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## Introduction

**Benjamin L. Merkle**

*Editor*

This un-themed issue of *STR* includes essays from a variety of fields (including Old Testament, New Testament, church history, theology, and missiology). The first essay is by Tracy McKenzie, Associate Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, with the help of Jonathan Shelton. Their essay, “From Proverbs to Prophecy: Textual Production and Theology in Proverbs 30:1–6,” demonstrates that the author of Prov 30:1–6 is not creating his words *ex nihilo* but is drawing upon earlier tradition in the Hebrew Bible, especially 2 Samuel 7 and the promise of a Davidic son of God.

In the second essay, Paul Himes, Instructor of Ancient Languages and Bible at Baptist College of Ministry, considers the possibility (and likelihood, he argues) that Jesus’s reference to “no other burden” in Rev 2:24 is an allusion to the decision made at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. If such is the case, then Jesus cites the apostles in Rev 2:24 and is thus speaking in continuity with what the apostles had declared earlier (but was not being heeded by the church at Thyatira).

In the third essay, Peter Dubbelman, Senior Adults Pastor at Apex Baptist Church and Ph.D. Candidate at Southeastern, enters into the debate between Protestants and Catholics regarding Augustine’s view of justification. Specifically, he maintains that a correct understanding of Augustine’s position must integrate his soteriology with his doctrine of justification. Consequently, Dubbelman insists that Augustine affirmed a justification that heals. That is, a justification that is both an event and a process.

The fourth essay is by Daniel Hill, Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. This essay considers the significance of how the Spirit informs our understanding of the human person. The Spirit not only played a critical role in constituting the church, but the Spirit also plays a crucial role in grounding a coherent account of human identity. More specifically, the Spirit is the one who grounds our conception of the good life, reorients our perspective of our pasts, and enables our proper worship in the present.

The final essay, “Christ in the Scripture of Islam: Remnantal Revela-

tion or Irredeemable Imposter,” is by Matthew Bennett, Assistant Professor of Missions and Theology at Cedarville University. Through a careful examination of the Jesus (‘Isa) of the Qur’an and the Jesus of the Bible (Yasua’), Bennett demonstrates that the two are not really compatible but only have superficial similarities. Furthermore, the qur’anic Jesus is an attempt to subvert the message and work of the biblical Jesus. As a result, the missiological tool of using qur’anic nomenclature is often shortsighted and even harmful to evangelistic endeavors since the intent of the qur’anic character (‘Isa) is to subvert his biblical counterpart.

## From Proverb to Prophecy: Textual Production and Theology in Proverbs 30:1–6

Tracy J. McKenzie with Jonathan Shelton  
*Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary*

*Proverbs 30:1–6 draws upon tradition and texts in the Hebrew Bible in order to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the Davidic son of God. This article analyzes texts in the Hebrew Bible that have a relationship with Prov 30:1–6 and discusses how various texts build upon and develop the promise that YHWH would give David a son who would reign forever. It concludes by considering the way in which Prov 30:1–6 theologically comments upon the promise to David.*

*Key Words:* 2 Samuel 7, 2 Samuel 23, David, innerbiblical allusion, Numbers 24, Proverbs, Son of God, textual production

The promise to King David that YHWH would give him a son who would reign forever is one of the two or three most important declarations in the Hebrew Bible. Its importance for Christianity is no less significant given the claims of the lineage, person, and nature of Jesus of Nazareth. Proverbs 30:1–6 draws upon tradition and texts in the Hebrew Bible in order to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the Davidic son of God. This essay demonstrates the relevance of the Davidic promise from an initial appearance in 2 Sam 7 to its incorporation into Prov 30:1–6. It discusses how various texts build upon and develop the promise and analyzes texts in the Hebrew Bible that have a relationship Prov 30:1–6. This essay also compares the language of these texts in order to establish any associations between them, considering the texts' dependence upon traditions at various times in Israel's existence up to and including Second Temple Judaism.<sup>1</sup> It concludes by considering the way in which Prov

30:1–6 theologically comments upon the promise to David.

Proverbs 30:1–6 presents the reader with more than one enigma. A brief survey of introductory statements by scholars demonstrates the difficulties in the text. One scholar says, "In a book filled with difficult patches, the Words of Agur (Prov 30:1–9) remain among the most difficult and contentious. Basic questions of genre, function, and the pericope's extent have not found a consensus."<sup>2</sup> Another comments, "Indeed, every word in the superscription has been disputed by the versions or by scholarship."<sup>3</sup> A third opines, "Recent scholarly treatment of this passage has led to readings as different in their grasp of a single text as one could probably find anywhere in biblical interpretation."<sup>4</sup> The passage contains dubious lexical forms, perplexing idioms and grammatical constructions, and theological conundrums since it stems from a book otherwise containing wisdom features.<sup>5</sup> These issues form the impulse for our analysis.

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*und prophetische Messiasvorstellungen in den Schriftfunden von Qumran* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); J. A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Essays*, SBLMS 25 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1979); James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema, eds., *Qumran–Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); Antti Laato, *A Star Is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations*, International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism 5 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Seyoon Kim, *The Son of Man as the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Doubleday, 1992); Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll, *Israel's Messiah In the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "The Background to Proverbs 30:4a," in *Wisdom, You Are My Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Michael L. Barré, CBQMS (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Franklyn, "The Saying of Agur in Proverbs 30: Piety or Skepticism?" *ZAW* 95 (1983): 239.

<sup>4</sup> Rick D. Moore, "A Home for the Alien: World Wisdom and Covenantal Confession in Proverbs 30, 1–9," *ZAW* 106 (1994): 96.

