporary sources. Collins also observes that Paul often

mixed his metaphors for emotive effect. While modern readers find these difficult to unravel, Paul's first-century recipients would have quickly felt his passion.

In the final chapter, Collins revisits the many images used by Paul. Collins arranges the metaphors into broader categories that he presents in subchapters (e.g. *Kinship*, *The Body*, *Construction*, *Finances*, etc.), noting the letters in which they occur and offering a brief review of their purpose and connotation. He concludes by commenting on the sources of Paul's figurative language (i.e. the Jewish and Hellenist streams in which he was thoroughly immersed), his use of personification, his penchant for mixed metaphors, and the occurrence of *hapax legomena*—words that appear only once in Paul's extant writings. Finally, Collins ends his writing with a short epilogue in which he affirms Paul as a master of metaphors who wielded his words for the purpose of changing lives.

Collins' work is a helpful tool for students of the New Testament. It introduces the reader to the world of Paul and his first-century audience by explaining the meanings behind his many metaphors. The reader quickly learns that verbal images were employed to draw the recipients of Paul's letters into his argument and to explain new concepts in tangible terms. Collins does an admirable job of demonstrating the ways in which Paul utilized the Jewish and Greco-Roman aspects of his experience for the purpose of communicating clearly to churches that were made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Collins is quite familiar with the background material and uses it effectively to state his case. Also beneficial is that way in which he shows how the metaphors fit the rhetorical argument of their individual pericopes as well as that of larger sections of the text.

Collins' effort falls short in at least one area. Although he often addresses how Paul's images fit within broader portions of their respective passages, he at times fails to tie them to the overall theme of the letter. While the reader is allowed to see the many vignettes that make up each scene, he is not always shown the unity of the whole performance. Collins' treatment of Philippians provides an example. He sees the presences of military language and rightly associates it with the retired soldiers who settled in Philippi. However, when he identifies terms related to athletic events he unfortunately misses their more clear connection to Paul's military theme. If Collins would have searched for a unifying theme, he might have seen the more persuasive nature of Paul's argument for the Philippians to strive together as an army of one for the purpose of advancing the Gospel.

Overall, *The Power of Images in Paul* is a beneficial resource as an introduction to Paul's use of metaphors. Readers unfamiliar with the cultural background from which the New Testament emerged will find

this work to be a helpful starting point in their studies. For those more familiar with the topic, the manner and depth of Collins' presentation is able to deepen their understanding of this significant subject.

Brett R. Akright
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study.* By James Leo Garrett. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2009, 743 pp., \$55.00, Hardback. ISBN-10: 0881461296**

James Leo Garrett, Jr., Baptist theologian and professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has written a massive volume on Baptist history that meticulously outlines what Baptists in the past four centuries have believed. Garrett's volume not only provides detailed biographical information but comprehensive listings of the theological beliefs of Baptist theologians, pastors, and evangelists. Moreover, Garrett's volume seeks to describe the theological and denominational controversies in which Baptists have engaged. Such controversies characterize certain Baptist movements that Garrett uses as a foil in constructing a Baptist history. While Garrett's immense work defies summary here, several of the major movements and controversies Garrett describes deserve mention.

First, Garrett outlines (chapters 2-3) the debate that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries between the Arminianism of the English General Baptists, represented by such figures as John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, Thomas Grantham, Matthew Caffyn, Dan Taylor, and the Calvinism of the Particular Baptists, represented by the First London Confession, the Midland and Somerset Confessions, Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin, John Bunyan, the Second London Confession, Benjamin Keach, and many others. Garrett demonstrates that many early Baptist Confessions were rooted in a Dortian theology (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints). For example, the Second London Confession was greatly influenced by the Calvinism of the Westminster Confession, though it retained its Baptist identity in areas such as baptism and ecclesiology. Garrett does not fail to mention the stream of Hyper-Calvinists that emerged at this time as well, including Baptists such as John Brine and John Gill.

Second, Garrett moves on to describe the early American Baptists and the continuing controversy over Calvinism and Arminianism (chapter 4). Of particular interest are the Free Will Baptists, whom Garrett defines as those who believed that (1) humans are depraved but

not guilty of Adam's sin and therefore guilt is not imputed until one voluntarily rejects Christ, (2) Christ's atonement is universal (3) faith and repentance precede regeneration so that it is the sinner's choice to decide for himself whether or not he will be saved, (4) the Calvinists view of reprobation is to be rejected and instead election is to be viewed as conditioned on God's foreknowledge of man's faith, and (5) some believers do finally fall away and apostatize from the faith. However, other nineteenth century American Baptists such as John Dagg and James P. Boyce, founder of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, disagreed, returning instead to the tenets of the Second London Confession of Faith. Boyce was deeply indebted to his Princeton teacher Charles Hodge for his Dortian Calvinism. This influence is apparent in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, but more implicit in the formulation of the *Abstract of Principles*, a task assigned by Boyce to Basil Manly, Jr. Nevertheless, the influence of the Second London Confession upon the *Abstract of Principles* is apparent. Yet, others took on a more moderate Calvinism, as exemplified in the New Hampshire Confessions of Faith, which stood in contrast to the explicit Calvinism of the Philadelphia Confession. Garrett's opening chapters are especially relevant today as there continues to be debate among Baptists, particularly Southern Baptists, over the issues of Calvinism and Arminianism.

Third, Garrett dedicates a section of his work (chapter 5) to the first and earliest Baptist missionaries, with an appropriate emphasis on the influence the theology of the Particular Baptists had on men like William Carey and Andrew Fuller. Certainly Garrett's chapter on the laborious, tiresome, and yet zealous efforts of these men and many others to see the gospel go forth to the nations could not be more timely, as the Southern Baptist Convention has recently taken up the challenge of the Great Commission Resurgence.

