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Luther discovers “the Righteousness of God” (Romans 1:17)

“I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1[:17], ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed,’ that had stood in my way. For I hated that word ‘righteousness of God,’ which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught

to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, ‘As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!’ Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith,

as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

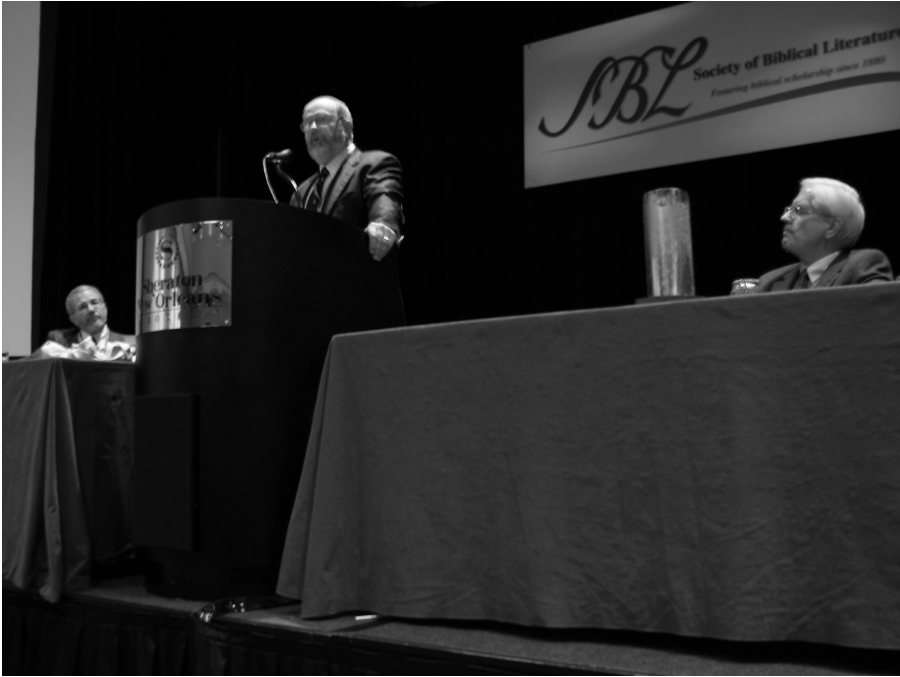
And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word ‘righteousness of God.’”*

*Martin Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings* (1545) (ET: Lewis W. Spitz, Sr., in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther* [4 vol.; ed. Theodore G Tappert; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress]) 1:26-27.

N. T. Wright on How Luther (and Everybody Else) Got Romans 1:17 All Wrong

“Unless there had grown up in the Western church a long tradition of (a) reading ‘God’s righteousness’ as *iustitia Dei*, then (b) trying to interpret that phrase with the various meanings of *iustitia* available at the time, and (c) interpreting that in turn within the categories of theological investigation of the time (especially the determination to make ‘justification’ cover the entire sweep of soteriology from grace to glory)—unless all this had happened, nobody would ever have supposed that the ‘righteousness’ in question in Romans 1:17 was anything other than God’s own ‘righteousness,’ unveiled, as in a great apocalypse, before the watching world. And unless the scholars of any time had lost their moorings completely, drifting away from the secure harbor of ancient Jewish thought, not least the biblical thought where both Paul and his contemporaries were anchored, and had allowed the little ship of exegesis to be tossed to and fro with every wind of passing philosophy, nobody would have supposed that ‘God’s righteousness’ was anything other than his faithfulness to the covenant, to Israel and, beyond that again, to the whole of creation. It would have been taken for granted that ‘God’s righteousness’ referred to the great, deep plans which the God of the Old Testament had always cherished, the through-Israel-for-the-the-

world plans, plans to rescue and restore his wonderful creation itself, and, more especially, to God's faithfulness to those great plans."*



N. T. Wright at the 2009 Society of Biblical Literature Meeting in New Orleans (Photo: R. Huggins)

*N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 178.

Editorial

Welcome to the Spring 2010 issue of the *Midwestern Baptist Journal*, the academic journal of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri. The theme articles of the present issue feature N. T. Wright and his view of the doctrine of Justification. The first two articles represent the text of the Sizemore Lectures, delivered at Midwestern on 3-4 November 2009 by Dr. Mark Seifrid, Ernest and Mildred Hogan Professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. These lectures represent some of Dr. Seifrid's most recent contributions to the ongoing debate between himself and Bishop N. T. Wright on the issue of Justification, a debate many of our readers will have undoubtedly followed in recent books and scholarly articles. Dr. Seifrid is well known as a defender of what has come to be called the "Lutheran" reading of Paul, and has been keenly critical of certain features of Wright's "Fresh Perspective" on that apostle's teaching. Following Professor Seifrid's contributions we include a moderating article by Dr. Rustin Umstattd, Professor of Theology at Midwestern, who gives his own take on the debate between Seifrid and Wright. Finally, rounding out the theme section of our issue, Dr. Radu Gheorghita, Professor of Biblical Studies at Midwestern, provides a personal reflection upon his own encounters with the works of N.T. Wright, whom he has come to appreciate as "an 'exclamation point' theologian, who has had an epoch-making impact in New Testament studies."

In addition to our theme contributions, we also include a number of articles addressing other important issues.

In the first place, Midwestern doctoral candidate, Joshua Lee Mann, has contributed an article in which he argues for the presence of Chiasmus in Acts 2:2-4, and reflects upon its possible interpretive significance. Josh also served as the editorial assistant on the present issue of the journal, and the editor wishes to express his gratitude for Josh's invaluable aid at every stage of production.

Next Dr. Fred Sanders, whose book, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* is forthcoming in August from Crossway Publishers, contributes an article in which he

declares that it is time for theologians to express “the doctrine of the Trinity with unprecedented clarity as a biblical doctrine, or, to speak more precisely, as a doctrine that is in the Bible.” Dr. Sanders is Professor of Theology at Biola’s Torrey Honors Institute.

From there we move into the realm of Christian ethics as Dr. Jerry A. Johnson, Professor of Ethics and Theology at Midwestern and Dean of Midwestern Seminary, leads us in an exploration of the significant implications of the incarnation of Jesus for establishing the full personhood of the unborn.

After that comes an article exploring the roots of the oft-repeated myth crediting the Emperor Constantine with the formation of our New Testament Canon. This article is from the keyboard of the editor, as also is the final piece in this issue, on the Pelican as a symbol of the sacrificial suffering of Christ in art.

The final contribution to be mentioned is of special interest. Grant H. Palmer spent his career as a teacher within the LDS Church Educational System. In 2005, however, Palmer was disciplined after writing a book, entitled *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, that called into question Mormonism’s claims about its founder, the Prophet Joseph Smith, while at the same time calling upon his church to place greater emphasis on Jesus Christ. Palmer’s personal background as a trusted LDS leader and teacher led to this book’s being particularly impactful. He was three-times director of LDS Institutes in California and Utah, and an instructor at the LDS Church college of New Zealand. He also served as an LDS seminary instructor in Utah. Palmer is not a Southern Baptist, indeed he still considers himself a Mormon. 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 Bosom.” Every Christian who has had any sort of extended interactions with Mormons will appreciate the importance of Palmer’s discussion.

A final word of thanks goes to Cheri Smith for her help with proofreading and formatting.

(W)right with God?: A Response to N. T. Wright's Vision of Justification



Sizemore Lecture I
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
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ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION IN
THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

MARK A. SEIFRID*

*Ernest and Mildred Hogan Professor
of New Testament*

*The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, KY 40206
mseifrid@sbts.edu*

The doctrine of justification has proved to be a sticking point for N. T. Wright's ambitious attempt at a new theology of the New Testament. In now at least four monographs, Wright has circled around Paul's Gospel always keeping God's justifying work in Christ at the center of his vision.¹ It remains under debate whether or not he has made a successful landing. Wright himself clearly is aware of the questions that his proposal has raised and in his most recent work gives an answer to those who have questioned his interpretation of Paul's Gospel.² His rhetoric, as

*Dr. Seifrid is the author of *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).

¹ That includes N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991/Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992); N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005); *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

² Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009). Subsequent page references in this essay correspond to this American edition. Although he addresses various critics along the way, his primary response is directed to his primary partner in debate, John Piper (see, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007]).

always, is remarkable. His concern to combat a perverted individualism and to promote a healthy, biblical concern for God's work in this world should be welcome to all of us. At the same time, it must be said that a reading of Wright's work reveals equivocations and inconsistencies that jeopardize his entire program.³ It is hard to tell whether Wright's rhetorical flourishes, or his commitment to his larger scheme of "Israel's return from exile," or both prevent him from seeing these problems. To raise questions about Wright's program is to risk appearing as a cranky traditionalist who wants to spoil the celebration of a fresh perspective with stale dogma. But perhaps, as Jaroslav Pelikan once urged, it may be possible to celebrate tradition without falling prey to traditionalism.⁴ From the fires of the past, we might yet bring the flame and not the ash.⁵

Wright's program may be summarized succinctly in his repeated claim that "God's single plan to put the world to rights" is nothing other than his "plan to do so through Israel" (p. 65). The formal and material dimensions of this proposal stand or fall together. It is only as God acts in, for and through Israel that one may speak of a single, saving purpose of God. Likewise, only if God's plan is simple and unbroken may one speak of "Israel" and "Israel" alone as the vehicle of God's saving purpose. Wright's inconsistencies concerning the identity of Israel and the function of the Law call into question his proposal to read Scripture as a straight-line narrative.⁶ We shall have to leave them aside here. Our

³ "Omnis aequivocatio mater errorum," Luther, *WA* 39:2, 28,28.

⁴ J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 9: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."

⁵ The latter dictum is cited by many; I have it from Hugh T. Kerr, "Warfield: The Person Behind the Theology," *PSB* 25.1 (2004): 93.

⁶ As a confession of the oneness of God, Wright's formal claim that Scripture tells of a single plan of God for the salvation of the world (p. 94) is all well and good, even if the target of his complaint remains obscure. [If Wright has some sort of "Lutheran" view in mind here (as he explicitly indicates at various points in his work), he misses his target widely, since "Lutherans" (both the confessional ones and at least some of the Westerholm type) will quite heartily agree with him. They would merely want to add the caveat that so long as we remain on this side of glory we cannot see the whole of the single, divine plan. As Paul himself confesses, the oneness of God is presently a matter of faith (Rom 3:27-31). The distinction between the present fallen age and the one to come turns out to be critical to the assessment of Wright's work. See also Mark A. Seifrid, "Story-Lines of Scripture and Footsteps in the Sea," *SBJT* 12.4 (2008): 96-106.] One may question, however, whether Wright remains true to his proposal. According to his reading, the Scriptures tell the story of God

putting the world right through his covenant with Israel: “Here we have it: *God’s single plan, through Abraham and his family, to bless the whole world,*” (p. 67; Wright’s italics). [In his assertion that there is a single covenant of God, in which promise and demand are joined, and which was given to Israel for the world, and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Wright stands remarkably close to Barth’s mature theology of the covenant—perhaps unconsciously taking it up. For a useful summary of the development of Barth’s “covenant theology,” see E. Busch, “Der eine Gnadenbund Gottes: Karl Barths neue Föderaltheologie,” *ThQ* 176.4 (1996): 341–54. Wright differs from Barth in his radical redefinition of Israel, on which point his thought clearly parallels that of Oscar Cullmann. See O. Cullmann, *Christus und die Zeit: Die urchristliche Zeit- und Geschichtsauffassung* (2d ed.; Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1948), 104–6. His equivocation on the identity of Israel that we examine below nevertheless exposes weaknesses that are inherent to the work of both Barth and Cullmann.] Wright repeatedly argues that Israel was faithless in its calling to be a “light to the nations” (Isa 42:6; 49:6). Where Israel failed, Jesus arrived as “the faithful Israelite, through whom the single plan can proceed after all,” offering obedience to God in his faithfulness to death on the cross (p. 105). Wright correspondingly affirms that Jesus died for Israel’s guilt, taking up himself the death they deserved (p. 105). It is this concession that throws his claim of a straight-line story into question, since if the cross was a substitutionary event, one must conclude that God apparently did have a “Plan B” to his saving work through Israel (p. 73). The alternative is to say—in an inversion of Caiaphas’ judgment—that God intended *Israel* to be crucified for the sins of the world. Wright misses this problem, perhaps because he understands Jesus’ death primarily as an act of “representation.” For him the individualistic category of “substitution” is a subordinate element of a larger, corporate event. In rejecting what he calls, “the sterile old antithesis between ‘representation’ and ‘substitution’,” he argues that “the Messiah is able to be the substitute *because he is the representative*” (p. 106; Wright’s italics). [In the significance he attaches to the “faithful obedience” of the Messiah, Wright comes remarkably close to his partner in debate, John Piper (p. 105). Each in his own way regards Jesus as a representative, whose “active obedience” in fulfillment of the Law (and the divine purpose) constitutes an essential and *distinct* element of the substitutionary effect of his saving death. Admittedly, Wright argues in the interest of corporate categories that “imputation” (and therewith “justification”) has to do merely with the according of a status as a member of the people of God (pp. 90-91). Nevertheless, he recognizes that Jesus bore the death and condemnation that belonged to Israel as well as to all of us (pp. 105-106). Wright parts ways with Piper in that he understands Jesus’ “active obedience” as extending all the way through Jesus’ death, and more importantly, in that he denies its “substitutionary” significance. Piper follows the traditional Protestant *loci*, of course, and understands Jesus’ “active obedience” as imputed to the believer.] Wright thus recognizes an *individual* dimension of Jesus’ death, and yet circumscribes its role within the drama of salvation. Jesus’ death in place of us merely grants us a new status and thus places us within the people of God.

What happens within that community constitutes the main event, namely, our participation in Jesus' faithfulness and transformation into the divine image. Yet Wright does not do away with the substitutionary dimension of the saving event; he only limits it. This moment of individualism, the recognition of *Jesus* as an individual distinct from Israel, undermines his insistence that the Scriptures present a single divine plan to bless the world through the nation.

The corporate conception of "representation" that Wright embraces creates its own problems for his urging that the Scriptures present a single story-line. In Wright's reading, Jesus comes to embody Israel without reserve. Indeed, Jesus' achievement as Messiah effects the *redefinition* of God's people. The people of God is now the family marked by "faith(fulness)," and not by any ethnic boundary-marker (pp. 103-105, 117). The nation of Israel thus loses its identity. Whatever one makes of this redefinition of "Israel," it introduces discontinuity into the story of salvation. [The supersessionism of Wright's proposal is remarkably similar to the kind that Adele Reinhartz finds in Dorothy Sayers: "Caiaphas' Post-Canonical Career," (paper presented at the 63rd annual meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, Lund, Sweden, 4 August 2008).]

Wright's privileging of corporate categories likewise introduces confusion into his treatment of the law and the question of human guilt. On the one hand, the law served to show that Jews, like the rest of the human race, were sinful, because it was impossible to keep it perfectly (p. 118). [It is strange that Wright imagines that Luther had no conception of the goodness of the Law or the *usus politicus*, and stranger yet that Wright scolds Luther for saying precisely what Wright himself affirms, that the law condemns (p. 72).] Indeed, "Israel under the Torah cannot be declared to be God's people, because the Torah merely points to sin" (p. 121). [Wright probably does not mean this statement absolutely (which would be quite problematic), since he speaks of Jesus as Israel's *representative*. Nevertheless, his way of understanding "the people of God" anticipates the moralism that is characteristic of his program.] The Law gets in the way of the promise to Abraham "by apparently choking the promise within the failure of Israel, . . . then finally by locking everything up under the prison house of sin" (p. 123; cf. pp. 135, 200). At this juncture, Wright appeals to Jesus' substitutionary death: for the positive verdict on Israel and the world the Messiah's faithfulness unto death was necessary (p. 121). On the other hand—following Calvin—Wright argues that the law was given at Sinai as a way of life to a people already redeemed, in order to set Israel apart from the nations (pp. 72-73). Torah included the sacrificial system, through which atonement could be made, so that "one did not need or expect to be always perfect in all respects" (p. 76). Does the law bring guilt or not? The inconsistency in Wright's two opposing assessments has to do with his ambivalence concerning the substitutionary dimension of Jesus' death. As is consistently the case with him, the corporate category of representation takes over his interpretation: "The point is that Torah must be understood *within the strange single-plan-of-God-through-Israel-for-the-world*" (p. 129, Wright's italics) so that through "the Messiah and his faithful, saving death" God's people are now identified by the badge of "faith/faithfulness." By means of this problematic identification of Jesus and

attention will be focused instead on Wright's understanding of the atonement and justification, faith and Christian community into which these inconsistencies spill over.

The current attractiveness of Wright's proposal among evangelicals rests in his insistence that salvation primarily has to do with believing community. "Justification" for Wright has to do with Israel as the people of God, and then through Jesus, with all the nations who join God's people.⁷ Consequently, "justification" does *not* have to do with the

Israel, Wright shifts the question of the law from the sphere of guilt to that of salvation-history: "Torah had a purpose all right; it was indeed God's holy law; but its purpose was to keep Israel in check, to stop God's wayward people going totally off track, until the time when, through the Messiah, the long-term ultimate promises could be fulfilled" (p. 129). Wright here thinks in terms of the Messiah as representative, so that the *usus elenchticus* that he elsewhere affirms disappears, and the *usus politicus* becomes the sole purpose of the law. Indeed, according to Wright it is an "old caricature" to speak of the law as "driving us to despair of accomplishing its demands" and to flee to Christ to find the way of faith (pp. 129, 232). The relationship between the law of God and the faith of the gospel consequently becomes a mere shift in salvation-history: life under Torah was like living with candles in the dark; now the sun has risen (p. 129). There is no overlooking Wright's inconsistency here. He must decide whether the law had the merely temporary function of restraining the evil within Israel, or if the law exposes the guilt within Israel—and the world—with which the cross has dealt. Normally, of course, the *usus politicus* is not played off against the *usus elenchticus*. If, however, one does so, one cannot have it both ways.

⁷ In some ways Wright stands close to Albrecht Ritschl's theological program both in his tendency toward biblicism and in the priority he gives to the corporate dimension of salvation. He shares Ritschl's preference for Reformed theology, and, like Ritschl, makes appeal to the divine covenant as a fundamental category for understanding redemption. For Wright as well as for Ritschl, the distinction between old and new covenants is that of the particular and national versus the universal. Likewise, Jesus serves for Wright as a moral ideal in much the same way that Ritschl understood him as an ethical archetype. In certain respects Wright remains more committed to Protestant orthodoxy than does Ritschl, and thus maintains a distinct place for a substitutionary atonement as a satisfaction of divine wrath that is lacking with Ritschl. Nevertheless, much like Ritschl he subordinates justification to the effecting of the larger divine plan. Both understand justification in the first instance as a communal reality. Just as with Ritschl justification comes to the individual only within community, with Wright justification establishes the status of the individual within the community. Ritschl thinks more consistently in terms of the community of the reconciled, and thus leaves questions of individual faith unanswered. Wright allows more room for the individual, and thus offers a less consistent program. For a summary of Ritschl's thought see R. Schäfer, *Ritschl: Grundlinien eines fast verschollenen dogmatischen Systems* (BHT 41; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr

“imputation of Christ’s righteousness” *nor* with the new creation of the human being, but with being granted a new status, namely, membership in the people of God. “Faith” likewise does not in the first instance have to do with our standing before God, but is a badge and emblem of membership in God’s people, the necessary mark of “covenant renewal” and of our participation in the divine image. Consequently, for Wright “justification” brings final salvation only through the work of the Spirit who transforms us into the divine image manifest in Jesus.⁸ The outward and visible acts of the believing community thereby become not merely the showplace of salvation, but its final criterion. Here, as elsewhere in his thought, Wright loses from his view the full dimensions of the final judgment. This lost horizon of judgment and the subordination of the individual to corporate concerns is not uncommon in recent evangelical thought. It deserves further reflection.

I. THE ATONEMENT AS REPRESENTATION AND SUBSTITUTION

The priority Wright gives to community has significant entailments for his understanding of the atonement that we must consider on our way to assessing his proposal concerning justification. In rejecting what he calls “the sterile old antithesis between ‘representation’ and ‘substitution’”, he argues that “the Messiah is able to be the substitute *because he is the representative*” (p. 106; Wright’s italics).⁹ For Wright,

Siebeck, 1968). Correspondingly, Wright’s program likewise bears remarkable similarity to the Social Gospel in its utilitarian conception of individual faith, its image of Jesus as the initiator of the kingdom, and its emphasis on the continuity between present righteousness and that of the kingdom to come. See, for example, W. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 95–166 and “The Brotherhood of the Kingdom” (1893) in *Walter Rauschenbusch: Selected Writings* (ed. Winthrop S. Hudson; New York: Paulist, 1984), 71–94.

⁸ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 108–29.

⁹ In the significance he attaches to the “faithful obedience” of the Messiah, Wright comes remarkably close to his partner in debate, John Piper (p. 105). Each in his own way regards Jesus as a representative, whose “active obedience” in fulfillment of the Law (and the divine purpose) constitutes an essential and *distinct* element of the substitutionary effect of his saving death. Admittedly, Wright argues in the interest of corporate categories that “imputation” (and therewith “justification”) has to do merely with the according of a status as a member of the people of God (pp. 90–91). Nevertheless, he recognizes that Jesus bore the death and condemnation that belonged to Israel as well as to all of us (pp. 105–106). Wright parts ways with Piper in that he

then, Jesus' death is primarily an act of "representation." "Substitution" is a subordinate element of a larger, corporate event. Because Israel failed to reflect the faithfulness of its covenant God, and thus to be a blessing to the nations (p. 67), God required "*a faithful Israelite, through whom the single plan can continue after all*" (Wright's italics; p. 105). Through his faithful obedience, Jesus "has attained the position of sovereignty over creation marked out for human beings from the beginning" (p.103). Wright thus speaks of "the achievement of Jesus as the crucified Messiah," (p. 117) and even of Jesus as the "hero" of the divine drama (p. 27).

It is not clear (to me at least) what Wright means when he rejects a so-called "sterile, old antithesis" between "representation and substitution." It is clear, however, that in his subordination of "substitution" to "representation" Wright effectively reduces the atonement to a mere moral transaction. For Wright, Jesus is first and foremost a faithful Israelite, indeed, the one faithful Israel, who is able to serve as Israel's substitute only because he has representatively fulfilled the divine will. It is entirely appropriate, of course, to understand Jesus' obedience as essential to the atonement, and, indeed, as having been in a sense "rewarded" by God (Phil 2:8, 9-11; cf. Heb 5:7-8). In assigning priority to Jesus' "representative" role, however, Wright goes further. As "the faithful Israelite," Jesus does not in the first instance die in place of the nation. He embodies it. Israel thus saves itself in Jesus its representative, so to speak, before anything may be said to have been done in its place. Admittedly, Wright understands Jesus to serve not only as Israel's representative, but also as *God's* representative. Jesus' faithfulness is the revelation of God's faithfulness and of the divine image. But this equation does not change the dynamic of the atonement. Indeed, Wright so draws God into Jesus' faithfulness that he nearly makes God out to be nothing more than a moral authority who rewards Jesus' heroic performance. The core of Wright's conception of the atonement is, thus, moralistic. Thus, he fails to see the real drama of redemption, the exchange of our person with the person of Christ, the exchange of sin and righteousness, the exchange of death and life. He misses the "great pleasure" of the cross (cf. Johann Georg Hamann)¹⁰

understands Jesus' "active obedience" as extending all the way through Jesus' death, and more importantly, in that he denies its "substitutionary" significance. Piper follows the traditional Protestant *loci*, of course, and understands Jesus' "active obedience" as imputed to the believer.

¹⁰ "Im *Kreutz*, wie es unsere Religion schon sinnlich und bildlich nennt, liegt ein großer *Genuß* unserer Existenz—und zugleich das wahre Treibwerk unserer verborgensten Kräfte" (Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefe* [7 vols; ed. W.

that can be tasted and experienced only where Christ as Savior is not displaced by Christ as example, only where “substitution” is not demoted by “representation.”

The ordering of the relationship between “representation” and “substitution” which Wright offers implies that these two dimensions of God’s atoning work in Christ are distinct and separate. Is it not rather the case that the two are interwoven? In a sense, it is fair to say that as a human being, Jesus serves as Israel’s substitute only because he is its faithful representative. But is it not equally true to say that Jesus is able to serve as Israel’s representative, only because he has come as its substitute? Paul, thus, instructs the Galatians: “When the fullness of time had come, God *sent forth* his Son, coming to be (born) of a woman, coming to be under the Law” (Gal 4:4). The preexistent Son has entered into the world and into his kinship with Israel, as the root of Jesse and the new David. His incarnation, death, and resurrection mark a fresh *beginning*. A substitution and exchange has taken place within the fallen world. The Son has taken our place. As the Son who comes as God and Lord, Jesus is Israel’s representative only as its substitute. “Representation” and “substitution” are not separate, but interwoven dimensions of the atonement. Paul, thus, describes Christ’s work in such a way that “representation” and “substitution” meet: “Don’t you know that as many as have been baptized into Christ Jesus, have been baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3; cf. Eph 2:11-18; Col 2:6-15). In one respect, the redeemed are present in the saving event. In this sense we may describe that event as “representative,” or, more precisely, as an event of “inclusive representation.” In another respect, those who are redeemed were *not* present in the saving event. In that sense, then we may describe the event as “substitutionary.” We understand God’s saving work in Christ properly only as we see that these two dimensions of that work interpenetrate and qualify one another. Once “representation” is separated from “substitution,” it becomes nothing more than “solidarity,” or perhaps, as with Grotius, an exemplary act. As we have seen, Wright in his own way understands Jesus’ death, or rather Jesus’ obedience in the face of death, primarily as a moral example, even if he retains the traditional Protestant understanding of the atonement in of its substitutionary dimension.¹¹ Over against Wright’s subordination of

Ziesemer and A. Henkel; Wiesbaden, Germany: Insel Verlag, 1955–79], 4:391.16–19.): “In the *cross*, as our religion sensually and pictorially calls it, lies a great *pleasure* of our existence—and at the same time the true movement of our most hidden powers.”

¹¹ We should note that the same considerations apply to a conception of “substitution” that is stripped of any representative dimension. Once isolated in

“substitution” to “representation,” then, “representation” and “substitution” are to be understood as inseparable, interpenetrating aspects of Jesus’ cross and resurrection. In one sense, we *were* there when “they crucified (our) Lord,” in another sense we were *not*.

We also must not overlook that both the representative and substitutionary dimensions of the atonement extend beyond Jesus’ cross to his resurrection. Romans 6, to which we already have referred, makes it clear that those who have been baptized into Christ’s death also share in his resurrected life: “just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4b). To be included and to share in Christ’s death is to be included and to share in the new life of obedience and the hope of the resurrection, that is, to share in Christ’s resurrection communicated to us by faith (Rom 6:5-11). It is not only Christ’s death that was an event of “inclusive representation,” but also his resurrection. Christ stood in our place in his death so that we might stand in his place in the life of the new creation.

Because of the priority Wright assigns to “representation,” he has difficulty in taking into account this participation in Jesus’ saving resurrection. The bare nail on the cover of the American edition of Wright’s recent work betrays its thrust: his attention is focused on Jesus’ obedience to death.¹² He has given extensive attention elsewhere, of course, to the resurrection of the Son of God. Even in this work, however, his understanding of salvation is tilted toward Jesus’ obedience, so that he does not appreciate the full significance of Jesus’ resurrection. His discussion there of Romans 6:1-11 is instructive.¹³ He quite rightly understands Paul to refer to the future resurrection of believers in vv. 5 and 8: “if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom 6:8). As he indicates, the new obedience of the Christian of which Paul speaks, our “walking in the newness of life” (Rom 6:4), implies a “metaphorical resurrection,” or more properly

this way, “substitution” becomes nothing more than an act of “replacement.” One ends up with a bare Anselmian understanding that leaves the *communication* of the saving benefits of God’s atoning work in Christ unexplained. See Stephan Schaede, *Stellvertretung: Begriffsgeschichtliche Studien zur Soteriologie* (BHT 126; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 625–41, esp. 629–30.

¹² One of Caravaggio’s paintings of Paul’s conversion appears on the cover of the UK edition. Here Wright’s idealistic conception of a transforming vision comes to expression. Despite the obvious reference to Jesus’ resurrection, the implicit theology of the cover remains the same, as does, of course, the content of the book itself.

¹³ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 3; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 251–4.

stated, Jesus' resurrection in metaphor. For Wright, this "walking in newness of life" is a continuation of the "exodus" theme: just as Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt and led into the promised land, our underlying status is freedom from sin and our ultimate destination is the life of the age to come. While the appeal to the pattern of the exodus is not entirely wrong, Wright's focus on Jesus' obedience as a model for our own leads him to underestimate our share in Jesus' resurrection. At least three observations are in order. First, although Paul's language *implies* that our present participation in Jesus' resurrection is to be understood metaphorically, Paul does not, in fact, employ metaphor, but uses direct speech that makes the comparison explicit: "In order that, *just as* Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, *so we, too*, might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Second, in this direct speech the similitude or likeness that grounds the potential metaphor becomes clear. Our new obedience corresponds to the resurrection of Christ *in that* "the glory of the Father" manifest in Christ's resurrection and "the newness of life" that is given to us are implicitly equivalent. It quickly becomes apparent from a scan of Pauline usage that these expressions signify the effecting of the new creation and its presence, respectively.¹⁴ One is led, therefore, to the striking and profound conclusion that Paul's metaphorical transfer of *meaning* from Christ's resurrection to our new obedience is based on the transfer of *the reality* of Christ's resurrection here and now to those who believe.¹⁵ Our new obedience is nothing other than the resurrection in transferred form. This "transferred resurrection" comes to full metaphorical expression in Colossians and Ephesians: we have been raised with Christ and seated with him "in the heavenlies."¹⁶ Indeed, it is the realistic metaphor, the

¹⁴ On "glory" see: Rom 5:2; 8:18, 21; 9:23; on "newness" see: Rom 7:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15.

¹⁵ See Joachim Ringleben, "Luther zur Metapher," *ZTK* 94.3 (1997): 336–369; "Metapher und Eschatologie bei Luther," *ZTK* 100.2 (2003): 223–240. Luther speaks significantly in respect to 2 Cor 5:21 of Christ being made metaphorically into sin ("Christus . . . factus est peccatum metaphorice"), on which see Gerhard Ebeling, "Christus . . . factus est peccatum metaphorice," in *Wort und Glaube, Band 4: Theologie in den Gegensätzen des Lebens* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 583–609.

¹⁶ See Col 2:12–13; 3:1; Eph 2:5–6. Wright himself momentarily recognizes the import of these verses, but then quickly slips into his salvation-historical scheme in which the "transferred" resurrection loses its real weight: "Without downplaying the future hope of actual resurrection itself, the fact that the church lives in the interval between the Messiah's resurrection and its own ultimate new life means that the metaphorical use of 'resurrection' language can be adapted to denote the concrete Christian living described in 2.10." Wright, *The*

transfer of the reality of the new creation into our life in the present order that guards against a totalistic metaphor that would suppose that our life in the present order is resurrection life. Paul's metaphorical realism guards against the Corinthian error that we encounter again in the Pastoral Epistles, the subsuming of the resurrection life into the present age (1 Cor 15:12-19; 2 Tim 2:18-19; cf. 2 Thess 2:2). It is not clear that Wright's symbolic appropriation of the Pauline metaphor sufficiently guards against such a totalizing approach: "building for the kingdom" may well displace the hope of the kingdom breaking in upon this world. For Paul, baptized believers in Christ live in the intersection of the times. We make progress and enter the promised land of resurrection life only because in Jesus Christ we already share in that resurrection life here and now. Third, Wright's loss of perspective stands out all the more sharply in his treatment of Paul's statements about our death. In contrast with his discussion of Jesus' resurrection, he leaves this language unexplored and effectively treats it as direct speech. Consequently, for Wright believers *in a certain sense* live in an "intermediate state," dead to sin but not yet literally raised from the dead. Quite right, of course. But Paul's realistic metaphor goes missing. Christian obedience is no intermediate state and is far deeper and greater than new behavior.¹⁷ The difference between Wright's handling of Christ's death and Christ's resurrection is remarkable in that while Paul employs more or less direct speech to describe our participation in Christ's resurrection, he uses full-blown metaphor to describe our participation in Christ's death: "we were baptized into his death; we were buried with him, through baptism into death; we have been planted together with the likeness of his death; our old person has been crucified with him; we have died with Christ" (Rom 6:4, 5, 6, 8). Our reckoning of ourselves as dead to sin does not differ from our reckoning ourselves alive to God in Christ. Paul's language shares in metaphor in both instances. In both instances, however, he speaks of real participation here and now in Christ, both in Christ's resurrection as well as in Christ's death. Jesus' resurrection is much more than a goal to which we are to be conformed. It is also a reality in which we already share: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17). Only those who in the present life possess the life of the resurrection shall enter into the life of the resurrection at the coming of the Lord. The reality of the new creation in which we share in Christ goes missing in Wright's work, because Wright understands Jesus first and foremost as Israel's representative.

Resurrection, 237; see also 236–40.

¹⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 251–3.

Wright has difficulty not only in accounting for Jesus' resurrection, but also for his death. This is not the only remarkable irony about Wright's scheme, as we shall see! In his representative role, within the larger divine plan, Jesus loses his individual identity and becomes generic. Wright's Jesus, thus, cannot utter the cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" since he represents the entire nation and fulfills "the-single-plan-of-God" of which he is fully aware.¹⁸ In this way, contrary to Wright's own intent and concern, he dehistoricizes Jesus. His elevation of Jesus' representative role makes Jesus into an image and model of obedience. It is at this point, again, that Wright fails to capture the true dynamic of salvation. Our salvation goes beyond *what Jesus did* in obedience to the will of God. It includes *what Jesus suffered*.¹⁹ It is not merely Jesus' obedience unto death that saves us, but his very death itself. "He was crucified on account of *weakness*, but lives by the power of God" (2 Cor 13:4). Jesus saves as the Crucified One who lives, not merely as the Obedient One who was vindicated.

In depersonalizing Jesus, not only does Wright miss the depths of Jesus' suffering, he also—again, ironically—misses the heights of New Testament Christology, despite his admirable concern with it. In a way that transcends Wright's proposal, Jesus appears in the New Testament not merely as the Suffering Servant who fulfills the divine purpose, but also as the one human being *who acts as God*.²⁰ That is already clear in the Markan ransom saying, according to which the Son of Man acts freely out of love and with the power to redeem, apart from any reference to the Father: "the Son of Man *gives his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28). Likewise, according to the Johannine witness, Jesus lays down his life of his own accord. No one takes it from him. The *commandment* he has received from the Father paradoxically rests in his *own* authority to lay down his life and take it up again (John 10:17-18).

¹⁸ Wright subsumes the cry of dereliction under Jesus' vocation: the kingdom comes through the suffering of the righteous. Jesus' suffering thus becomes generic—and the cry of dereliction is explained away. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 600–1.

¹⁹ Karl Friedrich Ulrichs rightly underscores this matter in reference to the debate over the meaning of "the faith of Christ." See K. F. Ulrichs, *Christusglaube: Studien zum Syntagma pistis Christou und zum paulinischen Verständnis von Glaube und Rechtfertigung* (WUNT 2/227; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 6, 193.

²⁰ Paul's identification of Jesus as God is diminished in Wright's Christology of the divine image, according to which the human Jesus displays the divine character. One might perhaps describe this tendency as Eutychian. See Seifrid, "Story-Lines of Scripture," 97.

In Romans 5, Paul speaks not only of the obedience of Christ (Rom 5:19), but also, and in the first place, of the “gift by the grace of the one human being, Jesus Christ,” a gift and grace that is equivalent to the grace of God (Rom 5:15).²¹ Jesus suffers not merely as an obedient human being fulfilling the divine will, but as very God, who gives himself for us and, thus, saves us. Christ’s triumph is that of *his own* all-conquering love, a love that is nothing other than the love of God itself (Rom 8:39). The atonement is something larger than a moral accomplishment or transaction. It is *Christ’s own* defeat of sin and death: “it was for this purpose that Christ died and lived again, that he might rule as *Lord*, both over the dead as well as over the living” (Rom 14:9; cf. 2 Cor 5:14-15).

Wright’s interpretation of the atonement primarily in terms of Jesus’ role as Israel’s representative, thus, not only obscures its substitutionary dimension, it obscures the exchange of persons that is at the heart of that substitutionary understanding. The message of the New Testament is not merely that God has done something for us in Jesus. It is that in Jesus Christ God himself has exchanged places with us, taking our persons, our sin, our death, our judgment upon himself and giving *himself* to us so that we might have his righteousness and life. Paul, thus, summarizes Christ’s saving work in profoundly personal terms when he speaks of the life he lives as that of “the son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). Wright’s commitment to the priority of corporate categories leads him, in stark contrast, to a moralistic—and, indeed, rationalistic—conception of the atonement.