<sup>5</sup> Consider Arthur Keefer's article against a Christian interpretation, "The Use of the Book of Proverbs in Systematic Theology," *BTB* 46 (2016): 38–39. See also Franklyn, "The Saying of Agur," 238–52.

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<sup>1</sup> We presume that Prov 30 was produced in a historical context that included a messianic discussion of texts in Second Temple literature prior to the turn of the millennium and prior to subsequent Christian or Jewish development, in particular regarding a descendent of David. See John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Johannes Zimmermann, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran: Königliche, priesterliche*

### Proverbs 30:1–6 and Its Treatment within Old Testament Studies

Old Testament Studies is in a period of flux. At the risk of oversimplification, the study of the Old Testament has shifted from a pursuit of the *ipsissima verba* of the prophets, from putative independent sources and autographs, to a pursuit of how texts were composed or developed from previously existing texts or traditions.<sup>6</sup> Situated within Old Testament studies in general, the study of Proverbs has shifted with the discipline. Older methodologies sought solutions to the enigmas in Prov 30 from comparative Semitic literature,<sup>7</sup> from its supposed relationship to an original author of the chapter,<sup>8</sup> or more recently, from its relationship to wisdom literature within the Ancient Near East.<sup>9</sup> Some contemporary studies seek to understand the interrelationship of texts or textual rewriting within a passage.<sup>10</sup>

### Convergence in Developments in Old Testament Studies and Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls

Publications on the Dead Sea Scrolls developed slowly after the initial

<sup>6</sup> The turn is evident with Michael Fishbane's *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1985). The same year that Fishbane published his work, George J. Brooke published *Exegesis at Qumran: 4Q Florilegium in Its Jewish Context*, JSOTSup 29 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985). Brooke's analysis showed that Hellenism influenced Jewish interpretation of the intertestamental period and that later rabbinic interpretation emerged partially from that influence. Moreover, his analysis demonstrated that rabbinic interpretation was consistent with scripture's own use and development of other authoritative texts (*Exegesis at Qumran*, 36–44). For a critique of tradition criticism, see Rolf Knierem, "Criticism of Literary Features, Form, Tradition, and Redaction," in *Form, Concept, and Theological Perspective*, vol. 2 of *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium*, ed. Wonil Kim, Deborah Ellens, et al. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 1–41, in particular, 22–28.

<sup>7</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, K&D 6, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 260–314.

<sup>8</sup> Franklyn, "The Sayings of Agur," 238–52.

<sup>9</sup> Leeuwen, "The Background to Proverbs 30:4aα," 102–21.

<sup>10</sup> It was published too recently to consider in this analysis, but see Ryan O'Dowd's article, "Poetic Allusions in Agur's Oracle in Proverbs 30.1–9," in *Inner Biblical Allusion in the Poetry of Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Kevin Chau, Beth LaNeel Tanner (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 103–19.

discoveries in 1947.<sup>11</sup> Increasingly, scholarly research on these manuscripts began to shed light on a phase when these authoritative texts were used, how these texts were passed down, and how these texts were produced and incorporated into what is now the Hebrew Bible.

This period in which texts continued to develop was largely unknown for the Old Testament, or in the case of the versions such as the Septuagint, ignored or explained away as secondary. Subsequently, scholars have increasingly recognized that studies on the Old Testament converged with scholarship on the production of texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The discovery of how authors/scribes produced texts at Qumran coincided with how others produced the legal codes of the Pentateuch; prophecies in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve; or books like Samuel-Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah.

Those responsible for the handing down, the composition, and the production of manuscripts and scrolls at Qumran did not utilize one single method for textual production. But enough data and overlap exist that a new consensus is developing to explain the production of biblical books in similar manner. The question concerns how authors reused earlier texts in their production of biblical books. It is more than a question of quotation, allusion, or intertextuality. It is a question of how authors produced texts and how the incorporation of various texts within the final shape constrain interpretation. Textual reuse and commentary upon that textual reuse may privilege a particular interpretation over another.<sup>12</sup> A similar type of query considers why authors juxtapose one text to another. A synchronic analysis would treat the arrangement of two texts in an equivalent relationship to one another. An analysis that considers relative chronology would interpret the later juxtaposed text as interpreting or constraining the interpretation of the earlier text. What was the inherited text—the default portion—that we can examine synchronically and how has the author incorporated other material? Rachele Gilmour, in her fascinating volume on the importance of juxtaposition as a hermeneutical tool, argues that "the placement of pericopes and stories was itself an act of interpretation of the meaning of the events, and therefore it is an appropriate method for reading of the text also."<sup>13</sup> Incorporating pieces of texts or juxtaposing one text to another forces the reader to read the texts in close

<sup>11</sup> Weston W. Fields, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See Mark McEntire, *The Internal Conversation of the Old Testament*, SHBC 32 (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2018), 1–2, 21–22. See also John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 97–103, 206–15.

<sup>13</sup> Rachele Gilmour, *Juxtaposition and the Elisha Cycle*, LHBOTS 594 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 18; Brooke, *Exegesis at Qumran*, passim.

association with one another. Moreover, the reader senses a different production technique than she would if she was listening to a speaker or conceived that a text stemmed from a single moment of writing.