Fourth, while Garrett does spend time taking note of the Landmarkism (chapter 6) that has characterized certain pockets of Baptist life (James Graves, James Pendleton, Amos Dayton, etc.), Garrett's main focus shifts to the nineteenth and twentieth century controversies, such as the Down Grade Controversy and the liberalism that took root among Southern Baptists. Charles Haddon Spurgeon takes center stage as one who, in 1887, warned of the serious "downgrade" and declension that was occurring with the denial of major doctrines such as the divine, plenary inspiration of Scripture, the historicity of Adam's fall, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the virgin birth of Jesus, the substitutionary atonement, the resurrection of Jesus, justification by faith alone, and eternal punishment in hell. Spurgeon also identified the negative effects of the adoption of Darwinian evolution, German higher

criticism of Scripture, rationalism, the universal Fatherhood of God, postmortem salvation, conditional immortality, and universalism on Baptist theology. Spurgeon saw the signs of liberalism which would only continue into the twentieth century with men like Harry Emerson Fosdick of the Northern Baptists. Fundamental to the entire controversy was the rejection of the inerrancy of Scripture, eventually leading Spurgeon and the Metropolitan Tabernacle to withdraw from the Baptist Union. Readers will find Garrett's focus on Spurgeon not only informative but relevant for today, as the issue of inerrancy continues to be a battle ground for evangelicals.

Fifth, the last six chapters of Garrett's work deal with Baptists in the twentieth century. Chapter 8 focuses on biblical theologians, chapter 9 on Southern Baptists since E. Y. Mullins, chapter 10 on contemporary Baptists like Millard Erickson and Bernard Ramm, chapter 11 on the rise of modernism, dispensationalism, British Christological aberrations, and Open Theism, chapter 12 on the recent ecumenical movement, and chapter 13 on the most recent Baptist theologians, including Wayne Grudem, John Piper, Thomas Nettles, D. A. Carson, Stanley Grenz, Timothy George, Roger Olson, David Dockery, and others. Readers will recognize Garrett's emphasis on the resurgence of Calvinism among Baptists due to figures like Grudem, Piper, Nettles, and Carson and the challenge Baptists like these have faced from Arminians like Roger Olson and Open Theists like Gregory Boyd and John Sanders, the latter of which is reminiscent of the challenges the Particular Baptists faced from Socinians who likewise denied God's exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. Surely this is a debate which will continue into the current century. Also of importance is Garrett's sections devoted to the rise of dispensationalism and post-conservative theology (cf. Grenz, Olson). Garrett's discussion is a reminder that Baptists today face the difficulty of deciding how far they will differentiate themselves from covenant theology. Whether such a separation is to be moderate (as evident in some of the early Baptist confessions) or more drastic (as apparent with dispensationalism), continues to be debated and is an area where there is a need for more theological reflection on the continuity and discontinuity between the covenants. Also of significance is Garrett's mention of Grenz and Olson, who have proposed a post-conservative theology in light of postmodernism. Baptists like D. A. Carson, however, have demonstrated that there are serious flaws with postmodernism, especially in its denial of absolute truth. The tendency of post-conservative theologians to adopt the postmodern agenda, which only serves to compromise the inerrancy of Scripture and the truth-claims of the Bible, is no better.

The weaknesses of Garrett's work are minor and are due more to style and omissions than to any error of logic. First, Garrett's work is encyclopedic in nature, which is a strength because of its exhaustive and meticulous description of major Baptists since the seventeenth century. However, it is also a weakness because the book tends to read at times like an encyclopedia. While this may not detract committed Baptist scholars, it does make the work burdensome for a lay audience. Second, while Garrett's work is masterful in its survey of Baptist theology, the book lacks a thesis. The purpose of the book is made lucid in the preface but it is not clear to the reader on the surface of things exactly what Garrett is trying to accomplish or demonstrate in his work. The situation is not helped by the fact that Garrett does not provide an introduction to his work nor does he have a conclusion in which he explains how his research should impact Baptist studies. Rather, his conclusion is a summary of the book. Therefore, while Garrett's theological leanings in the book are hinted at and his understanding of what a biblical Baptist theology should be are beneath the surface, the work as a whole is descriptive. Nevertheless, a lack of thesis may not be a problem for many readers if they are simply looking for a reference work. Third, it is odd that Garrett chooses to discuss theologians as contemporary as Piper, Grudem, Grenz and many others, as well as the diverse movements that have paralleled them, but chooses not to discuss at any length the recent controversies over the New Perspective on Paul and the Emerging Church. Such omissions may be the book's largest flaw since the New Perspective is an issue that is at the forefront of evangelical and even Baptist discussions, as is the Emerging Church, a movement which raises serious challenges to traditional Baptist identity and ecclesiology. Understandably, Garrett's volume is already seven hundred pages. However, Garrett's inclusion of these movements and their impact on Baptists today would have been especially relevant to contemporary readers thinking through what a Baptist theology should look like in light of these challenges.

These weaknesses are outnumbered by the many strengths the work possesses. First among them must be the level of research and scholarship made available in a work of this size. Each page is infiltrated by footnotes and Garrett provides a glossary of key terms at the opening of his work to aid the reader. Garrett's familiarity with Baptist history is obvious and he writes the volume in a way that introduces the reader to the main theological issues that have surrounded Baptists for the last four centuries. Second, though it is beneath the surface, Garrett shows how important it is that Baptists maintain the confessional formulas of their forebearers. Garrett demonstrates in his survey that when Baptists

abandon doctrines like inerrancy, creationism, and orthodox Christology, there is a fast and sudden shift into liberalism.

In closing, this review is but a small slice of what is contained in Garrett's volume, which is a wealth of knowledge for Baptists today. Readers will find Garrett's work an outstanding resource that will undoubtedly be a work to be consulted in the decades to come. Garrett's breadth of knowledge and research is impressive and nothing short of remarkable. Though the work is not so much a narrative of the Baptist story as it is a reference book for Baptist beliefs and important figures throughout the centuries, the volume should serve as a valuable reminder to Baptists today of both where Baptists have stood on important issues of evangelical theology as well as a guide to the present situation of Baptists and the challenges still to be faced.

Matthew Barrett
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

***A Theology for Christian Education.* By James R. Estep Jr, Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008, 302pp., \$34.99, Hardback. ISBN-10: 0805444572.**

Within the context of church ministry a tension always exists between engaging the surrounding culture while simultaneously living a holy and righteous life set apart for God's purposes. At various periods in history the Christian church embraced more of a rigid/separatist stance, which perhaps blinded some from God's unfailing love for lost souls. However, in our current seeker-friendly church atmosphere, our attempts to accept and engage non-Christians swings the pendulum in the opposite direction. Accordingly, some Christian educational methods and programs are often difficult to distinguish from their secular counterparts, bringing to the forefront questions such as, "What makes Christian education *Christian*?" Therefore, Estep, Anthony, and Allison's text, *A Theology for Christian Education*, provides a philosophical grounding for Christian educators at a moment in time when foundational principles are indispensable.