II. JUSTIFICATION IN LIMITED PERSPECTIVE

Wright’s loss of perspective on our full participation in Christ and his resurrection limits his perspective on God’s justifying work in Jesus. On the one hand, Wright rightly understands Jesus’ resurrection as, “the ‘vindication’ of Jesus, his ‘justification’ after the apparent [*sic*] condemnation of the court that sent him to his death” (p. 106). He, thus,

²¹ The same idea appears regularly in the Pauline prescripts, e.g. “grace and peace to you, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:7). In the “grace-wish” of Galatians, Paul names Christ along with the Father as the source of grace and describes him as the one, “who gave himself for our sins, that he might redeem us from the present evil age” (Gal 1:4). Christ’s death is not merely an act of obedience toward God. It is simultaneously a free act of love toward us. On this theme, see Wiard Popkes, *Christus traditus: Eine Untersuchung zum Begriff der Dahingabe im Neuen Testament* (ATANT 49; Zürich, Germany: Zwingli Verlag, 1967), 271–95.

acknowledges the *effective* character of God's justifying pronouncement. On the other hand—at least in his most recent work—Wright follows a strict and narrow *ordo salutis* within which our justification “denotes *one specific aspect of or moment within*” the sequence of thought having to do with salvation by grace (p. 87, Wright's italics).²² He, thus, insists that our justification is nothing more than “*the status that someone has when the court has found in their favor*” (p. 90). Not even his appropriation of Austin's “speech-act” theory sways him from this judgment: as a “speech-act” the decision of the judge creates nothing more than a new status of membership within the people of God (p. 69). Although it is difficult to tell, given the shifting sands of Wright's thought, this characterization of “justification” appears to mark a significant change over against his earlier insistence that “justification” is a mere declaration about the faith that God finds in his people: that declaration would constitute a “constative” utterance, not a “performative” one in Austin's terms.²³ In any case, the status given in the divine declaration is not the status of the judge, who does not transfer his righteousness to the defendant by imputation, nor in any other way (pp. 66-69). Even if consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, one wonders how this rigid interpretation of justification can be squared with Wright's proper insistence elsewhere that the justification and righteousness for which the people of God hope is their final *vindication*.²⁴ In fact, in his discussion of 1 Cor 1:30, Wright joins Paul in celebrating the risen and vindicated Christ as *our* righteousness, and indeed, as our final vindication (pp. 155-157). Wright is able to equivocate on this matter, because he regards the initial status given in justification as the gift of forgiveness and of the Spirit, and, thus, is happy to speak of this initial justification as “vindication” (p. 90).²⁵ Now, however, there are two “vindications”: the initial vindication that sets us within the people of God and a final vindication in the resurrection to life eternal. Wright insists on limiting the language of justification to our initial “status” and reserves the references to our sharing in God's righteousness to the progress and consummation of our salvation (68-71).²⁶ The link between the two for Wright is the sure and certain work of the Spirit who transforms us (188-189). His thought is, thus, nicely Augustinian and Tridentine, despite his

²² Wright himself suggests that “this [understanding of ‘righteousness’] is something that no good Lutheran or Reformed theologian ought ever to object to” (p. 90).

²³ See, e.g., Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 159–60.

²⁴ Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98–9, 131.

²⁵ See also, e.g., Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98–9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

attempts to distance himself from this theology. An initial vindication and a final vindication hardly differ from initial and final justification, even if Wright varies his language. The “status” of believers in the people of God is likewise drawn into this equivocation, since it is no longer clear if their standing within the people of God consists purely and entirely in the forgiveness of sins or if it includes their transformed life. Indeed, Wright elsewhere tilts toward the latter, arguing that “justification” is not about becoming a Christian, but about God’s recognition of true human beings, in whose heart the Spirit is at work.²⁷ Wright, thus, drives a wedge between Jesus and us: we can no longer have him in an unqualified way here and now as our righteousness. We must be transformed into his image in order to share in salvation. How much transformation is enough?

The driving force behind Wright’s distinction between the risen Christ and our justification lies again in Wright’s subordination of “substitution” to “representation” in the atonement. As we have noted, Wright is able to speak of justification in traditional terms: “. . . in Romans 3, Paul’s point is that the whole human race is in the dock, guilty before God” (p. 90). Correspondingly, “justification” has to do with “acquittal” and “forgiveness” (p. 90). The human being stands, so to speak, in the divine “lawcourt.” Justification takes place *coram Deo*. Quite right. When, however, Wright treats Paul’s confrontation of Cephas in Galatians 2:11-21, we are no longer in a “lawcourt,” but at a dinner table. Here “justification” does *not* mean “to be granted free forgiveness of your sins.” It means *instead*, “to be reckoned by God to be a true member of his family, and hence with the right to share in table fellowship” (p. 116). There is nothing wrong, of course, with arguing—as, in fact, Paul does—that no one can be justified by “works of the law,” *both* because the law brings guilt *and* because the one God saves both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 3:19-20, 27-21). Nor is it wrong to give attention to the details of the text, even if Wright’s dissonant readings of Galatians and Romans strain credulity. Wright goes further, however, and plays off membership within the people of God against forgiveness and acquittal. Precisely what is our standing within the people of God, if it is not participation in the community of forgiven sinners? Wright speaks of “being reckoned a true member of the family” in terms of “*faithful* membership” (emphasis mine) in “the Christian family” (p. 116). This status in the “Messiah-redefined family” appears to be

²⁷ See the discussion below and Mark A. Seifrid, “The Narrative of Scripture and Justification by Faith: A Fresh Response to N. T. Wright,” *CTQ* 72.1 (2008): 38–40.

something more than being forgiven and acquitted (p. 117).²⁸ Is it contingent upon the faithfulness and true humanity effected within us by the Spirit?²⁹ The answer appears to be, “Yes.” For Wright, as we have seen, justification is God’s acknowledgement of those who belong to the covenant community, the granting of a status within the people of God. That status is marked by “faith,” or more properly, by the “faithfulness” which is present prior to any justifying judgment.³⁰ As a mere “finding of the facts,” justification is contingent upon a prior work of God’s grace in us. Our justification at the final judgment is no different. On this point, Wright appeals to Calvin’s *beneficia duplex*—justification and sanctification—that are given within the larger reality of union with Christ (p. 85). As we have seen already, however, Wright, quite unlike Calvin, limits the significance of justification to the status *initially* granted to the believer within the community and correspondingly expands “sanctification” so that it becomes the decisive element of union with Christ. What God said and did for us in Jesus is not a single, undivided reality in which we participate. For Wright, it is parceled out into a declaration of status that is followed by an “actual rescue” (p. 170). We must become “in reality” what we already are “by declaration.” (p. 106). Wright thus strangely embraces a fictional understanding of justification, the caricature that is often attributed to Protestant theology. In so doing, he again creates problems for his own understanding of justification. Does not justification, according to Wright himself, mark out those who share in the faith(fulness) of the Messiah?³¹ How, on Wright’s reading, can we be declared to be something that in reality we are not?³² We must leave it to Wright to sort out this inconsistency. In his view, in any case, the Spirit enables us to freely choose to become what is pleasing to God, and reflect God’s image as it is seen in Jesus, as we look away from ourselves to the faithful Messiah (and to the Spirit as well, as we shall see). *In this way*, we become fit to stand at the final

²⁸ For Wright, “membership in the covenant” means being a “forgiven sinner,” but that “only among other things.” See Wright, *Paul in Fresh*, 121. These “other things” apparently are not aspects of forgiveness, but distinctly “other” than forgiveness.

²⁹ Wright’s urging that the problem of sin and that of judgment—as manifest in the divine dispersion of humanity at Babel—“sit comfortably side-by-side” does nothing to resolve this question (p. 118).

³⁰ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 117–25, 159–160; *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 113–31.

³¹ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 122.

³² Is it, perhaps, that Wright is an unwitting member of the school of Karl Holl and understands justification in terms of God’s foreknowledge of the work he intends to perform in his people?

judgment (pp. 144, 149, 156, 226, 239). As Wright repeatedly insists, his conception of salvation is *not* Pelagian. It is Augustinian through and through.³³ Fair enough. But the question remains as to whether it is biblical. It is certainly not reformational.³⁴

Wright's position becomes even more difficult when he comes to 2 Cor 5:21: "[God] made the one who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him." Here, as elsewhere, Wright understands "God's righteousness" as "God's covenant-faithfulness," expressed in God's action of reconciling the world to himself. Despite the obviously universal dimensions of the saving event, Wright understands Paul to speak here of himself and other apostles. It is Paul, not the Corinthians, who embodies the righteousness of God, a righteousness manifest in what Paul does as Christ's ambassador (pp. 162-165). Wright, thus, understands "God's righteousness" in moral terms and transfers the force of "our becoming the righteousness of God" entirely to the apostle (cf. 2 Cor 5:19-20). Paul supposedly speaks here of the representative faithfulness of Jesus that he embodies and which is finally to be embodied in the Corinthians.

Several observations are in order. In the first place, it is clear from the context that the scope of the atoning event is universal: "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). Paul makes it clear that his apostolic ministry is nothing other than a giving forth of that which he has received, namely his reconciliation to God through Christ. Only in this way does he act as an ambassador of Christ. When, therefore, he speaks of God's atoning work in Christ, he does not merely refer to himself, but also to the Corinthians, to whom he immediately appeals out of the atoning event: "And working together [with God, who acted in the saving exchange in Christ] *we, too, urge* you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor 6:1).³⁵ The reconciling word of the apostle is nothing other than the reconciling work of God accomplished in the saving exchange in Christ. Paul works together with God in that God makes appeal through the apostle who announces this work to the Corinthians.³⁶ That work of God in Christ is effective and complete: "If

³³ Of course, medieval theology sought and found ways to circumvent the implications of Augustinian anthropology and to introduce the contribution of the human being. Wright likewise seems to have found his own way of doing so.

³⁴ It can be little wonder, then, that his proposal has met with such alarm and has provoked such a strong response from John Piper!

³⁵ The little particle *de* in 2 Cor 6:1 links what Paul says there to what precedes.

³⁶ The adverbial *kai* following the conjunction $\delta\epsilon$ marks out 2 Cor 5:21 as spoken in reference to the Corinthians: *Synergountes de kai parakaloumen mē*

one died for all, all died” (2 Cor 5:14); “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17); “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Just as God’s making Christ to be sin was not a process but an event, so our being made the righteousness of God is not a process but an event that has taken place in Christ. The text speaks of a dramatic substitution, an exchange of persons in the cross and resurrection in which Christ was made what we are. Wright misses this exchange of persons and its effective character. He instead understands Christ as a visible representation of God’s righteousness that morally transforms the apostle and keeps God’s righteousness entirely separate from justification. What God has given as an unqualified gift in Christ, Wright would like to attain by the power of the Spirit.

Here the individualism inherent to God’s work in the crucified and risen Jesus that Wright attempts to drive out reenters his reading unnoticed through a back door in corrupt form. All the justified members of the people of God embody God’s righteousness and faithfulness, but some, like the apostle, embody that faithfulness more than others (pp. 166-167). This embodiment of God’s faithfulness, moreover, constitutes for Wright what it means to be “truly human” (p. 209).³⁷ The conclusion then lies at hand: all of us are human, but some of us are more human than others. We shall consider this highly problematic individualism in the second essay.

It becomes apparent, then, in Wright’s wrestling with 2 Cor 5:21 that he overlooks essential elements of the justifying event. The problem lies in his description of “the lawcourt,” according to which God appears as the judge who finds the facts of the case before him in an impartial verdict (pp. 68-71). As the term “lawcourt” already suggests, the scene Wright imagines presupposes the division of powers of a modern democracy.³⁸ In the biblical contexts that provide the relevant background to the language of justification, the pronouncement of the judge and its effect were fully connected. To rule is to judge, and to judge is to establish one’s rule: one “*does* judgment” (□*asah mishpat*). Thus, Israel’s *shophetim* appear in the biblical texts as those whom the Lord raised up to deliver Israel from its enemies (e.g. Judg 2:16–18). The same dynamic is apparent in the summary of David’s rule: “David

eis kenon tēn charin tou theou dexasthai hymas (2 Cor 6:1).

³⁷ See also Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 109, 124.

³⁸ Even in this setting, however, the pronouncement of the judge *effects* the verdict, at least in criminal cases. In his analysis of speech-acts, Austin recognizes this performative dimension of judgment. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. (William James Lectures; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 152–3.

ruled as king over Israel; David executed justice and righteousness for all the people” (2 Sam 8:15).³⁹ Within the contexts of the Hebrew Scriptures, the judgment of priests, elders, or the *pater familias* involved a similar joining of judicial and executive powers.⁴⁰ In the Roman period, rulers, governors, and magistrates likewise bore not only judicial but also executive authority.⁴¹ The New Testament image of the final judgment takes a corresponding form. The Son of Man shall come as king, not merely to make a declaration of status, but to pronounce a verdict and, thus, to *effect* it: “Come . . . inherit the kingdom” and, conversely, “Depart from me . . . into the eternal fire” (Matt 25:34, 41). According to Paul, we must appear before the *bēma* of Christ, not merely to hear a verdict, but to be *recompensed* for the things done in the body (2 Cor 5:10).

Correspondingly, while those who judged in Israel are enjoined to strict impartiality with regard to persons, they are called to passionate intervention on behalf of the oppressed: “Learn to do good; seek justice; set matters right for the oppressed; judge for the orphan, contend for the widow” (Isa 1:17; cf. Deut 10:18; Ps 68:5). The judge is to take the part of those who have been defrauded of their rights, to enter into contention on their behalf. Jesus’ parable of the importunate widow expresses the biblical expectation, including its effective dimension. She appeals to the judge, “Give me vengeance against my opponent!” (Luke 18:3). Jesus promises in the parable that God is ready to take the part of all his oppressed children who cry out to him at the coming of the Son of Man. Indeed, in the past God already entered into contention with his people Israel who themselves oppressed the weak in their midst. The same has taken place in Jesus Christ, who became the object of our murderous lies and violence (Rom 3:10-18; cf. John 7:7; 15:24-25). Here our unbelief, disobedience, and idolatry, already announced by Scripture, are laid bare: the fallen human being and God are in a deadly contention. The question of God’s faithfulness is *not* that of a Leibnizian theodicy, that is, one in

³⁹ Absalom stirred up his insurrection by promising to *effect* the justice that had been neglected by his father (2 Sam 15:1-6). Solomon’s famous judgment likewise was predicated upon his executive authority (1 Kgs 3:16-22).

⁴⁰ Not to be overlooked here, either, is the legislative authority of the judges, and especially of the Davidic kings: they “legislated from the bench” creating fresh law by their decisions (see Keith W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* [JSOTSup 12; Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1979]). Righteousness had to be established ever anew in the face of continuing injustices and disputes: the promise of God’s righteousness, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, may be understood as the final and definitive bringing of justice to the world.

⁴¹ See G Thür and P. E. Pieler, “Gerichtbarkeit,” *RAC* 10.368-401.

which God is made to stand before the forum of human reason.⁴² The question is rather that of whose word is true and shall triumph. Is it the word of a human being, who in the refusal to give thanks to the Creator creates idols and so claims to be wise? Or is it the word of God, which tells us the truth about our idolatry? In this conflict of judgments, the apostle is certain that God, and not the human being, shall triumph: “Let God be true, and every human being a liar” (Rom 3:4; Ps 51:6).⁴³ By the wonder of God’s grace, this deadly confrontation brings us life in Jesus Christ.

The justification of God—the revelation of God’s righteousness—turns out to be our justification *by the communication of God’s righteousness to us in Jesus Christ*. It is this “wonderful exchange” between God and the human being in Christ in 2 Cor 5:21 that Wright overlooks. In his incarnation and cross, Christ became what we *are* and, thus, came to embody sin (so deep is the reach of sin) in order that in his resurrection we might become the righteousness of God (so radical is salvation). Paul does not speak here of mere conformity to a moral ideal, but of our participation in the life of the resurrection, the new creation that has begun already here and now (2 Cor 5:17). God’s righteousness itself appears here in the human creature, namely, in the resurrected Christ (2 Cor 5:21). In Christ, God *comes* to be righteous, not, of course, in himself, but in us and in the world. We, thus, “become the righteousness of God”—not in ourselves, but *in Christ*, in whom we share (2 Cor 5:14-19). Christ is the one meeting place, the mercy-seat, where the righteous God and the fallen human being meet. The forensic dimension of the event and all that one might say about “imputation” become apparent here. As the wonder of God’s grace, this communication of God’s righteousness to the human being does not fit into the scene of any human “lawcourt,” and certainly not the one that Wright imagines.

The same divine triumph appears in the suffering and deliverance of the Isaianic Servant, a pattern to which Paul makes appeal in the context

⁴² A recent monograph fatally misconstrues theodicy in this way: J. R. Daniel Kirk, *Unlocking Romans Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁴³ Wright recognizes the lawsuit between God and Israel (pp. 63-67) and yet not that with the nations—since in his view “God’s righteousness” must be limited to a covenantal relation—and the covenant exists only with Israel. Perhaps for this reason, the conflict between God and the world—God’s wrath in its understandable form—plays no role in Wright’s conception of justification.

of 2 Cor 5:21.⁴⁴ As is the case with Paul, the Lord appears in these contexts not as an impartial arbitrator, but as party to a conflict with the nations, with their idols, and with disobedient, unbelieving Israel.⁴⁵ Despite his contention with his people, the Lord's final message is one of comfort: he contends for his people against their oppressors and in so doing, contends against the idols.⁴⁶ The salvation which the Lord brings his people is judgment. The Lord's judgment is the salvation of his people: "Those who contend with you shall be as nothing and perish—you shall seek them and you will not find them . . . for I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand" (Isa 41:12-13). The Isaianic language echoes the appeals of the psalmists for the Lord to contend for them,⁴⁷ and corresponds to the call upon those who rule and judge in Israel "to do justice" for the oppressed.⁴⁸ Here again, to triumph in judgment is not merely to secure a verdict but to see that verdict effected. Correspondingly, with Paul, "justification" is a forensic *act* that effects the new creation. The idea of "justification" as a *mere* pronouncement of status that Wright offers does not match biblical thought (pp. 68-70).⁴⁹

As the larger context of 2 Cor 5:21 makes clear, the communication of God's righteousness is also the communication of God's glory to the fallen human being in Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 3:4-18). Here we touch on a debate between Wright and Piper, and, more significantly, on Wright's pivotal claim that God intended Israel to be a "light to the nations" (Isa 42:6; 49:6). The question here is that of whether and how the human being participates in the divine glory. Wright rejects Piper's definition of God's righteousness as "God's concern for God's own glory," which, as Wright correctly observes, suggests a God concerned for nothing but himself.⁵⁰ The righteousness of God instead expresses "God's concern

⁴⁴ See 2 Cor 5:17; 6:1-2; cf. Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12.

⁴⁵ Isa 43:22-28; 48:1-12; 50:1-11.

⁴⁶ Isa 40:1-2; 41:8-13, 21-24, 25-29; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 45:8-25; 54:1-17.

⁴⁷ E.g. Ps 7:6-11; 35:1-28; 43:1-5; 54:1-7.

⁴⁸ E.g. Judg 4:4-5; 2 Sam 8:15; Ps 72:1-4; Jer 22:3, 15-16.

⁴⁹ For further discussion see Mark A. Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background," *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 2, The Paradoxes of Paul* (WUNT 2/181; eds. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck/Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 39-74.

⁵⁰ Of course, Piper does not intend to present this image of God, but leaves himself open to this charge by taking his orientation from the contemplation of the divine being in itself, i.e. from God's hidden majesty (which cannot properly be the object of our contemplation). See J. Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 57-71. On Luther's related rejection of Aristotle's Supreme Being, see Oswald Bayer,

. . . for the flourishing and well-being of *everything else*” (p. 70; Wright’s italics).⁵¹ God’s righteousness is manifest in God’s granting blessing and salvation. In this respect, Wright stands closer to the Scriptures than does Piper. Not only the biblical references to God’s righteousness, but also references to God’s glory speak of it as the revelation of God’s saving mercy—a mercy that (like God’s righteousness) arrives through judgment. Just as God’s glory once came near to Israel at the “mercy seat,” so now God’s glory comes near to dwell with fallen human beings in the crucified and risen Christ.⁵² Those who believe in Christ boast in the hope of the glory of God, once rejected but now restored in him (Rom 1:23; 3:23; 5:1). God wills to make known “the riches of his glory” on vessels of mercy whom God prepared for this very purpose (Rom 9:23). The revelation of the glory of the Lord brings salvation (Isa 40:1-11), and rises and shines upon his people, drawing the nations to him (Isa 60:1-3; cf. Ps 96:2-3). The listing of passages could go on and would include the Isaianic references to the Servant of the Lord being made a “light to the nations” (Isa 42:6; 49:6; cf. Isa 42:12; 49:3). It is not through the Servant’s obedience or fidelity that the Servant comes to be a “light.” The Servant—both as Israel and as Israel’s deliverer—manifests the glory of the Lord *as the object of the Lord’s deliverance*. Unlike the lifeless idols, the Creator promises salvation and brings it to pass in and for his Servant, thus, making the Servant “a light to the nations.” The Servant’s active role of bringing justice to the nations (Isa 42:1-4; 49:7-13) is subordinate to the Servant’s passive role as the *recipient* of justice. The Lord takes him by the hand, preserves him in trouble, and through him brings forth “new things” (Isa 42:5-9; 49:8). It is through *his own experience of being delivered* that the servant delivers others from violence, sufferings, and death. He first listens, then speaks and

Freiheit als Antwort: Zur theologischen Ethik (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 36, n. 36: “While Aristotle, in order to preserve that Supreme Being of his from unhappiness, never lets him look at anything but himself, because he thinks it would be most unpleasant for him to see so much suffering and so many injustices. The prophets, however, who did believe in God, had more temptation to regard him as unjust—Jeremiah, for instance, and Job, David, Asaph, and others.” (Luther, *WA* 18:784, 36–785, 10; see also *WA* TR 1:73, 31–32).

⁵¹ Wright’s confession of God’s self-giving goodness runs into conflict with his earlier insistence that the world and those in it revolve around God (see Wright, *Justification*, 23).

⁵² As rightly noted by Cristof Gestrinch, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 296, n. 61.

embodies the Lord's work that he announces.⁵³ In *answering* and helping his servant—who not only is identified with Israel, but also distinct from it—the Lord comforts his people and delivers them from oppression—and also from their own unbelief and idolatry.⁵⁴ Formed by the Creator in his experience of suffering and deliverance, the servant, thus, displays the Creator's glory. In the book of Isaiah, as in the Psalms, “light” signifies the saving work of the Creator alone, the One who alone “forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates evil” (Isa 45:7).⁵⁵ Israel—in so far as the image of the servant includes the nation⁵⁶—does *not* (as Wright claims) fail in its calling to be a “light to the nations.” Indeed, its calling never rested in its own obedience or actions, but in the redeeming work of the Lord who is Creator. It is not any moral quality within Israel that causes it to shine, but purely and entirely the glory of the Lord, which rises upon the rebellious nation precisely in the midst of the misery and retribution that have come upon it (Isa 60:1-3). The Isaianic language thus stands in stark contrast to Wright's moralistic interpretation of “light” as imitative participation in God's faithfulness and goodness.

Over against Wright, then, one must say that it is *by means of the spoken Gospel* that we *see* the transforming vision of the glory of the Lord—the glory of Christ, God's image—and we see that this glory is communicated to us. God the Creator *speaks* and *creates* light in the darkness. The one who raised Jesus shall also raise us with Jesus and present us before him together with the apostle who bears this *spoken* message—in his very life (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6; 2 Cor 4:4-6, 13-15).⁵⁷ In this

⁵³ Isa 42:5-9; 49:1-6, 7-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-12.

⁵⁴ E.g. Isa 42:18-43:7; 43:22-43:8; 46:3-13; 48:1-11 50:4-9; 52:3-6.

⁵⁵ See Isa 50:10; 51:4; 52:10 (cf. Isa 40:5); 53:11 (1QIsa^a, 1QIsa^b, and LXX); 56:1; 58:8-9; 60:1-3, 19-20 (cf. Rev 22:5); 62:1. Deliverance, correspondingly, appears as the granting of sight to the blind (Isa 42:7, 18-25; 43:8-13; 44:9, 18; 59:9-10). “Light” thus stands alongside the related Isaianic images of salvation, including the making of a way (Isa 40:3-5; 42:16; 43:19; 51:9-11), the giving of drink (43:20; 44:3; 45:8; 48:21; 49:10), and, especially, the opening of the ears of the deaf (Isa 42:19; 43:8; 50:4-5).

⁵⁶ It is more likely that Israel is in view in Isa 42:6, than Isa 49:6, of course, where the servant's work is to restore the nation.

⁵⁷ Consequently, it is in the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ and in the Gospel that we behold the glory of the Lord (2 Cor 4:3-6), not in one another, and certainly not in our moral transformation. (Cf. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 188–9). The apostle is indeed the bearer of the Gospel—and of the dying of Jesus. Yet it is not in his person, a mere earthen vessel that he is, but in his *speaking* in the midst of distress that light shines forth *sub contrario* (2 Cor 4:7-15). In the communication of God's glory creature and Creator necessarily

way, the Creator gives his glory without reserve to the human creature while it remains the glory of the Creator alone.⁵⁸ Together with the Servant, those who believe are made to be “a light to the nations,” *not* as those who emulate a moral ideal of faithfulness or divine goodness, but as those delivered by the Lord. This deliverance makes them new creatures and children of God, who are in fact called to imitate the God, *who is already their Father*. This new obedience does not displace the work of the Creator that makes us God’s children anew, but arises from it. It is not without significance that in the context of 2 Cor 5:21 Paul continues his exhortation of the Corinthians with an appeal to Isa 49:8, that is, with words directed to the servant of the Lord: “At an acceptable time I heard you [sg.], and in the day of salvation I helped you [sg.]” (2 Cor 6:2). It is quite clear that Paul here speaks of the crucified and risen Christ as the Isaianic servant, through whom God brings about a new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). Christ’s experience of suffering and comfort is now that of the apostle who communicates this comfort—given to him with the sufferings of Christ—to the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:3-7; 4:7-15). It is, then, not only the apostle, but also the Corinthians, who in Christ are “made to be the righteousness of God.” The transgressions of the world and its enmity toward God are overcome in his Servant, as the Lord promises Israel in the book of Isaiah. The communication of God’s righteousness, thus, corresponds to the communication of God’s glory and takes the same form: righteousness remains God’s alone, and yet is given to us in Jesus Christ.

remain distinct.

⁵⁸ Indeed, the Creator’s glory is manifest and known only as it is given “to the creature, through the creature”: so Johann Georg Hamann (*Aesthetica in nuce* [in *Samtliche Werke*; 6 vols.; ed. Josef Nadler; Vienna, Austria: Herder, 1949–57], 2:198.28–30). On this topic, see Oswald Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede: Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1990) 9–32; Gestrich, *The Return of Splendor in the World*, 1–28.

(W)right with God?: A Response to N. T. Wright's Vision of Justification

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THE FAITH OF THE COMMUNITY
AND THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

MARK A. SEIFRID
*Ernest and Mildred Hogan Professor of New Testament
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, KY 40206
mseifrid@sbts.edu*

I. THE FAITH OF CHRIST—AND FAITH IN THE SPIRIT

In the first essay, we noted the equivocation in Wright's thought as to when and how God savingly "vindicates" fallen human beings. One kind of "vindication" is the initial "status" granted to us within the people of God. The other kind of "vindication" is our resurrection to eternal life. Between the two stands a gap that somehow must be bridged. A similar form of equivocation appears in Wright's understanding of faith. On the one hand, Wright is able to speak in relatively traditional Protestant terms of Abraham's faith as "the sign of a genuine humanity, responding out of total human weakness and helplessness to the grace and power of God."¹ On the other hand, he immediately follows this description of faith with the assertion that God is not an "existentialist" who wants an "authentic" response rather than an "external" one. Faith, "indicates the presence of genuine, humble, trusting, and indeed we might say image-bearing humanity" (p. 209). Here again Wright's moral idealism expresses itself, as becomes apparent in his following statement: "And, within that, 'faithfulness' has all along (so it seems) been the thing that God requires from his people." The divine plan "has been fulfilled by the Messiah's faithfulness (*pistis*)," so that "the badge of the covenant people from then on will be the same: *pistis*, faith, confessing that Jesus

¹ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 209.

is Lord”² Despite some ambiguity in Wright’s language, his understanding of faith here becomes fairly clear. “Faith” for Wright serves as a “sign,” “emblem,” or “badge” of another, more fundamental reality. Furthermore, as an external sign, faith includes the faithfulness manifest in the Messiah, indeed, the obedience that God has required from his people all along. The badge of the covenant people *is the same* as the faithfulness of the Messiah who fulfilled the divine purpose (p. 209). Again, while there may be some confusion here—at the very least there is ambiguity—Wright openly states his basic concern. He wants to exclude the thought that faith might be a merely internal act, a view that he quite naturally associates with Bultmannian existentialism.³ What then is the relationship between “faith” and “faithfulness” according to Wright?⁴ Confusion arises because of Wright’s suggestion that the badge of faith is the same as the faithfulness of the Messiah. Is faith then to be *equated* with faithfulness? And if “faith” is to be equated with “faithfulness,” shall we say that we are “justified by faithfulness”? How much “faithfulness” is necessary for us to be justified at the final judgment? Wright plays with reformational questions, apparently without realizing it. Does the tension Wright seeks to maintain between the individual and the corporate, traditional doctrine and personal innovation, confuse him—or does he intentionally equivocate? It is hard to see the difference between Wright’s correlation of “faith” and “faithfulness” and the Thomistic and Tridentine distinction between

² Ibid. On the interpretation of the debated expression *pistis Christou*, I am persuaded that both the objective genitive (“faith in Christ”) and the subjective genitive (“faith/faithfulness of Christ”), favored by Wright, miss the mark. The expression is best understood as containing a genitive of source or possession: Paul speaks of the faith that *comes from Christ*. See Mark A. Seifrid, “The Faith of Christ,” *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009/Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 129–46.

³ Does Wright imagine that all Protestant theology that does not follow his line of thought is somehow unconsciously Bultmannian? That would be a strange choice—and impossible to sustain.

⁴ At this point Wright’s thought parallels that of Barth, who likewise introduces confusion into the concept of faith by suggesting that the twofold usage of the term *pistis* shows that in faith we have to do with an *imitatio Christi* as an imitation of God (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 634-637). Nevertheless, Barth makes a distinction between the judgment of God and the life of the Christian, between “the center” and “the circumference” of faith (CD IV/1, 618), between unqualified justification and our correspondence to Christ (CD IV/1, 645-636). Wright blurs this distinction by making “justification” the mere starting point of salvation.

“unformed faith” (*fides informis*) and the “faith formed by love” (*fides caritate formata*) that finally saves. If faith itself is to serve as an emblem or badge, it must be thought to consist in something outward, like the verbal confession of Christ or becoming a member of a church or, more importantly for Wright, doing outward, visible good. As significant as these actions may be, it is hard to see them as the sum and substance of faith, or certain marks of its genuineness. “Faith” is not an outward badge, but an unseen reality that manifests itself in our works, as is apparent in the well-known challenge of the Jacobean interlocutor: “Show me your faith without works, and I shall show you faith by my works!” (Jas 2:18b).⁵ We must not forget, moreover, that the true nature of our “works” will become evident only at the final judgment. Prior to that judgment, outwardly good works remain ambiguous: only when our persons become manifest before the judgment seat of Christ will it become clear whether or not these works are in reality what they appear to be outwardly (2 Cor 5:10). The work of the Spirit is not without outward effect, but the work itself remains hidden until the Last Day. The sheep at the right hand of the throne of the Son of Man remain unaware of the good they have done (Matt 25:37-39). The hidden Jew receives praise, not from people, but from God (Rom 2:29). Not even the apostle Paul is ready to pass judgment on himself and his work before the Last Day (1 Cor 4:1-5). It is the risen Lord alone—with eyes as a flame of fire—who knows and exposes the works of his churches (Rev 2:2, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). Faith is the hidden source of all good works, the secret power that makes them good rather than self-serving: “everything that does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23). To make “faith” into an outward emblem is to rob it of its vitality.

It is in the vision of Jesus the Messiah, in whom the faithfulness that God required of Israel has come to reality, that Wright binds “faith” to “faithfulness.” Here, as we have noted, lies the heart of Wright’s program: the image of God and of true humanity had to be embodied in human life, a calling at which Israel failed.⁶ In seeing Jesus our representative, we see the true God and what it means to be truly human. In seeing him we are transformed by the power of the Spirit. As we observed in the previous lecture, Wright thereby renders Jesus generic and thus de-historicizes him. Here, again, is a remarkable irony! Although Wright valiantly, and in many ways brilliantly, defends the

⁵ James does not call his readers to examine their works in retrospect, but to engage in the works of a living faith!

⁶ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 70. See Mark A. Seifrid, “The Narrative of Scripture and Justification by Faith: A Fresh Response to N.T. Wright,” *CTQ* 72.1 (2008): 28–34.

historicity of the Gospels and of Jesus' resurrection, in his attempt to combat Bultmann's existentialism, he falls into the very problems that are fundamental to it. The earth, it turns out, is round. The great distance that separates Wright and Bultmann serves in the end only to bring them together: "consistent eschatology" in existential mode meets "realized eschatology" in Wright's modification of it.⁷ Bultmann carries out his program of de-mythologizing the New Testament by distinguishing between the natural and the historical. He sets apart the world that is accessible to human investigation from the "historical," namely, that which calls the human being to authentic decision. He, thus, no longer sees the world as creation and transposes all God's works, including the cross and resurrection of Christ, to the inward life and existence of the human being.⁸ Wright does the opposite. Where Bultmann *internalizes*, Wright *externalizes*. As we have seen, "faith" for Wright is finally faithfulness, the outward and visible expression of being truly human, the doing of the will of God, sharing in the covenant faithfulness of God manifest in the obedience of Jesus. As the true human being who is our representative, Jesus remains distant and generic. Otherwise, in what Reinhold Niebuhr calls, "genuine prophetic Christianity" the "moral qualities of Christ" would be "not only our hope, but our despair."⁹ In a way that is remarkably reminiscent of Bultmann, Wright insists on the particularity of Jesus, but cannot, so far as I can see, provide a substantive reason as to why Jesus *alone* should be the representative of God's faithfulness. Could not the saints fill this role? Why, moreover, must this faithfulness be bound to Israel's story? Why not a Gandhi? In this de-historicizing interpretation of Jesus, Wright likewise misses the work of the Creator, who gives himself to us in Jesus and in him makes us into a new creation. As we have seen in the first essay, for Wright it is first and foremost Jesus' *obedience* unto death that saves us, and not his death itself. We do not meet Jesus in "wondrous exchange" as he has come down into the depths of our misery and sin. Indeed, for Wright Jesus does not come down to us. We must first come up to him. Much

⁷ In his interpretation of Jesus' parables and apocalyptic, Wright clearly stands in the interpretive tradition of C. H. Dodd—and yet reacts against it by attempting to draw a straight line from the present age into the age to come. See C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner's, 1961), 20–84, 157–69.

⁸ See Oswald Bayer's important critique of Bultmann, which unfortunately does not appear in English translation, *Theologie* (Handbuch systematischer Theologie 1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1994), 475–84.

⁹ R. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: World, Meridian 1956), 73.

like Bultmann, then, Wright turns “faith” into a moral demand. Neither of them has a taste for the cross as the “great pleasure of our existence.”¹⁰ Of course, their differences remain. While Bultmann understands “faith” as the call to authentic decision, Wright understands “faith” as the call to authentic action. Paul, in contrast to both of them, understands faith as the new creation, Christ present within the heart through the Gospel: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. What I live . . . , I live by the faith of [i.e. given by] the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20).¹¹

In Wright’s program, then, a gap stands between us and Jesus. With that gap the pressing question arises: Is it possible to *trust* in Jesus, if we regard him first and foremost as the representative bearer of the divine image? Wright himself has difficulty in doing so and, thus, speaks of trusting in the Spirit, who transforms us into that divine image that Jesus embodies (pp. 107, 188). Jesus appears for Wright *primarily* as the manifestation of a moral ideal—a moral ideal to which we cannot of ourselves attain. The Spirit therefore necessarily becomes the object of faith alongside Jesus. No longer does the Spirit do anything other than make known the mysterious cross-words of Jesus (John 14:15-21, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15). No longer does the Spirit come as a polemicist who wages war against the world and the flesh (John 16:8-11; Gal 5:17).¹² No longer is the presence of the Spirit the life of the resurrection given to faith here and now (Rom 8:1-11). No longer does Christ come to us and dwell in us by the Spirit (“I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you”; John 14:18; cf. Rom 8:9-10). Rather than bringing Christ down to us, the Spirit must lift us up to Christ, and that in a nearly mystical manner. The Spirit is thus robbed of the task of communicating Christ and his benefits through the Gospel, and must instead bring unnamed benefits of his own. “Faith” consequently becomes divided and diffused in Wright’s program. Wright appeals to the creeds in support of his urging that we should place our trust in the Spirit, and thereby confuses the content of faith (*fides quae creditur*) with the act of believing (*fides qua creditur*). If, following Wright’s appeal to the creed, we place our

¹⁰ We have already pointed to this reflection of Johann Georg Hamann. See Bayer, *Theologie*, 479; Oswald Bayer and Christian Knudsen, *Kreuz und Kritik. Johann Georg Hamanns Letztes Blatt: Text und Interpretation* (BHT 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 111.

¹¹ On “faith of Christ” as a genitive of source see Seifrid, “Faith of Christ,” in Bird and Sprinkle, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 129–46.

¹² See Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 71.

trust in the Spirit, shall we then not also place our trust in the Church?¹³ Indeed, above all else with Wright, confusion remains as to where we should place our trust. In what measure shall we place our trust in God's work in Jesus? In what measure shall we place our trust in God's work in us by the Spirit?

II. THE LAW, GUILT, AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

As with "faith" and "justification," there is an inconsistency within Wright's thought as to whether or not the law serves merely to keep sin in check or to expose human guilt. This uncertainty on his part entails an underestimation of the reality of guilt and its effects. One of the reasons that Wright has such difficulty in understanding the law in Scripture is that he fails to see that the law is not the cause of our fallen condition, but the means by which it is brought to light. This condemning work is not a misuse of the law, as Wright—in line with a Barthian approach—seems to say at one point.¹⁴ According to Scripture, it is a fundamental purpose of the law (e.g. Rom 4:15; Gal 3:12, 19-22; 2 Cor 3:6). There is a large difference between the reality of our guilt, and the small measure of it of which we are aware. Most of us do not live with a tormented conscience. It is the hearing of the demands of the law from without—often through the voice of another—that reveals to us the reality of sin and guilt that is present in our hearts. The encounter with the law is no mere moment of intellectual illumination. It is a deadly engagement in which our whole person is captured afresh by sin and brought into guilt. The "knowledge of sin" that comes through the law is an experiential knowledge: tragically, all of us know both the reality and guilt of coveting (Rom 3:19-20; 7:7-13). In this concrete and personal way, as Paul says, "through the commandment sin becomes utterly sinful." In the face of the law's demands, we find ourselves simultaneously guilty and powerless. The commandment, which we and all human beings agree is "holy, righteous and good," exposes our desire to do away with the God who gives the commandment and to take for ourselves that which belongs to our neighbor. Unable to remove from our heart either our recognition of the good or the reality of evil, we live in the constant need to justify ourselves and our life. We no longer are able to see the world

¹³ The Apostolic Creed: *Credo in Spiritum sanctum, sanctam ecclesiam catholicam . . .* ; The Niceno-Constantopolitan Creed: *pisteuomen...kai eis to pneuma to hagion...eis mian hagian katholikēn kai apostolikēn ekklesiam.* (*Credo . . . Et in Spiritum Sanctum . . . Et unam, sanctam, catholicam, et apostolicam Ecclesiam.*)

¹⁴ Wright, *Justification*, 73.

as *creation*, in and through which our Creator not only promises to give us “all that we need to support this body and life,”¹⁵ but also to rectify its wrongs and to triumph over its evils. Consequently, we either deify or objectify God’s creatures—including our fellow human beings—either worshipping them and expecting from them that which we can receive from God alone, or manipulating them and exploiting them in so far as they fall within our powers. Rather than joyfully assuming our God-given roles as stewards and servants, we seek to possess and dominate. We are no longer able to see *ourselves* as God’s creatures. We have forfeited our life as an unconditioned, unmerited gift from God.¹⁶ In setting aside the justifying word of the Creator, who pronounces *us* along with all that he has made as “very good” (Gen 1:31), and in taking on the burden of “knowing [and thus determining] good and evil” (Gen 3:5), we must justify ourselves and give meaning to our existence in the midst of the chaos and disorder of the fallen creation. We have traded the grace of bodily existence in the midst of all created things for the impossible burden of *self-justification* in the midst of vanity, emptiness, and death. We have forfeited the glory of God that was ours in thanksgiving and praise of our Creator. It has departed from us: Ichabod (Rom 1:23, 3:23) “Justification” thus does not merely have to do with our sinfulness, but with our creaturely existence, as Oswald Bayer, drawing upon Luther, especially has made clear.¹⁷ As is already apparent, while the justifying event of the cross bears an unmistakably individual dimension, it does not further an isolated individualism. Just the opposite: it frees us from it by restoring us to a right relation with our Creator and all creatures. Conversion, which, despite its decisive beginning includes every day of this earthly life, is nothing other than what has sometimes been called a “conversion to the world.”¹⁸

¹⁵ As Luther confesses concerning the first article of the Apostles Creed.