An example of juxtaposition takes place at the end of the book of Jeremiah. Why—after Jeremiah's words end in Jer 51:64—does the author reuse for his final chapter (Jer 52) a text that we also know from 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30? What was the content of the composition before this final chapter was added? What lacunae existed that the author felt compelled to juxtapose a text that we know otherwise from 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30? Moreover, the reuse of texts occurs not only in chapter-size texts. Reuse also exists in smaller textual units, including clauses and even phrases. One example is the common clause in the book of Ezekiel, “And you will know that I am YHWH.” The clause contains a different grammatical person on occasion as a way to fit it to a particular context, at one point even unexpectedly indicating that the Gentiles will know Yahweh is Lord (Ezek 36:23; 38:23). In such cases, one should ask why the author has incorporated it, and how it should affect our understanding of the surrounding material. We will attempt to demonstrate such reuse in Prov 30:1–6 by examining the incorporation of various clauses and material. The author's reuse of clauses will articulate his own view of the transcendence of the Davidic son of God.

### Proverbs 30:1–6

Scholars commonly divide the unit between vv. 9 and 10 because of the grammatical first person that begins after the superscription (30:1a) and stops after v. 9. However, for the purposes of this article, we will not analyze beyond v. 6 because the relationships of the first six verses to other biblical texts will demonstrate the connection of Proverbs 30 to elements of the Davidic promise.

#### Proverbs 30:1

The initial verse of the chapter already presents difficulties. It does so with the name “Agur.” The stich reads, “The words of Agur, son of Yāqeh, the oracle.” The name is not otherwise known inside the Bible, nor is his father's name.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the etymology of Agur's name has to do with “to sojourn” (*gūr*) so the conjecture that it could indicate a non-Israelite is well known, a factor that will materialize when we observe its

<sup>14</sup> Franklyn, “The Sayings of Agur,” 238–52; For *Yāqeh*, see Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 260–61.

relationship to the non-Israelite prophet, Balaam, in Num 24.<sup>15</sup> The construct noun, “the words of,” is an important factor in determining the relationship between Prov 30:1 and Prov 31:1, where one reads similarly, “The words of King Lemuel, an oracle.” Here, “Lemuel” is another unknown name. The initial verse in each chapter then labels these “words,” as an “oracle” (*maššā*), a genre marker for prophecy.<sup>16</sup> It is noticeable that the final two chapters in this book of proverbs are “oracles.”

In Prov 30:1, “the oracle” follows the identity of Agur's father. The two occasions of this word at the end of the book are the only two occurrences of the lexeme in the entirety of Proverbs. But does it really indicate that the chapter is somehow a prophetic oracle? And why have an “oracle” at the end of a book of “proverbs” (משלים)? Indications of genre link prophecy to proverb in the following ways. First, the construction in Prov 30:1, 31:1, “The words of,” which appears in the prophetic books of Jeremiah and Amos as introductions to their prophecies, ring of a prophetic utterance (2 Sam. 23:1–2). Second, and most tellingly, the phrase “the utterance of the man” appears in apposition to “the oracle” in Prov 30:1a. This phrase, whose only other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible appear in the commonly understood messianic poem of Num 24 (vv. 3 and 15) and in 2 Sam 23:1, strongly indicates an association to the notion of prophecy.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, in Num 22–24, Balaam is a “diviner” (22:7; 23:23; 24:1) who Balak hires to curse Israel. Balaam eventually makes his way to the encampment of Israel, where he gives an “utterance of the one

<sup>15</sup> For an analysis of the Balaam text found at Deir ‘Alla and its relationship to biblical texts, see Meindert Dijkstra, “Is Balaam also Among the Prophets?” *JBL* 114 (1995): 43–64.

<sup>16</sup> Some propose the locale Massa from Gen 25:14, but Prov 30:1 provides merely an article and noun and not the preposition “from.” Contra Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 518, who emends the text, saying, “The emendation is supported, however, by the fact that ‘oracle’ would likely not be followed immediately in the next line by ‘utterance’ (*nē’um*).” He does not explain why he thinks that “the utterance of the man” would not reinforce the notion that “oracle” indicates some sort of prophetic revelation. Furthermore, the noun lacks a typical gentilic form that would denote that Agur is a “Massite.” The relative clause following the same noun in 31:1 makes this gloss unlikely. Franklyn, “The Sayings of Agur,” 240.

<sup>17</sup> Contra Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon, 1954), 12–14, 313–14. Mowinckel demonstrates that it is a commonly understood messianic poem, although he disagrees and thinks it only refers to David. Either way, this connection strengthens our case in Prov 30.

hearing the words of God” (24:4). Indeed, he “sees a vision of the Almighty” and his “eyes are uncovered.” Although Balaam is not an Israelite prophet, he has a revelation from God. Numbers 24:2 even says that “the Spirit of God came on him,” again indicating that Balaam will speak the words of God. Precisely in this context, Balaam “lifts his proverb” in Num 24:3. English versions translate this phrase with terms such as “parable,” “message,” or “discourse,” but the same Hebrew word (מָשַׁל) underlies our gloss “proverb.” Balaam is a diviner who speaks in proverbs (Num 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23). The writer of Prov 30 has recognized that a book of proverbs is the appropriate place to comment further upon the star from Jacob, about which Balaam, the speaker of proverbs, prophesied in Num 24:17.