The book provides educators with a solid understanding on appropriately integrating theology and educational practice in a theocentric manner. "The guiding premise of this book is that Christian education is *Christian* because what we believe theologically should inform and influence not only the content of education in the church but also the overall approach to education in the church" (p. 2). The authors neatly unpack this thesis philosophically and practically. The book's

organization allows the reader to understand how theology should direct all educational practices that are Christian.

The text is divided into three sections. In the first segment (chapters one through three), the authors outline the foundational issues of education. Anthony explains how worldview is at the core of educational theory, in that one's worldview will influence the way one applies information coming from the social sciences. When social science research is filtered through a Christian worldview, educational theory may be synthesized. Out of educational theory come means and methods, the visible part of Christian education. A helpful visual of this overview is found on page 20; however, the book contains the following misprint: the words "social services" which should read "social sciences."

The middle and largest section (chapters four through ten) contain a systematic discussion of the following Christian doctrines: revelation, the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, humanity and sin, salvation, and ecclesiology. Each of these doctrines is discussed in its own chapter that is subdivided into two sections. A brief summary of the doctrine comprises the "*what we believe*" section, and the "*so we educate*" segment addresses educational principles influenced by that specific doctrine. Therefore, the following rubric is created. What we believe about Christian doctrine (revelation, Triune God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, humanity and sin, salvation, and the church) influences how we educate (purpose and objectives, teacher and student, curriculum, environment, and assessment of learning). For example, because we believe that the Bible is the Word of God, we will assure the centrality of Scripture in the church's curriculum (p. 96). Because we believe that the Holy Spirit knows the hearts and lives of students better than teachers do, we begin lesson development in prayer asking God for wisdom and insight as we choose the lesson aim (p. 169). Because we believe that God is summoning his chosen people to Himself by means of his divine call through the gospel, Christian education bears the burden of educating people from completely non-Christian philosophies in the essentials of the Christian worldview (p. 221).

In the final section of the text, Estep presents a sketch of what this should look like in practice by providing a framework that takes the seven common elements of educational theory and integrates the Christian distinctive in the form of theologically informed principles of Christian education. These core components of educational theory, initially proposed by Anthony in the first chapter, will most likely be considered the meat of the book for Christian education practitioners. However, as the book's premise alludes, these educational elements (objectives, curriculum, etc.) can only be understood in light of Christian doctrine. The book is obviously applicable to those studying or immersed

in church ministry, yet it is equally relevant to Christian schooling or any arena in which the measuring rod for truth and reality is God's Word.

In summary, philosophy matters. Christian educators need to understand and articulate their philosophy because it will influence everything they do, including what they teach and how they teach it. In regards to an education that is Christian, philosophy is theology. Therefore, what one believes about Christian doctrine should direct every aspect of education that is Christian. The book fills an important gap in the study of Christian education. Some textbooks provide a good overview of the breadth of Christian education, such as Anthony's book, *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*. Likewise, *A Theology for Christian Education* also presents an overview perspective, but here is the twist. It provides the reader with the often "missing link," the connection between philosophy and practice. The authors do this in two ways. First, they provide the reader with a rubric--scaffolding that utilizes core Christian doctrines as the measure. Second, they follow their own guidelines, demonstrating to the reader how to appropriately mesh theology and education, in essence, providing an example of how to do Christian education *Christianly*.

Yummy Pandolfi

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***A Case for Mixed Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews.* By C. Adrian Thomas. New York: Peter Lang, 2008, 327 pp., \$82.95, Hardback. ISBN-10: 1433103311**

Thomas' volume was initially completed as a PhD dissertation under the direction of Dr. Buist M. Fanning at Dallas Theological Seminary. One can see points of contact with his work and Fanning's "Classical Reformed" perspective in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. by Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007). Thomas argues that Hebrews' warnings have in view specific unsaved individuals (Heb 3:12-13; 4:1, 11; 6:11-12; 10:24-28; 12:15-16), and are intended for the broader community only in a general sense, as a stimulus to persevere in the faith they had already professed. Thomas writes: "In this regard, the warnings serve as a test of one's profession, since the criterion of a genuine faith is that it perseveres. This further means that profession is not necessarily a sign that one possesses saving faith; that is, one's profession of belonging to a New Testament community is not the insignia of faith" (16).

In chapter two Thomas provides an historical survey of the interpretation of the warnings. Thomas divides his review into two sections: the Fathers to the Reformation and the Reformation to the present. Thomas notes that Calvin's position was that Hebrews had in view not those who occasionally lapse in faith, but one who would finally renounce the Gospel. Ironically, the views of Arminius closely mirrored those of Calvin on the matter. This is telling: contemporary variant interpretations of Hebrews' warnings results not from comments Calvin and Arminius made on specific texts, but how specific texts are interpreted by proponents of the theological systems developed in their names.

Thomas states and critiques five major contemporary views on the warning passages: "The Hypothetical Loss-of-Salvation View," "The Loss-of-Rewards View," "The Means-of-Salvation View," "The Loss-of-Salvation View," and finally, "The Test-of-Genuineness View." In his understanding the last of these best explains Hebrews' warnings. Thomas defends his position against those who argue that it is theologically motivated, and not based upon the warning passages themselves, by stating that the phrases in Hebrews' warnings, which seem to indicate that they are directed toward a genuine believer (e.g., Heb 6:4-5), are ambiguous enough to warrant a more cautious stance. Hebrews' author may have in view those general blessings--experienced even by those who do not yet believe--as they identify with the Christian community (91-95).