¹⁶ Wright’s insistence that we orbit around God, *and not God around us* (*Justification*, 23-24), is misguided. Naturally, if God is reduced to the projection of our desires, Wright’s warning has its point. Nevertheless—and the Copernican revolution notwithstanding—the wonder of the grace of creation is that God causes the sun to shine on us and the rain to fall on us, and that whether we are good or evil (Matt 6:45). All appearances to the contrary, all things serve us, not, of course, so that they feed our egoistic desires, but so that we find our heavenly Father, and as God’s children serve our fellow human beings (Rom 8:28). The alternative that Wright offers, it seems to me, is a utilitarian God, who does not want us so much as he wants what he can get from us.

¹⁷ See Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 95–119.

¹⁸ Yet not in the sense of a second conversion.

This exposure of our guilt, painful though it is, therefore turns out to be an advantage (cf. Rom 3:1-2). Just as the law does not create our fallen condition, the purposes of God are not exhausted in it. The condemning work of the law merely prepares for the word of the gospel: where the letter has put to death, the Spirit makes alive; where the law has brought condemnation, the gospel brings righteousness (2 Cor 3:4-11). This twofold work of God is anything other than automatic. As Paul himself knew, it is quite possible to be deaf to the voice of the law, to regard its fulfillment as first and foremost a matter of performing outward deeds, and not a claim upon our whole person and life (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:4-6). It is also possible to hear the condemning voice of the law as the last word, and to despair in the face of it, as in the stark example of Judas: “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!” (Matt 27:4). In either case, whether one lives in *superbia* or in *desperatio*, in pride or in despair, one lives *in one’s self*, in isolated self-absorption and self-justification.¹⁹

Whether pride or despair rules in the heart, the deliverance of the human heart comes by a word from without. The law is *given* and therefore comes as a word from without, especially to those who live in *superbia*: through Moses, through the prophets, through John the Baptist. The gospel, too, comes as a word from without, to those who through the law know their guilt, delivering them from despair: according to the Gospel narratives Peter is given the Lord’s word of promise, which apart from any virtue in Peter brings him forgiveness in his failure: Judas hanged himself, but Peter wept. No one comes to the gospel through reflection. All of us must be told and repeatedly reminded of the gospel by the word and voice of another: *fides ex auditu*, faith comes by hearing (Rom 10:17).²⁰ Consequently, although the forgiveness of sins comes to us as individuals, it is no individualistic experience.²¹ It takes place within and through the community where the Gospel is announced. Conversely, self-justification necessarily makes use of and exploits community—always the community of persons *like us*—to further its own individualistic ends: we seek glory from one another, rather than

¹⁹ Luther repeatedly describes fallen human beings as turned in on themselves: *cor incurvatus in seipsum*. See Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 182–4.

²⁰ Admittedly, *akoē* in this context signifies the “the message given for hearing,” or proclamation. But the point stands.

²¹ See Eberhard Hahn, “*Ich glaube . . . die Vergebung der Sünden*”: *Studien zur Wahrnehmung der Vollmacht zur Sündenvergebung durch die Kirche Jesu Christi* (Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie 92; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 46–8.

seeking the glory that comes from God alone (cf. John 5:44). In this respect, our acknowledgment of guilt and confession of sin is the moment of individuation, in which we—like the prodigal son—come to ourselves and tell the truth about ourselves in the presence of God: *tibi soli peccavi* (“Against you alone I have sinned!”; Ps 51:6).²² At the same time, just as the gospel is announced in and through the community of forgiven sinners, those who receive the forgiveness of their sins are placed within that community. God’s word as law and gospel individuates, but it does not isolate.²³ As his very words reveal, the older son in the parable of the prodigal is after all—in his mind and in heart—the brother of the younger son.²⁴ Had he turned, he would have recognized his brother. We, who are many, are one in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-13). God’s justifying work in Christ is the deliverance of our persons from the community of manipulation and lies and our transfer to the community of forgiven sinners, where the truth is spoken and confessed in freedom (Col 1:13-14; Eph 4:4-16). In his concentration on the redemption of community, especially as it is expressed in his construal of the story of Scripture as Israel’s return from Babylon, Wright forgets that the outward evil that expresses itself in the structures of this present world has its root in the human heart:

Our towns are copied fragments from our breast;
And all man's Babylons strive but to impart
The grandeurs of his Babylonian heart.²⁵

Rightly understood, therefore, the question, “How can I find a gracious God?” is no hindrance to a proper concern for the redemption of creation. Quite the opposite: it is the only doorway to it. It is the proper, initial response to the reality of guilt that the law exposes in us. In asking this question, we ask how we can be set free from all the ways in which we exploit others and misuse the Creator’s gifts to us. The psalmist’s confession *tibi soli peccavi* (“Against you alone I have sinned!” [Ps 51:6]) is no attempt to evade responsibility for harm done to others. It is rather a full facing of responsibility: in the presence of God there is no room for excuse (cf. Luke 15:18, 21). The question, “How can I find a gracious God?” is not the question of the introspective soul, or at least

²² Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁴ He thus envies his younger brother’s whoring and wantonness, and wishes for a celebration, not with his father, but with his own friends (Luke 15:29-30).

²⁵ Francis Thompson, “The Heart Sonnet,” 2.12-14.

need not be. It is not restricted to the young Luther, nor is it confined to the Middle Ages. We find it in the Synoptics—admittedly in a corrupted and introverted form that Jesus corrects—on the lips of the rich young ruler who asks, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17-22; Matt 19:16-22; Luke 28:18-23).²⁶ If we do not ask how we might find a gracious God, it is either because we are content to live in the abuse of God’s creatures, or because we imagine in blind *superbia* that we have transcended such failures: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Until our final deliverance arrives at the last judgment, the need for the forgiveness of sins remains as much a part of our life as our daily bread. Granted, in the modern world and especially in the West, there are many who do not feel the need to find “a gracious God.” This tendency is not a mark of greater sophistication, but of increasing superficiality, as Karl Barth observed more than a half-century ago.²⁷ It is largely the result of our prosperity and the corresponding loss of the horizon of final judgment from our sight. No matter, however, how we try to suppress this question, we cannot remove it from our hearts. In our creatureliness we cannot sustain our life and our future, and, thus, are bound to have a god to whom or to which we look for help and deliverance in all our troubles—as Luther profoundly observes.²⁸ The search for a gracious God is inherent to us, whether we are aware of it or not. The only question is whether we find the true God or place our trust in idols.

It is in this context that we are to understand the “good works,” which contrary to Wright, the Reformation certainly did not “love to hate” (p. 117). Whatever aberrations may have been and may still exist in Protestant thought, one need only read Luther’s 1520 “Sermon on Good Works” to realize how this judgment is fundamentally misguided and unfair. Luther and other Reformers by no means rejected “good works;” they only offered a sober realism about their place and value.²⁹ The human problem is not with the good works to which we are called, but

²⁶ Along many with others, Wright radically underestimates the individualism that had penetrated Jewish life in the time of Jesus, as is reflected, for example, in the practice of individual burial in either a wooden coffin or an ossuary that came to replace familial burial, and the earlier biblical concept of “being gathered to one’s fathers.” See Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup 94; Leiden Boston: E. J. Brill, 2005), 512–4.

²⁷ Barth, CD IV/1, 531.

²⁸ See Luther *WA* 30:132,32-133,8 (Exposition of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism).

²⁹ So, for example, Luther’s “Treatise on Good Works,” LW 44:17-113 = *WA* 6:202-276.

with our false estimation of them, the imagination that our works might make us pleasing to God, or that they may serve as certain marks of our progress and spirituality. We Christians must maintain a healthy suspicion about our works. We cannot take them at face value. Even when our works seem outwardly good and beneficial to others, they are not truly good unless they are done freely and without self-seeking or pride. Otherwise we are no longer serving our neighbor, but serving ourselves, no matter what the outward appearance might be. If, on the other hand, as Wright argues, my standing in the final judgment is contingent on my works, I am no longer free to serve my neighbor, but in one way or another must and will seek my final justification in my works even if I suppose that I accomplish them by the Spirit's help. I serve myself and not my neighbor. Works and faith, faith and faithfulness must not be confused with one another. The failure to distinguish between them is the death of both. Faith is nothing other than the finding of a gracious God in Jesus Christ. With that discovery comes both the unmerited justification of my life now and the assurance of that same justification at the final judgment. Out of this assurance that in Christ we are pleasing to God—and only out of his assurance—we are set free from our self-seeking so that we may serve our neighbor. Our works are truly good only to the extent that they are done in this faith. These are old, reformational insights that should hardly need to be repeated.

III. CREDO IN . . . SANCTORUM COMMUNIONEM

As we have repeatedly observed, Wright's program takes its material orientation from his corporate conception of salvation. The substitutionary dimension of the saving event, God's justifying work in Christ, as well as Jesus' individual identity itself are all overlooked or given diminished scope while "representation" and membership in the people of God are accorded primary and fundamental status. This new *ordo salutis* not only introduces the equivocations and ambiguities that we have considered above, it also brings with it a new form of individualism—one of which Wright himself seems unaware. As we have seen, although for Wright, "justification" establishes our "status" within the people of God, the people of God is that community marked by the badge of faith(fulness). We must become in "reality" what we are by "declaration."³⁰ As we observed in the first lecture, Wright strangely, yet happily embraces the caricature of a divine fiction, of which the

³⁰ It is reflected in Wright's illustrative depiction of marriage as a mere change of "status" that must be followed by a "steady transformation of the heart" (p. 91). Do the two become one only at the end of this transformation?

Reformers often have been accused! Of course, Protestant theology is well familiar with the call to “become what you are!” This relation, however, between the “indicative” and the “imperative,” between what God has done and what we must do, is a paradox. We are to take hold of that which already has been given and done for us in Christ (cf. Rom 13:14). In contrast, Wright restricts the effect of justification to a “status” that must be followed by an “actual rescue” in order for us to stand at judgment, so that our “status” seems to be nothing other than a legal fiction. As we again have repeatedly observed, he dissolves the biblical paradox and assigns final significance to a moral ideal. As a result, the gap between us and Jesus necessarily becomes a gap between us and others. The inevitable differences between Christians in virtue, godliness, and outward standing take on fundamental significance. All of those who have “the faith of Jesus” are human, but some of us are more human than others. As we have seen in the first lecture, that is clearly the case with the apostle Paul over against the Corinthians according to Wright’s own reading of 2 Cor 5:21 (pp. 162-165), even if Wright would be unwilling to admit it. Ironically, with Wright an absolute and, therefore, destructive individualism takes the place of the biblical form. Within the Scriptures, our individual differences are limited by the unqualified character of our very existence as a gift (1 Cor 4:7), by our standing as sinners *coram Deo* (the ground is level at the foot of the cross) and by the oneness in Christ that transcends all earthly differences and outward marks of spirituality (Gal 3:28). The opponents of Paul in Galatia were seeking by the grace of God, through Christ, to build a single humanity marked by faithfulness, a faithfulness in which outward progress was the measure of spirituality (cf. Gal 1:14; Luke 18:11). Shall we follow their example?

Rightly understood, the message of justification encompasses the whole of Christian existence. The forgiveness of sins is not merely the entry point into the Church, as Wright imagines, but that which makes its corporate life realistic and vital. Justification is not merely a matter of a personal relationship with God, it is the presence of the new creation in the midst of the fallen world that opens the world to us afresh as creation in its dynamic life of receiving and giving.³¹ The forgiveness of sins and the free justification of our existence, grounded in the first and last word of the Creator, sets us free from the reality of our guilt as well as from our sense of shame and inward need to justify ourselves. Through it we are set free to serve our neighbor with all that we are and have. That freedom includes the freedom of forgiveness. As the Lord’s Prayer

³¹ See Oswald Bayer, “Ethik der Gabe” (paper presented at Die Gabe-ein ‘Urwort’ der Theologie? Ein systematisch-theologisches Symposium; Katholisch soziale Akademie, Münster, 5 April 2008).

teaches us, forgiveness truly received, *necessarily* goes forth to others: “forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6:12).³² The entire dynamic of the common life of the disciples appears here, since the fifth petition presupposes that disciples who have received the forgiveness of their sins and have already given it forth to others, must themselves come again and again to receive it afresh from God (cf. Matt 18:21-35). The Christian community, in both its vertical *and* horizontal dimensions, exists in the constant receiving and giving of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ disciples love one another as he has loved them not only in the sharing of material goods, but also in washing one another’s feet (John 13:12-17).³³ It is only through this vehicle of forgiveness received and given forth that “the glory of God returns to the (fallen) world” and that the world and those who dwell in it receive healing.³⁴ No measure of material progress or sharing of earthly goods can remove the need for this healing. What would it have profited the paralytic of the Gospel story to have received the power to walk, but not the forgiveness of his sins? As Miroslav Volf has argued, final judgment itself includes the mutual justification and reconciliation of all God’s people with one another—as it must so long as the fifth petition of Lord’s Prayer still addresses us.³⁵

This matter of forgiveness touches upon a fundamental concern of the “new perspective” and of Wright in particular. The giving and receiving of forgiveness entails receiving one another as forgiven and justified sinners in Jesus Christ, *apart from all outward differences*—differences which invariably are mistaken as marks of faithfulness and piety. When believing Jews accepted believing Gentiles in the earliest Church, they confessed that they themselves were *and remained* nothing more than justified sinners alongside their Gentile brothers and sisters (Gal 2:15-21). When, later in Rome, Paul called upon believing Gentiles to accept those Jewish believers in the Messiah who retained their

³² Luther likewise understands the “blessed exchange” between Christ and the believer to overflow into the life of the church, so that, “the virgin must place her crown on the harlot, a faithful wife must place her veil over an adulteress” (*WA* 10.3, 217,11-218,16).

³³ Miroslav Volf recounts powerful examples from the experiences of his own family. See M. Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) 121–6.

³⁴ See Cristoph Gestrich, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 14–35, 263–337.

³⁵ See M. Volf, “The Final Reconciliation: Reflections On A Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition,” *Modern Theology* 16.1 (2000): 91–113.

conservative “boundary markers,” he was calling them to the same confession (Rom 15:1-6). Indeed, this changing call to the accepting embrace of the other flows out of the dynamic of God’s dealings with humanity, according to which God shuts up first one and then the other under disobedience, so that he might have mercy on all (Rom 11:28-36). In this way, God’s justifying work in Christ remains integral and vital to the building up of the body of Christ. As the Scriptures make clear, this dynamic of exchange is not new, but was always part of Israel’s history. God’s choice to bless the world through Abraham in no way does away with the regular, and yet ever-surprising reversal of roles: Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, Pharaoh, and Abimelech more pious than he; Ruth, the Moabite, is the model of *hesed*; Job, the Gentile, the model of patience; the pagan Cyrus is the Lord’s messiah; the name of the Lord of which Israel is weary “is great among the nations” where incense rises and pure offering is made (Mal 1:11). Israel’s role in the world is not that of a moral beacon, but that of the object and model of the forgiving grace of its Lord. The same is true of and within the Church, as already becomes clear in the book of Acts. The *sanctorum communio* is not visible in its outward works, but must be confessed in faith. Its fellowship does not consist in an outward badge or emblem—God save us from such saints!³⁶—but in the crucified and risen Lord who is its righteousness, from whom it continues to receive the forgiveness of its sins, through which forgiveness it makes its progress. In this respect, more than all the others we have considered, Wright has not succeeded in communicating the apostolic vision of God’s justifying work in Christ.

³⁶ See Luther *WA* 46:583,10-17.

Seifrid on Wright: An Inference Based upon an Implication Regarding an Emphasis



RUSTIN UMSTATTD*

*Assistant Professor of Theology
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
rumstatt@mbts.edu*

In his article, “(W)right with God?: A Response to N.T. Wright’s Vision of Justification,” published in this issue, Mark Seifrid sought to demonstrate that N.T. Wright’s interpretation of justification leads to a truncated view of atonement that deemphasizes Christ’s substitution for the sinner, while at the same time placing the believer in the position of having to conform morally to Christ through the Spirit in order to be vindicated at the final judgment. This leads, Seifrid contends, to a limited view of justification in which it is understood only as God’s declaration of acquittal of the believer in the present that must be followed by its becoming actual in the believer’s life. The foundation of Seifrid’s argument rests upon the contention that, for Wright, the atonement is primarily an act of representation and not substitution. In Wright’s subordination of substitution to representation, he effectively turns the atonement into a moral transaction.

According to Seifrid, Wright fails to see the drama of redemption, the exchange of our persons with the person of Christ, because this drama can only be appreciated where substitution is not demoted by representation. Wright’s ordering of the relationship between representation and substitution implies that these two dimensions in God’s atoning work in Christ are distinct and separate. Seifrid, to the contrary, argues that they are interwoven and that “Jesus is Israel’s

representative only as its substitute.”¹ He further contends that “Wright in his own way understands Jesus’ death, or rather Jesus’ obedience in the face of death, primarily as a moral example, even if he retains the traditional Protestant understanding of the atonement in his affirmation of its substitutionary dimension.”²

Seifrid contends that because of his emphasis upon the representation of Christ, Wright has a difficult time taking into account our participation in the resurrection of Christ. The new creation that we share in union with Christ is lost on Wright because he understands Jesus first and foremost as Israel’s representative. Because Jesus is viewed as representative, not only does Wright have problems with how we participate in His resurrection, but how we also participate in His death. Jesus loses his identity in his representative role in God’s plan and is depersonalized as merely an image or model of obedience. In short, Seifrid asserts that Wright’s interpretation “of the atonement primarily in terms of Jesus’ role as Israel’s representative thus not only obscures its substitutionary dimension, it obscures the exchange of persons that is at the heart of that substitutionary understanding.”³

Because Wright does not maintain our full participation in Christ and his resurrection, says Seifrid, this necessarily leads to a limited view of Jesus’ work in our justification. Wright holds to a “strict and narrow *ordo salutis*” (i.e., order of salvation) in which justification is the declaration a person has when the court has found in his favor. He thus appears to equivocate in his understanding of justification. Is it the initial declaration of acquittal given at the moment of one’s coming to Christ, or is it the final vindication one receives from God at the judgment? Seifrid argues that Wright’s position that one is initially justified and then final vindication affirms that justification, with the Spirit transforming us between the two events, is “nicely Augustinian and Tridentine, despite Wright’s attempts to distance himself from this theology. An initial vindication and a final vindication hardly differ from initial and final justification, even if Wright varies his language.”⁴

Seifrid further claims that Wright separates us from Jesus by basing

* Dr. Umstadd is Associate Academic Dean at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a previous contributor to the *Midwestern Journal of Theology*.

¹ Mark Seifrid, “(W)right with God?: A Response to N.T. Wright’s Vision of Justification: Atonement and Justification in Biblical Perspective,” *MJT* 8.2/9.1 (2010): 8.

² *Ibid.*, 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

our having Jesus as our righteousness here and now on the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the future. For Seifrid, being a part of the family of God is based upon being forgiven and acquitted in Christ. He maintains that, for Wright, it consists of more than being forgiven and acquitted, but of also being morally transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ. He asserts that Wright has adopted a “fictional” understanding of justification in that the initial declaration given to the believer that he is acquitted must be followed by an “actual rescue” that involves the moral transformation of the believer.

Seifrid argues that Wright’s interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:21, according to which Paul is not talking about all Christians becoming the righteousness of God, but about himself and his apostolic ministry, leads to the conclusion that the embodiment of God’s righteousness through moral conformity constitutes what it means to be truly human, and that, therefore, in Wright’s proposal “all of us are human, but some are more human than others.”⁵ Seifrid further proposes that Wright’s construal of justification in terms of the law court fits well with a modern democracy, but not with the biblical concept of God as a judge, whose judgment effects the declaration that is made. This is what Wright overlooks in his understanding of 2 Corinthians 5:21. When God declares that we are his righteousness, this is accomplished, not by our moral effort, but by the giving of his righteousness to us in Christ. “As the wonder of God’s grace, this communication of God’s righteousness to the human being does not fit into the scene of any human ‘law court,’ and certainly not the one that Wright imagines.”⁶ For Seifrid, justification is a forensic act that brings about a new creation, while for Wright, it is a mere pronouncement of a status to which the believer then has to conform by the Spirit.

I. A TANGLED PLOT LINE: WRIGHT’S READING OF THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

According to Seifrid, there are inconsistencies and equivocations that jeopardize the entire structure of N. T. Wright’s understanding of the atonement, and justification in particular. It must be acknowledged on the front end that Wright has mounted a large scale project into which atonement and justification are components, and to fully understand what he is doing, one must be willing to engage the entire scheme. With that said, one must engage it at the rock bottom level of exegesis, which is where Wright consistently sends his readers. Again, it must be stated that

⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶ Ibid., 20.

Wright is doing his exegesis with his program in mind and his exegesis shapes it. The old hermeneutical spiral comes into play here, and, therefore, it is important to engage Wright with his whole program in mind, while at the same time only focusing on a small part of it. This is what Seifrid has attempted to do in his article, and it is for that reason that his article can appear confusing at times. While he works away at a very small aspect of Wright's scheme, Seifrid is well aware he must keep Wright's big picture in view; but for a reader who has not encountered Wright or who is not familiar with that larger program, it is easy to get lost in the trees by not being able to see where the forest begins or ends.

Seifrid, as was said, acknowledges this large-scale project of Wright's and also that he is not seeking to engage the whole of it. Yet he does address it to some degree in footnote five, which in turn becomes foundational to Seifrid's basic critique of Wright. In this footnote, he does take a shot at knocking the giant off his feet when he claims that "if and only if God's plan is simple and unbroken may one speak of Israel and Israel alone as the vehicle of God's saving purpose. Wright's inconsistencies concerning the identity of Israel and the role of the law call into question his proposal to read the Bible as a straight line narrative."⁷ If Seifrid is correct in his assessment that Wright cannot maintain his meta-narrative of Scripture, then great weight is given to his critique in this article. If, however, he is unable to discount Wright's understanding of the narrative of Scripture and God's single plan through Israel to redeem the world, then his inferences drawn from his implications of Wright's potentially become less powerful.

The first question we must address then is the issue of whether or not Seifrid is able to derail Wright's reading of the single narrative of Scripture in which God works through Israel to redeem the world with Jesus becoming the representative Israelite who both saves the Jewish people who were stuck in the curse of the Torah and brings blessings on the Gentiles by incorporating them into the family of Abraham. Seifrid mounts a three pronged critique of Wright's straight-line reading of the biblical narrative. He first argues that since Jesus had to die for the Jewish people, this introduces discontinuity into the story. He then suggests that Wright's understanding of how Jesus redefined the nation of Israel around "faithfulness and not ethnic boundaries" causes the nation of Israel to lose its identity, and this also brings discontinuity into the story. Finally, he argues that Wright is inconsistent on the purpose of the Torah in Israel, whether it was given as a guardian to watch over the nation until it grew up or to increase the guilt of the nation by exposing its sinfulness. Seifrid does not think that in Wright's reading of Scripture

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

you can have it both ways, but that Wright nevertheless thinks you can and, therefore, brings about a break in the story. Let us now look at each of these critiques in turn.

We can quickly dismiss the second two critiques of the discontinuity in the story. Seifrid suggests that because Israel is redefined around faithfulness and not an ethnic boundary, this introduces discontinuity into the story; and yet it is Wright's contention that Paul goes back to Abraham to show that God made promises to Abraham that would encompass both Jews and Gentiles into the family of Abraham. This is Wright's major contention in his unpacking of Galatians 3.⁸ So while Seifrid sees this redefinition as a break in the story, it is, in fact, the conclusion to which the story was driving all along.⁹

The other critique Seifrid mounts is that Wright only sees the law as being used to keep the nation of Israel on the right path until the Messiah would come. In this sense, the law is like a guardian that is watching a child until that child reaches maturity. This is Paul's description of the law in Galatians 4. The law, however, is also used to reveal the sin and guilt of the people. In Wright's understanding of the Torah, it both locked the Jewish people up in the curse of the Law, while at the same time giving the nation a way to live so that a person did not always expect to keep the Law perfectly. It was the sacrificial system that allowed the Jewish people to continue to strive to keep the Law even after having broken it. Seifrid asserts that Wright's program only allows him to see the Law as a guardian to the nation and not as exposing the guilt of the people, although Wright explicitly affirms both uses of the Law.¹⁰ So, if Seifrid's critique is going to have any impact, he is going to need to show why Wright's program cannot hold to both uses of the Law and not merely assert that it does not, given that Wright clearly argues for and supports both uses of the Law.

Seifrid's first critique of Wright's straight-line story is clearly the most insightful. According to Wright, Jesus is the faithful Israelite who accomplished what the Jewish nation was unable to accomplish because it was itself trapped under the curse of the Law and needed to be rescued. Under this scenario, Jesus comes and redeems the nation from its curse by taking the nation's place under the curse. In so doing, he is the faithful Israelite who fulfills the purpose of the nation. The question that Seifrid asks, and rightly so, is if Jesus is the representative of the nation so that he fulfills the plan God had for the nation, was it God's plan for the

⁸ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 11-140.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71-73.

nation to be crucified all along, or does the moment of individualism in which Jesus has to die for the nation cause the straight-line story that Wright is espousing to break down. Seifrid has hit upon a question here that Wright will need to answer, but to which I am not aware that he has answered. My conjecture, and it is only conjecture since I would like to hear Wright's response, is that Wright would maintain that while Jesus is indeed the faithful Israelite who fulfills the plans God had for the nation, the nation's own sin has caused the story that is being told in the Bible to be resolved in a rather unforeseen manner, yet in such a way that it makes perfect sense. Jesus is the plot twist in God's redemptive plan in history that no one saw coming, but which was foretold in the Scriptures, so that once it happened, it could be clearly seen how it fits perfectly with what has gone before in the Old Testament. So while Jesus does have to die for the nation, and in that he does something that the nation was never called to do, he still fulfills the representative role of the nation by bringing the blessings of Abraham to the world. This was all along God's intended means to restore the relationship that was broken in the Garden.¹¹ This is of course just my own conjecture, not Wright's, and it would be enlightening to see how he would respond to Seifrid's critique.

II. AN IMPLICATION FROM WRIGHT'S EMPHASIS: REPRESENTATION ECLIPSES SUBSTITUTION

As already shown, the heart of Seifrid's critique of Wright lies in what he sees as a reduction in the emphasis upon the substitutionary element in the atonement compared to the representative element. Wright's strong emphasis upon Jesus as the representative Israelite effectively, if not explicitly, reduces his substitutionary role to nil. While Seifrid concedes in footnote five that Wright does hold to a substitutionary dimension in his understanding of Jesus' atonement, he consistently implies in the heart of his article that Wright cannot hold to substitution given his emphasis upon representation. Despite what Wright says about holding to substitution, it is maintained that his program will not allow him to hold to this dimension of Christ's work and, therefore, Wright gets the gospel wrong.¹² At least that is the inference that Seifrid makes from the implication he establishes based only on the emphasis that Wright holds between representation and substitution. In the first part of the article, Seifrid builds up his case by looking at representation and substitution in both the death and

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹² *Ibid.*, 106, 207.

resurrection of Jesus. It is to these two areas that we now turn.

What exactly did Jesus accomplish on the cross? Did he take the place of sinners by collecting the wages of sin for them, or did Jesus' obedience to the Father open the way for salvation for people, but without Jesus bearing the sins of the people? In truth, the "or" in the last sentence sets up a false dichotomy, a false dichotomy that Seifrid affirms in his critique of Wright. In Wright's emphasis upon representation, the atonement is reduced to a mere moral transaction in which the Father rewards the obedience of the Son. While Seifrid does not refute this emphasis in and of itself—for he affirms that we must understand the obedience of Jesus as necessary in the atonement as well as in a sense being rewarded—he does claim that Wright has eliminated the substitutionary aspect in the atonement by elevating the representative aspect. In so doing, Seifrid claims that Wright "nearly makes God out to be nothing more than a moral authority who rewards Jesus' heroic performance."¹³ While he is careful to qualify his claim by saying that Wright "nearly" makes God into what he claims, it is the "nearly" that betrays a crack in his argument. It is clear that Wright does not do this explicitly, so the most Seifrid can mount is that the inference to be drawn from Wright's emphasis is that God "nearly" becomes a rewarder of obedience.

In thus reducing the cross to a moral transaction, Wright misses the great pleasure of the cross, which is to be understood as the substitutionary work of Christ. Now this is a fairly strong accusation to level, and in so doing, one would have hoped that Seifrid would have presented a stronger case for how Wright has reduced the atonement to merely a moral transaction. His critique against Wright in this section of the article hangs upon the claim that "the ordering of the relationship between 'representation' and 'substitution' which Wright offers implies that these two dimensions of God's atoning work in Christ are distinct and separate."¹⁴ From this implication of separation, he then reaches conclusions about Wright's elimination of substitution from the work of Christ *in toto*. It is one thing to offer a critique in which one disagrees with a person's emphasis or even shows the possible results of over-emphasizing a position, but Seifrid does not do that in this article. Instead, he moves from his implications about an emphasis to arguing that in fact Wright drops substitution from his understanding of the work of Christ. He does this while at the same time affirming that Wright "retains the traditional Protestant understanding of the atonement in his

¹³ Seifrid, "(W)right," 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

affirmation of its substitutionary dimension.”¹⁵ Seifrid has argued that we must keep the substitutionary and representative aspects of the atonement interwoven, and in this he is correct, but he has not convincingly shown that Wright has failed to do this. All he has shown is that Wright emphasizes representation more than substitution and that because of this it is claimed that he has separated the two and effectively dropped substitution from the mixture. Simply making an inference from an implication about Wright’s emphasis does not make the inference true, it makes it only an inference, and a rather unstable one at that.

III. AN IMPLICATION FROM WRIGHT’S EMPHASIS: REPRESENTATION ECLIPSES RESURRECTION

Having supposedly established that Wright loses the substitutionary dimension of Christ’s work in his crucifixion, Seifrid then moves forward to show how Wright has the same problem with our participation in the resurrection of Christ. Since Christ is only our representative, we cannot be an ontological part of his resurrection, which effectively reduces our union with Christ to an experiential union that leaves little hope of a future resurrection. Seifrid’s critique revolves around Wright’s understanding of Romans 6, particularly in how we are in Christ in both his death and resurrection. He posits that in the book, *The Resurrection and the Son of God*, Wright’s “understanding of salvation is tilted toward Jesus’ obedience, so that he does not appreciate the full significance of Jesus’ resurrection.”¹⁶ It is clear by Seifrid’s language of “tilting” that Wright does not see salvation as only about Jesus’ obedience, but that does not stop Seifrid from moving forward as if he has established the claim that Wright in fact sees no substitutionary dimension in salvation.

In order to defend his critique, Seifrid goes through an exposition about the difference between Wright’s “symbolic appropriation of the Pauline metaphor” of resurrection and his own understanding of Paul’s “realistic metaphor.” He argues that Paul’s realistic metaphor of our resurrection life is “based on the transfer of the *reality* of Christ’s resurrection here and now to those who believe.”¹⁷ In other words, since Christ is our substitute, Paul is able to speak of our being resurrected in Christ now, even though that event awaits a future day. It is this tension between the “realistic metaphor” of resurrection that we have now and the coming real resurrection at the *eschaton* that prevents us from

¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

following the “Corinthian error” in which we subsume the resurrection life into the present age as if it was fully completed. Seifrid then assumes that since Wright does not hold to substitution that he cannot follow this same path, but we have already shown that Seifrid’s basis for saying that Wright rejects substitution is based upon an inference from an implication about his emphasis. Thus, Seifrid does not feel compelled to establish that Wright cannot follow this path, all he has to do is fall back upon his previous claim as if it was true, and then read Wright within this pre-established paradigm.

According to Seifrid, “It is not clear that Wright’s symbolic appropriation of the Pauline metaphor sufficiently guards against such a totalizing approach: ‘building for the kingdom’ may well displace the hope of the kingdom breaking in upon this world.”¹⁸ Of course, when one reads Wright it is obvious that he does not subsume the resurrection into the present life of the believer in the manner that Seifrid suggests.¹⁹ In fact, it would seem that Seifrid might be making this accusation, not based upon Wright’s exegesis of the passage in Romans, but because of Wright’s eschatological views on other issues and his willingness to be involved in various political works in the world.

Seifrid concludes his discussion on the resurrection in Wright by stating that “the reality of the new creation in which we share in Christ goes missing in Wright’s work, because Wright understands Jesus first and foremost as Israel’s representative.”²⁰ I would suggest that, in fact, Wright clearly argues that in the Spirit we participate in the new creation in Christ. Our union with Christ in the power of the Spirit is one of the major themes of Wright’s book, *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision*. Furthermore, a major argument he raises against some of his critics is that they completely leave the Spirit out of the discussion, but it is by the Spirit that we are placed in union with Christ so as to be able to share in the reality of the new creation that was effected by his death and resurrection.²¹

IV. AN IMPLICATION FROM WRIGHT’S EMPHASIS: REPRESENTATION ECLIPSES JESUS

Next, Seifrid suggests that in Wright’s plan “Jesus loses his

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection and the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 248-259.

²⁰ Seifrid, “(W)right,” 11.

²¹ Wright, *Justification*, 10, 188-193.

individual identity and becomes generic.”²² It is for this reason that he claims that Wright’s Jesus cannot utter the cry of dereliction of Psalm 22. Since Jesus is the representative of the nation of Israel and fulfills the single-plan-of-God for the nation of Israel, he must then die as the nation and, hence, cannot utter that God has forsaken him. This gets back to the break in the story that Seifrid alleges that Wright makes. Since we have already dealt with that issue earlier, here we will only say that if one rejects Seifrid’s claims about there being a break in the straight line narrative then there is no reason to accept his claim here that Jesus could not make this cry himself or that Wright “dehistoricizes” Jesus.

From this statement that Wright dehistoricizes Jesus, Seifrid then posits that “in a way that transcends Wright’s proposal, Jesus appears in the New Testament not merely as the Suffering Servant who fulfills the divine purpose, but also as the one human being *who acts as God*.”²³ In footnote 20, Seifrid says that Wright’s Christology might be described as Eutychian. He does not give any support for this claim directly from Wright’s work, but only points the reader to an article that he himself wrote. If one is going to apply the label of a major Christological heresy to a person, common courtesy should at least compel him to cite in detail how that person’s Christology is heretical.

V. AN IMPLICATION FROM AN EMPHASIS: SANCTIFICATION OVERSHADOWS JUSTIFICATION

In the second section of Seifrid’s article, he addresses the controversy that is raging over Wright’s redefinition of justification. According to Seifrid, it is Wright’s loss of perspective in our full participation in Christ that leads him to a flawed understanding of justification. He suggests that Wright is confusing on his use of the word justification. On the one hand it represents a part of the *ordo salutis* in which justification is the status of “not guilty” given when a court finds in a person’s favor, while on the other hand justification and the righteousness for which people hope is their final vindication. It is because Wright sees the initial status of not guilty that is given in justification as entailing the forgiveness of sins and the giving of the Spirit that he can thus speak of this initial justification as a vindication. Within this understanding, Wright argues that righteousness in law court imagery is not a reference to the moral quality of the person who receives the declaration of not guilty, but it is instead about the position into which the verdict places the person. Wright clearly rejects the idea that justification means that

²² Seifrid, “(W)right,” 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. He argues that this way of conceiving of justification does not do justice to the biblical imagery that Paul uses, but it does seek to capture what Paul means by our being “in Christ.”²⁴

The link between the initial declaration that we are not guilty and the final eschatological vindication of the believer is the Spirit. Wright wants to argue that it is the Spirit who guarantees that we are what we have been declared to be. The question that Seifrid rightly raises is how the post-conversion works of the believer factor into the initial declaration that is given in justification. In the Roman Catholic system, a person is initially justified, but then his works complete his justification, and if he does not work then his justification is not complete. Seifrid acknowledges that Wright has directly refuted this charge against his system, but Seifrid still sees Wright as on a road to Rome, even if it is a road that might not be the most well traveled one. The underlying critique that Seifrid sees in Wright’s program is that the status of those who are God’s is thrown into question. Is a person part of God’s family based upon the forgiveness of his sins or is his transformed life necessary for this membership? And if his transformed life is constitutive of his membership on some level, how much transformation is enough? The question we must ask Seifrid is has he correctly understood Wright’s presentation, especially as it regards the Spirit’s role in guaranteeing the believers final vindication in light of the initial declaration given in justification?

Seifrid advances his critique of Wright by looking at two passages: Galatians 2 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. He begins his case, however, in Romans 3 where he agrees with Wright’s language of justification in traditional terms.²⁵ When Wright talks about justification and/or righteousness in Galatians 2, however, he highlights that for Wright we are now at the dinner table and the issue is about who is a part of God’s family. In Galatians, justification does not mean “free forgiveness of your sins” but instead it means “to be reckoned by God to be a true member of his family, and hence with the right to share in table fellowship.”²⁶ From these two uses of the word justification, Seifrid asserts that Wright has a dissonant reading of Romans and Galatians. I would posit that Wright is simply trying to be faithful to the surrounding context in which the words appear and that it is the immediate context of the passage that has the greatest bearing on how a word is to be understood. Regardless of this small issue, Seifrid makes the contention

²⁴ Wright, *Justification*, 95, 135, 206, 231-33.