The writer of Prov 30 (and likely 31) has something more that he wants the book to say. He juxtaposes his own prophetic word next to the notion of wisdom otherwise found within the previous chapters. He utters his oracle not so much by “lifting a proverb” like Balaam does in the pericope in Num 22–24 but by lifting a text and commenting upon tradition. In this case, he will incorporate a text and comment upon the tradition of the Davidic “seed” who is likewise a “son of God” (2 Sam 7:14).<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the obvious importance of Num 24 in the history of interpretation as it relates to messianism, there is the significance of the phrase “the utterance of the man” in relationship to 2 Sam 23:1. This verse, articulating the final words of David after a structurally significant poem, says, “These are the last words of David, the utterance of David, son of Jesse, and the utterance of the man raised up, concerning the anointed one of the God of Jacob, and the sweet one of the songs of Israel.”<sup>19</sup> Space does not permit us to consider this poem in detail. However, besides the significant repetition of “the utterance of the man,” the verse mentions the “messiah [anointed] of the God of Jacob” and indicates that David “was raised up.” Michael Rydelnik points out how the

<sup>18</sup> We presume here and throughout the article that well-known criteria demonstrate textual association or dependence. See Tracy J. McKenzie, *Idolatry in the Pentateuch: An Intertextual Strategy* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 53–59; Jeffrey M. Leonard, “Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 241–65. Space does not allow a full discussion of these issues, but because the writer of Prov 30:1–6 combines Davidic tradition/texts and the Balaam prophecy of Num 24, it is probable that he depends upon those texts and traditions. See our full discussion for the data.

<sup>19</sup> Author’s translation; Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* NACSBT 9 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 39–41.

LXX witnesses a text, or at the least, an interpretive gloss, that David is speaking about the messiah of YHWH and not himself.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in 2 Sam 23:5, David indicates that God has “placed an eternal covenant” with him. The covenant refers to the promise in 2 Samuel in which YHWH promises David regarding his son, a son to whom Yahweh says, “I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me” (2 Sam 7:14). Just like the association with Num 24, the writer of Prov 30 can utilize the notion of the “messiah” who was “raised” (קָם) as a means to theologize regarding the names of God and his son. The divine sonship of the Davidic king takes on significance in the history of interpretation of Ancient Israel’s scriptures, a point to which we will return in this analysis.

The mere lexeme “utterance” (מִקְוֶה) is used frequently in the prophetic literature and also in Num 24. It is used in construct with various titles for God in all other occurrences besides the three passages where it is found in the unique phrase “the utterance of the man” (Num 24:3–4, 15–16; 2 Sam 23:1; Prov 30:1).<sup>21</sup> Its appearance here, in particular in construct with “of the man,” denotes that the upcoming words are on par with prophetic revelation; these words are revelation from God. Similar to Prov 30, chapter 31 contains “the words of Lemuel, a king, an oracle.” Not only do the chapters begin with the same phrase (“the words of”), but these words also stem from names otherwise unknown in the Hebrew Bible. Interestingly, both chapters fall outside the Solomonic associations that are prevalent in the first twenty-nine chapters. What connotation does the placement of these two chapters at the end of the book of Proverbs convey? The two chapters not only segue into the following book in the Hebrew Bible—Ruth—but they shift the focus of the book from truths by a son of David to the lineage of David through the self-contained acrostic poem about a “woman of valor” (31:10). Ruth, a non-Israelite and the only other “woman of valor” (Ruth 3:11) in the Hebrew Bible outside of Proverbs, is praised by her husband (Ruth 2:11; 3:11; 4:1), as is the woman in Prov 31.<sup>22</sup> The verbal linkages between the two books and their juxtaposition divulge that the oracles in Prov 30–31 are associated with Ruth who happens to be the ancestor of David. Connotations associated with a Davidic dynasty thus transpire in both books.

From the observations of these initial stiches, one is already able to

<sup>20</sup> Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, 39–41.

<sup>21</sup> See Eva Strömberg Krantz, “‘A Man Not Supported by God’: On Some Crucial Words in Proverbs XXX 1,” *VT* 46 (1996): 549.

<sup>22</sup> See Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC 14 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 248, who identifies v. 23 regarding public respect for her husband as the center of a chiasm spanning the acrostic. This prominent verse also finds parallels in Ruth (4:1–2, 4).

discern the method of the author's composition of this text and what may presumably continue as we analyze the remainder of the passage. Acknowledging the manner in which these texts have been produced from the composition of smaller texts or traditions justifies our inquiry as to the effect of the juxtaposition and incorporation of particular texts. In Prov 30:1, the incorporation of "oracle" and the placement of "the utterance of the man" compels two effects. First, a reader should carefully consider that what follows Prov 30:1 is revelation in the prophetic tradition. This assessment will aid in a subsequent contrast between "wisdom" and revelation. Second, the incorporation of "the utterance of the man" from Num 24:3, 15 and 2 Sam 23:1 indicates that the writer is bringing together these two texts in an effort to comment on their content, e.g., "a star from Jacob" and the covenant with David that his son would be the son of God.

Proverbs 30:1a–b continues obliquely, "For Ithiel, for Ithiel and Ucal."<sup>23</sup> A common approach to these words in modern versions is to understand them as proper names. Indeed, such seems to be the only option unless one emends the Hebrew text. To that end, one reads in the ESV, "I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and worn out." In either case, scholars note that with minor emendations, the Hebrew lemmata translate to indicate that the speaker is at the end of his life.<sup>24</sup> Balaam also speaks of his "death" and "last (day)" (אַחֲרִית) in Num 23:10, after which he will "go to his people" and "place" in Num 24:14, 25 before he is killed in Num 31:8. Likewise in 2 Sam 23:1, David utters "his last words" (אַחֲרָיִם) before "the utterance of the man."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, each oracle is introduced by a name of the one uttering it, followed by an indication of the "son of," then in the case of Num 24:3 and 2 Sam 23:1, the "utterance of" the named character, and concluding with a passive description of the character (2 Sam 23:1, "raised"; Num 24:3, "opened"; and Prov 30:1, "consumed"<sup>26</sup>). This observation makes more plausible the proposal that Agur is "worn out." Furthermore, it strengthens the argument that the writer of Prov 30 uses Num 24 and 2 Sam 23 to convey his message.