In chapter three, "The Nature of the Danger Threatening the Community of Hebrews," Thomas proposes that the participles in 6:4-6 are decisive for one's conclusion on the whole of Hebrews' warnings (152-56). For Thomas three exegetical points argue for his mixed-audience view: 1) The flow of participles in these verses moves from aorist to present, with the climax being the aorist *παραπεσόντας* "(those who have) have fallen away" (Heb 6:6, NAS, 1995), which he argues constitutes a final falling away; 2) all five participles are governed by the same definite article, designating a kind of plural-plus Granville-Sharp construction which necessitates seeing a group or class of people, perhaps within the broader sphere of the church; and 3) the final two participles, *ἀνασταυροῦντας* "they again crucify," and *παραδειγματίζοντας* "(those who have) put Him to open shame" (Heb 6:6), are in the present, expressing the continuous and on-going grounds for the aorist, here final, *παραπεσόντας* "(those who have) have fallen away" (Heb 6:6). In Thomas' understanding, those thus described have little in common with the audience the author has in view when he writes in Heb 6:9, *Πεπείσμεθα δὲ περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀγαπητοί, τὰ κρείσσονα καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας* "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you."

Thomas argues that the sin in view with *παραπεσόντας* “(those who have) have fallen away” (Heb 6:6) involves a return to Judaism, a deliberate turning from Trinitarian blessings and church fellowship. He posits that internal pressure from fellow Jews and external pressure from Roman persecution stimulated some of the unbelieving in the congregation to this very course.

Chapter four, “How the Author Indicates a Mixed-Audience is in View,” comprises the focus of this volume. Thomas here argues that saving faith always perseveres and faith that ultimately fails is rooted in false profession. His argument is based upon an interpretive paradigm, aimed especially at the conditionals in Heb 3:6, 14, but having implications for the whole of Hebrews. Thomas proposes an evidence (Apodosis)-inference (Protasis) pattern of interpretation in which: *ἐάν[περ] τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος κατάσχωμεν* “if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end” (Heb 3:6b), is the evidence for the inference: *οὗ οἴκος ἐσμὲν ἡμεῖς* “whose house we are” (Heb 3:6a). The evidence (Apodosis)-inference (Protasis) schema is expressed in Heb 3:14 respectively by: *ἐάνπερ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως μέχρι τέλους βεβαίαν κατάσχωμεν* “if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,” and: *μέτοχοι γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ γεγόναμεν* “we have become partakers of Christ” (182-86).

Thomas proposes that one’s interpretation of the conditional framework of Hebrews’ warnings has implications for how he understands Hebrews’ *ὁμολογία* (Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23). He notes that in Hebrews “unless one continues to hold fast to what he confesses or professes about the Son of God his is hardly regarded by the author as belonging among those who possess saving faith. Apostasy, therefore, is the mark that separates false from true profession” (201, italics original). From Thomas’ paradigm of Hebrews’ conditionals, and his interpretation of Hebrews’ *ὁμολογία*, he posits three crucial distinctions in Hebrews’ audience: two kinds of hearing, two kinds of hearts, and two kinds of faith/response (201-16). He argues that Hebrews’ ‘mixed-audience’ schema is not a New Testament anomaly, but that the warnings of Jesus’ parables (e.g., the sower, Mt 13:1-23) and the Epistles of the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor) have in view primarily those who are suspect in their fruitfulness, but more generally also the persevering ones.

Thomas’ final chapter is given to summary and discussion of theological and practical problems, including the extent of human depravity, testing the genuineness of faith, and the fruit of assurance. This proves to be a necessary segment of his argument, since it has implications for both scholars and laymen. Although Thomas’ work is undergirded by a sound exegetical process, this reviewer wishes there would have been a more extensive discussion: 1) concerning verbal

aspect and its influence on the interpretation of the warnings; and 2) greater analysis of mixed audiences in other New Testament epistles. While those who are not of a Reformed persuasion may not be persuaded by the truthfulness of Thomas' position, they would have difficulty faulting the validity of his argument. Thomas' proposal of a mixed-audience is able to explain Hebrews' warnings while maintaining the integrity of the text and his theological position. Perhaps the features that are most commendable in this volume are that Thomas is forthcoming with his theological position and attempts to explain the text from his position without a diatribe against his opponents.

Todd R. Chipman
The Master's Community Church

***Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke.* By Seyoon Kim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008. 228 pp. Paperback. \$24.00 ISBN 9780802860088**

In the past decade, Pauline studies have witnessed the rapid emergence of the "Paul and Empire" movement, otherwise known as "imperial-critical" scholarship. The primary idea embedded within this phenomenon is that Paul (as well as other New Testament writers) structured his teachings to challenge both the Roman political structure and imperial cult. Proponents of this movement are numerous, including such figures as N. T. Wright, Richard Horsley, John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed, J. R. Harrison, and Warren Carter, among others.

With the publication of *Christ and Caesar*, Seyoon Kim (Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary) enters this arena with perhaps the most strident critique of the movement to date. Published in 2008, the book is reasonably priced, up-to-date in its scholarship, and written by a noted New Testament scholar in Evangelical Christianity. Moreover, while the work is certainly not comprehensive in its treatment of the New Testament material (being a two-part work on Pauline and Lukan writings respectively), the book nevertheless examines those texts and assumptions that Kim deems as central to the "Paul and Empire" movement.

In the first major section ("The Epistles of Paul"), after spending two chapters refuting imperial-critical interpretations of Pauline texts, Kim devotes the third and fourth chapters to examining the methodology and assumptions of this program. In chapter three he maintains that the supposed "political" interpretive method espoused by these scholars is flawed at the most fundamental levels. He issues four charges against

them: (1) parallelomania; (2) deduction from assumptions; (3) proof-texting; and (4) appeal to coding (28-33).

Chapter four details various factors that militate against imperial-critical interpretation. Kim lists no fewer than nine of these. A major critique in this section is Kim's contention that Paul neither explicitly rebuts the Roman Empire nor the imperial cult in his epistles. He also appeals to Romans 13:1-7 and Philippians 1:19-26 as proof of Paul's non-confrontational mentality toward Rome. Moreover, Kim cites the ethic of non-retaliation, the transcendent concept of salvation over against temporal deliverance, the fact that such imperial-driven interpretation is absent in the early church, as well as other points in the chapter to build his case that imperial-critical interpretation suffers from a plethora of mitigating arguments. Finally, to end his section on Pauline material, Kim offers a concluding chapter.