²⁵ Seifrid, “(W)right,” 15-17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

that Wright goes further than seeing a nuanced use of the word justification between the two books, but that, in fact, he plays off membership in God's family against forgiveness and acquittal. Seifrid contends that our membership in the family is nothing other than our forgiven status, and he asserts that for Wright it is "contingent upon the faithfulness and true humanity effected within us by the Spirit?"²⁷

Wright does not argue that our membership in God's family is predicated upon our faithfulness, but upon the faithfulness of Christ.²⁸ By faith a person is joined to Christ and it is Christ's faithfulness to God that makes the person righteous. It is in union with Christ through the Spirit that a person is in the family of God, that a person appropriates the faithfulness of Christ. Wright does make a concerted effort to hold together a judgment according to works in Romans 2:6-11 with the eschatological renewal in Romans 8. He does this by an appeal to the Spirit. Once a person is in union with Christ, that person is then empowered by the Spirit to live in such a manner as to reflect Christ and his faithfulness. Wright rejects the idea that the moral transformation brought about by the Spirit earns final salvation, but he does argue that if a person does not show the fruit of the Spirit that his salvation stands in question. When a person is in Christ in the present, it is the Spirit who guarantees that the person will be vindicated at the final judgment in the future.²⁹

Seifrid contends that Wright does not see what God did for us in Jesus as a single, undivided reality, but that Wright parcels out Christ's work into an initial declaration and a final rescue. On one level, I get the impression that Seifrid and Wright are talking past each other on this issue. Wright is working within a historical-redemptive context and Seifrid is working within a more systematic theological context, and as such it is difficult to bring the language of the two together. Seifrid willingly admits that Wright's view of salvation is not Pelagian, but he questions whether it is biblical, while clearly declaring that it is not reformational. Wright would agree with the statement that it is not reformational, but he would also hold that his loyalty is not to the Reformation, but to the Reformation tradition of *sola scriptura*. While we owe a great debt to the Reformers, and we do ourselves a disservice not to listen to their voices, they are not our basis for authority, that position is held by Scripture. It is for this reason that the repeated accusations that Wright is not reformational tend to ring a bit hollow, in that being biblical is more important than being reformational, and I

²⁷ Ibid., 16.

²⁸ Wright, *Justification*, 117-118.

²⁹ Ibid., 235-40.

think this is something that the Reformers would endorse. This is not to argue that Wright is correct over the Reformers, but only to highlight the truth that merely showing that the Reformers held a certain view does not make that view correct.

When it comes to 2 Corinthians 5:21, there is a sharp disagreement between Seifrid and Wright over the meaning of God's righteousness. For Wright, this phrase refers to God's faithfulness to his covenant, while for Seifrid this is about the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. Wright is clear in his work that he is not following the traditional reformational reading of this verse. It is, therefore, difficult to enter into a critique of Seifrid's position against Wright because Seifrid does not so much refute Wright's interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:21 as he just reasserts the traditional reading and then shows how Wright's position does not fit with that reading. It would be more helpful to show why Wright's reading is wrong first before highlighting the mistaken positions that flow from his reading. Since Seifrid does not do this, we will have to content ourselves with seeing if his implications about Wright's position are correct.

The question again revolves around the issue of substitution, in that according to Seifrid "Wright misses the exchange of persons and its effective character. He instead understands Christ as a visible representation of God's righteousness that morally transforms the apostle and keeps God's righteousness entirely separate from justification. What God has given as an unqualified gift in Christ, Wright would like to attain by the power of the Spirit."³⁰ At the root of the problem with this statement is that Seifrid is talking past Wright in many ways. Wright argues that this verse is not about the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but he also argues that the idea that imputation seeks to address is found in other places. Seifrid does not address the point from Wright, but forges ahead as if he never said it. He, thus, gives the implication that Wright does not hold to substitution, with all the results that such a position would entail. He also claims that for Wright God's righteousness morally transforms Paul and that this keeps righteousness separate from justification. According to Wright, God's righteousness is his covenant faithfulness, and in Christ God keeps his covenant with Abraham. Because God keeps his covenant in Christ, Paul then says that as an apostle he has become the righteousness of God in that he is now proclaiming the faithfulness of God in Christ. I am not sure that Wright treats this idea as a moral transformation. Paul's being the righteousness of God is not about his moral transformation, but about his gospel proclamation.

³⁰ Seifrid, "(W)right," 18.

From his conclusion that Wright understands God's righteousness as moral transformation, Seifrid makes the odd assertion that according to Wright some followers of Christ are more human than others. We need to unpack this assertion for a moment before we move on. Here is how I understand Seifrid on Wright: Since God's righteousness is moral transformation into the image of Christ, who is himself the true measure of what it means to be human, the more one is transformed morally into the image the more one is human. While the argument makes logical sense, I do not think it makes sense of what Wright is saying. Wright argues that we are members of God's family based upon the faithfulness of the Messiah. It is Jesus' faithfulness, his obedience, which is the basis for God's declaration of not guilty upon a believer. Having been incorporated into God's family through Christ, the believer is then transformed by the power of the Spirit into the image of Christ.

One final note on this section involves Seifrid's critique of Wright's use of law court imagery. This is one of the foundational points of Wright's work, and if Seifrid can undermine Wright's position then much of what Wright has proposed might collapse. The problem is that Seifrid merely asserts that Wright envisions a modern democratic law court, and then he proceeds to show how this makes Wright's position wrong. It would have been beneficial if Seifrid would have shown from Wright's own work how he gets the law court imagery wrong, since in his most recent book, *Justification*, Wright explicitly lists Seifrid as a critic who has made this charge, but has shown no evidence to support it.³¹

Seifrid concludes his article with a comment on how the nation of Israel was to be a light to the nations. He argues that the nation was to be a light not by morally imitating God but by being rescued by God. "The Servant's active role of bringing justice to the nations is subordinate to the Servant's passive role as the *recipient* of justice."³² According to Seifrid, the idea of being a light to the nations is about the nation reflecting the saving work of the creator. In this way, Israel, in so far as the nation is included in the Servant, does not fail to be a light to the nations, as Wright asserts, because its light shining was never about moral acts, but about being rescued. It is not the nation's moral efforts that make it shine, but precisely the rescue that God effects for the nation. It is the glory of the Lord that shines from the midst of misery and degradation that is the light that shines forth. The Isaianic language of light (40:1-11, 60:1-3, 42:12, 49:3, 49:6-13, 42:6, 45:7) stands in stark contrast to Wright's moralistic understanding of light, according to

³¹ Wright, *Justification*, 68

³² Seifrid, "(W)right," 22.

Seifrid.

Seifrid posits then that those who are a light to the nations, à la 2 Corinthians 5:21, are not those who emulate a moral ideal, but those who are delivered by God. This deliverance makes them children of God who are then to imitate the God who is already their father. In 2 Corinthians 6:2, Paul clearly aligns Jesus with the Servant. Christ's suffering and deliverance is now Paul's who communicates this comfort given to him with the sufferings of Christ to the Corinthians. It is, therefore, not only the apostle but also the Corinthians who are made the righteousness of God.

In this argument, and especially the issue regarding how the nation of Israel is to be a light to the nations, Seifrid has offered a major critique to Wright's reading of the narrative of Scripture. How exactly was the nation of Israel to be a light to the nations? Seifrid maintains that it would be a light, first and foremost, by being rescued by God. It is the rescue that shines forth the glory of God, the light of God, to the nations. In that understanding, Israel, in so much as the nation is in the Servant, has not failed to be a light. In fact, the nation must be rescued in order for the light to go forth. I am not aware that Wright has addressed this issue directly, but I can see how Seifrid's reading could fit into the overarching narrative that Wright construes. The understanding that the nation needed to be rescued fits in neatly with the two-pronged emphasis of Wright's reading in which Jesus is both the representative of the nation (i.e., the Servant) and a substitute for the nation. It is because Jesus is the substitute for the nation that he can be the representative, and in fact, by being the substitute, by bearing the curse of the law, he is able to be rescued from death and, thus, fulfill his representative role.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is Seifrid's contention that "Wright's interpretation of the atonement primarily in terms of Jesus' role as Israel's representative thus not only obscures its substitutionary dimension, it obscures the exchange of persons that is at the heart of that substitutionary understanding."³³ As such, "Wright's commitment to the priority of corporate categories leads him, in contrast, to a moralistic—and, indeed, rationalistic—conception of the atonement."³⁴ The two preceding statements sum up nicely Seifrid's critique of Wright in which he argues that he gets the gospel horribly wrong.³⁵ It is one thing to argue that a person's emphasis could

³³ Ibid., 13.

³⁴ Ibid., 13.

³⁵ While the article never uses the phrase that Wright gets the gospel

lead someone to miss something that is a part of the atonement, but it is quite another to argue that an inference drawn from implications about an emphasis in one's treatment of the atonement entails that a portion of the atonement, in this case substitution, is completely missing from one's project. While Wright does not speak in the traditional language of the systematic theologian, and he indeed does have an emphasis upon the representative role of Jesus, it is uncharitable to accuse him of dropping substitution from his program based only upon implications drawn from his emphasis when he has asserted that he has not dropped substitution from his understanding of the atonement.

horribly wrong, this position was espoused during a Q&A that took place before the Sizemore lectures were delivered.

Wright! Write. Right?



RADU GHEORGHITA*

*Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
rgheorghita@mbts.edu*

In an instance of “creativity gone wrong,” I originally titled this essay “Jeru-Wright” because I kept thinking about Jeru-Baal as I wrote this essay. The title was supposed to be an echo of the episode in Judges 6:25-35, in which Baal is summoned to defend itself against the attacks of Gideon, the Israelite judge who destroyed the idolatrous altar. I soon realized, however, that the similarities are quite precarious, and, even worse, by associating Bishop N. T. Wright with Baal, I would have sent the exact opposite message than the one intended.

In the end, wisdom prevailed and I settled on the new title which captures, albeit enigmatically and employing a somewhat overused pun, the nature and scope of my article. The first “Wright!” designates the topic of the essay, N. T. Wright, the Bishop of Durham, an “exclamation point” theologian, who has had an epoch-making impact in New Testament studies for the last quarter of a century. The second “Write.” in the title stands for one of the most distinctive characteristics of this theologian: he is a prolific writer, which implies that his ideas are disseminated on a large scale with potentially huge impact. Last, but certainly not least, the question mark in “Right?” points to the need to assess Wright’s ideas and overall contribution to the field of New Testament studies and our understanding of the origins of Christianity.

At the outset, a word of clarification is in order regarding the readers’ expectations and the kind of article that is hereby offered. Even though the following considerations revolve around scholars and their theological disputes, focusing on one scholar in particular, by choice they have not been written in a scholarly manner. The main reason for this choice was simply the abundance of such approaches, from single

articles to entire series of books – and everything in between – a stream of publications that is unlikely to run dry anytime soon.¹ There has been a significant number of studies that engage with the ideas and the writings of Wright at the highest scholarly level published in the last decade, not leaving much justification for yet another. In fact, it was in one such volume, written predominantly by evangelical scholars, that I first became aware of the impact of Wright’s work.²

Furthermore, even though I am an enthusiastic, albeit nuanced admirer of Wright, I did not plan to advance a fully fledged defense of his theology, because I believe that he does not need any peer theologian to defend him. In this sense, then, Jeru-Wright, “Let Wright defend himself!” (cf. Judg 6:31). Here, and only here, the similarities with the Baal episode to which I alluded earlier are applicable. Wright is more than capable to present his theology and to defend it, and he does it better than anyone. Auspiciously, he is engaged in such defense almost constantly since he firmly upholds to the imperative of doing theology in the agora of ideas and not secluded in the proverbial ivory tower.³

Here, however, is the missing link that this article wants to address. In order to allow Wright to defend himself, the potential dialogue partner must give him the chance to do so. First and foremost this means engaging with the man and his work first hand, via the fruit of his labor, i.e., his books. It implies reading and understanding him, assessing his ideas and their implications; it implies observing their impact in all sorts of ways and walks of life.

But why bother to do this evaluation? Who is Wright and why does

*Dr. Gheorghita is the author of *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of Its Influence With Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3-4 in Heb 10:37-38* (WUNT 160; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2003, which is a revision of his 2000 Cambridge University dissertation.

¹ See, for example, the two volumes edited by D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid: *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), and *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004).

² Carey C. Newman, ed., *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999).

³ The latest and the best example of theological dialogue in print is the ongoing debate between John Piper and N. T. Wright on the doctrine of justification by faith. It has generated much interest and polarization. Piper’s position is given in *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), Wright’s in *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

he deserve a closer look than anyone else? Wright is a New Testament scholar and theologian, the current Bishop of Durham in the Anglican Church, who comes close to what might be considered a phenomenon in the area of New Testament studies. A biblical theologian par excellence, with the rigor of a master in the research of primary sources, with an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of the Christian Church and doctrinal beliefs, and possessing equally an incredible power of synthesis of the essence of the Christian faith and a profound discernment of the complex reality in which we live, Wright will certainly be considered one of the most important theologians of our time. His contribution to our understanding of Jesus, Paul and the message of the New Testament in general will be remembered as one of the key segments in the history of NT interpretation and theology at the turn of the millennium.

It should be noted that the seed for this article was planted during the Sizemore Lectureship in Biblical Studies hosted by MBTS in the Fall of 2009. The guest speaker, Dr. Mark Seifrid, *Professor of New Testament Interpretation* of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has acquired the reputation of being one of the keenest and most vocal critics of Wright. The two lectures he delivered for that occasion are printed in this edition of the *Midwestern Journal of Theology*. I believe that the choice for the series topic as well as for the speaker could not have been better, other than, of course, having Wright in person.

To the audience in the chapel as well as to the readers of the printed lectures, it is quite evident that Dr. Seifrid has detected serious faults in the theology of Wright, primarily in its implications for the body of reformed theology. It is not the intention of this article to summarize Dr. Seifrid's criticism and to offer a rebuttal. Dr. Rustin Umstattd of MBTS, a keen observer and assessor of Wright's theology, takes that very route in his contribution to this volume. I did not want to duplicate that approach, but to remain silent was not an option, either.

The goal of this article is more modest. While the following considerations will not be a defense in the strict sense of the word, I would like to take this opportunity to issue an invitation to all the readers to tackle and to test for themselves the theology of Wright in the most direct way. As eluded earlier, I would not extend this sort of invitation for any theologian; I am doing it, however, in Wright's case, because I believe he deserves a hearing. In the post modern era, the internet, which has become the main source of info-education, assaults us with a barrage of voices that are so noisy that the voice of the bona-fide scholar is barely audible. That is why Wright books are so valuable: In them one could still hear the scholar and not the amateur addressing the issues at the heart of the New Testament and Christian doctrine.

Here then is the plea advanced in this article: Get Wright's books

and read them! This would be the best start, a path that would avoid – at least for the time being – the never ending cycle of criticism, counter-criticism, counter-counter-criticism which is growing exponentially in Wright’s case. I myself am frequently frustrated with the inevitable law of scholarship: “criticism breeds criticism.” Yet, important as this law is, somehow in Wright’s case the rebuttals, the counter-rebuttals, and counter-counter-rebuttals have made the quarrel deafening. Time and again I have found this dialogue marred by accusations of “not reading me properly” or “not construing my words rightly” flying back and forth. It is clear to me that for Wright this unfortunate pattern will continue unabated primarily because he cannot be reduced to sound bites and clichés; his proposals are far too complex and loaded with too much theological nuance to permit sound-bite rebuttals.

At this juncture, however, a personal testimony is in order. It was during my early seminary years at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School that I first came across the ideas of Wright in a course on the Synoptic Gospels focusing on the life and teachings of Jesus. During the study of Jesus’ parables we reached Luke 15 and the well known parable of the prodigal son. Here is Wright, speaking for himself:

Son, or father? The prodigal son, it is often called; but the son is not the only prodigal in the story. This is an explosive narrative, designed to blow apart the normal first-century reading of Jewish history and to replace it with a different one. Just as we saw in NTPG that some retellings of the Jewish story were designed to subvert others...so this tale subverts the telling of the story which one might expect from mainstream first-century Jewish, not least those claiming to be the guardians of Israel’s ancestral heritage.

He continues,

Years of scholarship have produced many commentaries on Luke, and many books on the parables. But none that I have been able to consult has noted the feature which seems to me most striking and obvious. Consider: here is a son who goes off in disgrace into a far country and then comes back, only to find the welcome challenged by another son who has stayed put. The overtones are so strong that we surely cannot ignore them. This is the story of Israel, in particular of exile and restoration. It corresponds more or less exactly to the narrative grammar which underlies the exilic prophets, and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and a good deal of subsequent Jewish literature, and which must therefore be seen as formative for second-Temple Judaism. The exodus itself is the ultimate backdrop: Israel

goes off into a pagan country, becomes a slave, and then is brought back to her own land. But exile and restoration is the main theme. This is what the parable is about.⁴

I remember vividly the impact this idea had on me. It was not only a novel and unexpected twist in the interpretation of the parable, for which I thought nothing new could be said; it also seemed to make very good sense in the historical milieu of Jesus' life and ministry, in fact much better sense than scores of alternative proposals. It was freshness itself, especially in a field of investigation in which recycled ideas seems to be more often the expected norm.

I was thus introduced to the world of Wright and to his overarching theological and historical reconstruction of the first-century Judaism. In Jesus, according to Wright, the God of Israel is intersecting in a decisive way with the history of humankind and its plight: His promises are fulfilled, the Temple is restored, the Covenant is renewed, and the Exile was finally over. These themes are foundational to all his subsequent work.

After that first encounter, I marked down his name for future reference. It was a decisive moment in understanding the importance of these theses and their potential to reshape the discussion in the research area of the Historical Jesus, particularly the "Third Quest," a term coined by Wright himself.⁵ Soon I was to discover that Wright is just as important a contributor in the area of Pauline studies, especially in what has become known as the "New Perspective on Paul," a label attributed to James D. G. Dunn. Since I had just started my doctoral work, the desire to delve into Wright's take on Jesus and Paul studies had to be quenched for the moment and any direct engagement with his theology postponed. I had a colleague, however, whose dissertation topic was a critical assessment of Wright's understanding of Paul. That helped me maintain a sliver of contact with the developments in Wright's world, but my main interest was devoted to the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Septuagint, two topics outside of Wright's radar.

When I finished the dissertation, Wright was on the top of things to which I was determined to return after graduation. Meanwhile, Wright's name had become the talk of the theological town. I decided that the time had arrived to look into him more seriously. There were plenty of sources to tackle: two of his volumes in the Christian Origins series were

⁴ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 126.

⁵ Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* (new ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 379.

out and a number of books for the laymen had also been published. I started reading with fascination, not only because I saw how much the studies of Jesus and Paul have progressed during my absence, but also because I was dealing with a central think-tank in the field, one destined to remain an essential contributor to the dialogue. I discovered in Wright a man engaged in a panoply of theological and ecclesiastical issues, not limited to bookish exegesis but also dealing with real life issues. By now, after teaching positions at McGill University and Oxford, an unsuccessful candidacy for the position of NT professor at King's College, London, followed by an appointment as Dean of Lichfield Cathedral and later as Canon Theologian at the Westminster Abbey, Wright became the Bishop of Durham, the fourth most senior position in the Anglican Church.

Foremost, I found in Wright an incredibly good writer. In all his writing he comes across as a very able and captivating communicator. Here again is a lengthier quotation from an article on New Testament Christology:

What are we therefore saying about the earthly Jesus? In Jesus himself, I suggest, we see the biblical portrait of YHWH come to life: the loving God, rolling up his sleeves, (Isaiah 52:10) to do in person the job that no one else could do; the creator God, giving new life; the God who works *through* his created world, and supremely through his human creatures: the faithful God, dwelling in the midst of his people; the stern and tender God, relentlessly opposed to all that destroys or distorts the good creation, and especially human beings, but recklessly loving all those in need and distress. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall carry the lambs in his arms; and gently lead those that are with young.' It is the Old Testament portrait of YHWH; but it fits Jesus like a glove.

Let me be clear, also, what I am not saying. I do not think Jesus 'knew he was God' in the same sense that one knows one is tired or happy, male or female. He did not sit back and say to himself, 'Well I never! I am the second person of the Trinity!' Rather, 'as part of his human vocation, grasped in faith, sustained in prayer, tested in confrontation, agonized over in further prayer and doubt, and implemented in action, he believed he had to do and be, for Israel and the world, that which according to scripture only YHWH himself could do and be.'⁶

⁶ N. T. Wright, "The Biblical Formation of a Doctrine of Christ," in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology and the Church* (ed. Donald Armstrong; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 47-68, esp. 64-65.

I do not recall reading or hearing a more succinct, precise, biblical, and, at the same time, beautiful description of Jesus' vocation and identity as the Savior of the world. This is the kind of treat awaiting those who turn to Wright's books.

At this stage in my book-based encounter with Wright, Atlanta 2003 happened, the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society followed by the Society of Biblical Literature. It was my first chance to hear Wright in person, and I concluded that captivating as he was in his writings, he was even more so at the lectern. He was scheduled to deliver a paper and engage in a debate with J. D. Crossan on the resurrection of Jesus.⁷ Unfortunately, the designated room for the event was utterly insufficient for the interest generated by the session. In fact, about 30 minutes before the session would start, there was no standing room in the hall; all the access ways were jammed packed. I remember hearing the lecture standing on a chair by the main door, and even there, I did not benefit from a 'front-row' situation: I was hanging on the person in front of me, and backed by three more rows of people behind, all standing on chairs, grasping for a better chance to see or hear him. Not since the days of the Second Baptist Church of Oradea, the flagship Romanian church that opposed and defied the communists, had I ever seen anything of the sort. The lecture hall was taken by assault. I am sure that if the fire department knew what was going on, they would have stopped the lecture without recourse. I probably do not need to convince the reader that an interest in theology of this magnitude does not happen very often, and while flooding lecture halls are not indicative of the rightness of one's theology, I wish we had more theologians who could generate this kind of interest in their discipline, and ultimately in God's Word.

Of course, the lecture did not disappoint. In content, in civility, in wit, and foremost in the scholarship espoused, a better display of theological dialogue could not be envisaged. These occasions, unfortunately rare, prove that the old accolade still holds true: theology, when done properly, is indeed the "queen of sciences." It was also clear to me and to all the participants that in Wright the more liberal exponents of the historical Jesus have found their match. The Crossans, the Ehrmans, the Pagelses, the Macks, and the Funks of academia, to say nothing of the rest of the infamous Jesus Seminar, or the idiosyncratic Dan Brown (not really deserving a place on this list) were now assessed critically, and found wanting, demolished and replaced with a superior

⁷ The classic dialogue was later published as *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (ed. Robert B. Stewart; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

reconstruction of the life of Jesus and the origins of Christianity, one more solid biblically and more accurate historically. Furthermore, this was done by someone who could not be easily dismissed or silenced simply by being labeled an evangelical conservative, unworthy of being given a hearing.

My conclusion after that meeting was easy to reach: regardless of what his critics or admirers might say, Wright is a phenomenon in the field of New Testament theology. It seems to me that he is the kind of theologian who emerges once in a lifetime. Indeed, one often hears accolades and praises similar to the one offered by Richard Hays: “The sweep of Wright’s project as a whole is breathtaking. It is impossible to give a fair assessment of his achievement without sounding grandiose: no New Testament scholar since Bultmann has even attempted – let alone achieved- such an innovative and comprehensive account of New Testament history and theology.”⁸ This indeed is the reason for writing my own kind of defense for Wright. Love him or abhor him; he will not go away, and New Testament Theology will be forever changed by his contribution.

If this article has failed to raise the readers’ interest in and determination to explore the theology of Wright, it is my own fault, not theirs. If it did, however, I would like to end by recommending a pathway into the theological world of Wright, an entry through the front door of listening to the man himself and not through the back door, tantalizingly opened by his critics. Of course, one can always try the latter route and start out by forming his or her first impressions by reading what others have said about Wright. In a sense, the articles in this volume of *MJT* offer this alternative. While, indeed, this would be a legitimate approach, in Wright’s case, I would strongly advise against it, primarily because the former pathway is so much better and offers so much more. So, start with him; then go to his admirers and his loathers.

Here then is my recommendation for a Wright 101. Nothing seems to be more important to the reader at this juncture that to become aware of the kind of books Wright has published, roughly divided into two major tiers: the scholarly studies on the one hand, and works written for a larger readership, on the other. Depending on the reader’s time, budget, and preferences, one tier may be more suitable than the other.

The first tier comprises of N. T. Wright’s scholarly contribution, the three volumes in an anticipated seven-volume series under the overarching title “Christian Origins and the Question of God,” a project undertaken by Fortress Press. None of these three titles are for the faint-of-heart; they are demanding tomes. I believe, however, that they

⁸ Jacket blurb for *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

represent theological and historical scholarship at its best. We see in them a Wright in his researcher garb, building architectonic structures, analyzing biblical passages, clarifying potential misinterpretations, defending his position and engaging others with the vigor of a seasoned scholar. The footnotes and bibliography galore will satisfy the expectations of even the most demanding reader.

The first volume in the series introduces the theological landscape of Wright's program and functions as a methodological prolegomena to the subsequent volumes.⁹ Volumes two and three cover essentially the life of Jesus within its historical, literary and theological contexts.¹⁰ The material is somewhat unevenly distributed between them, with roughly 660 pages devoted to the teachings, the life and death of Jesus, in volume two, while a massive 750 pages treat the resurrection of Jesus in the third volume, a partition not planned originally. The subject matter of the third volume was intended to be the concluding chapter in the second volume: the result of the research, however, had outgrown its intended banks and demanded to be released as a separate volume. It offers one of the best ever scholarly analyses and defenses of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical event. Even as I write, word circulates that volume four in the series, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, an eagerly anticipated study on Paul, might be released in 2010.

Worthy of a place in this first tier is also Wright's 400 page commentary on the book of Romans. It is part of the New Interpreter's Bible, one of the finest series of commentaries on the Bible in print. Since his doctoral work Paul's letter to the Romans has always been a primary focus of Wright's work. It is no surprise then to see his attention turning to the crown of Pauline corpus for a scholarly commentary. I find it full of fresh and interesting insights, arresting in its exegesis, fair in the treatment of the difficult passages, and, foremost, animated by the desire to let Paul be Paul. There is a constant effort to prevent as much as possible this first century document becoming cluttered by theological and ecclesiastical debates developed centuries later. A commentary written from the vantage point of having the Greek text of the epistle memorized will always command respect.

It is beyond any doubt that the aforementioned volumes, both the historical-literary-theological investigation of nascent Christianity as well as the trademark exegetical commentary on Romans would convince any skeptic of Wright's preparedness to engage with an

⁹ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).

¹⁰ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003).

important topic such as the beginning of Christianity and the nature of God. It goes without saying that no fair criticism should be leveled against Wright before these volumes are thoroughly covered and digested. They constitute the most rigorous presentation, explanation, and defense of his positions.

For the busy pastor or student, who would rather approach Wright in smaller strides, the options available are even more accommodating. The Jesus and Pauline studies are roughly summarized in three volumes: *The Challenge of Jesus, What Did Paul Really Say?* and *Paul in Fresh Perspective*.¹¹ Each one of these volumes rehearses in condensed format and in more accessible language the essence of Wright's position on these matters. Alongside these volumes there is a sprawling collection of thematic studies in areas of applied theology as diverse as the authority of Scripture,¹² Christian worship,¹³ and the presence and the reality of evil.¹⁴ As I write, I have on my desk the latest book of Wright on ethics and the Christian character.¹⁵ It forms, together with two earlier titles, *Surprised by Hope* and *Simply Christian*, a formidable trilogy of applied NT theology.¹⁶ The last mentioned one in particular is a sure candidate to become a classic, and will do for our generation what C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* did for the generation before us. All the titles in the second tier remind me of a well composed fugue of J. S. Bach, in which the main theme is first stated, then retaken in a different register, expanded, inversed, compelled to enter into inter-voice dialogue, only to be brought to a harmonious final accord.

Alongside these predominantly thematic approaches, there is a fine series of NT commentaries published by John Knox Westminster Press, including such titles as *Hebrews for Everyone* and *Acts for Everyone*. To date, the series covers about half of the NT books. Not since William

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), and *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005).

¹² N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

¹³ N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series have I encountered a more enjoyable and helpful exposition of the biblical text.

In addition to this fervent publishing activity, Wright is a conference speaker in high demand. The interested reader will be able to follow and keep up with his recent or past lectureships on his web page, www.ntwright.com.

So, let Wright defend himself! He has made his position known both in scholarly and in larger laic circles. If the reader wants proof that the New Testament is not a boring, stale, obsolete area of research, he ought to read Wright. His reconstruction proves that the NT remains a powerful and complex locus of revelation. Each generation is called out to read it, analyze it, understand it and live it out. The answers and conclusions of yesteryear are important and are valuable, but the homework done by our theological forefathers does not absolve us of the responsibility of doing it for our own generation. This is where Wright's contribution comes into place: he is on the forefront of the theologians who have undertaken this challenge. His proposals and solutions are not infallible; his lead cannot be followed blindly; yet, he cannot be ignored nor dismissed lightly. He has many critics, some accusing him for being too far right, other for being too far left. Regardless of where Wright ends up in anyone's assessment, I believe it is important to recall that only three decades ago the then Bishop of Durham, Rev. David Jenkins, was making headlines by rejecting the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁷ To have the same bishop seat now occupied by a theologian who not only believes and affirms the historical resurrection of our Lord, but also emerges as one of the foremost defenders of its historicity is a tribute to the power of the Gospel of our Lord.

It would be a fitting end to these thoughts to alert the readers that the 2010 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta will have the theme of justification as the overarching topic and Wright as one of the plenary speakers.¹⁸ The event is promising to be one of the most important, highly anticipated, and definitive evangelical debates on the doctrine of justification. Jeru-Wright!

¹⁷ The story of the controversy is chronicled in Murray J. Harris, *Easter in Durham: Bishop Jenkins & the Resurrection of Jesus* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985).

¹⁸ For details, visit the site of the ETS: www.etsjets.org.

The Rhetorical Function of Chiasmus in Acts 2:2-4



JOSHUA L. MANN*

Ph.D. Candidate (New Testament)

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Kansas City, MO 64118

joshleemann@gmail.com

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to identify chiasmus in Acts 2:2-4, evaluate the probability that the arrangement is chiasmic, and propose and evaluate possible functions of the arrangement in the immediate context of Acts 2 and the broader context of Luke-Acts. In brief, chiasmus is inverted parallelism. Ian Thomson has defined it more thoroughly as a “bilateral symmetry of four or more elements about a central axis, which may itself lie between two elements, or be a unique central element, the symmetry consisting of any combination of verbal, grammatical or syntactical elements, or, indeed, of ideas and concepts in a given pattern.”¹

The modern study of chiasmus is sometimes thought to have started with the brief treatment of the subject in Johannes Bengel’s *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (1742)² and Robert Lowth’s *De Sacra Poesi*

*Joshua Mann serves as Editorial Assistant for the *Midwestern Journal of Theology*.

¹ Ian H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters* (JSNTSup 111; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 25–26.

² Translated into English in John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (ed. Andrew R. Fausset; trans. James Bandinel and Andrew R. Fausset; 2 vols.; 3rd ed.; Philadelphia, PA: Smith, English, and Co./New York: Sheldon and Co., 1860).

Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicae (1753).³ These early discussions of chiasmus (or related forms of parallelism) did not hold the attention of most scholars until the publication of Nils Lund's 1942 volume, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte*.⁴ The next major treatment of the subject came in 1981 in a volume of essays entitled *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*.⁵ In the last three decades since that time, a plethora of chiasmic structures (large and small) have been proposed throughout the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament. Especially controversial among many scholars is the legitimacy of macro-chiasms, structures which are said to span across multiple chapters or entire books of the biblical text.⁶

II. A PROPOSAL OF CHIASMUS IN ACTS 2:2-4

Using the preliminary definition of chiasmus proposed by Thomson, Acts 2:2-4 (in fig. 1 below) exhibits a "bilateral symmetry" of seven elements, one element which comprises "a unique central element," the

³ Translated into English in Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of Hebrews* (trans. G. Gregory; 4th ed.; London, UK: Tegg and Co., 1839). Others who followed Bengel and Lowth include John Jebb, *Sacred Literature* (1820); Thomas Boys, *Tactica Sacra* (1824); and John Forbes, *Symmetrical Structure of Scripture* (1854).

⁴ Nils Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1942). One of the most significant contributions of Lund is his attempt to identify criteria for identifying chiasmus. He names seven "laws" of chiasmic structures: (1) The center is the turning point of the passage; (2) The center often introduces an antithetical idea and a change in the trend of thought; (3) Identical ideas often occur in the extremes and at the center; (4) Ideas at the center of one chiasmic structure might be contained in the extremes of another system; (5) Certain terms tend toward certain positions in a structure; (6) Larger literary units are often introduced and concluded by "frame-passages"; (7) Both chiasmic lines and alternating lines often occur within a single unit (40-41). Lund goes on to describe instances of chiasmus in the Old Testament, the epistles of Paul, the Gospels, and the book of Revelation.

⁵ John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981).

⁶ For discussions of criteria for identifying chiasmus, see Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 9-15; D. J. Clark, "Criteria for Identifying Chiasm," *LB* 35 (1975): 63-72; Craig Blomberg, "The Structure of 2 Corinthians 1-7," *CTR* 4.1 (1989): 3-20; Thomson, *Chiasmus*, 27; M. J. Boda, "Chiasmus in Ubiquity: Symmetrical Mirages in Nehemiah 9," *JSOT* 71 (1996): 55-70; David A. deSilva, "X Marks the Spot? A Critique of the Use of Chiasmus in Macro-Structural Analyses of Revelation," *JSNT* 30.3 (2008): 343-371.

symmetry consisting of a combination of “verbal elements” (B, C, C', B') and “ideological concepts” (A, A').

One may observe the ideological relationship between (A) *egeneto* ... *ēchos* (a sound came) and (A') *erxanto lalein heterais glōssais* (they began to speak in other tongues), both of which are phenomena produced by the Holy Spirit. The sound is said to (B) *eplērosen holon ton oikon* (fill the whole house) and (B') *eplēsthēsan pantes* (all were filled). The Spirit fills the house (C) *hou ēsan kathēmenoi* (where they were sitting), and the tongues (C') *ekathisen⁷ eph' hena hekaston autōn* (sat upon each one of them). The central statement of the chiasmic structure becomes the axis: *kai ōphthēsan autois diamerizomenai glōssai hōsei pyros* (tongues distributed as fire appeared to them).

<p>A και ἐγένετο ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἦχος ὡς περ φορομένης πνοῆς βιαίας</p> <p><i>And a sound came suddenly from heaven as a mighty rushing wind.</i></p> <p>B και ἐπλήρωσεν ὅλον τὸν οἶκον</p> <p><i>And it filled the whole house</i></p> <p>C οὗ ἦσαν καθήμενοι</p> <p><i>where they were sitting.</i></p> <p>D και ὠφθῆσαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι ὡσει πυρός</p> <p><i>And tongues distributed as fire appeared to them.</i></p> <p>C' και ἐκάθισεν ἐφ' ἓνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν,</p> <p><i>And it sat upon each one of them.</i></p> <p>B' και ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου</p> <p><i>And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.</i></p> <p>A' και ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἐτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς.</p> <p><i>And they began to speak with other tongues just as the Spirit was giving to them to speak.</i></p>

Fig. 1. Chiasmic Structure of Acts 2:2–4.

III. NON-CHIASMIC SYMMETRY

In addition to the chiasmic structure observed above, this passage

⁷ It should be noted that two important NT manuscripts (X and D) contain the plural *ekathisan* rather than the singular *ekathisen* reflected in the NA27. The plural form would suggest *glōssai* as the subject of the clause, and the singular may suggest *pyros* as the subject (denoting the distribution of individual tongues or flames resting on each one of them—*ep' hena hekaston autōn*). The singular reading is more likely original since it is the more difficult of the two.

exhibits further symmetry through non-inverted parallels. In his seven laws of chiasmus, Lund notes: “There is frequently a mixture of chiasmic and alternating lines within one and the same unit.”⁸ While Lund fails to elaborate on this point, Thomson explains it as follows: “In a chiasmus ABC...C'B'A', it is sometimes apparent that a given pair of elements (say B and B') can each be resolved into two sub-elements, B₁ and B₂, and B₁' and B₂', where the sub-elements occur without inversion of order. This gives AB(B₁B₂)C...C'B'(B₁'B₂')A'. In this case, there is no inversion of order of the sub-elements.”⁹ The extremities of the chiasm proposed in Acts 2:2–4 seem to exhibit this characteristic as illustrated in figure 2 below.

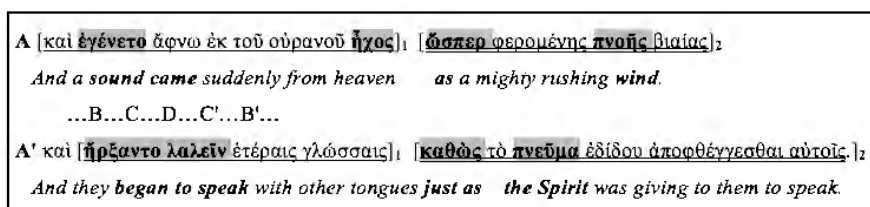


Fig. 2. Sub-elements in the Chiasmic Structure of Acts 2:2-4.

The corresponding sub-elements proposed in figure 2 are A₁ and A₁', both indicating phenomena produced by the Spirit (noise and tongues, respectively), and A₂ and A₂', both beginning with comparative markers (*hōsper* and *kathōs*) introducing clauses which provide a fuller description of the event narrated in the respective preceding clauses. Further, *pnoēs* in A₂ and *pneuma* in A₂' are lexically similar, both derived from *pneō*. If the sub-elements proposed above are legitimately present, the chiasmic structure might be abbreviated as follows: A(A₁A₂)BCDC'B'A'(A₁'A₂').

⁸ Lund, *Chiasmus*, 41.

⁹ Thomson, *Chiasmus*, 27 n. 79.