<sup>23</sup> See Krantz, "A Man Not Supported By God," 548–53; and Longman who concludes, "I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and exhausted" (*Proverbs*, 519).

<sup>24</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 853–54. Emending vowel pointing and spacing generates the reading.

<sup>25</sup> Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 853.

<sup>26</sup> For the passive construction of "consumed," see Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 853–54.

## Proverbs 30:2

Proverbs 30:2a begins with the predication, "Indeed, I am stupider than (any) man" (שִׁיחַ). The clause indicates that the speaker lacks knowledge when compared with other men. If one is *ba'ar*, he is stupid. In the context, the speaker has in mind that he lacks the knowledge that comes with the craft of wisdom, otherwise so prevalent in the book and wider context of wisdom literature. Another association to Num 24 emerges in the pun on *ba'ar*. Balaam is introduced as a son of "Beor," using the same triradical root.

Proverbs 30:2b continues: "I do not (even) have human understanding" (דָּעָה). The word "understanding" is a positive trait to pursue in wisdom literature. The fact that the writer does not have it indicates again the contrast he is making with what for him is revelatory knowledge. Moreover, the reader has now read two different nouns against which the author is defining his comprehension. Both nouns indicate a similar group, "man." These are similar but distinct from a third term for humanity in v. 1: "The utterance of the man" (גִּבּוֹר). On the one hand, Agur presents "the utterance of the man," but, on the other hand, he is ignorant and lacking understanding. Already one discerns that this oracle will reveal knowledge that is different in kind from what man might generally know.

## Proverbs 30:3

Proverbs 30:3a is the third clause in a series of four and unequivocally states that the speaker has missed necessary learning or development of understanding in comparison with others. Indeed, this clause suggests that he lacks wisdom training: "And I have not learned wisdom." In comparison with the positive acquisition of wisdom in the book, the clause surprises. The root occurs thirty-nine times in the book (חִכְמָה). The terms "wisdom," "knowledge," "understanding," and "learning" often appear parallel to one another, and the following clause is no exception. Translated rather woodenly, Prov 30:3b states, "But knowledge of the holy one(s), I know." Here, he integrates a piece of text from Prov 9:10, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of YHWH and 'knowledge of the holy one(s)' is understanding."<sup>27</sup> His assertion that he has knowledge of the

<sup>27</sup> While both occurrences of "holy ones" are commonly translated as a singular in the English versions, "Holy One," they are grammatically plural in Hebrew (קְדוּשִׁים). These occasions are the only two references to God in the Old Testament where he is called the "Holy One(s)" in this unambiguous plural form, whereas he is frequently referred to as a singular, "the Holy One," in Isaiah and

holy one(s) indicates a contrast to his acquisition of wisdom. The comparison exposes a satirical element transpiring in Prov 30:3 between wisdom of the world and revelatory knowledge. The plural adjective “holy ones” is often understood here as a singular substantive. Joshua 24:19 articulates this understanding in its description of God, i.e. the plural “*Elohim*, He is holy” (קדשים). However, here in Prov 30:1–6, nomenclature denoting *Elohim* has not appeared and when it does occur in Prov 30:5, it is singular (אלוה). In contrast, v. 4 articulates a pair: “his name and the name of his son.” The occurrence of the duo at the end of verse 4 suggests a plurality in the holy ones here in verse 3. We will return to this question below.

Besides integrating “knowledge of the holy ones” from Prov 9:10, does the author negate knowledge or affirm that he has it? Most modern versions gloss the clause as a negation. But the Hebrew text does not contain an explicit negation in Prov 30:3b.<sup>28</sup> Instead, translations assume an ellipsis from the previous clauses, which do include the negative (e.g., “I have not learned wisdom”). Apparently, most English versions presume that because Agur has used two negations in a row, he then articulates a third one. Or do the translations have to do with the fact that he would

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elsewhere. Hosea 11:12 (HEB 12:1) contains a third occurrence of the plural form (see the discussion of Josh 24:19 in text above), but the rarity of the plural form as a title for God and the unique interpretive difficulties of Hosea 11 have caused some commentators to see it as a reference to the Canaanite pantheon. See Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, NAC 19A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 230–31; Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 601–3. These data have led some to conclude that the reference to “holy ones” in Prov 30:3 does not refer to God, but Prov 9:10 utilizes the same clause and does so in parallel structure with “YHWH.” However, see C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1948), 194. The most common response has been simply to read the plural “Holy Ones” here in Proverbs as another instance of the so-called plural of majesty. However, these titles are typically found in the plural when used as a title for God, whereas “holy one” is, besides these exceptions, found in the singular.

<sup>28</sup> See Fox who did not include the negation in his original translation. Though he later changed his position due to doubt that Agur would claim such knowledge, he attests the lack of the negative particle and thus the grammatical positive assertion (Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 854–55). Moore likewise acknowledges this reading, proposing that the switch from the Hebrew perfect to imperfect verb forms further signal disjunction. He suggests that Agur would say, “I shall have knowledge of the Holy One, but not through the pursuit of wisdom,” a translation that aligns well with our stance (Moore, “A Home for the Alien,” 99).