The second section, "The Writings of Luke," surveys themes and passages within Luke-Acts that are germane to (anti)imperial studies. In chapters six through ten of the work, while Kim admits that certain aspects of Luke-Acts were probably understood as opposed to Roman imperial power, this was certainly not the primary intention of Luke (76). Yet at the same time, Luke's goal was to present Jesus as the Davidic Messiah and universal Lord who would liberate Israel (77-93). At first glance this concept seems to indicate some type of anti-imperial thrust to the Gospel; however, Kim seeks to avoid this potential pratfall by demonstrating from Scripture that the worldly power which held Israel captive was under the control of Satan. Thus, Kim believes that the type of liberation Luke envisioned was one from the power of spiritual evil (114-150), not political oppression (94-113).

Kim realizes that his theses beg the question as to why the early Christians would not have been concerned with the political ramifications of the Gospel message. Therefore, in chapter eleven, Kim lists imminent eschatology, political realism, and an appreciation for the *Pax Romana*, among others, as reasons for the lack of concern for the political materialization of Christ's work of redemption (161-190). Chapter twelve summarizes Kim's position and offers conclusions, while chapter thirteen offers some implications of his proposal for today.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Kim's work lies in its exegetical treatment of relevant texts. His exposition of Romans 13 and Philippians 1 merits careful attention by scholars on both sides of the debate. In this reviewer's opinion, Kim has also sufficiently proven the primary place of eternal deliverance from sin vis-à-vis temporal deliverance from Rome in the Gospel message. Moreover, his critiques of the (pre)suppositions of the imperial-critical method are valid, and should be considered by such interpreters.

Regretfully, however, the weaknesses of this work eclipse its positives. First, Kim does not adequately allay the tension concerning how Luke presents Jesus as the liberator of Israel and how Kim himself yet affirms the Gospel as “politically innocuous” (77). Although Kim asserts that the ultimate power at work behind Roman government is satanic (90), and that the Gospel is addressed along such lines, this simply evades the issue without addressing the inevitable political dimensions and ramifications of announcing Jesus as *kyrios* and *soter* in a culture where such terms were regularly applied to imperial authority.

Second, and most importantly, Kim has noticeably misrepresented the overarching agenda of the “Paul and Empire” movement. He writes as though imperial-critical interpretation posits that the biblical writers desired to instigate an all-out political and military coup of Roman rule—as if the early Gospel message were merely a Christianized form of Jewish zealotry. In fact, one is hard-pressed to locate any “Paul and Empire” scholar who would advocate such an extreme view. Thus, while imperial-critical scholarship does seek to demonstrate tensions, even oppositions, between the Christian Gospel and the Roman Empire, Kim’s caricature of this movement substantially marginalizes his contribution to this field of study.

This work’s value lies mainly in its positive contribution in presenting the Gospel as primarily concerned with deliverance from sin. However, the reader is cautioned regarding those sections where Kim seeks to represent his opponents’ views. Overall, *Christ and Caesar* is not highly recommended as an even-handed critique of imperial-critical scholarship.

Daniel J. Bradley
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Crazy Good Sex: Putting to Bed the Myths Men Have About Sex.* By Les Parrott. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 219 pp., \$19.99, Hardback. ISBN-10: 0310273560**

Recent years have seen an almost adolescent infatuation with sex by a new generation of ministers who seem only recently to have discovered that God addresses sexual intimacy in Scripture. From the advice of Mark Driscoll to Ed Young, Jr.’s “seven-day challenge,” sexual intimacy is an omnipresent sermon topic. Les Parrott’s provocatively titled *Crazy Good Sex* contains a frustrating mix of good information along with immature humor about sex.

Les Parrott is a very popular evangelical author and conference speaker on marriage and relationships. Parrott is a member of the

Church of the Nazarene and Professor of Clinical Psychology at Seattle Pacific University, a Christian school. He earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Fuller Seminary where he studied under Lewis Smedes (1921 – 2002). Parrott's wife, Leslie, is also a psychologist and teaches at Seattle Pacific as well. The Parrotts have a strong focus on marriage mentoring and have rightly challenged evangelicals to mentor young married couples in their churches.

The target audience for *Crazy Good Sex* is married, Christian men. Parrott wants to give Christian men spiritually sound and scientifically accurate advice about sex in marriage while correcting some erroneous ideas about sex commonly held by men. Specifically, Parrott addresses six topics: a comparison of sexual desire between men and women; the myth that sex with the same person gets boring; myths surrounding pornography; myths associated with male genitalia; masturbation; and myths surrounding the purportedly untamable nature of the male sex-drive. Each chapter ends with a brief word to wives who may be curious about the book their husband is reading. Parrott also includes web-driven video resources that correspond with each chapter. The book is written on a popular level and Parrott hopes men will use the book in small-group settings.

There are many aspects of *Crazy Good Sex* which are sound and accurate. Parrott rightly emphasizes that monogamous, married couples are in fact the most sexually satisfied people. He also strongly condemns the use of pornography, providing powerful descriptions of the neurochemical changes within a man's brain when he engages in use of pornography. Because pornography is so toxic, many Christians may be surprised at the number of therapists who suggest married couples use pornography. Parrott provides a strong rebuttal to this wrong-headed thinking and says, "The bottom line is that pornography radically disconnects sex from its intended meaning." (107) Furthermore, Parrott debunks the tawdry promises made by purveyors of sexual products aimed at men, emphasizing that none of these non-prescription products work. Instead, Parrott correctly emphasizes the degree to which male sexual health is related to not smoking and maintaining a healthy weight (135 – 136).

Parrott's best advice comes in his discussion of "Myth 6: My sex drive is too powerful to control." Parrott debunks this myth and explains how men engage in certain rituals prior to engaging in sexual immorality. Identifying these rituals can lead to victory over sexual temptation. Furthermore, Parrott explains that the most determined man who tries to overcome sexual temptation by not thinking about it is doomed to frustration. He offers sound counsel and says, "The point is that you can only extinguish an unwanted thought by replacing it with

another thought. Simply saying something like, “I shouldn’t think about this” won’t work. You’ve got to deliberately put new thoughts in its place” (179).