<p>A [καὶ ἐγένετο ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἦχος]₁ [ὡς περ φορομένης πνοῆς βιαίας]₂ <i>And a sound came suddenly from heaven as a mighty rushing wind.</i> ...B...C...</p>
<p>D [καὶ ὤφθησαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι]₁ [ὡσεὶ πυρὸς]₂ <i>And there appeared to them distributed tongues as fire.</i> ...C'...B'...</p>
<p>A' καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις]₁ [καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθεγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς]₂ <i>And they began to speak with other tongues just as the Spirit was giving to them to speak.</i></p>

Fig. 3. Sub-elements in center of the chiasmic structure of Acts 2:2-4.

Having established the possibility of the sub-elements noted above, the presence of corresponding sub-elements in the chiasmic center will be proposed (see fig. 3). The addition to the proposal at this point attributes correspondence between D₁, the manifestation of tongues made visible, and A₁ and A₁', the descriptions of other manifestations of the Holy Spirit. With reference to D₂, correspondence is attributed between the comparative *hōsei* (introducing an explanation of the clause which precedes it) and the similar function of the comparatives in A₂ and A₂'. If this is the case, the chiasmus in Acts 2:2–4 might now be abbreviated as follows: A(A₁A₂)BCD(D₁D₂)C'B'A'(A₁'A₂').

IV. PROBABILITY OF INTENTIONAL CHIASMUS

The goal here is to briefly investigate the probability that the parallels are *intentionally* arranged and are not imposed on the text by the interpreter. Chiasmus is less likely in instances where the respective components of the structure divide sentences or clauses in unnatural places. In Acts 2:2–4, the chiasmic structure lines up well with the natural division of the clauses. Every line is an independent clause beginning with *kai*, with the exception of line C which is a relative clause. The presence of this clause (*hou ēsan kathēmenoi*) lends to the intentionality of the arrangement since it seems necessary for the chiasmic structure, not the narrative proper. Further, the chiasmic structure does not compete with other structural markers and, in fact, ends the paragraph which starts in 2:1 (the next paragraph in 2:5 is marked with *de*). Verse 1 functions to establish a new narrative setting in Luke's usual style of using non-aorist verbs (or verbals). Verse 2, where the chiasmic structure commences, begins the simple description of the event on the narrative mainline using aorist verbs. Structural markers such as chiasmus serve to set apart

significant passages in ancient Greek texts, especially considering that most written works were written *scriptio continua*, a style reflected in Codex Sinaiticus, for example (see fig. 4 below).¹⁰

The second major factor which suggests authorial intentionality is the balanced arrangement of obvious parallels, both lexically (*eplēpōsen* and *eplēsthēsan*, *kathēmenoi* and *ekathisen*) and ideologically (*egeneto ... ēchos* and *erxanto lalein*). Of the seven lines, nearly every part of every clause corresponds with another. The inverted lines are nicely balanced, and the parallels occur in similar places within their respective clauses. The dense symmetry creates a near rhythmic effect as one reads the text aloud. Since it seems, then, that the structure is intentional, an investigation of its function is in order.

V. THE RHETORICAL FUNCTION OF CHIASMUS IN ACTS 2:2-4

There is debate in general as to the function of chiasmus in a text. Explicit references to chiasmus in ancient discussions of rhetoric do not seem to appear until the fourth century AD.¹¹ Thomson notes, however, that the modern understanding of chiasmus might be exemplified by certain features of a number of ancient *figurae elocutionis*, including *commutatio* and *figurae*.¹² As for function, Thomson suggests that in relation to the text, chiasmus might be used for artistic expression, as a mnemonic device, and/or as a structuring device; In relation to an argument, chiasmus might be used to aid in the movement of thought or to enhance content.¹³ Similarly, Welch gives four possible purposes of chiasmus: highlighting a main point by placing it in the center, marking center, marking significant contrasts, aiding memorization, or providing a sense of closure in a selected passage.¹⁴

¹⁰ The arrow in fig. 4 marks the beginning of Acts 2:2 in the text.

¹¹ George A. Kennedy points out what seems to be the first reference to the term in Pseudo-Hermogenes which he dates around the fourth century AD; see Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 28.

¹² Thomson, *Chiasmus*, 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34–41.

¹⁴ John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999), 162.



Fig. 4. Acts 2:2-4 in Codex Sinaiticus.¹⁵

In regard to Acts 2:2-4, could the chiasmic structure have been utilized for aid in memorization? The density and symmetry would certainly lend to its use as a mnemonic device. But how does one determine whether it was ever used this way? It is impossible to assert one way or another. Perhaps Luke was not the originator of the chiasmic structure and the dense arrangement in Acts 2:2-4 was present in an earlier source that Luke utilizes. In this case, the arrangement might reflect an early Christian formulation of the Pentecost event that was easily memorized. Again, it is impossible to prove. It seems that the case for Lukan origination of the chiasmic arrangement is more compelling, however, as the following paragraphs will attempt to show.

Two observations relating to the immediate context of Acts 2:2-4 are now in order. First, in regard to structural functions, it has already been established that the chiasm ends the paragraph started in 2:1. Further, the *inclusio* established by A and A' nicely encloses the account of the

¹⁵ Note that figure 4 depicts only a portion of the relevant page in Codex Sinaiticus. The right two columns of Greek text which appear on the original page have been omitted.

descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Second, if the chiasm successfully marks off the account as significant, then the chiasmic structure may serve to highlight the climactic fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit anticipated in Acts 1:5 and 1:8. This possibility will be investigated further below, especially as it relates to Luke-Acts as a whole.

In the broader context of Luke-Acts, Luke has a theological motivation to emphasize the manifestation of the Spirit, especially as it is related in the center of the chiasm— *kai ōphthēsan autois diamerizomenai glōssai hōsei pyros*. Luke’s motivation and purpose for writing Acts seem to lie in the purpose statement of the first volume in Luke 1:1–4.¹⁶ Here Luke states that his purpose for writing (1:3) is *hina epignōs peri hōn katēchēthēs logōn tēn asphaleisan* —“in order that you might recognize the certainty of words concerning which you have been instructed” (1:4). Though commentators disagree as to the significance of this statement and the meaning of *tēn asphaleisan*, many still agree that Luke is attempting to provide assurance to his audience—regarding major events of the Jesus/early-church tradition which he will go on to record in Luke-Acts.¹⁷ Luke’s purpose is sometimes construed as “social legitimation” of one sort or another—perhaps legitimation related to Roman rule, Gentile inclusion in the church, God’s faithfulness to Israel, or a number of other issues.¹⁸ George Bonnah has recently argued that

¹⁶ There are essentially three views regarding the unity of Luke and Acts, the first and second of which are compatible with the argument presented in this article: (1) The two comprise two-volumes of the same literary project (a common view in recent decades, argued as early as Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* [New York: Macmillan, 1927]); (2) Acts is composed as a sequel to Luke (or is similarly related), but the two do not represent a singular planned project (see Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993]); (3) Luke and Acts are written by different authors, and therefore any unity between the two must be explained without reference to shared authorship (see Patricia Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence* [SNTSMS 145; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009]).

¹⁷ Loveday Alexander, for instance, suggests that 1:4 may just be a “conventional afterthought.” See Alexander, *The Preface to Luke’s Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS 78; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142. For a recent discussion of the meaning of $\square\sigma\phi\square\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha$ along with a new proposal, see Rick Strelan, “A Note on $\square\sigma\phi\square\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha$ (Luke 1.4),” *JSNT* 30.2 (2007): 163–171.

¹⁸ See Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden, Germany: Brill, 1992); Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-*

the author of Luke-Acts uses the Holy Spirit to “legitimate his narrative” in two ways: (1) The author’s presentation of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture; and (2) The author’s presentation of the Holy Spirit’s responsibility in the church’s mission (as one who empowers and directs).¹⁹

In regard to the relationship between the Spirit and Scripture, Bonnah discusses two passages in which Septuagint quotations are attributed to the Spirit and suggests that the two form an *inclusio* around the book of Acts (1:16; 28:25). He thus asserts, “The Holy Spirit...is responsible for all that the narrator has to relate to Theophilus and the entire [*sic*] readers of Acts.”²⁰ While this conclusion may be a bit of an overstatement, Luke certainly uses the Holy Spirit to validate a number of things in Luke-Acts, including divine promises, ministry (as seen in John the Baptist, Jesus, and a number of characters in Acts), and most significantly, to validate Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God (see esp. Acts 2:33). Indeed, Luke’s portrayal of the Holy Spirit throughout Luke-Acts, including the narration of the Pentecost event, seems to relate often to the purpose of writing given in Luke 1:4.

Related to this is one of the primary ways Luke seems to fulfill his purpose for writing—through an emphasis on the sovereignty of God, especially as demonstrated in the fulfillment of divine promises. In this regard, Bock states that “the center of Luke’s concern is a detailed discussion of God’s plan . . . ” which is “. . . supported by the note of promise and fulfillment in the Gospel and Acts, especially as it relates to the Scriptures.”²¹ Similarly, Talbert speaks of promise-fulfillment in terms of the fulfillment of prophecy, observing that prophecies are made through three channels in Luke-Acts: the Jewish Scriptures, living prophets, and heavenly beings.²² He concludes: “The evangelist takes

Acts (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1972); R. L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation* (SBLMS 33; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987).

¹⁹ George Kwame Agyei Bonnah, *The Holy Spirit: A Narrative Factor in the Acts of the Apostles* (SBB 58; Stuttgart, Germany: Verlag Katholishes Bibelwerk, 2007), 266, 269–390.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

²¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 27–28.

²² Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (rev. ed.; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 263–64; cf. William Kurz who sees promises or prophecies in two categories: (1) biblical promises; and (2) prophecies of biblical characters within the narrative—Kurz, “Promise and Fulfillment in Hellenistic Jewish Narratives and in Luke and Acts,” in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s*

pains to show its fulfillment in the course of his narrative.”²³ The following paragraphs will attempt to trace this promise-fulfillment theme as it relates to the Holy Spirit and Pentecost.

One of the major prophetic promises in the Luke-Acts narrative is introduced in Luke 3:16 in the words of John the Baptist: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Some debate exists as to whether or not this is a reference to the account of Pentecost presented in Acts 2.²⁴ In view of the similar reference to the Pentecost baptism by Jesus in Acts 1:5—“Because John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not after many of these days”—it would seem strange if Luke did not intend for the link between Luke 3:16 and Acts 2 to be made.²⁵ Turner is right to suggest that even if John the Baptist’s statement in Luke 3:16–17 anticipated eschatological judgment, John’s viewpoint must be distinguished from the viewpoint of the narrator himself.²⁶ Turner concludes: “Luke himself came to see the Baptist’s promise of 3.16–17 fulfilled in an unanticipated way, mainly beyond Pentecost (Acts 1.5; 11.16).”²⁷

Luke has Jesus hinting at the promise of the Holy Spirit in Luke 11:13: “. . . how much more will your Father from heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” Later, Jesus anticipates the presence of the Spirit with the disciples as he describes a future time of persecution: “For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that hour what you must say” (Luke 12:12). At the end of the Gospel, Jesus makes a final statement to his disciples: “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but you remain in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (24:49). This power from on high is surely a reference to the promise—the Holy Spirit whom Jesus will send. In addition, note that the word translated “remain” (*kathisate*) in Luke 24:49 is the same verb which describes the action of the Holy Spirit (in terms of “tongues as fire”) in relation to the disciples in Acts 2:3 (*kai ekathisen eph’ hena*

Legacy (vol. 1 of *Luke the Interpreter of Israel*; ed. David P. Moessner; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999): 147–70.

²³ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 263–64.

²⁴ For a helpful discussion of the issues, see Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (JPTSUP 9; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 170–87.

²⁵ Further support for a link between Luke 3:16 and Acts 2 may come from συμπληροῦσθαι in Acts 2:1. Tannehill argues that the infinitive clause suggests the fulfillment of the prophecies about the coming Spirit in Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8. See Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles*; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 26–27.

²⁶ Turner, *Power from on High*, 186–87.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

hekaston autōn). Further, as established above, this clause in Acts 2:3 corresponds in the chiasmic arrangement with the relative clause in the previous verse: *hou ēsan kathēmenoi*. Thus, it is at least possible that a wordplay of sorts exists between the command to “sit” (*kathisate*) in wait for the Holy Spirit in Luke 24:49, the “sitting” (*kathēmenoi*) of the disciples in the house in Jerusalem in Acts 2:2, and the fulfillment of the earlier promise as the tongues of fire “sit” (*ekathisen*) on the disciples in Acts 2:3.

Recalling Talbert’s assertion that Luke takes pains to demonstrate the fulfillment of promises made in the Old Testament, by living prophets, or by heavenly beings, it should be noted that the promise of the Holy Spirit is attested in Luke-Acts at least in the former two channels. The designation of the Holy Spirit as “the promise” (*epangelia*) in Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4, and Acts 2:33, 39 is significant and likely harkens back to Old Testament promises of a new covenant (cf. Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26–27). Jesus also participates in the act of promising the Spirit in Luke 24:49 and certainly in Acts 1:5, 8. As Peter follows up the Pentecost baptism with a sermon, he concludes that Jesus himself has poured forth the Spirit (Acts 2:33). In fact, it seems that Peter is arguing that the manifestation of the Spirit witnessed by his audience (2:33c—*ho hymeis [kai] blepete kai akouete*) supports the fact that Jesus has been exalted (2:33a—*tē dexia oun tou theou hpsōtheis*). These early Christological assertions in the book of Acts are essential to Luke’s overall agenda of enabling his audience “to recognize the certainty of words concerning which [they] have been instructed” (Luke 1:4).²⁸

In light of the fact that Luke emphasizes the promise-fulfillment motif in reference to the Holy Spirit, one must ask: Why might Luke emphasize the idea at the center of the chiasm in Acts 2:2–4 (i.e., *kai ōphthēsan autois diamerizomenai glōssai hōsei pyros*)? It seems that Luke wants to bring the focus of the reader to the moment in which the baptism of the Spirit was made manifest (*ōphthēsan autois*). The extremities of the chiasm also refer to manifestations of the Spirit—first to the initial entrance of the Holy Spirit into the house (*egeneto...ēchos*), and finally to the phenomenon of tongues produced by the Spirit (*erxanto lalein heterais glōssais*).

The center of the chiasm is unique in that Luke emphasizes a distinct moment of manifestation. The aorist passive *ōphthēsan* indicates a simple event on the narrative mainline, namely that tongues distributed as fire “appeared to them.” Arguably, the anticipation of the subject of *ōphthēsan* throws the focus of the reader forward to the description of the

²⁸ Cf. William S. Kurz, S. J., “Hellenistic Rhetoric in the Christological Proof of Luke-Acts,” *CBQ* 42.2 (1980): 171–95.

manifestation (the subject of the verb), *diamerizomenai glōssai hōsei pyros*. While the significance of the event ultimately rests in the speaking of tongues, Luke takes a special interest in highlighting extraordinary supernatural events that are witnessed by others (cf. Acts 2:22, 32, 33; 3:9; 15; 4:13, 33). Thus, the appearance of the distribution of tongues as fire is the climactic fulfillment of the promise of the baptism of the Spirit first mentioned in Luke 3:16, a promise which will arguably continue to be fulfilled as new converts repent and believe throughout the book of Acts.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article has proposed a chiasmic structure in Acts 2:2-4, determined the high probability that the arrangement reflects authorial intentionality, and proposed and evaluated possible functions of the arrangement in the immediate context of Acts 2 and the broader context of Luke-Acts. The possibility that the dense chiasm was present in the author's source for the Pentecost account has been rejected based on arguments for the probability of Lukan origination. The rhetorical function of chiasmus in the passage has been argued in view of the promise-fulfillment motif in Luke-Acts, especially as the motif relates to the Holy Spirit. In employing chiasmus in Acts 2:2-4, Luke desires to emphasize the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at the moment of the Holy Spirit baptism to indicate a climactic fulfillment of an earlier promise introduced in Luke 3:16 on the lips of John the Baptist and recollected in Acts 1:5 on the lips of Jesus. This is in accordance with Luke's overarching purpose of providing certainty to his readers regarding the Jesus/early-church tradition, as observed in the preface of Luke-Acts (Luke 1:1-4).

Trinitarian Theology's Exegetical Basis: A Dogmatic Survey



FRED SANDERS*

*Associate Professor of Theology
Torrey Honors Institute, Biola University
La Mirada, CA 90639
fred.sanders@biola.edu*

One of the chief obligations laid upon trinitarian theology in our time is that it renders the doctrine of the Trinity with unprecedented clarity as a *biblical* doctrine, or, to speak more precisely, as a doctrine that is in the Bible. If there ever was a time when theology could afford to hurry past this task, with an impatient wave of the hand in the general direction of scripture, that time is not now. It is not enough to show that the doctrine is capable of harmonizing with biblical themes, or to settle for the double-negative claim that it is at least not unbiblical. Nor can we any longer afford to displace the weight of this burden onto a temporary resting place like tradition or the consent of all the faithful, lest that prop suffer the strains of bearing what it was never intended to support. Nor, finally, can we encumber this doctrinal field with a jumble of unworthy and unserious arguments and illustrations. For we have come to a stage of crisis with regard to this doctrine. A prominent feature of the current era is the growing unpersuasiveness and untenability of the traditional proof texts that were used to establish and demonstrate the doctrine. In this context, it is imperative that whenever we handle the doctrine of the

*Dr. Sanders is the author *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* forthcoming in August from Crossway Publishers. He has written and published extensively on the doctrine of the Trinity, including the entry on that central Christian doctrine for *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Trinity, we handle it as a doctrine that is both known to be and shown to be biblical.

I. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AS A HELPER IN THE TASK OF EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

In the middle ages, theologians like Thomas Aquinas warned against using weak arguments for sacred doctrines, lest the believer be exposed to the *irrisioem infidelium*,¹ the mockery of unbelievers, when they see us believing Christian claims on risibly inadequate grounds. It is the task of this paper to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is, in fact, well grounded in the gospel and well attested in the Scriptures, and, furthermore, that this doctrine was not waiting for any new arguments from the theological journals before it attained credibility. Considered in itself, the doctrine is already credible and biblical. Nevertheless, trinitarianism as it exists in the minds of most believers, many Biblical scholars, and some theologians in our time is a jumble of highly suspect proof texts, unarticulated assumptions, buried premises, loud non-sequiturs, and obtuse analogies. It is a congeries of Hebrew divine plurals, shamrocks, Melchizedeks, ice cubes, and random occurrences of the number three in Bible stories. In the field of Biblical studies, the overall trend of sober historical-grammatical labors has been toward the gradual removal of the trinitarian implications of passage after passage. Some of these passages were, in fact, never anything but trinitarian mirages: 1 John 5's "three that bear witness in heaven," for example, was rightly dismantled by the first generation of textual criticism. Other texts, like those where the word *monogenes* is used, are still matters of contention because of the disparity between the traditional and the modern translations. But all the proofs have descended into the valley of divided details without clear connections that would bind them into a recognizable doctrine, much less warrant the average New Testament scholar, acting in his or her professional capacity, to believe that God is the Trinity.

The service that systematic theology can provide in the present state of disorder is not to do the exegesis itself, nor to dictate in advance what the exegetes are required to find. The lines of authority in the shared, interdisciplinary task of Christian theology do not run in that direction, nor with such directness. But the theologian can draw attention to the

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *S.T.* 1.32.1 resp. In context, his point is that this kind of mockery is the consequence of trying to prove the revealed doctrine of the Trinity using arguments from natural reason; he does not have in view the question of the worthiness of individual arguments drawn from scripture.

larger structures within which the exegetical laborers can do their skilled work. My hope is that a survey and description of the proper foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity can make it plain where meaningful work is to be done by qualified investigators. It is these larger structures that make sense of the individual bits of information that go into the doctrine of the Trinity. We will come at last to those bits of information, but there are two primary dogmatic structures we must first attend to. One is the trinitarian hinge between the Old and New Testaments, the canonical nexus which is the happy hunting ground for trinitarian theology. But that hinge is situated within another, more comprehensive structure which is revelation. By “revelation” I mean the character of biblical revelation itself as a manifold union of historical event and inspired textual witness.

But this manifold unity of biblical revelation is precisely what modern theology has struggled unsuccessfully to hold together. One of the achievements of twentieth-century trinitarian thought was the refocusing of attention onto the economy of salvation, but this led many prominent theologians since Karl Rahner to attempt to derive the doctrine of the Trinity entirely from the events of salvation history, as distinct from the scriptural witness. In attempting this transcendental deduction of the doctrine of God from the events of the economy of salvation, it is clear that these theologians were in reaction against the style of atomistic text-collation that characterized biblicistic proofs of the doctrine in previous generations, proofs of the sort that gather up the scattered arguments of Scripture and combine them to produce the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, to a remarkable degree, modern Trinitarians have felt forced to choose between event on the one hand, or Scripture on the other hand, as the basis of the doctrine.

Neither approach is adequate to have produced the doctrine of the Trinity in the first place, and neither serves fully to explain or defend it. The doctrine of the Trinity is rather a conceptual foregrounding of the entire matrix of economic revelation, and must be approached from a place in which all the events of the economy and all the words of Scripture hang together with an inner unity. It is senseless to try to retain the result of the early church’s holistic interpretation of Scripture—the perception of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity—without cultivating, in a way appropriate for our own time, the interpretative practice which produced that result. The one pre-modern interpretative practice which is crucial for the doctrine of the Trinity is not the infamous allegorical exegesis, nor the florid development of the *sensus plenior*, nor the other shockingly holistic or quaintly self-referential moves the church fathers

were always perpetrating with Scripture²—moves which, as Bonaventure said of the humility of St. Francis, are portents more to be admired than imitated.³ No, the single crucial interpretative practice, both for exegesis and for systematic theology, is attention to the economy of salvation as a coherent whole.

The term “economy of salvation” is an ancient one, but it has been revived in contemporary theological literature and become a piece of theological jargon, so let us unfold its meaning and use a bit. The economy of salvation is the flawlessly-designed way that God administers his gracious self-giving. When God gives himself to be the salvation of his people, he does not do so in a haphazard or random way. God's *agape* is never sloppy. He has a plan, and he follows a procedure that is both premeditated and perfectly proportioned. When Paul talks about God's economy (*oikonomia*), his point is that God is a supremely wise administrator who has arranged the elements of his plan with great care. To give our attention to God's way of carrying out this economy is to be instructed in the mystery of his will, and to gain insight into the eternal purpose of his divine wisdom.

The instruction that we receive from scanning the economy of God is a deliberate sequence of lessons from God. God has, in fact, carried out the central events of the economy with definite communicative intent, the intent of making himself known to us in them. The economy of salvation is simultaneously the economy of revelation, which teaches us things about God because God intends it to do so. Specifically, God's intention is for the economy of salvation to teach us who he is. It is in the central events of this economy that God has actively and intentionally expressed his character and identified himself.

These central events of the economy are the sending of the Son and the Spirit. The apostles met these two persons, sent by the unmet first person. Their coming is the historical event, the first aspect of revelation. But the church was also clearly told the meaning of this event in words, the form of sound doctrine that was not from human initiative, but was breathed out by God through men moved by God. We have been notified

² Perhaps the modern retrieval of patristic exegesis has already passed through its enthusiastic phase and is entering a phase of greater caution. A book that is instructively located at the boundary between the two phases is John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno's *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

³ Bonaventure, *Life of Francis*, 6:2. Available in the *Bonaventure* volume of *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (trans. Ewert Cousins; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 230.

that in these last days, God has spoken by a son, and that the name of God into which we baptize and are baptized is the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We did not invent these terms as our best guess at the meaning of the economy. The first Christians received these propositions from the same God who gave himself in the history of the sending of the Son and the Spirit. Filled with that knowledge and insight, classic trinitarianism learned to interpret rightly what had occurred, and took up the task of reading Scripture for further clarity about the Trinity.

II. THE CANONICAL HINGE AND PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

This description of the relationship between event and text brings us to the trinitarian hinge between the two testaments. The actual revelation, strictly speaking, of the Trinity was the historical sendings of the Son and the Spirit. The documents of the Old Testament always looked forward to the revelation, while the documents of the New Testament already looked back to the revelation. This observation may have a Barthian ring to it, but that is only because Karl Barth was right on this point. To banish the specter of a neo-orthodox tendency to drive a wedge between Scripture and revelation, between the word of God on one hand the Bible on the other, let me assure you that this event-word distinction is central to the trinitarian theology of no less conservative a bibliologist than B. B. Warfield.

In his classic essay on the doctrine of the Trinity in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*,⁴ Warfield rather oddly affirmed that the doctrine is biblical, but denied that it was revealed in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. “We cannot speak of the doctrine of the Trinity,” said Warfield,

as revealed in the New Testament, any more than we can speak of it as revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written before its revelation; the New Testament after it. The revelation itself was made not in word but in deed. It was made in the incarnation of God the Son, and the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit. The relation of the two Testaments to this revelation is in the one case that of preparation for it, and in the other that of product of it. The revelation itself is embodied just in Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁵

⁴ Reprinted in his *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 22-59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Historically speaking, this observation is trivial enough: first comes Jesus, then the Gospels. But two significant corollaries follow from the sequence event-then-document. First, the sequence accounts for the oblique way in which the New Testament contains trinitarian elements. The authors of the New Testament seem to be already in possession of a trinitarian understanding of God, one that they serenely decline to bring to full articulation. The clearest trinitarian statements in the New Testament do not occur in the context of teachings about God or Christ, but as almost casual allusions or brief digressions in the middle of discourse about other things.

The second corollary is that we should not seek to construct the doctrine of the Trinity from the words of the New Testament alone, where it is not properly revealed so much as presupposed. Instead, we must develop hermeneutical approaches and exegetical skills that let us read the New Testament in the spirit of its own composition: with constant reference back to the revelation in Christ and the Spirit. Our Trinitarian theology should be demonstrated from Scripture, but in a way that recognizes the priority of the actual revelation in events, and the dependent character of the inspired texts.

The third corollary is that we should expect the strongest arguments for the doctrine of the Trinity to be found along those seams where the Old Testament's prospective witness and the New Testament's retrospective witness are both present in overlap. That is, the doctrine of the Trinity is best established in an extended thematic study of the way the New Testament uses the Old Testament in its talk of God and salvation. This happy fact is a link between the state of scholarship in the twenty-first century and the second, as we are currently living in a kind of golden age of mature studies of the use of Old Testament by the New Testament.⁶ And in the second century with the ancient Jewish canon and the recent documents of the New Testament before him, Irenaeus of Lyons wrote a short, classic theological work⁷ in which he argued two major points: The Bible is one coherent book in two testaments, and God is triune. The prophetic and apostolic witnesses, together, determine the shape and certainty of the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁶ On top of the wealth of journal articles, see the comprehensive reference work entitled *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); and the important survey *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

⁷ Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997). The work is from about the year 175.

C. Kavin Rowe has recently argued that “the two-testament canon read as one book presses its interpreters to make ontological judgments about the trinitarian nature of the one God *ad intra* on the basis of its narration of the act and identity of the biblical God *ad extra*.”⁸ Indeed, he says that “it is safe to say that the doctrine of the Trinity would never have arisen on the basis of the Old or New Testaments in isolation.”⁹

This trinitarian hinge is the place for important work on the exegetical basis of trinitarian theology, and research in this area will be able to locate and identify a host of new demonstrations of the elements of trinitarian theology. The field is wide and requires the implements of professional exegetes for its cultivation, so I name only a few instances here to indicate the sort of work that is possible. C. Kavin Rowe’s own treatment of the name LORD in the narrative of Luke-Acts is one example of the new approaches proving fruitful in recent years;¹⁰ Richard Bauckham’s reading of how Isaiah’s theology informs John’s Gospel is another.¹¹ The baptismal command of Matthew 28 seems to be a re-interpretation of Daniel 7’s vision of the Ancient of Days, the Son of Man, and the heavenly host, blended with the Levitical blessing of Numbers 6 with its threefold occurrence of the revealed name of God followed by the summary, “Thus shall you put my name on the people.”¹²

There is great promise here. In fact, it seems to me that creative new ways of demonstrating the doctrine of the Trinity are emerging even more rapidly than the old traditional proofs fell away. This changing of the guard need not be alarming, nor is it a signal that Christian theologians are merely ideologically motivated to find any arguments that serve to prop up their ready-made conclusions, being clever enough to devise new ones as fast as the old wear out. Instead, we, like the more ancient generations of Christians, are under the authority and guidance of the Word of God and are walking along after it, attempting to articulate for our own intellectual cultures, and in our own idioms and canons of

⁸ C. Kavin Rowe, “Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics,” *ProEccl* 11.3 (Summer 2002), 308.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁰ C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The LORD in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹² Benedict T. Viviano, O. P., “The Trinity in the Old Testament, from Daniel 7:13-14 to Matthew 28:19,” in *Trinity – Kingdom – Church: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitat-Verlag, 2001).

persuasiveness, what we see and understand. We are all catching up with the Bible. Our task in this age is not to cast about looking for ways to replace yesterday's superannuated arguments, but to articulate as faithfully as possible what we find in Scripture.

Most of the work ahead in re-articulating trinitarian theology's exegetical basis will be verse-to-verse combat, working back and forth across that trinitarian hinge between the testaments. However, we can describe the overall pattern into which the detailed investigations will fall. They will fill out what I call retrospective prosoponic identification and convergent hyperfulfillment.

III. RETROSPECTIVE PROSOPONIC IDENTIFICATION

Taking our stand on the ground of the New Testament, looking back through its witness to the events of the incarnation and Pentecost, we are able to ask relevant questions of the Old Testament witness. Having met Christ and the Spirit, we can look for them in the Old Testament in a way we could not have without having met them in person. This practice is retrospective prosoponic identification. It names a strategy for reading the Old Testament initiated in the New Testament and carried forward by the post-apostolic church. Patristics scholar Michael Slusser has described it in similar terms as prosopographic exegesis, a "practice of discerning the speakers or prosopa in reading scripture."¹³ The right question in various complex Old Testament passages is, in general, "who is talking?" Slusser says that for the church fathers this inquiry after prosopa was not only "a tool for literary analysis and historical identification, but also and especially one of spiritual perception and theological elaboration." One reason this is important is that this practice is the source of basic trinitarian vocabulary like the word "person." It was "the source of the use of the word person/prosopon in Christian theology." The most striking instance of the prosoponic question being applied as a reading strategy in the New Testament itself is the Ethiopian eunuch asking about Isaiah 53, "of whom does the prophet speak by this? Of himself or of someone else?"

Let me underline, however, the retrospective aspect of this reading strategy: Only because of the advent of Christ and the Spirit can we seek to go back and identify them. If we immerse ourselves in the Old Testament world itself, without reference to our place in progressive revelation, we would not draw securely trinitarian conclusions. For instance, the Old Testament is gloriously replete with an array of poetic

¹³ Michael Slusser, "The Exegetical Roots of Trinitarian Theology," *TS* 49.3 (1988), 463.

personifications of God's presence and power. God characteristically uses evocative circumlocutions to describe the way he is personally present and active among his people: Moses asks God for a promise to accompany him, and God responds that he will send his angel, in whom he will put his name. God is present by presence; "the presence" becomes a way of referring to God. His hand, voice, will, wisdom, glory, arm, breath, law, and so on, are all put forth as his way of being God with us. And sometimes these terms are strikingly personified or hypostasized. To take the trinitarian step of selecting two of them as actual persons, distinct subsistences eternally abiding within the one divine nature, seems arbitrary and capricious. If we are to promote any of these "figures of speech" to full personhood, why not all of them, leading to a dozen persons in the Godhead?

The answer can only be that we are to approach the Old Testament from this side, asking not, "which of these personifications is somebody?" but "can Christ and the Spirit, whom we have met at the turning of the ages, be picked out retrospectively from among the many rays of God's old covenant glory?" And in asking this, we are not simply trying to interpret the events of God's self-revelation, but also the text of his self-revelation. For we are told clearly enough that it is the Word who became flesh. We may also affirm that the wisdom became flesh, or that the arm of the Lord was revealed in Christ, but in each case we are only underlining the same retrospective prosoponic identification.

The principle obviously needs to be extended to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This pneumatological extension is not simply parallel to the work done with the Son of God, because the Spirit is a different person from the Son, and his difference is registered on both sides of the canonical hinge. In the Old Testament, the range of possible allusions to him and the relevant semantic domains are considerably more extensive and indefinite than is the case with the Son. And in the New Testament, the Spirit continues to be revealed in more oblique ways, always with reference to the more direct manifestation of the Son. Nevertheless, the exegetical materials are sufficient for carrying out the pneumatological extension of the process of retrospective prosoponic identification. When this is done at a sufficient level of detail and correlated systematically with the Christological investigations, trinitarian interpretation reaches a kind of conceptual stabilization. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are discernible in their structured, revelatory, economic relations to each other. This pattern of relation can then be recognized as a free self-communication of God in salvation history. Because I am only undertaking an initial dogmatic survey here for the guidance of exegetical studies, it is prudent to prescind from the full-blown, elaborate trinitarianism that has historically resulted from

successful and thorough-going exegesis: the eternal immanent processions which ground the temporal missions.

IV. CONVERGENT HYPERFULFILLMENT

The second pattern to be observed is the way lines of thought which seem to emerge from the Old Testament witness along trajectories which diverge from each other, are in fact revealed to have been converging toward each other in God's economy of salvation and revelation. Thus in the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit, all God's ways are fulfilled, but they are more than fulfilled, or hyperfulfilled, because they all converge on the events at the trinitarian hinge of the canon. This convergent hyperfulfillment is most manifest in Jesus, who is both David's son and David's lord, the root and the branch of Jesse. Taught to look for a messianic son, a suffering servant, a prophet greater than Moses, and the Lord himself, the apostles met them all in one person. Some of this convergent hyperfulfillment can just be asserted on the basis of the personal advent of the Son and Spirit. But for the exegetical case, much depends on demonstrating that, according to the witness of the New Testament, the Lord and the apostles understood the Old Testament in precisely this manner. They drew these conclusions in arguments about David's son being David's lord (Matt 22:41-46), in their use of layered Old Testament fulfillments, and in numerous other ways. And much depends on showing that even the highest points of the Old Testament witness manifest an awareness of the coming convergence: That Psalm 110 (the text mobilized by Jesus in Matt 22) is already drawing together priest and king, and that the later chapters of Isaiah envision a servant whose completed work is indistinguishable from the presence of the Lord in person, matters a great deal. Convergence discernible within the Old Testament witness is the ground of convergent hyperfulfillment in the New Testament witness, which alone enables a theological interpretation broad enough to establish the doctrine of the Trinity.

Traditionally, appeals to convergent hyperfulfillment have centered on the Christological aspect of the biblical witness. But one of the ways that the categories of classic trinitarian theology can inform exegetical investigations is by reminding us that the pneumatological aspect is equally significant. In fact, the locus of hyperfulfillment is not simply the coming of the Son, but the coming of the Son and the Spirit together in the fullness of time on the mission of God the Father. The messiah is the anointed one. If the symbolism of anointing is kept in mind, and the Spirit's role in anointing functions as a live metaphor, then the best term for the point of convergence is that it is *messianic*: The Son who is

constituted as Christ by the anointing of the Spirit is the focal point. This reminder is very helpful in keeping the hyperfulfillment argument from converging on such a narrow point (Jesus considered abstractly, in isolation from the Spirit and the Father) that it comes to seem forced and artificial. That sort of artificiality would only open the doctrine up again to the *irrisioem infidelium*, but the solution is to be more comprehensively trinitarian rather than less so.

It should also be emphasized that all of the interpretive maneuvers we have outlined so far, from negotiating the canonical hinge, to working out retrospective prosoponic identifications, to tracing the lines of convergent hyperfulfillment, are only possible because of an implicit logic that is eschatological. These moves are only possible in the case of a definitive and unsurpassable self-revelation of God, and would lose their persuasiveness and necessity if they were only provisional developments along an ongoing trajectory. The opening passage of the book of Hebrews sketches out the fundamentally eschatological logic that is to be followed. According to Heb 1:1-2, the pluriform modes of divine disclosure in the Old Testament are all gathered, fulfilled, and surpassed in the coming of the one who antedates creation itself, yet whose personal identity as the all-inheriting Son of the Father has only been unveiled eschatologically. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” All the major authors of the New Testament advance similar claims to the finality of what they have seen in Christ, and that eschatological definitiveness is what makes the trinitarian interpretive moves not just possible, but urgent and necessary. There are no other hinges in the canon to compare with the one between the covenants; there are no further divine persons to identify retrospectively; and there is only one convergence-point of the lines of messianic hyperfulfillment. Käsemann famously asserted that “apocalyptic is the mother of all Christian theology,”¹⁴ and it is true in the case of the exegetical foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Eschatology is the mother of all trinitarian theology.

V. THE PIECEMEAL PROOF

Finally, the front line of trinitarianism’s exegetical demonstration is going to continue to be a synthetic interpretive move in which the parts

¹⁴ Ernst Käsemann, “The Beginnings of Christian Theology,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (trans. W. J. Montague; ed. Ernst Käsemann; London, UK: SCM Press, 1969), 82-107.

of the doctrine are identified and assembled. This traditional mode of demonstration can be called the piecemeal proof. Practitioners prove the various elements of the doctrine and then assemble them. This mode of argument, while it can be carried out in an uninspiring and disjointed way, is nevertheless appropriate to the character of trinitarian revelation, because the various propositions are not assembled thematically in any single tract of Scripture. For this reason, it will always be appropriate to demonstrate, in serial fashion, that the Son is divine, then that the Spirit is a distinct person, then that they are not the Father, and to conclude by re-establishing that there is only one God. These arguments then combine to yield a set of propositions which must be reconciled with each other, resulting in a doctrine of one God in three persons.

However, it is worth remembering that the piecemeal proof has a naturally fragmentary tendency, and that as a result it colludes with the spirit of the modern age in a way that does not serve the needs of trinitarian theology. Emphasizing one sub-topic at a time, it can only with difficulty climb back up to the level of the comprehensive judgment necessary to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. The whole thrust of this article, with the hermeneutical maneuvers it commends, is to reinstate large, comprehensive structures of meaning. The doctrine of the Trinity requires such comprehensive patterns of thought, and does not thrive unless those patterns are cultivated. Trinitarianism was at its lowest ebb in modern theology when it was thought to stand or fall with a series of individual arguments, or even to await the conclusions drawn from the inductive gathering of numerous exegetical fragments. A case in point is the Anglican philosopher and priest Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), whose 1712 book *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* undertook an exhaustive investigation of every verse of Scripture which provides evidence for trinitarianism. Clarke printed and commented on these verses in his massive book, and gathered them under the headings of fifty-five propositions constitutive of his construal of scriptural trinitarianism. This method, though bearing some resemblance to earlier projects, was characteristically modernist: it was the kind of inductive approach one would expect from a philosophical member of Newton's circle during the period of the exhilarating rise and formulation of modern science. Clarke's approach to the Trinity is an instance of an early modern tendency to press the methods of the natural sciences into service in every field, including fields where they are not methodologically appropriate. The doctrine of the Trinity is a particularly integral doctrine which cannot be formulated in the fragmentarily inductive way Clarke, or other critical moderns, attempted.