then be asserting something about divinity, regardless of whether his assertion refers to a plural or singular “holy one(s)”? Is it because he asks questions in 30:4 rather than asserting information about the divine beings? Although an ellipsis is possible given the terseness of poetry, the writer appears to be contrasting wisdom with a word from God. The contrast is explicit in that in Prov 30:2–3a, the writer has not acquired knowledge relating to “mankind.” That information includes “a man” (איש), “human” (אדם), and “wisdom” (חכמה) that he himself has not “learned.” However, in 30:3b, he asserts knowledge of God due to the oracular knowledge from 30:1 and will in subsequent verses assert something about the divines. The writer’s juxtaposition suggests that he does have knowledge of the holy one(s). The incorporation of content related to Num 24 helps resolve any ambiguity. Balaam, in his own prophetic utterance, had claimed to be one who “knows the knowledge of the Most High” (Num 24:16), so now Agur, with very similar language (double repetition of ידע “to know” + title for God), should be understood as positively asserting the same in Prov 30:3b. Moreover, in the final clause in v. 4, the writer utilizes the same root “to know” that he used twice in 30:3b “knowledge of the holy ones, I know.” He asserts in 30:4bγ, “Indeed, you know.” His questions in v. 4 are themselves a sort of answer. Additionally, there is the juxtaposition of the second oracle in Prov 31. Its placement after Prov 30 is an answer through the poem about the woman of valor. The juxtaposition of Ruth after Proverbs constrains a reading that interprets the son of Ruth, i.e., David as the son of God in Prov 30:4bβ.

### Proverbs 30:4

Proverbs 30:4 commences with four interrogative clauses that begin with “who” (מי), then continues with two more interrogative clauses that begin with “what” (מה), and finally concludes with an assertion. The first question is perhaps most enigmatic: “Who has ascended into heaven and then descended?” Two observations lead one to expect a single answer from the two verbs. First, the two verbs are governed by one interrogative, in contrast with its repetition in the following three interrogative clauses. Second, the *wayyiqtol* verbal form “descended” transpires in sequence to the *qatal* form “ascended.” This twofold construction anticipates one response. In light of v. 3, the obvious answer would be the “holy one(s).” It would seem that no mere human could accomplish such a circuit.



Scholars have combed the literature of the ANE for references to divine ones ascending or descending into heaven.<sup>29</sup> Examples from comparative literature demonstrate that traditions of one ascending to heaven would not be unique when dealing with the divine and semi-divine, but few statements found in materials from the ANE contain both ascent and descent; nor do these ANE texts contain other linguistic connections common between them and Prov 30. As such, it is very difficult to demonstrate that Prov 30:4a alludes to any particular texts or expects the reader to know such texts.

While the obvious answer of Prov 30:4 appears to indicate a supernatural being, it is peculiar that this being must first “ascend” before “descending.” The natural sequence for a divine being would be to descend first and then ascend back to a heavenly position. This observation has been common among commentators, which has led to the conclusion that the clause could indicate a man.<sup>30</sup> In an effort to understand Prov 30:4 in relationship to ANE texts, Van Leeuwen proposes that the clause indicates a man because the trope in ancient literature can also operate negatively.<sup>31</sup> Some beings attempt to ascend to heaven, which improperly imbalances the cosmos, and later fall in defeat. Although some broad themes overlap, the context of Prov 30 does not appear to lend itself to such readings. It is possible that the oracle uses an ANE trope, tradition, or genre element in Prov 30:4a<sub>x</sub> to introduce the idea of an inter-transcendent trip by a man. Proverbs 30:4a<sub>x</sub> would then suggest that a divine first appears on earth. Although at first glance this notion seems implausible, we will eventually have reason to suspect a connection to the traditions and texts surrounding the “son of David” who according to 2 Sam 7 would also be the “son” of God.

But if comparative ANE literature does not yield conclusive results, what about other parallels in the Hebrew Bible? Given the author’s incorporation of other materials from the HB, are there scriptures that relate to the themes in Prov 30:4? At least four passages exist that relate to a man having access to above and below places: (1) Gen 28:11–19, which speaks of the messengers of God (מלאכי אלהים) who ascend and descend on a ladder, which is stationed on the ground but extends into heaven; (2) Dan 7:13, which speaks of one who “came to the Ancient of Days with

the clouds of the heaven”; (3) Exod 19, in which Moses repeatedly mediates between YHWH and the people by ascending the mountain to talk with God and descending to talk to the people; and (4) 2 Sam 23:1.<sup>32</sup>

Genesis 28 concerns YHWH’s appearance to Jacob at Bethel. Jacob thinks that the place where the messengers were ascending and descending was the heavenly gate (v. 17). It was here that YHWH stood on the ladder in Jacob’s dream and reaffirmed his promise to Abraham (Gen 28:11–19). In spite of the similar language and the reaffirmation of the patriarchal promise in Genesis, an association with Prov 30 is not immediately transparent. Scholars have attempted to locate the sayings of Agur with the tradition about Jacob. Patrick Skehan in *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* explains, “Agur means ‘I am a sojourner,’ and takes its origin from Gen 47:9, wherein Jacob tells Pharaoh, ‘The number of the years of my sojournings is 130 years’—my sojournings, *meḡārāh*.”<sup>33</sup> For Skehan, this means that the name, Agur, in conjunction with “utterance of the man” (נִכְרַר) indicates that he is a mere mortal and is associated with Jacob. What makes the connection for Skehan, however, is not so much the text in Genesis but a reference from the pseudepigraphal work, the *Wisdom of Solomon*. In Wis 10:10, the personified wisdom is said to help Jacob flee from his brother’s anger and guide him. Moreover, Wisdom showed him the kingdom of God and gave him “knowledge of the holy ones,” a quotation of Prov 30:3b. The obvious allusion to Jacob escaping his brother and having knowledge of the holy ones—presumably ascending and descending on a ladder according to Gen 28:12–13—follows “I know knowledge of the holy ones” in Prov 30:3b by “ascending to heaven and descending” in v. 4a. Thus, the similar terminology between *Wisdom of Solomon* and Prov 30 makes the connection for Skehan, not a linguistic relationship between Gen 28 and Prov 30.<sup>34</sup>

In the history of messianic interpretation, Dan 7 bears special importance. Its importance lies at the center of the subject matter in Prov 30:4. Proverbs 30 is stating knowledge of one(s) who is(are) transcendent from creation. Who has ascended to “heaven,” “gathered wind,” “stirred up waters,” “established the ends of the earth,” and how do these actions relate to the “son of God”? Like Proverbs, the book of Daniel is in the

<sup>29</sup> See Van Leeuwen, “The Background to Proverbs 30:4a<sub>x</sub>,” 102–21; Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 118–19.