Though there is much to commend in Parrott’s work, the book fails in its intended purpose as a pastoral tool for men’s Bible studies. For example, Parrott references data gathered from Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948). While Parrott acknowledges that Kinsey’s data was skewed by “self-reportage bias,” (127) he goes on to make unqualified reference to Kinsey’s research (170). I find any positive reference to Alfred Kinsey’s research highly questionable. Kinsey’s research was methodologically and ethically flawed, “self-reportage bias” being the least of his problems. At one point, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* records experiments involving 317 boys aged 2 months to 15 years in which Kinsey’s researchers masturbated their subjects to orgasm. This is both poor science and immoral. Positive appeals to Kinsey damage Parrott’s presentation. In point of fact, the references to Kinsey are confusing since it is clear that Parrott disagrees with both Kinsey’s worldview and morality.

Parrott’s chapter addressing masturbation is disconcerting at points. Parrott begins his discussion by repeating a crude joke about masturbation from Seattle pastor Mark Driscoll. He then recounts some absurd ideas about the practice advocated by Nineteenth Century Adventist Sylvester Graham. In this way, Parrott presents a “straw man” argument and subtly suggests that Christians who raise moral concerns about the practice of masturbation are as misguided as Graham. To Parrott’s credit, he does also quote Dan Heimbach’s *True Sexual Morality* as a moral stance opposed to the practice.

The most disappointing aspect of Parrott’s book is a tendency to use crude humor, thus severely curtailing the book’s usefulness. Even the title of the book, *Crazy Good Sex*, reflects Parrott’s edgy approach to the topic. There is nothing wrong with tasteful humor, even when used in reference to marriage and romance. However, we live in a society that only knows how to make crude jokes about sex. In fact, Parrott repeats some of these vulgar jokes, including extended dialogue from *Austin Powers* (133) and quoting Jay Leno (147). Sex is holy and good, and this holy and good gift should not be degraded by low-brow humor. If a pastor uses this book in a small group study for men, the men will receive the message that borderline vulgarity about sex is acceptable behavior for Christian men. In this way, *Crazy Good Sex* underscores a broader concern I have concerning younger ministers who lack discernment in areas of holiness and separation. I find *Crazy Good Sex* to be in flat contradiction of Paul’s command to avoid “coarse jesting”

(Ephesians 5:4). Christian leaders need to be in the business of elevating the church's thinking and behavior, not lowering the standard.

Because there is so much misinformation about sex, this book has the potential to fill a vital need in the Christian community. It is because correct information is so desperately needed that I regret my inability to affirm this book for use by its intended audience.

Alan Branch

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Amos: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text.* By Duane A. Garrett. Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008. 304 pp., \$24.95 Paperback. ISBN-10: 1932792694**

Duane Garrett is the John R. Sampey Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His previous publications include *Rethinking Genesis* (Baker, 1991), *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Broadman & Holman, 2002), plus several commentaries and scholarly articles.

With *Amos: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, Garrett provides students of Biblical Hebrew with a close reading of the Masoretic Text. The book has a concise but very helpful introduction (pp. 1-11) in which the author discusses some basic critical issues pertaining to Amos. He also explains how his own methodological approach to translating the book considers both its macrostructure and microstructure. Garrett believes the overall structure of Amos is a chiasmic one and that "each division . . . has internal coherence and structure (6-7)." Although he uses traditional stem names for verbs (e.g. qal, piel), Garrett does not use the traditional terminology for Hebrew conjugations (i.e. perfect, imperfect). Instead he uses some more recent designations: *qatal*, *yiqtol*, *wayyiqtol*, *weqatal*, and *weyiqtol*.

After the brief introduction, the commentary proceeds through the structure of Amos. First, Garrett provides his own translation of a larger unit (e.g. pp. 19-23, where he translates all of Amos 1:3-2:16, the "Oracles against the Nations"). Next, he breaks these larger units down into subunits, providing an overview at the beginning of each one (e.g. pp. 23-25, "1:3-5: First Oracle – Damascus"). The real payoff, however, comes at the next step as Garrett handles the microstructure of the text, clause by clause. He pays close attention to the Masoretic accentuation and utilizes it to determine clause constraints and divisions. Garrett provides parsing for virtually every form in Amos. He frequently provides syntactical classification with some helpful discussion about translation possibilities. Readers get to see how his exegetical decisions

at the smallest level determine Garrett's translation of each line. He points out patterns in the book (at all levels of structure) and carefully notes where vocabulary and ideas occur in other places in Amos. After working through the text, the book has a small but helpful glossary and a terrific bibliography for further study.

One basic criticism of the book has to do with its editing. Put simply, the book seems rushed. For instance, Garrett says there are seven divisions of Amos after 1:1-2 (p. 4), but he clearly only gives and works through six divisions. The very first line of Hebrew text in the commentary (p. 14, Amos 1:1) is missing the very important form translated as "sheep-breeder/shepherd," a form that is the subject of much scholarly discussion and gives Amos' occupation. In the commentary for Amos 6:13, רִיץ is given as the root of a form that obviously comes from אָנַח (p. 201). This type of mistake is quite frequent throughout the book and can be an unnecessary interference in working through the material. In fairness to the author, all these mistakes should have been corrected at the editing stage.

The positives of the book far outweigh the negatives. For example, it does not use transliterations, a decision at which students of Hebrew will no doubt rejoice. Another positive is that the syntactical discussions are meaningful and helpful. Garrett does not waste the reader's time on obvious things. On page 36, for instance, he simply classifies one form as a "direct object" and moves forward. When deeper discussion is merited, however, Garrett obliges. On pages 38-39, he classifies a form in Amos 1:11 (translated "his brother") as a direct object and provides an entire paragraph discussing interpretive issues. I also think that readers who are unfamiliar with his conjugation designations (e.g. *qatal*, *yaqtol*, etc.) will benefit from exposure to them, even if one does not make the switch from using "perfect" and "imperfect." Readers should also benefit from his utilization of the Masoretic accent markings. It is helpful for intermediate students to see how the Masoretic line divisions can help define clauses and structure, though I should point out that Garrett in no way sees these constraints as inviolable. In fact, he sometimes ignores the markings and explains why he does so.

This book is not for everyone. It will not be helpful for those who have not had, at the very least, first-year Hebrew. For those who have a basic understanding of Hebrew, however, Garrett's work will be stimulating and helpful. I heartily recommend *Amos: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* to students of Biblical Hebrew who want to work through the Masoretic text of Amos and hone their grammatical skills. Even if one does not agree with Garrett's division of the book, conservative treatment of the text, or interpretation and translation of particular lines or units, this book still provides an opportunity to see how one veteran

scholar handles the text as one plows through the linguistic terrain. Professors teaching Intermediate Hebrew or a “readings” class on Amos should definitely take a look at this work.