In particular, the most crucial conceptual step that must be taken is the move from the events of the economy of salvation to the eternal life

of God. Therefore, even while assembling the elements of the piecemeal proof, we must be especially sensitive to passages and lines of argument that drive us to the affirmation of the immanent Trinity. This is the crucial step, and it is a step taken with the fewest explicit and concise expressions: verses. And this is a warning about how the piecemeal proof is to be deployed. Because of the uniquely integral character of the doctrine of the Trinity, it resists being formulated bit by bit from fragmentary elements of evidence. The atomistic approach can never accomplish or ground the necessary transposition of the biblical evidence from the salvation-history level to the transcendent level of the immanent Trinity. Such a transposition requires first the ability to perceive all of the economic evidence at once, including the intricately structured relations among the three persons. As a coherent body of evidence, then, that economic information can be rightly interpreted as a revelation of God's own life. To make the jump from economy to Trinity, the interpreter must perceive the meaningful form of a threefold divine life circulating around the work of Christ. What psychologists of perception call a gestalt, a recognizably unified coherent form, is what the trinitarian interpreter must identify in the economy. This triune form, once recognized, can then be understood as enacting, among us, the contours of God's own triune life. He is among us what he is in himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is only an initial systematic-theological survey of the exegetical basis of trinitarian theology. It is not the last word, and is not intended to announce in advance, from the high table of dogmatics, what exegetes are supposed to go out and find in obedience to the claims of a system. But it does attempt to illuminate the fact that Christians, whatever their theological training, are not simply poring over Scripture as if for the first time, to see what we might find. We have been given guidance from a much higher table, about what we are to seek in God's holy word. And there is much still to be seen in that word, more than the theological tradition, pre-modern, modern, or post-modern, has yet succeeded in noting and articulating.¹⁵

¹⁵ This article is based on a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in New Orleans in 2009.

The Word Became Flesh: The Ethical Significance of Incarnation For Embryonic Stem Cell Research¹



JERRY A. JOHNSON*
Professor of Ethics and Theology
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
jjohnson@mbts.edu

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

—John 1:1 and 14

The gospel of progress . . . plays the Crucifixion backwards, as it were; in the beginning was the flesh, and the flesh became Word. In the light of this Logos in reverse, the quest for hope is the ultimate hopelessness; the pursuit of happiness, the certitude of despair; the lust for life, the embrace of death

—Malcolm Muggeridge²

*Dr. Johnson has been engaged in research, writing, and speaking about the sanctity of human life. This article is related to his Ph.D. dissertation, which was written in critique of Peter Singer's pro-animal/anti-human ethic that supports abortion, euthanasia, and embryonic stem cell research.

¹This article is an adaptation of a paper given by the author at the 61st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on November 20, 2009, entitled "The Word Became Flesh: What are the Ethical Implications of the Incarnation for Embryonic Stem Cell Research?"

²Malcolm Muggeridge, *Conversion: A Spiritual Journey* (London: Collins, 1988), 63.

Other things being equal, there is less reason for objecting to the use of an early human embryo—a being that has no brain, is not, and never has been conscious, and has no preferences of any kind—than there is for objecting to research on rats, who are sentient beings capable of preferring not to be in situations that are painful or frightening to them.

—Peter Singer³

I. “LOGOS IN REVERSE” VERSUS BIBLICAL INCARNATION

Last year, the cover of *Time* magazine promised to explain “How the Coming Revolution in Stem Cells Could Save Your Life.” As expected, the featured article happily announced “No more science in the shadows,” lamented “the dark days of the Bush Administration’s stem cell restrictions,” and celebrated Barak Obama’s campaign “promise to lift the research ban.”⁴

We have to admit that anything to “Save Your Life,” in the words of *Time*, sounds good on the face of it. But in this case, saving your life will require killing embryonic human life. Nevertheless, some say “it’s progress.” According to Malcolm Muggeridge, this “gospel of progress” is what we should expect from a materialistic milieu that has the “Logos in reverse.” Your life can be extended or enhanced, even if it costs the sacrifice of another human life, especially if the sacrificial human life can be explained away as potential, non-personal, tissue, leftover, etc. Seeking “the lust for life,” in this case extending one’s life at the cost of another human being’s embryonic life, actually results, says Muggeridge, in “the embrace of death.” It amounts to an ethic based upon incarnation “in reverse.”

The ethical implications of “reverse incarnation” are being played out now before us and are increasingly troubling. The disturbing results include destructive embryonic stem-cell research, abortion, and infanticide. Christians would do well to counter “reverse incarnation” by

³ Peter Singer, “Stem Cells and Immortal Souls,” *Free Inquiry* 20.2 (Spring 2000): 9.

⁴ The full cover title is more specific: “Diabetes, Heart Disease, Parkinson’s, How the Coming Revolution in Stem Cells Could Save Your Life,” *Time* (9 Feb 2009). Twice *Newsweek* magazine has featured similar language of “hope” and “promise” on its front cover. See “The Stem Cell Wars (Embryo Research vs. Pro-life Politics) There’s Hope for Alzheimer’s, Heart Disease, Parkinson’s and Diabetes. But Will Bush Cut Off the Money?” (9 July 2001), and “The Battle Over Stem Cells after Christopher Reeve: The Medical Promise and the Political Minefields,” (25 Oct 2004).

revisiting true incarnation, biblical incarnation.

The purpose of this article is to begin to explore how an incarnational ethic might inform the controversial issue of embryonic stem cell research. It assumes a three-fold concern. First, the debate over embryonic stem cell research is going to continue for the foreseeable future, in spite of the much-welcomed advances in adult stem cell research. Second, the 2005 Genetics and Public Policy Center poll revealed that half of conservative Christians favor embryonic stem cell research.⁵ Third, most Christian pro-life arguments have been based upon combating abortion and protecting the human fetus, not the embryo at the earliest stages. A new pro-life paradigm is needed to protect that life, which is based upon a macro-theme of the Bible (incarnation) and is also consistent with the micro-evidence of related texts on the same subject. This article is an introductory effort to identify a foundation for incarnational anthropology, to explore the application of that incarnational anthropology, and finally to survey some illustrations of this paradigm throughout the biblical record. It is assumed that the moral status of the fertilized egg, zygote, and embryo is the matter in question, and furthermore, that Christians need a scriptural and strong ethic to address that point.

II. FOUNDATIONS FOR INCARNATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY: O'DONOVAN, LEWIS, AND BARTH

Without any doubt, Oliver O'Donovan's *Resurrection and Moral Order* has enjoyed a dominant position as one of the most celebrated and influential works in Christian ethics for almost a quarter of a century.⁶ As the title and subtitle indicate, his "Outline for Evangelical Ethics" is based upon the resurrection. Specifically, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, O'Donovan sees "the reaffirmation of creation" and proposes it as "the starting-point" for Christian ethics.⁷ The resurrection theme is a gospel theme; it is his ethical mega-theme. O'Donovan is rooting ethics in the main lines of the gospel.

What is often overlooked in O'Donovan, and what will be most helpful here, is his secondary emphasis on incarnation. At one point he notes "the foundation of Christian ethics in the incarnation" and argues

⁵ Tom Storde, "Poll: Half of conservative Christians favor embryonic research," n.p. [cited 20 October 2005]. Online: <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=21863>.

⁶ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

that because “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, transcendent divine authority has presented itself as worldly moral authority.”⁸ O’Donovan explains: “in Christ the Word of God became flesh and took the cause of the world as his own cause.” As with the resurrection/gospel theme, he also writes of the incarnation: “the Christian gospel does proclaim that God has made himself at home in the world.”⁹ The discerning reader will infer that *The Resurrection and Moral Order* necessarily entails, and even presupposes, incarnation and moral order. From this starting point, O’Donovan has much to say about embryonic human life and fetal personhood that will be noted later. However at this juncture, it is telling that he is not the only Christian thinker that grounds ethics, and specifically theological anthropology, upon the incarnation. Moving from the general to the specific, a cloud of witnesses emerges.

So how have others gone from the incarnation, to ethics, to the moral status of the embryo? Reviewing even a popular definition of the incarnation, the implications are obvious. In *Mere Christianity*, part of C. S. Lewis’s apologetic appeal is his emphasis on the big themes of the gospel. Along with the resurrection, Lewis sought to describe the incarnation. In his signature style of profundity though simplicity, Lewis’s description of the incarnation contains an explicit reference to fetal personhood and an implicit one to embryonic personhood:

The Second Person in God, the Son, became human Himself: was born into the world as an actual man—a real man of a particular height, with hair of a particular colour, speaking a particular language, weighing so many stone. The Eternal Being, who knows everything and who created the universe, became not only a man but (before that) a baby, and before that a fetus inside a woman’s body. If you want to get the hang of it, think of how you would like to become a slug or a crab.¹⁰

Although Lewis is not arguing the point for fetal personhood, and certainly not a point against embryo destruction or even abortion, his explanation of the incarnation certainly implies the personhood of the fetus. Again, Lewis asserts that the incarnation means that “The Second Person in God, the Son became human . . . before that a fetus.” What about “before that” an embryo?

Some might protest this line of reasoning—projecting the incarnation of Christ, his personhood as fetus or embryo, upon other humans—

⁸ Ibid., 143.

⁹ Ibid., 158.

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 140.

claiming one cannot deduce from Jesus' embryonic or fetal personhood to others in general. In rebuttal to this line of argument, Karl Barth's method of theological anthropology seems apropos:

In our exposition of the doctrine of man we must always look in the first instance at the nature of man as it confronts us in the person of Jesus and only secondarily—asking and answering from this place of light—at the nature of man as that of every man and all other men.¹¹

Barth's approach mirrors O'Donovan's incarnation paradigm. If we want to know what it means to be truly human we must look to the God-Man, as man. His humanity should determine our anthropology. It is no secret that for Barth abortion was nothing other than murder, since, as Barth insists, "the unborn child, is from the very first a child. It is still developing and has no independent life. But it is a man and not a thing, nor a mere part of the mother's body."¹² In this specific context, Barth roots his argument more directly in the fact that human life was given by God and therefore belongs to God, and it is in that connection that his language becomes most passionate:

[W]e must underline the fact that he who destroys germinating life kills a man and thus ventures the monstrous thing of decreeing concerning the life and death of a fellow-man whose life is given by God and therefore, like his own, belongs to Him.¹³

III. APPLICATIONS OF INCARNATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY: TORRANCE, GEORGE, AND CAMERON

Barth's anthropology from above caught the interest of one of his translators, Thomas F. Torrance. Torrance argued that one of the crucial parallels to be found in the virginal conception of Jesus is that God's only Son became human flesh precisely at the point of conception. Beginning with our genes as an embryo, the Word has become flesh. Torrance asserted, "The Lord Jesus assumed our human nature, gathering up all its stages and healing them in his own human life, including conception."¹⁴ If the incarnation includes Christ's sharing in "all" of the "stages" of human life, certainly this would entail embryonic human life.

¹¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. Harold Knight et al.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), III.2 (p. 46).

¹² *Ibid.*, III.4 (p. 415).

¹³ *Ibid.*, III.4 (p. 416).

¹⁴ T. F. Torrance, *Test Tube Babies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984).

Torrance is not alone. Timothy George also finds the “central New Testament text” on the issue of abortion in the Johannine prologue. He mirrors Barth and cites Calvin as well on the method of defining anthropology via Christology. George turns to John 1:14:

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” This verse has tremendous implications for Christian anthropology for, as John Calvin wisely noted, the full meaning of the image of God can be nowhere better recognized than in the restoration of our corrupted nature in the incarnate Son of God, the second Adam, in whom alone our true and complete humanity is restored. (*Institutes* 1.15.4)¹⁵

George relates how much the phrase “the Word became flesh” would have contradicted the Greek and gnostic notions that disparaged matter as evil and thought it impossible for the Logos to become *sarx* (flesh). Yet the radical biblical claim of incarnation was so prominent in the New Testament that “Christians are admonished to regard as antichrist anyone who denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3).”

In contrast to this biblical motif of incarnation, George notes a modern “revival of gnostic anthropology in the modern movement for elective abortions.” He classifies Warren F. Metzler as a current day neognostic. As evidence, George produces this quotation from Metzler’s letter “Why Abortion Isn’t Murder,” in *First Things*:

Humans are actual spirits. The spirit exists prior to birth and will go on existing after the body dies. I propose that the spirit of a particular human enters the body along with the first breath of air. Not until the voluntary breath of the child is the full-fledged human present.¹⁶

Questions about the “voluntary” nature of the first breath aside, the above quote reveals one truth. George’s claim about current Gnosticism is not overkill. Perhaps if he is guilty of anything, it is understatement. On at least one level, first century Gnosticism was not as radical as its twenty-first century counterpart. While the Gnosticism confronting the early church claimed that God was too “great” spiritually to become

¹⁵ Timothy George, “Southern Baptist Heritage of Life,” in *Life at Risk: The Crises in Medical Ethics* (eds. Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 93.

¹⁶ Warren F. Metzler, “Why Abortion Isn’t Murder,” *First Things* 31 (March, 1993): 4, in George, “Heritage,” 94.

human, today's pro-abortion version claims that the human is too "great" personally to be present in an embryo or fetus. Surely, the distance between the human embryo and adult is not so great as the distance between God and man.

In any case, George documents that "In the face of the Gnostic disparagement of human reality, the early church pointed to the centrality of the Incarnation, confessing that Jesus Christ was truly (*alethos*) conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit; He was truly born in the manger of Bethlehem . . ." George's conviction is that today's church should do no less. When faced with "contemporary theories of human development which marginalize the sacred value of unborn human life," George insists the church ought to proclaim all the more firmly with Paul: "When the time had fully come God sent forth His Son, born of a woman (Gal 4:4 NIV)."¹⁷

Nigel Cameron applied this theological method when responding to the infamous pro-embryo destruction proposals of the Warnock Committee. Cameron maintained that "the fundamental Christian argument" for the pro-life position was based upon "an understanding of the status of embryonic human life; that it was at this point that the Son of God took human flesh, becoming incarnate *in utero* and in embryo."¹⁸ In addition, Cameron extended the point to include the notion of *imago Dei*:

If we accept a classical Christology we will of course want to go much further and affirm that since our Lord took human flesh first as a zygote, so in every zygote there is 'one of us' who bears the *imago Dei*.

On top of the image of God motif, Cameron adds the category of personhood:

In terms of Christian theology, the personhood of the early embryo as of the mature adult is rooted in the personhood of God—which is part of what possessing the 'image of God' means, that image which Christians believe to be coterminous with the genetic constitution of *Homo sapiens* in defining human being.

Clearly Cameron places great weight upon the ethical and doctrinal significance of the incarnation, expanding it to include not only

¹⁷ George, "Heritage," 94.

¹⁸ Nigel M. de S. Cameron, "The Embryo Debate," *Ethics & Medicine* 6.1 (1990): 4.

personhood, but also the *imago Dei*. From Torrance to George to Cameron, a practical pattern emerges for applying the theological method of incarnational anthropology.

Some specialists on the Trinity or the councils, especially Chalcedon, may wince at where this could lead. It is true that “The Word” who “became flesh” (John 1:14) was none other than the same “Word” who “was God” (John 1:1). If the incarnate Christ *in utero* was the second Person of the Trinity, is it heretical to argue from his personhood to the personhood of other human beings at the same stage? Is it a problem if we speak of Jesus as a human person at conception and a divine person? Does this threaten the Chalcedonian formula, “one person with two natures”? The answer is no.

However strongly one proclaims Chalcedon, Gordon Clark was right also to say about *the one person*, “Jesus Christ was and is both God and man, a divine person and a human person.”¹⁹ Carl F. H. Henry confirmed Clark’s view with great care and detail, embracing Chalcedon, but adding, “Christian orthodoxy has been convinced that two centers of knowledge and action in Jesus Christ need not mean dual personality, any more than three persons in the Godhead mean tritheism.”²⁰ Affirming the human personality of Jesus at conception does not equal Nestorianism. On the contrary, upholding the human personality of Jesus is an essential. Michael Drippe makes the fine point of distinction when he writes “Christ is the Person and hypostasis not only of His Divine nature, from all eternity, but also of His human nature from the moment of the incarnation.”²¹ As the Son of Man and the Last Adam, after the miraculous virginal conception, what was true of His status as human person *in utero* is true of us.

IV: ILLUSTRATIONS OF INCARNATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY: O’DONOVAN AND MITCHELL

So far, the basis and application for an incarnational anthropology has been proposed upon a theological method that turns on John 1:14, worked out as theological theory. It would be one thing if that was all one had. But it is quite another thing to look at specific scriptural

¹⁹ Gordon Clark, *The Incarnation* (Jefferson, IN: Trinity Foundation, 1988), 75.

²⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Identity of Jesus of Nazareth* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 113.

²¹ Michael Drippe, “The Christian Theological Understanding of the Human Person,” *Epiphany Journal* 14.4 (1994): 38.

accounts about conception, embryonic life, and fetal life concerning Jesus and other Bible characters.

“*And Who is a Person?*” That is the fundamental question of O’Donovan’s other relevant text, *Begotten or Made?*²² He answers using Scripture, along with other classical sources, to say that the *persona*, as “the agent,” is the one who could “appear in the public realm.” O’Donovan shows that Jeremiah, Pharaoh, and Cyrus were all recognized and appointed by God as players on the stage of history, when conceived and in the womb. Another Old Testament idea fits the identity/history motif of personhood: having children and grandchildren “and so contributing to the history which God designed for his people.”²³ He sees this biblical role of the person identified in history as “set in opposition to the qualitative analysis of what gives us our identity.”²⁴

The next obvious question, then, is, when does a person begin to be a person? O’Donovan points to Isaiah 7:14, which has its immediate fulfillment in a promised child during the reign of King Ahaz, yet a later fulfillment as well in Jesus. Like John the Baptist, that promised child’s beginning on the stage of history begins not at birth, but at conception. O’Donovan believes that “these theological observations do not of themselves yield any precise view of the beginning of individual identity.”²⁵ But added to the fact that a new genome results from the fusion of a sperm and ovum, he sees also an indication of “the beginning of a new personal history at conception.” O’Donovan states that “genetics can only indicate, and cannot demonstrate, personal identity,” but he goes on to say that nevertheless genetics seem to show “an appearance of a human being which has decisive continuities with late appearances.”²⁶ O’Donovan concludes by saying that “such science as we have today speaks to us of this point of new beginning at conception.”

O’Donovan is not unaware of those who disagree. To those who argue from fetal wastage or spontaneous abortions, he counters that no “statistical argument can give us a sufficient indication of discontinuity in individual identity.” Responding to those who set brain-function as the threshold for personhood, O’Donovan replies that their argument “rests on a philosophical preference rather than a scientific one.”²⁷

Christian ethicist C. Ben Mitchell takes a different approach than

²² Oliver O’Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

²³ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

O'Donovan. Without neglecting the Logos passage, Mitchell also carefully describes the 23 chromosomes from a father's sperm and the 23 from a mother's ovum and the resulting union of a one-cell human zygote, containing 46 chromosomes. "The human zygote is already a 'he' or 'she' and contains all the information he or she will ever have or need. The event is known as fertilization or conception."²⁸ From here Mitchell moves from the embryo, to the fetus, to the infant, and so on. And he is clear to affirm the incarnational approach suggested earlier:

The miracle of Jesus' incarnation took place through the agency of the Holy Spirit and a human ovum—Mary's ovum, to be precise. From fertilization to birth, Jesus' embryonic development proceeded just as has been outlined above. In this way the "Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).²⁹

But Mitchell shifts from the larger theological theme to specific birth narratives like Luke 1:41. Here John the Baptist "leaped" in the womb of Elizabeth his mother when she was visited by Mary, who Mitchell says (perhaps too precisely) was only two weeks pregnant with Jesus.³⁰ Mitchell asks, "At what stage of development did Jesus become a human person? John knew—and we know—that Mary's embryo was as much the incarnate Christ as the adult man who hung on Calvary's cross and who arose from that borrowed tomb."³¹

Of course other elements of this narrative fit the O'Donovan theme of the pre-born human as a player on the scene of history. John the Baptist is already pointing the way as a prophet to the Messiah, leaping with "joy" (Luke 1:44). As well, John is named and assigned a task before his birth (Luke 1:13-17). Of course all of these examples are in close proximity, as birth narratives, to the incarnation theme. But O'Donovan's "player in history" paradigm is found elsewhere throughout the text of Scripture.

A summary of some of the pre-birth players on the stage of biblical history is telling. The *in utero* actors include: Isaac (Gen 18:9-15, 21:1-7); Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:22-23); Samson (Judg 13:2-7); Samuel (1

²⁸ C. Ben Mitchell, *Was Jesus an Embryo? The Ethics of Human Embryo Research and the Brave New World* (Nashville, TN: The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1995), 2.

²⁹ Mitchell, *Was Jesus an Embryo?* 4-5.

³⁰ It is doubtful whether the New Testament evidence can provide such precision in dating. In any case the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth probably took place quite early in Mary's pregnancy.

³¹ Mitchell, *Was Jesus an Embryo?* 5.

Sam 1:1-28); David (Pss 51, 139); Solomon (2 Sam 7: 12-16; 12:24-25); Job (Job 3:3; 10:8-12); and Paul (Gal 1:15). Already mentioned in O'Donovan are Pharaoh, Cyrus, Jeremiah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. The pattern emerging is not one of exception, but a kind of general rule. The major players of biblical history are typically introduced, described, called, or named long before their birth. The incarnational anthropology in general is confirmed by many particular individuals in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from O'Donovan, Barth, and the classic understanding of incarnation (John 1:14) it seems theologically sound to base our understanding of anthropology upon Christology, specifically the humanity of Jesus. This includes assessing the moral status of any human embryo on the same basis as that of the incarnate Christ. Given this approach, a compelling case exists for the personhood of the embryo, considering as well the other theological and biblical evidences for incarnation at the point of conception or fertilization.

The Word became "flesh," not an adult, teenager, child, or even an infant. The story of Jesus begins, as do other biblical biographies, with conception and announcement—not with birth, preferences, or self-consciousness—*contra* Metzler and Singer. From the moment of fertilization on, the sanctity of human life is based upon the incarnation of Christ, as well as the *imago Dei*. Christians should make this case to one another and bear witness to a culture of death, which affirms incarnation "in reverse." With Muggeridge, we can critique and correct the reigning zeitgeist of Logos "in reverse" with its resultant quest for life that ends in death. The final question in the great debate is not about who cared more for Ronald Reagan or Christopher Reeve, or who is more compassionate toward Michael J. Fox. The ultimate question at hand is whether we ought to engage in embryonic manipulation that results in the destruction of our youngest human beings. The answer to that question is clear.

Did Constantine Decide the New Testament Canon?



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

Blaming Constantine, the first Christian emperor, for determining which books would be included in New Testament is hardly new. People have been doing it for a couple of centuries at least. Given how often we hear the charge being made nowadays, on television, in magazines, in the kind of books one finds heaped on display tables at Borders and Barnes & Noble—books of the sort Boston University’s PHEME PERKINS describes so wonderfully as “‘religion lite’ for the PBS crowd”¹—many of us, especially here in America, may be surprised to discover that *no* credible scholars actually credit the charge. So, for example, even the gifted Bart D. Ehrman—who has increasingly established his own credibility with the “religion lite” crowd by famously losing the evangelical faith he feels sure he once had²—has correctly pointed out that the “emperor Constantine had nothing to do with the formation of the canon of scripture: he did not choose which books to include or exclude, and he did not order the destruction of the Gospels that were left out of the canon.”³

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

¹ PHEME PERKINS, “Getting Past Orthodox Doctrine,” *America* (July 7-14, 2003): 24.

² See, e.g., Christopher Hitchens’s admiring description of Ehrman as “a very serious young man named Barton Ehrman [who] began to examine his own fundamentalist assumptions,” in *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2009), 120.

³ Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code* (New York:

Those inclined to ignore such statements and continue to credit the claim invariable point to two different moments in Constantine's imperial career as significant. Some say Constantine decided the canon in cahoots with the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, others that it was when he sent an order for 50 Bibles to Eusebius of Caesarea in AD 331.

I. CONTRADICTIONARY SOURCES

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* came in with an impressive bang but went out with a fizzling whimper. As so often happens, what once seemed to engage the attention of the whole world—I remember stepping into a tiny book shop in Ljubljana on a sunny September afternoon back in 2006 only to be confronted by a copy of Brown's novel prominently displayed on the counter, *in Slovenian!*—has now fallen from its former glory and been replaced by a series of sappy novels and movies featuring what I gather is supposed to be a hunky vampire. I recollect Brown's contribution here only as a convenient (and still, hopefully, somewhat familiar) entry point into the subject at hand.

While cobbling together the pseudo-historical underpinnings for his *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown relied on one source, Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince's *The Templar Revelation* (1997), that argued for the former moment when the canon was decided, and another, Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln's *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (1983), that argued for the latter. In his novel, Brown lists both these titles as being on the bookshelf the character Leigh Teabing "ran his finger down" while explaining to Sophie Neveu how the "royal bloodline of Jesus Christ has been chronicled in exhaustive detail by scores of historians."⁴ Readers of the novel who remember this list might be interested to know that none of the authors mentioned would in any sense be recognized as credible historians by credible historians.

At any rate, when making their case, Picknett and Prince tie the supposed Nicene selection of some books and suppression of others to the early Church's supposed fear of the power of an alternative Christianity led by the followers of Mary Magdalene. In reality, no such issue was discussed at Nicaea. But in any case, here is what Picknett and Prince say:

The Council of Nicaea, when it rejected the many Gnostic Gospels and voted to include only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament, had no divine mandate for this major act of

Oxford University Press, 2004), 74.

⁴ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 253.

ensorship. They acted out of self-preservation, for by that time—the fourth century—the power of the Magdalene and her followers was already too widespread for the patriarchy to cope with.⁵

This was not the view presented by Dan Brown in his novel. It was however the one put forward in the film version, as is seen in the following lines from the movie script:

TEABING

To strengthen the new Christian tradition, Constantine held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea.

In a cavernous room now behind Teabing, robed men including Constantine SHOUT at each other around a large stone table.

TEABING (*over*)

And at this council, the many sects of Christianity debated and voted on—everything from the acceptance and rejection of specific gospels to the date of Easter to the administration of sacraments.⁶

In contrast to the movie, Dan Brown has Teabing say in the book that “Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier Gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.”⁷ The use of the word “commissioned” probably suggests that Brown is following *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, which claims that “in AD 331, he [Constantine] commissioned and financed new copies of the Bible. This constituted one of the single most decisive factors in the entire history of Christianity and provided Christian orthodoxy . . . with an unparalleled opportunity.”⁸

If Bart D. Ehrman is right in saying Constantine had nothing to do with the choice of the New Testament books then from whence do these two stories that say he did come from?

⁵ Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ* (New York: Simon & Shuster, A Touchstone Book, 1997), 261.

⁶ Akiva Goldsman, *The Da Vinci Code: Illustrated Screenplay* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006), 116.

⁷ Brown, *Code*, 234.

⁸ Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Dell, 1983), 368.

II. THE *SYNODICON VETUS* AND THE MIRACLE OF THE LEAPING GOSPELS

The claim that the canon of the New Testament was decided at the Council of Nicaea goes back to a fanciful miracle story that was originally intended to give positive support to the New Testament Canon. It derives from a single ninth-century work written in Greek known as the *Synodicon Vetus*, in the following passage:

The canonical and apocryphal books it [the Nicene Council] distinguished in the following manner: in the house of God the books were placed down by the holy altar then the council asked the Lord in prayer that the inspired works be found on top and—as in fact happened—the spurious on the bottom.⁹

What happened according to this story, in other words, was that all of the books that were contenders for canonicity were placed on the floor by the altar, and after prayer, the canonical ones leapt up onto the altar, while the apocryphal ones stayed put on the floor.

But is the *Synodicon Vetus* a reliable source for the history of the Nicene Council? In fact it is not. It is in reality an anonymous history of church councils from the beginnings of Christianity down to the year AD 887, and the value of its testimony, as historian Henry Chadwick aptly remarks, “increases sharply as the author nears his own time.”¹⁰ Both the lateness of the leaping gospels story (it supposedly happened in AD 325 but wasn’t reported until AD 887) and its hokey fancifulness, have caused historians (rightfully I believe) to leave it entirely out of account. So, for example, Benjamin Foss Westcott wrote in the nineteenth century that “neither in this [i.e., the Council of Nicaea] nor the following Councils were the Scriptures themselves ever the subject of discussion.”¹¹ Similarly, New Testament scholar and Jesus Seminar member Roy Hoover more recently writes:

How did the Church decide finally on what to include and what to exclude? Unfortunately, our sources are mute on the issue. The

⁹ John Duffy and John Parker *The Synodicon Vetus* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantine XV; Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979), 29.

¹⁰ “Review of John Duffy and John Parker *The Synodicon Vetus* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantine XV; Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979),” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 33.1 (April 1982): 301.

¹¹ Benjamin Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (6th ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980 [1889]), 430.

Council of Nicea in 325 did not address the question, and neither Eusebius nor Athanasius nor any other writer from the period tells us how this came about.¹²

In spite of this, the story did become popular among writers of dubious credibility in the nineteenth century after Spiritualists and Theosophists, like Andrew Jackson Davis,¹³ Laurence Oliphant,¹⁴ and most importantly the colorful, chain-smoking, propheticess from Yekaterinoslav, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,¹⁵ took it up and promoted it as an authentic ancient account, even perhaps an eyewitness account,¹⁶ of the goings on at the council of Nicaea.

Even today the story continues to be repeated uncritically by Moslem apologists, like Muhammad ‘Ata ur-Rahim and Ahmad Thomson,¹⁷ and “religion lite” writers like Neil Douglas-Klotz.¹⁸

III. CONSTANTINE’S 50 BIBLES (AD 331)

The second story rests on a letter Constantine wrote to Eusebius of Caesarea in AD 331 requesting 50 copies of the Scriptures to keep pace with the growth of churches in the emperor’s new capital of Constantinople (modern Istanbul), which he had consecrated the year before. Since the letter has survived, and since so much has been made of it, we reproduce it in its entirety:

(1) Victor Constantinus Maximus Augustus to Eusebius.

In the City which bears our name by the sustaining providence of the Saviour God a great mass of people has attached itself to the most holy Church, so that with everything there enjoying great growth it is

¹² Roy W. Hoover, “How the Books of the New Testament Were Chosen,” *Bible Review* (April 1993): 47.

¹³ Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Penetralia; Being Harmonial Answers to Important Questions* (rev. and enl. ed.; Boston, MA: Colby & Rich, Banner Publishing House, 1872), 225.

¹⁴ Laurence Oliphant, *Scientific Religion, or Higher Possibilities of Life and Practice through the Operation of Natural Forces* (London, UK: William Blackwood, 1888), 105-106.

¹⁵ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (3 vols.; 6th ed.; New York: J. W. Bouton, 1891 [orig. ed., 1877]), 2:251-52.

¹⁶ As for example, did Madame Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 2:252.

¹⁷ Muhammad ‘Ata ur-Rahim and Ahmad Thomson, *Jesus: Prophet of Islam* (rev. ed.; New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, 2003), 105.

¹⁸ Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Hidden Gospel: Decoding the Spiritual Message of the Aramaic Jesus* 1999), 14.

particularly fitting that more churches should be established. (2) Be ready therefore to act urgently on the decision which we have reached. It appeared proper to indicate to your Intelligence that you should order 50 volumes with ornamental leather bindings, easily legible and convenient for portable use to be copied by skilled calligraphists well trained in the art, copies that is of the Divine Scriptures, the provision and use of which you well know to be necessary for reading in church. (3) Written instructions have been sent by our Clemency to the man who is in charge of the diocese that he see to the supply of all the materials needed to produce them. The preparation of the written volumes with utmost speed shall be the task of your Diligence. (4) You are entitled by the authority of this our letter to the use of two public vehicles for transportation. The fine copies may thus most readily be transported to us for inspection; one of the deacons of your own congregation will presumably carry out this task, and when he reaches us he will experience our generosity. God preserve you, dear brother.¹⁹

Immediately following the letter, Eusebius, who preserved it for us in his biography of Constantine, reports: “These then were the Emperor’s instructions. Immediate action followed upon his word, as we sent him threes and fours in richly wrought bindings.”²⁰

It is interesting that in addition to the promotion, this second view gets from the sort of conspiracy mongers Dan Brown turns to for “expert evidence” in writing his novels, we find it being defended as well by, as it were, both the theologically far right (King James Only advocates), and far left (certain members of the Jesus Seminar). Naturally each group advocates it with vastly different ends in view.

IV. CONSTANTINE’S 50 BIBLES AND KING JAMES ONLY

King James Only advocates look to the letter as proof that Eusebius and Constantine conspired together to foist a corrupted version of the Bible upon the Church, a version that promotes the Arian heresy, which denies the deity of Christ, and that lies behind most modern English translations of the Bible. In addition, they regularly assert that the famous fourth-century biblical manuscripts, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus,

¹⁹ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4:36 (Clarendon Ancient History Series; trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 166-167.

²⁰ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4:37 (ET: Cameron & Hall).

were among the 50 Bibles produced for Constantine by Eusebius. For these advocates, it is less a question of which *books* were included in the New Testament than which *passages* are different from the way they appear in the KJV, especially where they seem to diminish emphasis on the deity of Christ or the Trinity.

In general, King James Only advocates praise the Byzantine family of manuscripts, which represents the majority of extant New Testament manuscripts, and unjustly demonize the Alexandrian family, which represents the earliest extant New Testament manuscripts.²¹ A striking example of this in relation to the story of Constantine and his 331 Bible order comes from the famous Christian tract writer Jack T. Chick, who includes the following frames in his booklet, "The Attack."²²

Satan used the intellectuals in Alexandria, Egypt, to mutilate Old and New Testament manuscripts of God's Word, and the mess they produced is called Alexandrian manuscripts.



Satan is using translators today who base their authority on these mutilated manuscripts to cause uncertainty on the validity of God's verbally inspired Word.

The Alexandrian Manuscripts down-played the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, salvation by grace through faith, etc.

The true Christians rejected these phoney manuscripts as works of the spirit of antichrist.



The second attack came when the Roman Emperor Constantine* (the first pope) ordered 50 Bibles created from the satanic Alexandrian Manuscripts. **

Or again, in two frames Chick produced as illustrations for David W. Daniels, *Babylon Religion: How a Babylonian goddess became the Virgin Mary*, a book also published by Chick in 2006.²³

²¹ As one can see, for example, in places where more modern translations of the Bible, though giving preference to Alexandrian manuscripts over Byzantine nevertheless offer translations that actually reflect a higher Christology than we find in the parallel passages in the KJV (Compare, for example, the NIV and the KJV translations of John 1:8 and Rom 9:5).

²² J.T.C. "The Attack," (1985).

²³ David W. Daniels, *Babylon Religion: How a Babylonian [G]oddess became the Virgin Mary*, (illustrated by Jack T. Chick; Ontario, CA. Chick Publications, 2006), 161.



¹ See Daniels, *Did the Catholic Church Give Us the Bible?* (2005), pp. 32-38 & 46.

Chick is, of course, incorrect in describing Constantine as the “first Pope,” as indeed Daniels is as well in asserting that the destination of the 50 Bibles was Rome.

In any case, Chick’s and Daniels’s King James Only arguments here, whether the two authors realize it or not, are rooted in a book by Frederick Nolan published in 1815 entitled *An Enquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate, or Received Text of the Greek*. I say “rooted” because Nolan’s book pre-dates by several decades several important formative events that would contribute significantly to the development of the full-blown King James Only position as we know it today. One of these was, of course, Constantin von Tischendorf’s discovery of the Bible manuscript Sinaiticus at Saint Catherine’s Monastery, Sinai, in 1844.

Nolan argued that the letter of the emperor ordering the 50 Bibles actually granted Eusebius “discretionary power” to undertake a new edition of the New Testament in which he was free to make textual excisions and amendments. Eusebius, Nolan said,

removed those parts of Scripture . . . which *he* judged to be neither conducive to use nor doctrine, and which are now marked as probable interpolations in the Received Text. They amount principally to the following; the account of the woman taken in adultery, John vii. 53. — viii. II. and three texts which assert in the strongest manner the mystery of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, and Redemption, i John v.7. i Tim. iii. 16. Acts xx.28.²⁴

²⁴ Frederick Nolan, *An Enquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate, or Received Text of the Greek* (London, UK: For F. C. and J. Rivington, 1815), 26-

Nolan based his argument on an idiosyncratic translation of a single word in Constantine's letter at the place where the emperor had said: "It appeared proper to indicate to your **Intelligence** that you should order 50 volumes." Nolan translated the bolded word "Intelligence" —*synesis* in Greek—as "consideration." As early as 1818, however, Thomas Falconer, the editor of the Oxford Strabo, had already demonstrated from Constantine's usage of *synesis* here and in other letters that it was for him a form of respectful address, like "your Grace," only in this case "your Intelligence."²⁵ Falconer was right and has been followed by later translators, including Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, whose recent translation for the Oxford University Press's Clarendon Ancient History Series, we have followed here.

Yet beyond this, even if we were generous and granted Nolan his peculiar translation of *synesis*, it would still fall far short of providing him with the support he needed to establish the idiosyncratic thesis he wanted to build upon it.

Despite Nolan's view having been effectively refuted nearly two centuries ago, his argument was afterward picked up in defense of a King James Only position by Seventh Day Adventist author Benjamin G. Wilkinson in the book *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (1930).²⁶ From thence, it was mediated to current King James Only circles when David Otis Fuller reprinted Wilkinson's book in the 1970s in the famous King James Only classic *Which Bible?*²⁷

After Sinaiticus was discovered in 1844, a possible connection between it and Vaticanus on the one hand and Constantine's 50 Bibles on the other again became a matter of scholarly interest. Scholars wondered whether Vaticanus's three columns per-page and Sinaiticus's four might help explain the very ambiguous statement in Eusebius where he says: "we sent him [Constantine] threes and fours in richly wrought bindings." Could the reference to "threes and fours" be to the number of columns per-page used in the 50 Bibles?²⁸ If so, the fact that Vaticanus and

27.