<sup>30</sup> See Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 273–75.

<sup>31</sup> Van Leeuwen, “The Background to Proverbs 30:4a<sub>x</sub>,” 102–21.

<sup>32</sup> See Ps 139:8 (Amos 9:2–4), in which the psalmist speaks of God’s presence whether he “arises to heaven” or “makes his bed in Sheol.” Although the lexemes in this context are different from Prov 30:4, the concepts are similar enough to note the conceptual overlap. The content concerns God’s immediate presence to humanity.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom*, CBQMS (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1971), 42–43.

<sup>34</sup> Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom*, 42–43.

third section of the Hebrew canon (TaNaK), known as the Writings. The book of Daniel combines apocalyptic materials with Hebrew narrative. The Hebrew characters are situated within an exilic setting, but the book contains heavenly visions that explain events concerning the “son of man” and the saints of God that will transpire in the last days. This purpose in apocalyptic dress informs an understanding of Prov 30:1–4.

Daniel 7 contains lexemes and themes that relate to Prov 30:1–6. In the vision that Daniel had in the night in Dan 7:2–3, the four “winds” (Prov 30:4aγ) from “heaven” (30:4aα) were “stirring up” (30:4aδ) the sea (water, 30:4aδ). Four beasts arise from (30:4aα) the sea who later represent kings from the earth (30:4aε). In the midst of that scene, the Ancient of Days appears and, among a plural number of thrones that were placed, sits on one of the thrones (Dan. 7:9). He is obviously the supreme being because of his description, because the multitudes serve him, because the court convenes before him, and because the books were opened before this Ancient of Days. After the dreadful beast was destroyed and the others neutralized, one like the “son of man” comes with the “clouds of heaven,” arrives at the Ancient of Days, and is presented before him (Dan. 7:13). To this one then was given dominion, glory, a kingdom, and peoples, nations, and languages to serve him forever so that his kingdom is not destroyed (Dan. 7:14).

The title “son of man” implies that he had to go up in order to come with the clouds of heaven and be presented to the Ancient of Days. Moreover, there is a correlation in the passage between the beasts that arise from the sea, representing kings that arise from the earth whose dominion is taken away, and the son of man who presumably must arise and whose dominion is everlasting. In such apocalyptic dress, Dan 7 addresses notions similar to Prov 30:4 that in the midst of “winds from heaven” and the “stirred up sea” one like a son of man came with the “clouds of the heaven.”<sup>35</sup> Extra-biblical literature exhibits reception of Dan 7 or similar traditions. This literature conflates Dan 7 with a “son of God.” Although space does not permit an analysis of such texts and traditions here, discussion of a “son of man” who was transcendent and “son of God” does exist in a post-exilic and Second Temple period.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> André Lacocque, “Allusions to Creation in Daniel 7,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 1, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Boston: Brill, 2002), 114–31; Perdue, *Wisdom & Creation*, 119.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., 4Q426, called, “The Son of God” text, 4Q491 frg. 11 Col.i; See Johannes Zimmermann, “Observations on 4Q426—The ‘Son of God,’” in *Qumran Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H.

Jewish and Christian scholars have noted the relationship of Exod 19 to Prov 30:4a, “who has ascended to heaven and descended.”<sup>37</sup> In Exod 19, Moses is portrayed as going up and down the mountain as a mediator between the people and Yahweh. In v. 3, Moses first “ascends” the mountain to hear from YHWH. Moses was to prepare the people for YHWH’s “descent” in v. 11. When the horn’s blast blew long, the people were to “ascend” the mountain (v. 13). Moses “descended” the mountain and prepared the people in v. 14. However, as the horn blew loud (v. 16) the people were afraid and stationed themselves at the foot of the mountain (v. 17). Yahweh then “descended” the mountain in the form of fire (v. 18). As the mountain trembled from the divine presence, Moses spoke, and God answered. Yahweh “descends” upon the mountain and called Moses (v. 20) to the head of the mountain and Moses “ascends.” He commanded Moses to “descend” to witness against the people (v. 21). Moses responded that the people were unable to “ascend” the mountain (v. 23) before Yahweh commanded Moses again to “descend and ascend” (v. 24), this time with Aaron because the priests and the people could not “ascend” the mountain. The chapter ends with Moses “descending” to the people (v. 25) with the words of the Ten Commandments in his mouth.

It is not only post-apostolic readers of the Bible that have noticed the peculiar up and down of Moses, Yahweh, and the people. In the second century BC, a playwright, Ezekiel the Tragedian, wrote a piece that expanded upon Moses’s role as a deliverer of God’s people from Exodus.<sup>38</sup> The play develops material in poetic meter, known from Greek tragedies,

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Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 175–90; F. García Martínez, “Messianische Erwartungen in den Qumranschriften,” *JBTb* 8 (1993): 171–208; É. Puech, “Fragment d’une Apocalypse en Araméen (4Q246 = pseudo-Dan<sup>d</sup>) et le ‘Royaume de Dieu,’” *RB* 99 (1992): 98–131; Karl A. Kuhn, “The ‘One Like a Son of Man’ Becomes the ‘Son of God,’” *CBQ* 69 (2007): 22–42; Laato, *A Star Is Rising*, 250–51; Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov, eds., *Texts Concerned with Religious Law*, vol. 1 of *DSSR* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 255–57.