R. Michael Fox
Brite Divinity School

***Brill's New Pauly: Chronologies of the Ancient World: Names, Dates and Dynasties.* Eder, Walter (ed.); Renger, Johannes (ed.). Translated and edited by Wouter F. M. Henkelman, Leiden: Brill, 2007. ISBN 9789004153202 Series and Series Number BNPS001 List price US\$194.00.**

This book originates from the major work of classical antiquity entitled *Brill's New Pauly*. While it is part of the series and marketed as a supplement to the encyclopedia, it is conceived as a separate work and independent of the major work, hence a separate editorial board. The supplement serves as a capstone to the original work by providing in one volume a synthetic work of the political leaders of the ancient world.

Upon initial perusal, this book is a collection of lists of dates and endless king lists of names. A reader will wonder if they will ever need to reference a list of rulers in Lydia according to Herodotus, or a list of Germanic Kingdoms in Italy. In spite of the nature of the information, scholars whose work is based on ancient History—which includes all disciplines found in seminary education—could justify the value of a resource that coalesces all the current scholarship into an updated single source.

The *Chronology* has many references to the *New Pauly* as the name of each person discussed in the encyclopedia is referenced so a reader can go to the *Brill's New Pauly*. Nevertheless, one does not need the *New Pauly* to use the *Chronology*. The book is divided into two main geographic sections: The Near, Middle and Far East [East] and The Mediterranean and Western Europe [West]. The East consists of nine sections: Mesopotamia and neighboring regions (e.g. Ebla, Ugarit, Babylon), Egypt, Israel and Judah, Asia Minor (Phygia, Lydian rulers, Selucids and minor states in the Hellenistic and Roman periods), Iranian Empires, Greco-Bacria and India, and Rome and the West in Chinese historiography. The West section discusses Greece and Rome, Germanic Kingdoms in Anglo-Saxon Britain and Western Europe, Huns, and Bishops and patriarchs of the Latin Kingdoms. One of the interesting finds is the treatment of biblical history. With current postmodern and critical trends concerning biblical historiography, this scholarly volume includes a section of the Israelite and Judean Monarchy.

Those who realize the impact individuals have within the historical continuum will appreciate a synthetic work that brings the results of current scholarship. As with the general work that initiated the trajectory of the *Chronology*, North American scholars are privy to the scholarship of European scholars whose expertise is the Greco-Roman ancient world. This has now become the authoritative reference work among ancient historians to study the interaction of individuals and events within larger social and political trends of the ancient world.

Steven M. Ortiz
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament.* By Philip S. Johnston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002, 288 pp., \$26.00 Paperback. ISBN-10: 0830826874**

What appears to be at the outset a simple treatise on hell is in fact a comprehensive linguistic, exegetical and historical analysis of the concept of afterlife in the Old Testament. This book is a popular version of Philip Johnston's dissertation and scholarly research on the topic. Most scholarly treatises on the concept of the afterlife tend to approach the topic from an 'History of Israelite Religion' approach and treat the text as later documents that interject the theology of Yahwism during the time of Hezekiah and Josiah. These studies tend to highlight select texts (e.g. teraphim in the homes of Laban and David, Saul and the Endor witch) to define normative Israelite belief regarding the afterlife as similar to the larger Ancient Near Eastern World. Other studies have analyzed the archaeological data on burial customs of the Iron Age. These studies have also concluded that Israel's early religious beliefs were similar to those throughout the Ancient Near East. Johnston's work is inductive and provides a detailed synthesis of all the biblical, textual (ANE), and cultural data and arrives at a more nuanced description of the concept of Sheol in the Old Testament. The book is systematic in its approach—discussing each text and its context.

The book is divided into four parts each with two or three chapters dealing with a specific topic of the study. The first part discusses death in general, focusing on its use in the biblical text and burial and mourning practices associated with death. The author presents the many euphemisms used in the text for death and the variety of practices. Johnston interprets the phrases "gathered to his people" and "slept with his fathers" as indicating joining one's ancestors in the afterlife or as formulaic phrases used for national leaders and not representative of

Bronze and Iron Age secondary burials as is commonly postulated in the scholarly literature.

The second part discusses the Underworld—terms used to refer to the underworld (Chapter Three), the Psalmists use of the term (Chapter Four), and descriptive terms of the underworld (Chapter Five). Johnston demonstrates that *Sheol* was the most common term (other terms are the pit and destruction), but concludes that *Sheol* was used as “an infrequent theme and an unwelcome fate (p. 85).” In this section Johnston examines the use of “earth” and “water” with the underworld. He illustrates that these are metaphors and the Hebrew writers do not have an elaborate or defined description of the underworld as found in other contemporary cultures.

The third part contains three chapters dealing with the Dead. Chapter Six discusses names of the dead (e.g. Rephaim, ‘gods’), Chapter Seven discusses necromancy in the Hebrew Bible, and Chapter Eight addresses whether Israel had an ancestor cult. It is in this third part of the study that Johnston rejects current scholarly opinion that Israel adopted practices of communicating with the dead or had an elaborate system of the underworld. While there is the use of terms borrowed from other Semitic languages (particularly Ugaritic) and examples of necromancy—these are exceptions to the general practice and should be viewed as anomalies within the wider Israelite culture rather than the norm.

The last part of the study contains two chapters entitled: Communion Beyond Death (Chapter Nine) and Resurrection from the Dead (Chapter Ten). Johnston examines pertinent texts. He notes that interpretation has veered between reading later Jewish and Christian eschatology of later periods back into the texts or denying that there was any post-mortem individual hope until the Maccabean period (p. 18). Johnston concludes that there are a few texts that hint at some form of continued communion with God, but there are only two that refer to a future individual resurrection.