²⁵ Thomas Falconer, *The Case of Eusebius of Caesarea, Bishop, and Historian, Who is said by Mr. Nolan to have Mutilated Fifty Copies of the Scriptures Sent to Constantine; Examined* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1818), 5-6.

²⁶ Benjamin G. Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1930).

²⁷ David Otis Fuller, *Which Bible?* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1972).

²⁸ See, e.g., Kirsopp Lake "The Sinaitic and Vatican Manuscripts and the

Sinaiticus belong to the Alexandrian family of biblical manuscripts rather than the Byzantine family (i.e., those manuscripts especially associated with Constantinople as the capital of the Byzantine empire) would seem to rule out our making more of the fact than that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are *like* the manuscripts Eusebius delivered to Constantine, in terms of their having the same number of columns. They would, however, likely have been *unlike* them in terms of the form of their respective texts, i.e., the manuscript families they followed.²⁹ In other words, we should not really think these two manuscripts were produced as part of Constantine's 50 Bibles.

V. CONSTANTINE'S 50 BIBLES AND THE SCHOLARS

The occasional use of the 331 argument by scholars focuses once again on the list of New Testament books rather than on the form of the New Testament text. My friend Robert M. Price, one of the most radical members of the Jesus Seminar, says in his book *The Pre-Nicene New Testament* (2006):

Eusebius tells us how Constantine had 50 deluxe vellum copies of the New Testament manufactured and sent to prelates all over the empire, this of course implying a fixed text. We cannot help thinking of the Islamic tradition that, to stifle theological debates in which opponents appealed to different texts of the Koran, the Caliph Uthman called in all known variant copies, had his scholars standardize an official text, and burned the earlier ones. The distribution of a New Testament codex from the home office by Constantine must have had the same effect of establishing an official list.³⁰

Roy Hoover, whom we have already quoted against the claim that the New Testament was decided at the Council of Nicaea, writes somewhat more modestly:

Eusebius . . . knew that these new bibles prepared for the capital city would play an important role in the unity of the church . . . the New

Copies sent by Eusebius to Constantine," *Harvard Theological Review* 11 (1918): 32-35.

²⁹ A point made, for example, by F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 204.

³⁰ Robert M. Price, *The Pre-Nicene New Testament: Fifty-four Formative Texts* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2006), xv-xvi.

Testament canon was settled for all practical purposes when Constantine gave the order to create 50 bibles. Their publication was palpable evidence of the unity of the church and hence the unity of the empire.³¹

More recently David L. Dungan wrote an entire book promoting this idea:

After Constantine's Bible had been produced, and in the tense atmosphere that followed the Council of Nicaea, what bishop would dare to use a Bible in his cathedral that differed in content from one used by the bishops in Constantinople? He would likely be informed upon and investigated. He could lose his office or worse!"³²

All three scholars' assertions overreach the evidence. Price is simply wrong in saying that Constantine had Bibles "sent to prelates all over the empire." Constantine speaks in the letter only of ordering bibles for the churches of the city of Constantinople. Nothing is said about Bibles being sent anywhere else. In addition, several features of the supposed parallel with the incident where Caliph Uthman is supposed to have "called in all known variant copies [of the Koran], had his scholars standardize an official text, and burned the earlier ones," are not supported by anything in Constantine's letter, which is the *only* evidence relating to the 50 Bible order. The letter says nothing whatever of calling in variant copies or of burning anything! Nor does it even speak of which New Testament books the 50 Bibles were to contain. It speaks only to the quality of writing and materials from which they were to be produced.

In contrast to Price, Hoover gets it right about the destination of the 50 Bibles, i.e., Constantinople. Still, he too transgresses the boundaries set by the evidence when he asserts that "the New Testament canon was settled for all practical purposes when Constantine gave the order to create 50 bibles."

³¹ Roy W. Hoover, "How The Canon Was Determined," *The Fourth R* 5.1 (Jan 1992): 5, 7. A slightly modified version of this same article is the one we cited earlier: Roy W. Hoover, "How the Books of the New Testament Were Chosen," *Bible Review* (April 1993): 44-47. A slightly more modest version of this quote (with *palpable* spelled right) appears on p. 47 of that article.

³² David L. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (London: SMC Press, 2006), 122. See further, e.g., Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2004), 251.

Finally, Dungan's assertion about the "tense atmosphere" following the Council of Nicaea making it dangerous for bishops to use of Bible manuscripts that in any way differed as to their lists of books from Constantine's 50 Bibles is pure surmise, and besides rings false to the real historical situation, at least as I read it.

Having said that, it is certainly reasonable to suppose that the form of the text and the list of books followed in New Testaments used in the capital of the empire could not help but influence what came to be preferred and used elsewhere. But what exactly was the form of the text Eusebius used in preparing Constantine's Bibles, and which books were included? Actually we have not a clue. The letter says nothing about that. Hoover supposes that the canon list followed there was the same as the one given in the 367 Easter letter of Athanasius of Alexandria, and the same which our New Testaments follow today.³³ But where is his proof? Again he offers none because there is none. Vaticanus and Sinaiticus provide no support for the idea either. Sinaiticus does not agree with Athanasius's list. It includes two additional works, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, the latter of which is explicitly ruled non-canonical by Athanasius's letter. As for Vaticanus, it breaks off at Hebrews 9:14, which, given its adherence to a different, ancient order of books, means that the end of Hebrews, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and the Revelation are missing . . . and what else? If we add for good measure the famous fifth-century uncial, Codex Alexandrinus, things are merely complicated further by the fact that that manuscript includes two other works not approved by Athanasius's list: 1 and 2 Clement, in addition to which, "An ancient table of contents prefixed to the entire manuscript shows that II Clement was followed by the apocryphal Psalms of Solomon, which concluded the volume."³⁴ It should be noted that all the extra books mentioned were not considered heretical by the early Church, just non-canonical.

All three of these manuscripts are considered Constantinian or early post-Constantinian, which means that if the 50-Bible order had, in fact, established *an* official list of New Testament books, it probably was not our current list. It certainly was not Athanasius's list. By the time the particular extra books were included in Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, their status in terms of canonicity had already long been a matter of discussion in the Church.³⁵ It appears that the early Church was not

³³ Hoover, "How Determined," 5, "How Chosen," 47.

³⁴ H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *The Codex Sinaiticus and The Codex Alexandrinus* (London, UK: Trustees of the British Museum, 1955), 35.

³⁵ On the Shepherd of Hermas, see the Muratorian Canon 73-76 (c. 200) and Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.4 (prior to 325). On the

particularly bothered when disputed books appeared in the Biblical manuscripts alongside canonical ones. In addition to this, the debate over which books should or should not be included in the New Testament continued to be an issue even after Constantine. So, for example, when Cyril of Jerusalem provides a list of canonical books in his *Catechetical Lectures* (c. 350), it does not include the book of Revelation.³⁶

Given these facts, the idea that a particular selection of books in Constantine's 50 Bibles would effectively lead to the closing of the New Testament canon seems highly improbable.

VI. CONCLUSION

All of the attempts to make Constantine out to be the father of our New Testament canon turn out to be quite baseless. The leaping Bibles story of the ninth-century *Synodicon Vetus* is both too late and too fanciful to credit. In addition, both the form of text used in Constantine's 50 Bibles and the list of books included are entirely unknown. We can say, however, that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus probably do *not* reflect either.

Epistle of Barnabas, see again Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.4.

³⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.36 in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1987), 311.

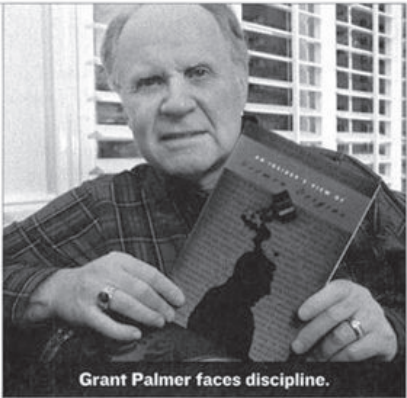
Religious Feeling and Truth

GRANT H. PALMER*

equal-protection clauses of the Constitution. Center director Gregory S. Baylor said it reflects "an outdated understanding of the separation of church and state."
• Stephen Adams in *Colorado Springs*

[RELIGION]
LDS 'Insider' Suspended
Author stands by critical book.

Grant H. Palmer had expected to be punished by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for writing the 2002 book *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*. But the delayed timing caught him off



Grant Palmer faces discipline.

damage to people's faith by causing them to doubt Mormon foundational claims," Palmer said. He is retired after 34 years as a college-level LDS educator.

COURTESY OF OFFICE OF SENATOR JOHN INHUNE

March 2005 CHRISTIANITY TODAY 23

Author Grant H. Palmer spent his career as a teacher within the LDS Church Educational System. In 2005, he was disciplined after writing a book that called into question Mormonism's claims about its founder, the Prophet Joseph Smith, while at the same time calling upon his church to place greater emphasis on Jesus Christ. Although Palmer is not a Southern Baptist—indeed he still considers himself a Mormon—we are pleased that he was willing to share with us how he came to the conclusion that one must not ultimately base the acceptance or rejection of religious truth on feelings. 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 really a prophet is to pray to receive a testimony, or “burning Bosom,” providing assurance that they are. (The Editor)

*Grant H. Palmer is the author of *The Incomparable Jesus* (Draper, UT: Kofford Books, 2005) and *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2002). He retired in 2001, after thirty-four years of teaching and counseling for C.E.S. He and his wife Connie, live in Sandy, Utah.

When Pontius Pilate interrogated Jesus shortly before his death, Jesus said, I came “into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice,” meaning to follow *him*. Pilate then asked his now famous rhetorical question, “What is truth?” and abruptly ended the interview (John 18:37-38). Earlier in his ministry, the Apostle Thomas had asked: “How can we know the way?” and Jesus explicitly replied, “I am the way, [I am] the truth” (John 14:5-6). The Apostles John, Paul, and Peter later repeated that “truth came by Jesus Christ,” that “the truth is in Jesus” and that Jesus is “the way of truth” (John 1:17; Eph 4:21; 2 Pet 2:2). The truth about God for the Christian is seen in the personality, character, wisdom, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. For the Christian, Christ is religious Truth.

How then does a person specifically come to know religious Truth/Christ? I like the fact that Jesus emphasized an empirical test of his teachings to “know” him rather than a metaphysical approach to truth. It is instructive to bear in mind that Jesus never invited anyone to know him by a religious feeling. Instead of advocating a controversial and highly subjective spiritual feeling methodology to know him and his teachings, Jesus taught: “If any man will *do* his [Father’s] will, he shall *know* of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” And in one of his recorded prayers, Jesus said that taking upon us the name of God and his character is to “*know* thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 7:17; 17:3, emphasis added).

The aged Peter reemphasized this doctrine to the saints —saying that the “divine nature” of Christ and his teachings can be known only by exemplifying the Christ-like characteristics of: “Diligence [in our daily walk] . . . faith [in God] . . . virtue . . . knowledge [of the Scriptures] . . . temperance [meaning self control, moderation and balance] . . . patience . . . godliness [goodness] . . . brotherly kindness [gentleness] . . . charity” [love and compassion]. Peter then explained that when these nine qualities “*be in you, and abound*” then we “*know . . . Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 1:4-8, emphasis added). Paul also taught the saints “to put on Christ,” to strive for these characteristics, until “Christ be in you,” “until Christ be formed in you.” His list of the fruits by which a Christian is known is almost identical with Peter’s. He also lists nine qualities: “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Rom 8:10; 13:14; Gal 4:19; 5:22-23).

Shortly before leaving the earth, Jesus promised his disciples that he

would send to them His agent, the Holy Spirit. Jesus then described the mission and responsibility of the Holy Spirit to his apostles: (1) He will “bring all things to your remembrance, *whatsoever I have said unto you*” —to sharpen and intensify all the words, teachings and example of Jesus’ ministry to their “remembrance” (John 14:26, emphasis added); (2) “When the Comforter is come . . . he shall *testify of me*” —he will bring “comfort,” peace and tranquility to their soul that Jesus is Christ (John 15:26, emphasis added); (3) When “the Spirit of truth, is come, he will *guide you into all truth* [about me]: for he shall . . . *glorify me*” —He will “guide” or “sanctify [them,] through the truth,” which further “glorifies” Christ (John 16:13-14, emphasis added; cf. John 17:19); (4) And after the “power . . . [of] the Holy Ghost is come upon you: ye shall be *witnesses unto me*” —He will empower, embolden, and enliven, to fill them with enthusiasm (God in us) and the confidence to compellingly *testify of Christ* to others (Acts 1:8, emphasis added). Shortly after the Day of Pentecost, all these promises are plainly manifested by the Apostles in Acts chapters 2-5. In summary, all of the statements made by Jesus about the Holy Spirit during his ministry have this in common —the Holy Spirit is all about Christ!

One of the most emphasized teachings in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is found in the oft quoted passage found in the Book of Mormon: “And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may *know the truth of all things*” (Moro 10:5, emphasis added). In this verse we see a move away from the Holy Spirit’s role of testifying of things Christ, as taught by Jesus in the New Testament, to the idea that one can *know* the truth about anything—about “all things.” An extreme example of this teaching within the Book of Mormon is when Nephi stated: “I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head” (1 Ne. 4:18). A more recent example of a Mormon being influenced by this teaching is when Ron and Dan Lafferty received a “revelation” of the “Spirit” to kill Brenda Lafferty and her infant child because, like Nephi’s rationale, Brenda was interfering with the future progress of their religious movement.

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. For example, does the spirit that is felt when reading the book mean that it confirms that God and Christ is the same being [Palmer alludes to the Book of Mormon’s modalistic tendencies] or that man is more evil than good—both doctrines taught in the Book of Mormon, but later reversed by Joseph Smith? Since Mormons now believe that God and Christ are two separate beings, and that man is more good than evil, taught since the early 1840’s in Nauvoo by Smith, which confirming spirit is a true

one? Nor does the Spirit confirm the truth or falsity of whether the Book of Mormon is a real record of a historical people of the distant past. The Holy Spirit testifies of all things Christ, not “all things” as Joseph Smith taught in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

When a church or group embraces the idea that when preacher and hearer “are edified,” or feel the “Spirit of truth,” and thus *what they speak and hear is the truth* (D&C 50:20-21), they open up a can of worms that leads to strange mis-directions and mischief, as witnessed throughout history. For example, many followers of the LDS and FLDS churches have received the confirming and edifying “Spirit” that Warren Jeff’s or Thomas Monson is the “prophet, seer and revelator” for humankind. Moreover, some fundamentalist Mormon churches pass out literature quoting Brigham Young and others that polygamy is divine and is to be practiced. The promise being that one can know by reading, praying, pondering, and feeling the “Spirit.” Some claim they receive the edifying “Spirit of truth,” and join with these religious congregations. Some young Muslims become fully convinced through religious feeling that Allah wants them to strap bombs around their waist and detonate themselves and others for the glory of Allah. I was once invited by an enthusiastic promoter to invest \$8,000 in a Fort Worth, Texas oil well. After praying and pondering and feeling the “Spirit,” I gave him the money but lost every cent. I also felt the “Spirit” strongly after hearing the inspiring World War II stories of Paul H. Dunn and Douglas Stringfellow, which were later found to be largely bogus. Some people claim they found their car keys only after praying and being led by the Spirit where to look. These kinds of stories are plentiful. The tendency of religious people is to report only those spiritual feeling experiences that actually come true, seldom those that fail. The reality is that God’s purposes in giving the Holy Spirit did not include infallibly leading us into a very literal “know[ing] the truth of all things.”

Throughout my life I have heard the repeated phrase, “I know the church is true,” “the only true church on earth” (D&C 1:30). I have come to believe that Christian churches are not true or false, but rather good or bad depending on the degree to which they focus on the life of Jesus, his teaching ministry, his character, his wisdom, atonement, and Christ-like service. Churches that emphasize Christ and his core teachings, such as the importance of being “born again” and the sanctifying role of God’s grace in that process resulting in Christ-like love and service to the less fortunate, are the most valuable. Churches that allow Jesus to fall through the cracks, that occasionally instead of regularly focus on Christ himself, that are largely preoccupied with their own peculiar beliefs and intuitional needs, with emphasis upon service within the organization, are less valuable.

The Sign of the Pelican on the Cross of Christ

RONALD V. HUGGINS

Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
rhuggins@mbts.edu

Pie Pellicane, Jesu Domine,
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine,
cuius una stilla salvum facere
totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.

Oh tender pelican, Lord Jesus,
Purify me, who am unclean, in your
blood,
One drop of which can save
The whole world from all its sins.

(From the *Adoro te devote*
of Thomas Aquinas)¹



Fig. 1. Illustration from “De Pelicano”
(chapter viii) of Christopher Plantin’s
1588 edition of Epiphanius’s *Physiologus*
(p. 30).

A sunny day, one of the first this spring. My wife Marguerite and I are strolling along, pleased as punch with the weather and one another, down the sidewalk edging the U of M’s Francis Quadrangle in the direction of the famous free-standing columns that serve as the central focus of the College quad and the icon of the city of Columbia, Missouri. Before we come parallel to the columns we turn aside, make our way up a set of stairs past a gaggle of waiting school children, and into Picard Hall, residence of the university’s diminutive but well chosen art and archaeology collection. As we enter, passing under the replica of the Chartres Tympanum, with its stately figure of Christ flanked all around by the symbolic representations of the four evangelists, I marvel once again at the blue room to our left filled with massive, pasty white plaster casts of the famous statues of the Western world, the Laocoon Group,

¹ Latin and English quoted in Hyman H. Kleinman, *The Religious Sonnets of Dylan Thomas: Perspectives in Criticism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 25

Apollo Belvedere, the Ludovisi Hera, the Venus di Milo, the Venus di Medici, who knows how many other Venuses, the well-known bust of Homer, and the one of Alexander the Great. Upstairs, passing through the Saul and Gladys Weinberg Gallery of Ancient Art, I pause to take a few snaps of the bust of the Emperor Hadrian as Diomedes (Fig. 2). As I do my wife rolls her eyes and barbs me with a query the substance of which turns on the conviction that I had already taken enough pictures of that “old plaster guy,” on our previous visit to provide more images of same than I am ever likely to have need of or use.

Let me rush to state, however, to go on record, as it were, that in the implication of her question my wife was wrong, DEAD WRONG! One never knows when a particular image of the Emperor Hadrian as Diomedes, taken from a particular angle, in a particular light, might come in handy. Nor, it should be said, was she giving due weight to the fact that the lighting in the gallery was better on this day than it had been when we visited before. Worse still, I am firmly convinced that even her bumpkinish remark about the “old plaster guy” was entirely feigned and disingenuous. It had in fact been *her* keen observation about a detail I had overlooked on one of the other pieces in the European section that had bought us back today so that I could take a picture of it. I suspect the real motive behind her remark was to speed things along so we could get on further down the quad to the Anthropological Museum in Swallow Hall to view their collection of old arrowheads and cracked pots.



Fig. 2. The “Old Plaster Guy,”
alias Hadrian as Diomedes.
(Photo: R. Huggins)

In discussing the matter further with her afterward, she suggested that the potentiality of a cappuccino brownie down the Uprise Bakery afterwards *might*—and only *might* mind you—have played into her attempts to move things along it as well.

Anyhow, the picture we had come for was a detail from a 15th century devotional cross attributed to a “Follower of [the Florentine artist] Benozzo Gozzoli, known as ‘Alunno di Gozzoli,’” (a curious redundancy since Alunno di Gozzoli *means* “disciple or student of Gozzoli”). As it happens it was the great Bernard Berenson himself, that doyen of 20th century Renaissance art historians and master (used here in a specialized sense as the masculine form of the feminine noun *mistress*)

of one of the daughters of the author of the *Christian's Secret to Happy Life*, who identified this otherwise anonymous piece.² My attempt to photograph it did not come off well because it was covered in glass, which made reflection a problem, and because the detail I wanted was so small. After several attempts I decided my best course was to seek a digital image of the detail from the museum itself. I was directed to the small basement office of the scholarly and genial Jeffery B. Wilcox, Curator of Collections for the museum, who helped me. As he looked into getting me the image he chatted helpfully about the cross and about how the thirteen-piece Samuel H. Kress Study Collection of which it was a part had come to be donated to the museum. S. H. Kress, which most of us know as the five and dime store king, was apparently also the Grand Poobah (my word not Wilcox's) of American art collectors. The National Gallery in Washington, D. C., was largely his idea, with a substantial part of its vast collection having been generously infused into its spacious galleries from his own private stash of masterpieces. After that there was a sort of second level of donations to museums around the country (pieces from his collection winding up, for example, in the Nelson-Atkins Museum here in Kansas City), and then finally a third level to universities in the form of study collections. The Alunno di Gozzoli *Devotional Cross* I was interested in, Fig. 3, came to the university museum as part of one of these third level donations back in 1961.³



Fig. 3. Follower of Benozzo Gozzoli, called "Alunno di Gozzoli," Italian, *Devotional Cross* (1480-1490). (Photo: R. Huggins).

What had drawn my wife's attention to this cross and what intrigued me was a detail of a pelican and its children, explained on the accompanying card as follows:

Below God the Father, a pelican feeds its young with blood by

² Norman E. Land, "An Overview of the Collection," in *The Samuel H. Kress Study Collection at the University of Missouri* (Norman E. Land, ed.; Columbia, MO, and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 29.

³ The story is told in more detail in Marilyn Perry, "Five-and Dime for Millions: The Samuel H. Kress Collection," in *Kress Study Collection*, 3-11.

piercing its own side. During medieval times, the pelican was believed to engage in this behavior, which was thought to parallel Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

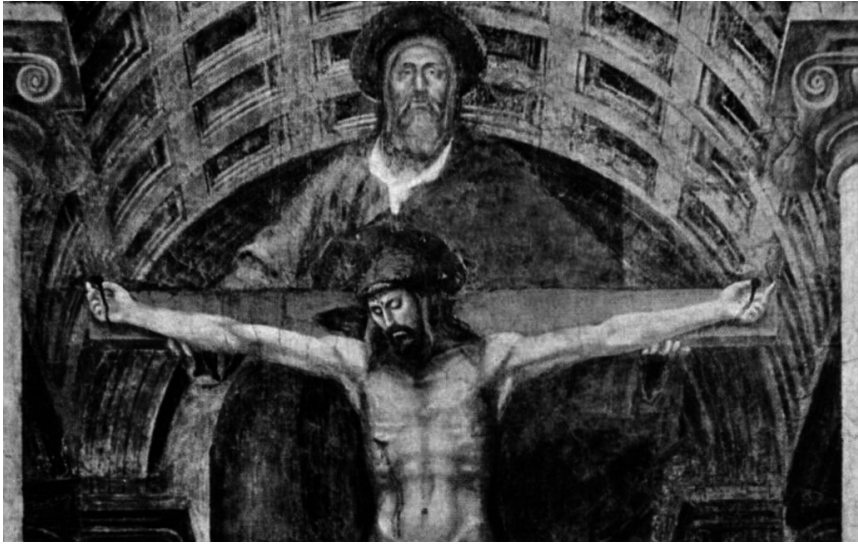
In looking at the black and white detail of the pelican (Fig. 4), the reader is not able to see that the dark spot on the mother pelican's breast, setting off the heads of the baby pelicans, is blood red.



Fig. 4. Follower of Benozzo Gozzoli, called “Alunno di Gozzoli,” Italian, *Devotional Cross*, 1480-1490, (detail) (Source: *Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri—Columbia*).

Part of the interest of this particular image was the placement of the pelican between the figure of God the Father in the quatrefoil at the top and the INRI (Jesus Nazareus Rex Iudaeorum) *titulus* above the head of the figure of the crucified Jesus. Given its placement and its particular rendering on this cross, the casual observer might easily mistake it for a figure of a dove representing the third-person of the Holy Trinity, as it appears, for example, in Masaccio's famous 15th century fresco at Santa

Maria Novella in Florence, in which the Father, the Dove (Holy Spirit), and the crucified Jesus are represented in just this way (Fig. 5).



*Fig. 5. Masaccio, Italian, Holy Trinity, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, 15th Cent.
(Source: Yorck Project at Wikimedia Commons).*

This is not to imply that the placement of the pelican motif in our devotional cross unprecedented or even unusual. We may think for example of the 15th century processional cross attributed to Neri di Bicci at the University of Michigan Museum of Art (which is strikingly similar to our cross),⁴ or again of the 14th century processional cross at the Brooklyn Museum of Art by the Master of Monte del Lago.⁵ Indeed crosses with pelicans above the figure of Christ—often seen, as here, nesting with their children in what looks like a tree growing out of the top of the cross itself are plentiful.⁶

⁴ See Land, “Overview,” in *Kress Study Collection*, 31-32 (Figs. 14-15) Accession No. 1942.6.

⁵ *Double Sided Processional Cross*, Italian, 14th cent., (Accession No. 34.845).

⁶ See, e.g., Giotto di Bondone (or his studio), *Crucifix*, Italian, ca. 1315, Louvre, Accession No. M.I. 357); Giotto (?), *Painted Crucifix*, Italian, ca. 1325-35, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College (Accession No. AMAM 1942.129); Sassetta, *St. Francis Kneeling before Christ on the Cross*, Italian, 15th cent. (Cleveland Museum of Art; Accession No. 1962.36). Sometimes it appears as if the nest is setting right on top of the cross itself, see e.g., Niccolò da Foligno, *The Crucifixion*, Italian, c. 1468, Pomona College Museum of Art

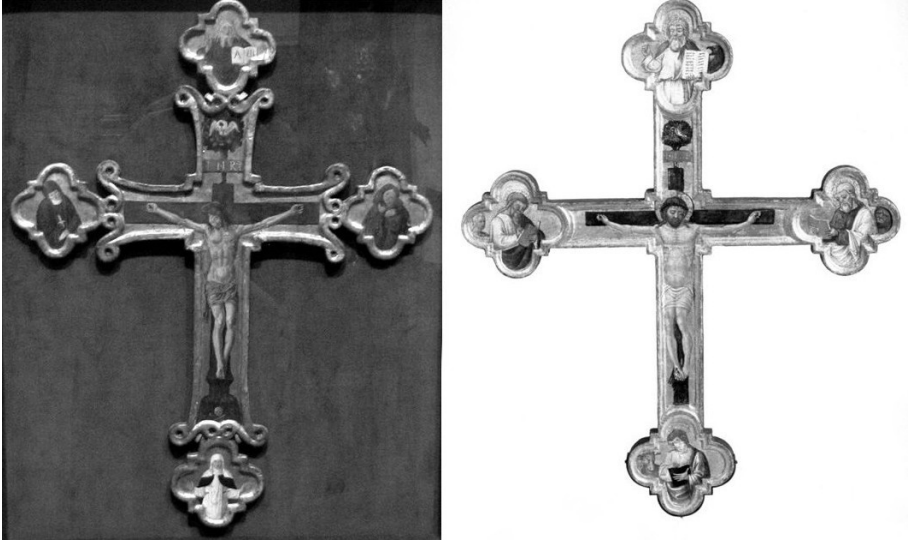


Fig. 6. Compare the Alunno di Gozzoli cross with the very 15th century processional cross attributed to Neri di Bicci (Source: University of Michigan Museum of Art).

In her magisterial work on Christian Iconography, Gertrud Schiller remarks that the “pelican is a common motif in *Arma Christi* images.”⁷ *Arma Christi* pictures images depict scenes cluttered with the instruments of Jesus’s betrayal and passion. A good example including our motif of a pelican nesting in a tree growing out of the top of a cross is seen in Lorenzo Monaco’s 15th century *Man of Sorrows* (Fig. 7).

(Accession No. P61.1.9). This last work is also from the Kress collection.

⁷ Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (2 vols.; trans. Janet Seligman; Greenwich, CT: New York: Graphic Society, 1971-1972), 2:137.

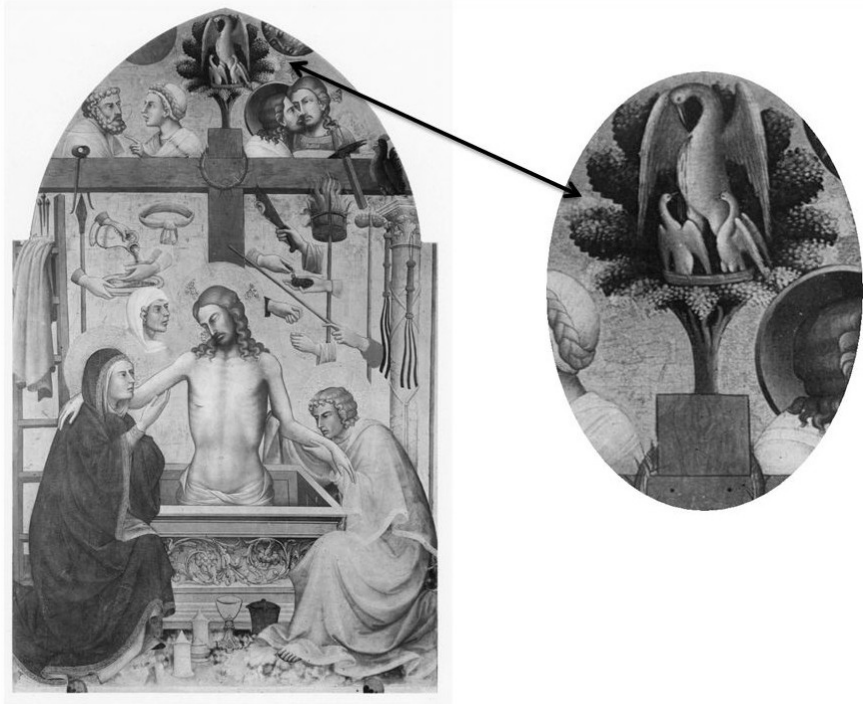


Fig. 7: Lorenzo Monaco, Italian, *Man of Sorrows*, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, 1404 (and detail) (Source: Yorck Project at Wikimedia Commons).

The motif of a tree growing out of the cross with a nesting pelican apparently represents a variation on the iconic theme of the cross of Christ as a living tree or tree of life.⁸ A splendid example of the latter comes from a 13th/14th century German manuscript from the West German Cistercian Abbey of Kamp now in Yale's Beinecke Library (Fig. 8).

I. A QUESTION OF ORIGINS

So then, where I wondered did this pelican motif originate? A little poking and scratching around in places like the magnificently stocked Spencer Art Reference Library on the top floor of Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art revealed that it came from a work called the *Physiologus*, which is sometimes attributed to the 4th century Greek

⁸ See for example the Nuremberg Rood Cross in Schiller, *Iconography* 2 (Fig. 489).

father Epiphanius of Salamis, but perhaps dating back as early as the end of the 2nd century AD.

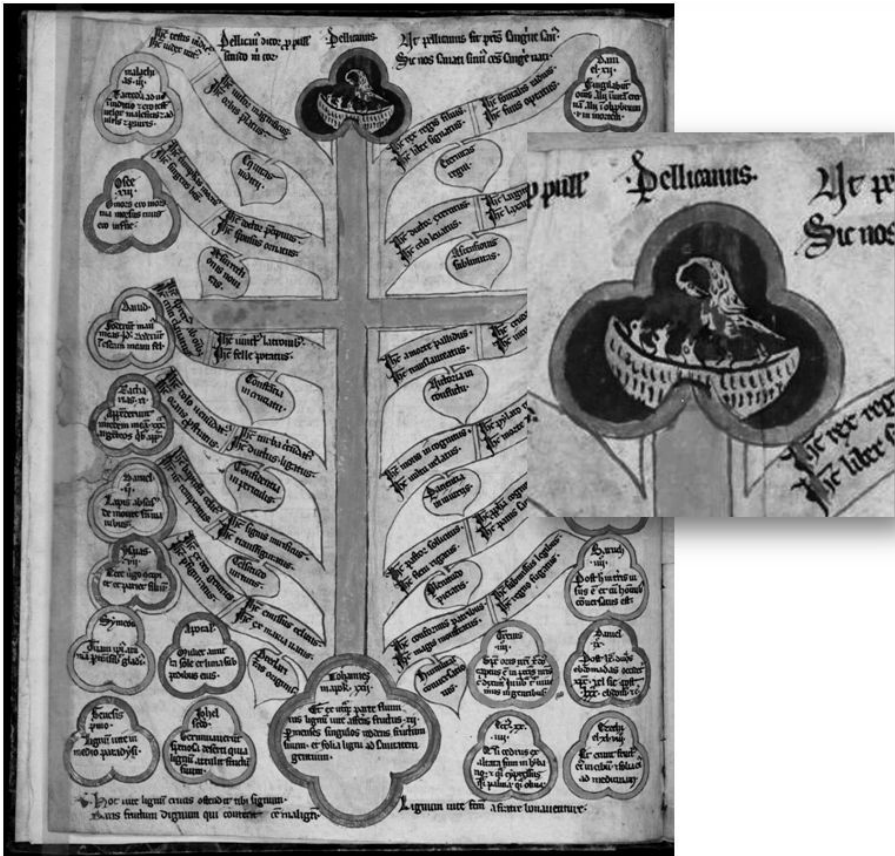


Fig. 8. *Speculum theologiae*, German, Beineke MS 416, p. 1v (and detail)
(Source: Beinecke Rare Book Room at Yale University).

The *Pysiologus* also served as the basis of the Medieval Bestiaries. On pursuing this further I discovered that the story told in the *Physiologus* and retold and expanded in later Bestiaries contained interesting additional details not mentioned in the description accompanying the Alluno di Gozzoli cross, nor the published discussion from the University of Missouri Kress collection catalogue itself. The following for example, rife with such details, comes from the Aberdeen Bestiary, which was produced around 1200 AD. There we read in part:⁹

⁹ Aberdeen University Library MS 24, Folio 34v-35r; ET: Colin McLaren & 126

‘I am like pelican of the wilderness’ (Psalms, 102:6). The pelican is a bird of Egypt, living in the wilderness of the River Nile, from which it gets its name. For Egypt is known as *Canopus*.

It is devoted to its young. When it gives birth and the young begin to grow, they strike their parents in the face. But their parents, striking back, kill them. On the third day, however, the mother-bird, with a blow to her flank, opens up her side and lies on her young and lets her blood pour over the bodies of the dead, and so raises them from the dead.

In a mystic sense, the pelican signifies Christ; Egypt, the world. The pelican lives in solitude, as Christ alone condescended to be born of a virgin without intercourse with a man. It is solitary, because it is free from sin, as also is the life of Christ. It kills its young with its beak as preaching the word of God converts the unbelievers. It weeps ceaselessly for its young, as Christ wept with pity when he raised Lazarus. Thus after three days, it revives its young with its blood, as Christ saves us, whom he has redeemed with his own blood.

The most notable elaboration in the above text, which as it turns out is also a commonplace feature in the traditional retelling of the pelican motif, is the reference to the baby pelicans rising up against their parents, being struck dead by them, and then raised up again after three days by having blood shed on them. It is no surprise that for the Church this imagined recurring sequence of events in the lifecycle of the pelican appeared to provide a wonderfully symbolical retelling of the story of the creation, fall, and redemption of humanity.

II. THE PELICAN AND THE FOUR-FOLD METHOD

The reader will notice that this description of the pelican in the Aberdeen Bestiary is linked to Psalm 102:6 (Vulgate 101:7). This brings into play here as in a number of Bestiaries, the Medieval four-fold method of biblical interpretation. According to this method a given scripture can to be investigated from four different perspectives in order to plumb the depths of its varying senses expressing the divine intention in producing it. These four are the Literal sense, the Allegorical sense,

the Moral (or tropological) sense, and the Anagogical (or eschatological) sense. The approach was summed up in the Latin, for example, by Nicholas of Lyra as follows:¹⁰

Litera, gesta docet
Quid credas, Allegoria
Moralis, quid agas
Quo tendas, anagogia

Robert M. Grant renders these in English as:¹¹

The *letter* shows us what God and our fathers did;
The *allegory* shows us where our faith is hid;
The *moral* meaning gives us rules of daily life;
The *anagogy* shows us where we end our strife.

The portion of the passage quoted here from the Aberdeen Bestiary touches only upon first the “letter,” i.e., the literal sense, the supposed “facts” about Pelicans, and then second their allegorical sense (or in case “mystic sense”). This Bestiary also contains an extended section on the moral sense relating to the pelican’s self-sacrificial act:

In a moral sense, we can understand by the pelican not the righteous man, but anyone who distances himself far from carnal desire. By Egypt is meant our life, shrouded in the darkness of ignorance. For *Egiptus* can be translated as 'darkness'. In Egypt, therefore, we make a wilderness (see Joel 3:19), when we are far from the preoccupations and desires of this world. Thus the righteous man creates solitude for himself in the city, when he keeps himself free from sin, as far as human frailty allows.

The pelican kills its young with its beak because the righteous man considers and rejects his sinful thoughts and deeds.

Nothing really is said in the Aberdeen Bestiary about the forth, or anagogical, sense as relating to the pelican.

Even though the Medieval four-fold method was left behind with the advent of the Renaissance and Reformation, the symbolism of the

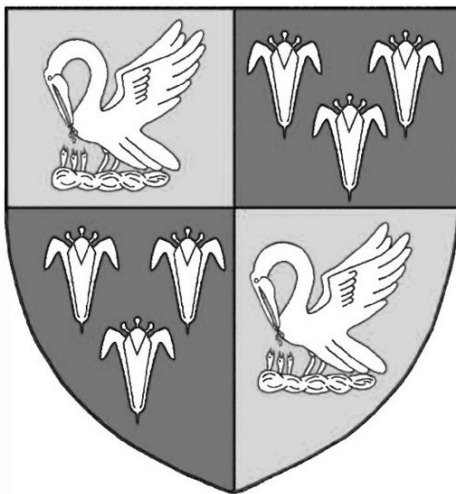
¹⁰ Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349) in William Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 101.

¹¹ Robert Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 19.

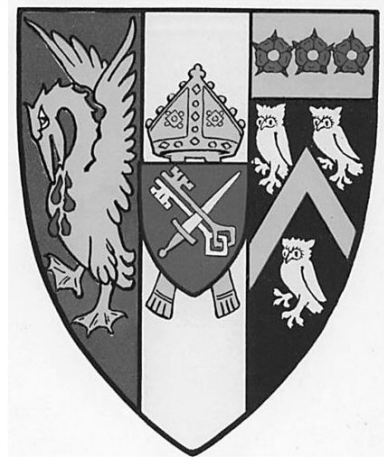
pelican has continued to make itself felt in our Western Culture. The symbol of the pelican after all represented self-giving love, an ideal that will always speak to the human heart, and one that found its most perfect expression in Christ's loving and giving himself for us (Gal 2:20).