Philip Johnston has presented his case thoroughly and persuasively. One glaring omission is that Johnston does not interact with the many treatments of Israelite Religion, archaeology, and cult practices associated with the dead. Granted, a monograph whose goal is to present scholarly research to non-specialists should not rehash the various scholarly views; but these should be addressed and summarized in the introduction, especially since Johnston’s conclusions are in opposition to the prevalent scholarly opinion. Nevertheless, in light of Johnston’s study, scholars will have to reevaluate current theories and models of the concept of afterlife in the Old Testament. His work will also serve as the reference for the development of theology and exegesis of the biblical text. This book’s premise and accessibility to non-specialists should

place it on the reading lists of Old Testament, Systematic Theology, and Hermeneutic courses. It should be included in the library of any person who teaches or studies the biblical text.

Steven M. Ortiz
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach.* By Kenneth Keathley. B&H Publishing: Nashville, 2010, 256 pp., \$24.99, Paperback. ISBN-10: 0805431985**

Molinism seems to be a mere drop in the bucket of theological thought with little attention in Church history. Ken Keathley's *Salvation and Sovereignty* surely brings hope of resurgence to the little known school of thought. With an exemplary effort to reconcile some of the most difficult theological doctrines, Keathley demonstrates amazing consistency in his pursuit for a Biblical understanding of salvation and divine sovereignty. Just as the Calvinist has his TULIP so does the Molinist have his ROSES. The acronym may be understood as "R" for radical depravity, "O" for overcoming grace, "S" for sovereign election, "E" for eternal life, and "S" for singular redemption.

What is important about the Molinist approach is where Keathley begins. He commences his book by dispelling a popular misnomer of Molinism and should be commended for doing so. He aptly states, "If Molinism were simply the overlaying of a philosophical grid on top of Scripture, then it would be a very bad idea and should not be done" (19). Molinism embraces the doctrine of middle knowledge with a commitment to understanding that God sovereignly controls all things via his omniscience. It is assumed that God genuinely desires the salvation of all men and the sin of unbelief truly belongs to the unbeliever. Keathley adopts the antecedent/consequent paradigm to reconcile God's universal salvific will and his will to condemn the reprobate. "God antecedently wills all to be saved. But for those who refuse to repent and believe, he consequently wills that they should be condemned" (58). After Keathley outlines his presuppositions he resumes his approach by bringing Molinism's ROSES to full bloom.

Radical depravity affirms that soft libertarianism is the most plausible understanding of human freedom in a state of sin. Man derives his freedom from God as a gift, which reflects the divine image. The difference between total depravity and radical depravity is that, though sin affects the totality of man, he does not relinquish his freedom even though it has been affected by sin.

Overcoming grace is certainly the crux of Keathley's framework and is due the most attention. The keystone for this doctrine is that God is the sole author and worker of salvation and damnation is only that of the sinner's free rejection of God. In this model the only act the sinner can do is resist due to his depraved nature. God overcomes the sinner's rebellion and the moment the sinner refrains from resisting the draw of the Spirit is the moment of regeneration. There is no cooperative effort or work the sinner does. The Holy Spirit brings the spiritually dead man to salvation not by anything the man *does*, but only by God's grace that overcame the resistance while still rendering damnation solely because of man's free rebellion and sin. With this understanding of grace Keathley has constructed a proper monergistic model of salvation while still affirming soft libertarian freedom.

Keathley's understanding of sovereign election, which he calls "consistent infralapsarianism," follows from his understanding of overcoming grace. Under this view, God elects all individuals who would freely cease to resist his saving grace. God will so arrange the world, via strong and weak actualizations, to bring about a person's experiences and circumstances in which they would freely refrain from rejecting him. With this understanding of election, God is both sovereign in actualizing salvation and permissive in allowing the reprobates to go their own way. Keathley's interpretation of Romans 9 is a historical rendition with little to no attention to the particular and individual aspect of the chapter. Though it is not necessary for Molinism to explain why God created this world, Keathley argues that Molinism is consistent with the existence of the elect and the reprobate. A particular shortfall of Keathley in this chapter on election is his response to the question, "Why does the reprobate exist?" In his attempt to distance himself from a theodicy he responds by resting it comfortably at "God's sovereign will." Though that is true, it would have been beneficial to focus more attention on that question.

Keathley's position on the doctrine of perseverance is that God has actualized a world where the elect are preserved by God and freely persevere in faith. Scriptural warnings are not only a means of perseverance but also tests of genuine belief. There is a possible world in which the elect do apostatize; however, this world is infeasible given the Scriptural warnings and preserving grace. Simply put, the saint *can* lose his salvation but he *will not* render it lost by apostatizing.

The last petal of Molinism's ROSES attempts to answer the question, "For whom did Christ die?" Singular redemption is distanced from the general view of atonement, where salvation is obtained for all but secured for none. It is difficult to make a distinction between singular redemption and limited atonement. Both hold to the penal

substitutionary view of the atonement but Keathley adds that salvation is provided for all but only efficacious for those who believe, whereas limited atonement is only provided for and efficacious to the elect. Singular redemption provides atonement for the non-elect, but because of their unbelief the atonement serves as condemnation and testifies against them.

Keathley succeeds in making a minimalistic case for a Molinist approach to soteriology. He is quite modest and appears to avoid more philosophically oriented Molinist doctrines. It would have been beneficial to include an appendix or two with further implications of Molinism or even theodicies from a Molinist approach where readers could have inquired more about questions and mysteries that may still remain. Nonetheless, after reading this book it will be quite difficult to substantiate the accusation that Molinism is all philosophy and not a Biblically based school of thought because Keathley derives *all* of his arguments directly from Scripture. Keathley gives Calvinism and Arminianism a fair and honest representation and cites the leading scholars for each school, though he tends to discuss Calvinist matters more than Arminian.

It is hard not to be enthusiastic about this book and the positive impact it can have on the church. After reading the chapter on overcoming grace I could only respond with reverent worship and thankfulness that God pursued me in my sin and that he overcame my wicked rebellion. The arguments and concepts will engage both the scholar and the layperson. As a result, the church should expect to see more ROSES and, perhaps, less of the TULIP. Relative to the aggregate literature on Protestant soteriology, Molinism has very few texts. My hope is that *Salvation and Sovereignty* may become a fundamental source for studying Molinism and that it may be a catalyst for more work by scholars and church leaders. In light of this book, the church should seriously consider a Molinist approach in her pursuit for soteriological consistency.

Max L. E. Andrews
Liberty University

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