The symbol of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service, or the *Seirbhís Fuilaidstriúcháin na hÉireann*, is a highly stylized pelican. Donate blood a hundred times and you get recognized with a reward of a porcelain pelican.¹² We find theme echoed as well in Shakespeare's Hamlet, where Laertes says, "To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms / And like the kind life-rendering pelican / Repast them with my blood."¹³

The allegorical link between the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and the pelican story is reflected too in the Coats of Arms for the *Corpus Christi* Colleges of both Oxford and Cambridge, *Corpus Christi* meaning "body of Christ" in Latin (Fig. 9).



Corpus Christi College
Cambridge



Corpus Christi College
Oxford

Fig. 9

¹² "Irish Blood Transfusion Service Annual Report 2006," 35. http://www.giveblood.ie/About_Us/Publications_Guidelines/Annual_Reports/IBTS_Annual_Report_2006.pdf.

¹³ Act IV, Scene 5, l. 3020-23.



Fig. 10. Flag of the State of Louisiana

It even turns up as the symbol of the State of Louisiana on its flag (Fig. 10), as is described in the Louisiana State Code:¹⁴

The official flag of Louisiana shall be that flag now in general use, consisting of a solid blue field with the coat-of-arms of the state, the pelican tearing its breast to feed its young, in white in the center The design of the flag depicting the pelican tearing at its breast to feed its young shall include an appropriate display of three drops of blood.

As we look back on this description of the pelican we may smile at what might appear to us as a quaint pre-scientific perspective. But in reality it could just as well be described as reflecting not pre-science, but the science of another time and place. But it also reflects the early Christians' expectation that earthly things, having been created by God—and not by some inferior being, as, for example, the Gnostics and others who denied the essential goodness of creation believed—to be filled with a rich symbolism of heavenly realities. The 3rd century theologian Origen of Alexandria describes this expectation well in the third book of his commentary of Song of Songs:¹⁵

¹⁴ Title 49, RS 49:153, §153, A.

¹⁵ Quoted in *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore* (trans. by Michael J. Curley; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979),

The apostle Paul teaches us that the invisible things of God may be known through the visible (*invisibilia Dei ex visibilibus intelligantur*), and things which are not seen may be contemplated by reason of and likeness to those things which are seen. He shows by this that this visible world may teach about the invisible and that earth may contain certain patterns of things heavenly, so that we may rise from lower to higher things (*ut ab his, quae deorsum sunt, ad ea, quae sursum sunt, possimus adscendere*) and out of those we see on earth perceive and know those which are in the heavens. As a certain likeness of these, the Creator has given a likeness of creatures which are on earth, by which the differences more easily might be gathered and perceived. And perhaps just as God made man in his own image and likeness, so also did he make the remaining creatures after certain other heavenly images as a likeness. And perhaps every single thing on earth has something of an image and likeness (*habent aliquid imaginis et similitudinis in caelestibus*) in heavenly things, to such a degree that even the grain of mustard which is the smallest of all seeds may have something of an image and likeness in heaven.

What Origen says also reveals his own links to Neo-Platonism, and echoes Plato's own doctrine of forms of ideas, according to which all earthly things represent imperfect passing shadow-reflections of heavenly archetypes, which Plato called *forms* or *ideas*.

Not all ancient Christians, it should also be said, received the story undergirding the pelican motif uncritically. We see this for example in the 4th/5th century Church father Augustine of Hippo's cautious way of telling the story:¹⁶

These birds are said to slay their young with blows of their beaks, and for three days to mourn them when slain by themselves in the nest: after which they say the mother wounds herself deeply, and pours forth her blood over her young, bathed in which they recover life. This may be true, it may be false: yet if it be true, see how it agrees with Him, who gave us life by His blood.

In this I have to say I appreciated Augustine's cautiousness, and yet, I still cannot help but wonder who is guilty of a graver error, the person who says that nothing that can be learned about God by listening to the

xiii-xiv.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Exposition on Psalms* 102.8 (NPNF¹ 8:497, slightly modified).

voice of nature, because on that subject nature is supposedly absolutely silent, or the one who listens to nature to hear from God but misinterprets her or even overspecifies what she says? In an age that has largely ceased looking for signs of God in nature at all, indeed which sometimes treats even the idea of such as dangerously subversive, it is a question that well deserves asking. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky proclaims the work of His hands," says Psalms 19:1, and the Apostle Paul: "From the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made" (Rom 1:20). In the same context Paul draws from his statement the implication that all those who turn away from God are, in so doing, "without excuse." In the Apostle Paul's view anyhow God wouldn't buy the defense Bertrand Russell had proposed for himself in the event that he died and found out that God existed after all, namely that he would tell God, "Not enough evidence, God, not enough evidence."¹⁷ Experientially I have to say I agree with Paul. If it really were true that there was "not enough evidence," if the heavens really were silent about the glory of God, and since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes . . . eternal power and divine nature, really were not clearly seen, or even evident at all, then what's all the recent fuss been about. If the rule makers, the gatekeepers, the boundary guardians of our myopic, fundamentally retentive, post-Christian culture really believe nature is silent, why do they spend so much time trying to force people to stop listening to her? If you have got your truth that works for you and I have got mine that works for me, why do you keep on trying to impose your truth about nature's silence on me? "Hey man, don't push your trip!" But after all is said and done Paul was right, and the Psalmist. The heavens *do* declare the glory of God, and so does the little pelican with her children. If not precisely in the way the Medievals thought, yet even so.

¹⁷ Quoted in Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 131.

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BRAUCH, Manfred T., *Abusing Scripture: The Consequences of Misreading the Bible*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009, 293 pp., \$18.00 paperback, ISBN 978-0830825790.

Manfred T. Brauch, retired professor of Biblical Theology and past President of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, is deeply concerned about “the integrity and viability of our Christian witness in today’s world, a witness that is frequently undermined and distorted by the abuse of Scripture” (p. 15). The noble cause displayed in the title and the stated goals of the book are sure to attract serious students of the Bible and concerned Christians. He helps identify for readers the various ways Scripture is abused or misapplied, even by those who profess a belief in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. He acknowledges that his identifications are unintentional abuses which “are often the result of letting our backgrounds, preconceptions, or biases influence and control the way we read and apply Scripture” (p. 16). In order to overcome these abuses of Scripture, Brauch calls Bible interpreters to be “self-critical, honest, and clear” (p.20). He asserts that the weakened witness, diminished impact, and caricatures from society Evangelicals now experience all stem from abusing Scripture.

Although the book is not devoted specifically to hermeneutics as the author claims, readers can find some helpful principles, methodology, and criteria for biblical author and context oriented hermeneutics. Brauch admirably calls evangelicals to give attention to the whole gospel and make constructive overtures to culture. He reproves certain Christian interpretive traditions that led to women’s inferior status, restricted roles, and demeaning subjugation (p. 253). But, readers may wonder if it is not possible that the very authorial intent he seeks intended different roles for men and women without intending demeaning subjugation. He provides helpful hermeneutical principles for why modern Christians do not need foot-washing, sacrifices, and the Sabbath Day. But, readers will likely find it puzzling that he selectively applies his principles to American tax policy, military policy, environmental issues, treatment of women and minorities and not to other thorny and disputable issues for modern Christians such as tithing, dancing, and alcohol. These are other issues occurring in the Bible which also have the unpleasant consequences of causing division and caricatures in our culture.

Brauch advocates the ‘incarnational’ nature of Scripture, brought *en vogue* by Peter Enns, which asserts the Bible’s divine and human

elements in a nuance they claim is analogous to the person of Jesus Christ, thereby accounting for the Bible's "limited interpretations" (p. 31, 93). Indeed, Scripture is the Word of God through human writers. But, the view of the Bible's nature espoused by Brauch and Enns seems neither totally analogous with the classically orthodox views of the person of Jesus Christ who is impeccably God in the flesh, nor consistent with many evangelical views of Scripture.

At times, Brauch's suggested hermeneutical principles seem inconsistent and strained. Out of one side of his mouth he calls for interpreters to consider all that the Bible says on a subject and out the other side he does not exercise what he advocates—for example, his diatribes against "the spread of weaponry" and "tax policies." On pages 84 and 255, Brauch seeks to address prophetically his perceived social ills of tax policies and corporate greed. If Brauch really is exercising Christian concern for the poor and not just Marxist class envy, does he want the poor to be better off than they are or as well off as the rich? Brauch's call for "overcoming evil with good" as a remedy for recent "warmongering" supported by some Evangelicals is admirable, but certainly all Bible readers can agree that Jesus did this and He was still hated by many. Did Jesus' witness lack the integrity or viability which Brauch desires?

His quasi-Hegelian hermeneutical method of "original vision"—"prophetic opposition"—"incarnation"—"full realization of original vision" (p. 249) is creatively insightful at points and less than helpful at points if the goal of the book is to encourage the right handling of Scripture. Readers could better benefit by Brauch avoiding the "exegetical gymnastics" he deplores and exercising the "honesty" he encourages and just plainly tell us his agenda. He has certain social and political views that part company with many conservative evangelicals, who embarrass him (like Falwell and Dobson as he claims), and he is looking for proof-texts to substantiate those views. His criteria and credentials for functioning as the arbiter concerning "original vision" (p.246), "limited interpretations" in the Bible (p.247), and "full realizations of the original vision" in the final form of biblical texts are sorely lacking. Seminary presidency aside, who is Brauch to determine when or if the Bible ever "stopped significantly short" in its full realization of the original vision? Scripture seems fully capable of displaying original vision and the full realization it intended. Brauch comes dangerously close to taking progressive revelation too far and advocating hermeneutics that do not take seriously *Sola Scriptura* or the Sufficiency of Scripture. Perhaps we can address abuse in the name of Christianity without such unhelpful statements concerning the nature of Scripture.

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Though the book is not about biblical interpretation as such, his goal is twofold: “(1) to demonstrate . . . how Scripture *is in fact* all too frequently and pervasively misinterpreted, mishandled, misunderstood and misapplied in and by the Christian community, both individually and collectively; (2) to demonstrate repeatedly, via multiple examples, that the abuse of Scripture has consequences” (p. 251). In disputes among Christians, both sides have Bible quoting advocates—and they stand by their verses. Integrity, maturity, and care surely calls for both sides, not just the side that may be politically incorrect or not as cool, to be “self-critical,” acknowledging “lens” and “filters” concerning the handling of Scripture. What if Brauch discovers one day that his interpretations put forth in this book were wide of the mark? Did he abuse anyone? Nevertheless, he makes some valid points in pursuit of these goals and Evangelicals should take heed.

Brauch’s goals for Christian united witness and the world knowing the transforming love of God are laudable (and sound much like Barack Obama’s 2008 Democratic Convention Acceptance speech), but his answers fall short for why Christians must placate questionable environmental science that has an *a priori* agenda and disregard a likely biblical intention in terms of just war and gender roles in church leadership. Though there is no excuse for abusing Scripture and the resultant abuse of people (and perhaps the environment), opposition to Christian witness and caricatures can still come from sources similar to those who once opposed Jesus—Bible interpreter *par excellence*. Those seeking a purely hermeneutics book can find some help here but are better served looking elsewhere, such as D. A. Carson’s *Exegetical Fallacies*. And those seeking a biblical resource to remedy the abuse of humans, without further abusing Scripture, can find help here but may be better served appealing to the doctrines of Soul Competency and *Imago Dei*, and Jesus’ clear command to love.

Michael Roy
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

MURAOKA, Takamitsu. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*. Louvain, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2009, xl + 757 pp., Euro 95.00 / US\$ 138.00 hardcover, ISBN 978-90-429-2248-8.

T. Muraoka’s Greek – English Lexicon of the Septuaginta is the kind of scholarly event that happens once in a generation. The achievement crowns the illustrious carrier of Takamitsu Muraoka, Professor emeritus at the Leiden University, known to the Septuagintalists for his

multifaceted contribution to the study of the Greek Old Testament, especially in the area of lexicography. For the English speaking readership, the anticipation of the completion of the lexicon could not have been more acute. The path to this event was prepared by two earlier editions of the lexicon, each one limited in scope, the first one covering the Minor Prophets (Louvain: Peeters, 1993) and the second the Pentateuch (Louvain: Peeters, 2002). The *Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint* of J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1992/1996) also deserves mention in this respect. Yet, even this reference title, the only Greek-English lexicon of the entire Septuagint available, was itself a work “limited in scope” and “more directly useful for students in these fields” (*GELS*, p. vii). With Muraoka’s Lexicon, however, the time is come! Every researcher in Septuagint and cognate studies, scholars and students alike, will now have at their disposal not a mere glossary of Greek to English lexical equivalents, but a fully fledged lexicon, the kind of lexicography canon that will set the standard in the field for decades to come.

The introduction (pp. vi-xvii) deals briefly with several features of the lexicon that deserve clarification. The reader is given a concise statement describing Muraoka’s position on a variety of issues, such as the scope of the lexical database, his approach to lexicography and the nature of the Greek displayed in the LXX, the textual basis for the lexicon and the role of textual criticism in the way the textual variants are handled, and the working methodology. The lexicon covers the entire Septuagint, the canonical books, as well as the deuterocanonical books or the Apocrypha. The books that have survived in more than one established Greek textual tradition, such as the Book of Daniel (represented by the Old Greek and the Theodotian text), or the two versions of the Book of Judges (preserved with significant differences in the two main codices) alongside the Antiochene text of the Judges are also served by the lexicon.

Perhaps one of the most important decisions guiding the project was Muraoka’s distinct take on Greek lexicography, an issue frequently debated in Septuagintalists’ circles. The reader is informed that unlike the Semitic equivalences approach promoted in their Lexicon by Lust *et al.*, or the interlinear model advocated earlier by A. Pietersma, Muraoka stresses the need to read and understand the lexical stock of the Septuagint on its own. The words must be treated now as they were then, by the mind of a reader living roughly in the 3rd or 2nd centuries BC, who tried to make sense of a Greek text without having knowledge of or access to the Semitic languages that the Septuagint translated. This position is the logical outcome of another principle followed by Muraoka, who considers the language of the Septuagint “to be genuine

representative of the contemporary Greek, that is to say, the Greek of the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, though necessarily influenced by the grammar and usage of Aramaic and Hebrew from which the bulk of the Septuagint was translated” (p. ix).

The textual basis for the lexicon was adopted in line with the Lagardian hypothesis, the largely accepted theory regarding the origin of its text, according to which the Septuagint evolved from an original phase of textual uniformity to later stages of textual pluriformity. Consequently, such a position led to choosing the standard critical editions of the Göttingen Septuagint as the textual support for the Lexicon. For the texts that are not yet represented in the Göttingen LXX, Rahlfs edition supplements the text.

A longer section in the introduction details the method employed, the foundation of which was laid as early as the first book investigated for the Lexicon of the Twelve Prophets. Even though the LXX concordance of Hatch and Redpath (Baker, 1998) has been extensively and gratefully used (p. x), by itself this classical work is insufficient for serious lexicographical investigations. The operating concept adopted by Muraoka is that of building the semantic ‘profile’ of words, since a word is “hardly ever used in isolation or on its own, but normally occurs in conjunction with another word or words” (p. xi). Consequently, the ultimate distinctive feature of this lexicon is that it supplies the definition of words, implying that the words are never to be regarded as mere translation equivalents. While a translation equivalent approach is to be preferred for largely pragmatic and traditional reasons, the adopted position of Muraoka is based on the method that seeks to give precise consideration to what a given lexeme means (p. xii).

Muraoka’s choices on these matters have inevitably left a non-negligible segment of the Septuagint words untreated. Specifically, the Hebrew calques – covered to a certain extent by *GELS* – do not make it into the lexicon. Similarly, in distancing from the approaches which trace or display the Semitic equivalents of the Greek words, Muraoka’s lexicon does not inform the reader when a particular Greek word translates a Hebrew proper name. In Ps 94 LXX [Ps 95 MT], the LXX translator rendered the two topographic proper names *Meribah* and *Massah* as *parapikrasmos* (provocation, rebellion) and *peirasmos* (temptation), thus precluding the LXX reader to link Ps 94 LXX with the specific events recorded in Ex 17. Following the two entries in the lexicon will not offer more help in this regard either.

The template chosen to display the data is both logical and functional, each entry consisting of three main sections. Section A, which comes right after the bold-faced headword, supplies important morphological information, listing forms of the tenses and moods other

than the present and imperfect forms. Nouns and adjectives use the standard lexical form. Various symbols are used to indicate additional information pertaining to each entry, including statistical details about the word usage and coverage given by the lexicon. Section B defines the sense of the headword and describes its usage. Distinctly useful, the lexicon provides the meaning determined by various syntactic relationships taken by a given lexeme. Section C provides, case by case, the words semantically associated with the headword such as synonyms, antonyms, or idiomatic expressions, as well as the significant references in the secondary literature.

All this wealth of information is given in a most pleasant and easy to use layout. While this element can be more easily accomplished in the age of computers, it should not be taken for granted. The enthusiasm for this volume will most likely be dampened by its price tag. Steep as it is, however, in the area of outstanding research tools pecuniary compromises ought not to be made, the readers being confident that in this lexicon they have an indispensable tool for the study not only of the Septuagint but also of the New Testament, Hellenistic Judaism, and the Greek language. I believe that Muraoka's lexicon deserves its place alongside the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich and Koehler-Baumgartner. Hopefully an electronic format will soon become available so that the standard Bible software will be able to offer it as downloadable module.

Muraoka's Lexicon is yet another clear sign that the Septuagint studies have come a long way in becoming a *bona-fide* theological field in their own right. While both OT and NT scholars will continue to intersect with the Septuagint studies, either for unlocking text critical issues of the Hebrew text or for establishing the textual base for scriptural quotations in the New Testament, the Septuagint's role as a theological power-house can no longer be ignored or relegated to a secondary tier. Fortunately, both the recent scholarly efforts on a variety of fronts, as well as the multiplication of outstanding research tools, such as the present Lexicon, will continue to aid the renaissance of the LXX studies. One can only hope that in the not too distant future a new Greek Grammar of the Septuagint, to match the excellence of this Lexicon, will be added to the mix.

Radu Gheorghita
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

PETERSON, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009, lv + 790 pp., \$65.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-0802837318.

In recent years, several major commentaries on Acts have been published, including those by Gaventa (2003); Dormeyer and Galindo (2003); Pelikan (2005); Bock (2007); and Longenecker (2007). Joining the list is Peterson's *The Acts of the Apostles*. Peterson is Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer in New Testament at Moore College in Sydney, Australia. He previously served as Principal of Oak Hill Theological College in London (1996-2007) where along with fulfilling his administrative duties he taught New Testament. Prior to writing *The Acts of the Apostles*, he published a number of substantive writings on the theology of Acts.

The writing under review is part of the Pillar New Testament Commentary series, edited by D. A. Carson. Authors in this series employ the TNIV as the basis of their individual studies. They aim to produce quality commentaries that will assist serious evangelical pastors and teachers in their study of Scripture. With his commentary on Acts, Peterson seeks to be as comprehensive as possible, investigating all major textual, historical, and social matters. Nevertheless, he is particularly concerned with hermeneutics, biblical theology, and correct application. His strong emphasis on the theology of Acts is especially evident, both in the introduction and in the commentary proper.

Peterson affirms the traditional view of authorship. Furthermore, based on Luke's apparent ignorance of Paul's letters, his portrayal of Judaism as a legal religion, and his omission of any reference to the Neronian persecution of believers, Peterson suggests that Luke probably composed his work some time between AD 62-64.

Concerning genre, Peterson designates the Gospel of Luke and Acts as a unified two-volume work. He finds evidence for their unity on three levels: narrative, theological, and thematic. Furthermore, following Witherington, he sees Acts as similar to Hellenistic historiography, though he does not regard the Gospel of Luke as an historical monograph. Peterson also recognizes the vital link between narrative and speech, for he designates Acts as "a narrative dominated by speeches" (p. 27). From his perspective, Acts' speeches express key theological themes and assist in moving the narrative forward. The reviewer found Peterson's analysis of the speeches (e.g., pp. 27-29, 244-267, 657-677) particularly enlightening.

In his approach to Acts as a literary product, Peterson follows closely Tannehill and his employment of narrative criticism. Like Tannehill, Peterson sees the work as a literary whole and identifies the essential

elements within the narrative that assist the reader in better understanding Luke's unique theological presentation. He expands Tannehill's use of literary devices to include the following features: editorial summaries; inclusion; key terms; employment of Scripture; speeches; narrative repetition; parallel accounts; contrasting accounts; and important geographical, cultural, and social indicators (pp. 42-27). Though Peterson's presentation of these features is brief, he astutely identifies the crucial literary devices that assist one in better understanding Luke's writing.

Another noteworthy feature of the commentary is the author's discussion of Luke's theology. Keeping in mind Acts' role as part two of a two-volume work, Peterson examines key themes in both Acts and the Gospel of Luke. He traces carefully Luke's unique expression of a given theme, making note of similarities and developments (pp. 53-97). Granted, by his own admission at times he could be more comprehensive by interacting with other sources and examining additional themes (p. 54). Nevertheless, overall he does a fine job of identifying the crucial themes located in the Gospel of Luke and Acts (God and his plan, Jesus as Messiah and Lord, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the gospel, the atoning work of Jesus, witness and mission, miracles, magic and the demonic, and the Church).

Peterson has written a fine commentary and should be commended for the following reasons. First, he approaches the text from the biblical author's viewpoint, a salvation historical perspective. In other words, Peterson highlights Luke's concern to present the story of God's divine work in causing the gospel to progress from Jerusalem to Rome for the purpose of bringing salvation to all peoples. As Peterson repeatedly acknowledges both explicitly and implicitly (e.g., pp. 14, 26-27, 54-57, 70, 247-267, 696), this initiative began with God's covenant with Abram (e.g., Gen 12; 15) and continued to Luke's own day.

A second praiseworthy attribute of *The Acts of the Apostles* is its accessibility.

Technical discussions are kept to a minimum, and even in those rare instances when Peterson does engage in a lofty discussion of a challenging textual matter, he pitches his song at a level that allows most to sing with him, or at least to follow the melody.

A third commendable feature is the high level of respect Peterson displays for Acts' historical reliability. For instance, in regard to Stephen's speech in Acts 7 Peterson suggests that in light of Saul's presence at Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7:58) and his later close tie to Luke, he (Saul) could have served as a reliable source for Luke (p. 247). This regard for Luke's role as an accurate historian may be found throughout the commentary (e.g., pp. 300, 430, 661).

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A fourth and final positive aspect of this commentary is its many helpful discussions of how to apply challenging narrative texts (e.g., Paul's conversion, Acts 9; decision of the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15). Among conservative evangelicals, this genre is one of the most misunderstood (and misapplied). Peterson's insights provide wise guidance for those seeking to apply the text responsibly.

Though a few minor changes could improve the work, such as the inclusion of visual aids (e.g., charts, maps), this reviewer highly recommends Peterson's commentary. It will prove itself a valuable resource for all serious students of Scripture.

Michael L. Bryant
Charleston Southern University

WALKER, Peter. *In the Steps of Paul: An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle's Life and Journeys*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008, 224 pp., \$19.99 hardback, ISBN 978-0310290650.

Peter Walker studied the classics and early church history at Cambridge University, where he completed his doctorate. Walker's doctoral thesis was on developing interest in the Holy Land during the early Constantine period. He has also done post-doctoral research in Jerusalem in the New Testament. He has a double doctorate and currently serves as a lecturer at Wycliffe Hall, within the University of Oxford in Oxford, England. Walker lectures in the areas of New Testament studies and Biblical Theology with special interest in the historical Jesus Christ as well as issues dealing with Jerusalem and the Middle East. Walker is a highly qualified Israel tour guide and leads student group tours to Israel regularly. Walker's knowledge of Jerusalem and the Middle East at the time of the New Testament and today clearly demonstrate his qualifications. Peter Walker's other books include: *Holy City, Holy Places?*, *Jesus and His World*, and *In the Steps of Jesus*.

In the Steps of Paul is a review of the life of Paul from the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus to the end of his life on earth. Walker traces Paul's steps from Jerusalem to Rome as Paul preaches the cross of Christ and plants churches all over the known world. The book starts off with a basic introduction of Paul, Luke, and the Roman world, including maps of Paul's missionary journeys and key dates associated with the Roman Empire, the writing of Luke and the writings of Paul. The fourteen successive chapters take the reader systematically through Paul's travels, covering each major city in chronological order. The cities included in this study are Damascus, Tarsus, Antioch, Cyprus,

Pamphylia, Galatia, Macedonia, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Miletus, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Malta, and Rome. Each chapter contains a rehearsal of the biblical information about the city in question as well as key dates, city maps, case studies on important topics about Paul's life, pictures, and sketches related to each city, as it existed in the first century. The second half of each chapter then turns to modern times giving relevant information about each of the key cities in Paul's missionary journeys. The details regarding these cities clearly come from Peter Walker's personal knowledge of the cities and include clear concise descriptions and vibrant color pictures of each city. The descriptions of the modern cities give the reader a solid picture of what they would see if they were to visit each of the cities that Paul visited during his travels.

Peter Walker has produced a gem in his book *In the Steps of Paul: An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle's Life and Journeys*. Each chapter is clear and concise, giving a description that allows readers to picture the events of Paul's travels in a new way. The author takes a passage from the Bible, such as the story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (pp. 18-19), and paints a picture with words that puts the reader on the road to Damascus with Paul and in Antioch praying for Paul and Barnabas (p. 46). This book provides its readers with a solid understanding of Paul's life and travels as well as the cities along his journeys all in one place and in chronological order. This is something that can be difficult to disseminate from Acts and the Pauline Epistles, but Walker takes all of the biblical information about Paul and puts it into a chronological yet comprehensive format. Adding the discussions about the modern day cities helps to further describe the importance these cities during the biblical times as well as giving the reader an understanding of what to expect if they were to visit the Holy Land. *In the Steps of Paul* is an easy read and is recommended to anyone who wants to get a better understanding of Paul. It is a critical read before making a first trip to the Holy Land, and could be used as a guidebook for those interested in tracing the footsteps of Paul.

Shane Parker
First Baptist Church, Albia, Iowa

WASSERSTEIN, Abraham, and David J. Wasserstein. *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, xviii + 334 pp., £40.00 / US \$75.00 hardcover, ISBN 9780521854955.

The volume in consideration stands out as a model of precise,

nuanced, and comprehensive research, the kind of enterprise the theological-historical research ought to be. It is quite rare that one finds a book that undertakes an exhaustive, systematic treatment of a given topic, but this is precisely what the Wasserstein duo has achieved, or so it seems to this reviewer, contrary to the self-claim of the authors (p. xi). The project was commenced by Prof. Abraham Wasserstein of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and completed after his death by David, his son, who teaches at Vanderbilt University. The monograph traces the reception, interpretation and amplification of the pseudepigraphic writing “the Letter of Aristeas,” the ancient text that purports to provide the historical account of the translation of the Hebrew Torah into Greek, the most important translation project undertaken in antiquity. The very title unveils one of the fundamental stances of the study, which, almost axiomatically, finds very little, if any, substantial historical value in the Aristeas account of the work of “the Seventy.” “This book is an essay in tracing the life of the *legend* that grew up around the origin of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible . . . [w]hat is presented here is an analysis of the *legend* of the original translation of the Pentateuch” (p. ix; italics mine).

Setting the scene for their investigation is the introduction, in which the authors cover the key aspects revolving around the “literary enterprise of immeasurable consequence in the history of western mankind” (p. 1). The praxis of translation in the ancient world as well as the social and religious life of the Jews in Egypt, both in the pre-Hellenistic and the Hellenistic periods, give sufficient support for the claim that the Greek version of the Torah was precipitated by the liturgical needs of the extended Jewish community, and in turn facilitated the proselytization in the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman periods. The Christian Church, as one of the heirs of the translation project, receives credit for the survival of the Septuagint: “the Septuagint, as we have it, is a version that is contained in manuscripts written, without a single exception, by Christian scribes” (p. 17).

Chapter one offers a brief survey of the document itself, composed “ca. 200 BCE though, on various grounds, a later date is preferred by some modern scholars” (p. 20). The Wassersteins contend that since the author himself used the term “narration” (*diegesis*) to describe his work, any future reader of the document will have to conclude that “the epistolary form is no more than a literary device” (p. 21). The work itself is “only a fiction conforming to the widespread genre of the literary letter that we find in the classical, Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman periods” (p. 21). Their verdict then is that “the Aristeas letter is a pseudepigraphon . . . [and] the author was not the man he pretended to be” (p. 22).

Chapters two and three are perhaps the sections that will be of prime

importance and usefulness for biblical studies. It is here that the authors present and evaluate the surviving testimonies pertaining to the way in which the ancient authorities read *The Letter of Aristeas* as a historical account of the translation. Both the Hellenistic Jewish tradition (chapter 2) and the Rabbinic literature (chapter 3) are extensively investigated. As far as the Hellenistic Jewish tradition is concerned, the story is retold in the writings of Aristobulus, Philo and Josephus, each passage scrutinized carefully to identify their distinctive construal of the translation account. Variations between their writings and *Aristeas* are carefully examined and presented. “The Rabbis and the Greek Bible” diachronically documents the rabbinic rapport with the Septuagint, which began with an initial acceptance of the translation, only to be replaced subsequently by a categorical distancing from it. The classical passages in BT *Megilla* 9, PT *Megilla* 71, *Mekhilta* BO 14, *Massekhet Sepher Torah*, *Massekhet Sopherim*, *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Abot de-Rabbi Nathan*, *Midrash Leqah Tov*, and *Midrash Ha-Gadol* are provided with Hebrew texts and their translation. The purpose is not simply to trace down the Rabbis’ take on *Aristeas* but also to underscore the criticism they voiced against the intentional changes in the translation.

Chapter four is a brief exploration of the Ptolemaic changes, the label traditionally ascribed to the changes made by the translators as they worked on the Pentateuch. Similar to the *Aristeas* itself, the authors assert, the list of alleged changes is “no more than a literary exercise . . . it was created . . . as part of the story of the miracle which was invented in the period between, roughly, 80 and 117 CE . . . with little real reference to the actual existing LXX” (p. 91).

The definitive proof of the extensive research conducted for this monograph becomes perceptible in chapter five, “The Church Fathers and the Translation of the Septuagint,” a *tour de force* through five centuries of patristic literature. Starting with the works of Origen and Jerome, the Wassersteins survey the most important writers who mentioned or wrote about the translation, including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Ps-Justin, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Philastrius, bishop of Brescia, Epiphanius, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria. Several less known representatives are also included. The English translation of the relevant passages is provided in what amounts to be one of the most useful compendia of the Church Fathers’ writings on the LXX.

Up to this point, the regular reader could have probably kept up with the information provided. It is the content of the following five chapters, the information which traces the story in the Christians in the Orient (ch. 6), the Muslim and the Septuagint (ch. 7), Yossipon (ch. 8) and Karaites, Samaritans and Rabbinite Jews in the Middle Ages (ch. 9), and the

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Renaissance and the Modern World (ch. 10), that is absolutely breathtaking. One can only stand in admiration of the amount of research that led to tracing down and finding writers interested – even fascinated – with *Aristeas*, in these important, yet so little-known peoples and circles. I believe that the conclusion of their investigation best summarizes the matter: “[T]he story has fired the imagination and aroused curiosity among Jews and Christian, Muslims and even pagans. We find it in the Iberian Peninsula and in Caucasian Iberia, on the shores of the Atlantic and in the wastes of Central Asia; we have seen it not just in its original Greek but also in Latin, and in Persian, in Armenian and in Ethiopic, in Hebrew and Arabic, and in Georgian to say nothing of English and Portuguese and other languages of modern western Europe. It fuelled religious controversy and fed religious faith from the second century BCE until the Renaissance and after, and even now its last echoes have not died away” (p. 270).

No reader could doubt the fervent interest of the Wassersteins for unearthing the historical reception of *Aristeas*. Without their passion for the subject, the quality of this book as well as the information therein would be substantially less. It is very sad indeed that, given its subject matter, this book will be an unlikely candidate for a place on the textbooks’ lists of undergraduate or graduate courses in biblical studies. The doctoral students, however, would do well to secure a copy for themselves, not only for its content, but also for the model of historical investigation it sets. Similarly, the seasoned biblical scholars, as well as the libraries of theological institutions will be richer by enlarging their collection to include the Wasserstein’s study, an epitome of investigative scholarship at its best.

Radu Gheorghita

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

WRIGHT, Christopher J. H. *Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006, 159 pp., \$15.00 paperback, ISBN: 978-0-8308-2591-2.

Christopher J. H. Wright is the director of international ministries for the Langham Partnership International. He formerly taught Old Testament at All Nations College in Ware, England and has authored several works, including *The God I Don't Understand* (Zondervan, 2009), *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament* (IVP Academic, 2007) and *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (IVP Academic, 1995).

The reviewer has had the opportunity to read several of Christopher Wright's works and found Wright's observations to be easily accessible to the layman and scholar, while still having a depth of insight that is often startling. I am delighted to say that *Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament* is no exception.

The book is divided into five main sections that are organized according to the general areas associated with the work of the Holy Spirit: creating, empowering, prophesying, anointing, and coming. Within each section or chapter there are several sub-headings that loosely follow a chronological and canonical arrangement. Some of the chapters follow this structure more closely than others; where there is divergence from this order, however, it does not detract from the flow of the text.

Wright begins his book with the chapter on the creative nature of the Holy Spirit by noting that all too often Christians relegate the Spirit to the New Testament. However, as Wright points out, the Spirit makes its entrance in the second verse of the Bible. The Spirit is an integral part of the process of creation from the very beginning. Wright notes that this establishes our expectation for what the Spirit will do in the future by anchoring this expectation in what the Spirit has done in the past. Wright skillfully weaves various passages together from throughout the Old Testament to demonstrate that the role of the Holy Spirit in the creation of all life naturally leads to his role as the guarantor and sustainer of all life. As an interesting tangent, Wright notes that the personal rationale of the Holy Spirit makes such ideological systems as science and ecology even possible. Finally, Wright notes the natural transition from the Spirit's role in creation to his role in the new creation as described in the New Testament.

In the second chapter Wright focuses on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in individuals to accomplish God's work. He notes the irony of the fact that the empowering of the Spirit in a person's life is not synonymous with being sinless. Utilizing Samson as an example, Wright demonstrates that quite the opposite is often true. Samson was empowered by the Spirit with great strength and yet he used that strength in ways that did not meet with God's approval. Wright notes that those who used the power of the Holy Spirit most effectively were those that had no faith in their own talents. Moses is the example *par excellence* in this case. Referring to Moses, Wright says, "So often we read the words, 'Moses fell on his face before the LORD' (Num. 14:5; 16:4, 22; 20:6). That is not the posture of the self-sufficient, though it suits the lowliest man on earth very nicely" (p. 48). He points to the fact that Moses was completely dependent on God's Spirit and that he accepted the work of God's Spirit in others. These two qualities made Moses the great leader he was. Thus, God's empowering Spirit in Moses' life led to a sort of

paradox. The greatest indicator of the presence of the Spirit in Moses life was the absence of those qualities of pride, jealousy of prerogatives, ambition, and self-sufficiency often linked with great and powerful people.

In the third section, Wright turns to the prophetic gifts of the Spirit. As with the empowering role of the Spirit, Wright notes that prophetic gifting does not necessarily overwhelm the prophet so that he is no longer his own. Yet true prophecy, according to 2 Peter 1:20-21, is authored and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. By contrast, the false prophet is characterized by a lack in three areas: moral integrity, public moral courage, and a prophetic mandate from God. Those Old Testament prophets that were motivated by the Holy Spirit had a compulsion to speak the truth, and the courage to stand for justice. As a result of the work of the Spirit in their lives, the prophets sought to bring people into proper relationship with God. Predicting the future was strictly secondary to this main task.

Wright's fourth chapter concerns the anointing work of the Spirit, with the major emphasis being on the anointing of the kings. Similar to the empowering work of the Spirit, Wright indicates that the anointing of the Spirit can be given to those who are not worthy of it. As was the case with Saul, the anointing of the Spirit did not guarantee a king's success (p. 91). It was the king who was "a man after God's own heart" who utilized the anointing of the Spirit to great effect. Wright links this anointing back to what it means to be in the image of God and therefore to the Spirit's role in creation.

Yet Wright does not limit the anointing work of the Spirit to kings. He also notes the Spirit's involvement in anointing the servant of God. This is especially evident in the Servant Songs of Isaiah. Through the work of the Spirit, the servant was to bring justice, compassion, enlightenment, and liberation to the people of God. All of these elements are part of the greater mission of the servant, namely to restore the people to God. This restoration then applies to the nations as well. All of these elements, in Wright's estimation, are part and parcel of the Spirit's anointing work, which would have its fullest fulfillment in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. After Christ's ascension this same anointing work of the Spirit becomes that of the church which is the servant of Christ.

The final section of Wright's book delineates the nature of the coming Spirit. Wright explores this facet of the Holy Spirit's mission by explaining the role of the Spirit in Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37 and Joel 2. Both prophets demonstrate how the Spirit will be involved in the re-creation of the world and of God's people with language that is reminiscent of the original act of creation in Genesis. Wright's analysis

of both passages is masterful, but this reviewer found his insights on Ezekiel particularly cogent and helpful. Wright connects the spiritual resurrection of the all-but-dead Israel in Ezekiel 37 with the resurrection of Jesus in John 20:22 (p. 134). The association with the life giving breath/wind/spirit in the two texts is striking. Furthermore, Wright notes that in both passages, resurrection for Israel meant the possibility of resurrection for all. Following the discussion on Ezekiel, Wright compares the democratization of the Spirit predicted in Joel 2 with the coming of the Spirit in the book of Acts.

Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament is a solid work. Wright's style is conversational and largely devoid of technical theological jargon that would hinder many. This makes the book easy and fun to read. His insights remain powerful and stir in the reader a desire to know more about the meta-narrative of Scripture. The only weakness of the work, which is a very minor one, is a tendency to see intertextual allusion under every proverbial rock. However, all of the intertextual connections that he draws are supported with solid reasoning and evidence. At points he may seem to be stretching things to the breaking point, but he never pushes them so far that they do actually break. Despite its diminutive size, the book is a major work for any Christian seeking to understand how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament. As such, it is warmly recommended.

N. Blake Hearson
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminar

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