<sup>37</sup> *Midrash Mishlei*, a midrash on Proverbs from 750–850 CE, asks the question along with Prov 30:4a “Who has ascended and descended” and then answers, “This is Moses.” See *Midrash Mishlei*, at [https://www.sefaria.org/Midrash\\_Mishlei?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Midrash_Mishlei?lang=bi), quoted in Van Leeuwen, “The Background to Proverbs 30:4aα,” 120–21. Cf. Deut 30:12.

<sup>38</sup> R. G. Robertson, “Ezekiel the Tragedian,” *OTP*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2011), 803–7.

and builds upon the Exodus narratives in several places.<sup>39</sup> The tragedy constructs from the drama of Moses's narratives a dream that incorporates elements from Dan 7 and possibly other messianic texts such as Num 24:17.<sup>40</sup> The poem is another indication of the discussion ensuing in the second century BC of a human figure who would receive a throne and have access to a transcendence over creation.

A final text related to Prov 30:4a is 2 Sam 23:1. This verse commences with the same formula as in Prov 30:1 and Num 24:3, 15, and introduces the one uttering the words as being "raised up on high" (רָם עַל) (רָם). Besides containing a lemma denoting "raised up" (רָם), the Hebrew text contains consonants that are associated with עָלָה, "to go up," the same lemma occurring in Prov 30:4a ("Who has ascended . . .?"). In 2 Sam 23:1, there is a question of whether the phrase refers to David as "raised up on high" or whether it is a preposition relating to the one who David is describing, that is, "concerning messiah of the God of Jacob."<sup>41</sup> Regardless, this collocation ("raised up on high") is another connection between the prophetic "utterance of the man" in 2 Sam 23:1 and the one who "ascended and descended" in Prov 30:4a.

The next clause in Prov 30:4aβ ("Who has gathered the wind in his fists?") is the second in the string of four interrogatives that commence with מִי. Commentators have noticed the similarities with Job 34:14 as well as shared content and lemmata with Ps 104:29 ("You gather their spirit; they expire"). In Job 34, Elihu is questioning Job's accusation of God's justice. Elihu begins his inquiry with the same interrogative ("Who?") and implies that God rightly gives man his breath and gathers his spirit (רוּחַ). Both Job 34:14 and Ps 104:29 acknowledge that it is YHWH who places רוּחַ in man, and when he "gathers" (אַסַּף) it, man perishes. Elihu maintains that it is God who set up the world. He is not unjust in his actions. The theme in Prov 30:4aβ is distinct from these verses, however, in that the word "wind" (רוּחַ) is not connoting man's life but the cosmic "wind" as parallel to the following clause with "water." Unlike in Elihu's inquiry, God's justice is not in view. Rather his creative power and transcendent control of the winds and water is maintained. However, there is something more to the clauses. Agur is making a riddle concerning "knowledge of the holy ones" (v. 3).<sup>42</sup> The questions are intended to reveal something about these holy ones.

<sup>39</sup> Robertson, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 803.

<sup>40</sup> See Robertson, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 811, for a possible allusion to Num 24:17 (e.g., the terms "stars" and "scepter").

<sup>41</sup> Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, 39–41.

<sup>42</sup> Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 25–26.

Proverbs 30:4aγ asks, "Who has wrapped up (צָרַר) waters in a garment?" The clause bears resemblance to Job 26:8a, "The one wrapping waters in his clouds" (צָרַר), in which Job states God's control over the universe to Bildad. In this case, Prov 30:4aγ has a similar purpose but no other linguistic connection arises with Job 26:8. However, now that we have considered Prov 30:4aα and its relationship to transcendence, another observation materializes. The first clause in 30:4aα contains the lexeme "heavens." The final interrogative clause in 30:4aδ contains "earth." In between are two other clauses, the first of which includes "spirit" (רוּחַ, also translated "wind") and the second of which includes "waters." These four lexemes also appear in Gen 1:1–2. Their appearance here in comparison makes up an ABB'A' pattern. Is it possible that the writer here also alludes to God's creation as he sets the riddle before the reader? The creation merism suggests that Agur is invoking the pattern of Gen 1:1–2. If so, the person in view possesses the transcendent and creative power of the divine.

Most have agreed that these rhetorical questions build on the same traditions reflected in Job 38.<sup>43</sup> No fewer than thirteen times, God asks Job "who" was there at creation's dawn. This litany of questions begins as God's speech commences in Job 38:2. God inquires who is speaking without "knowledge" (v. 2), the same word used in Prov 30:3b. The next clause (v. 3) taunts Job to get ready like a "man," the same word in the phrase "utterance of a man" (Prov 30:1). Job 38:3b challenges that God will ask the questions and then perhaps Job can make him "know" (יָדַע), the same verb used in Job 38:4b, Prov 30:3b, and Prov 30:4b. Job 38:4 begins with God asking Job a question ("Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"), similar to the Prov 30:4aδ ("Who established all the ends of the earth?"). The following clause, Job 38:4b, demands, "Declare if you know understanding!," the same noun used in Prov 30:2b (בִּינָה). Scholars have long recognized that the clause, "surely you know" (כִּי תֹדַע), in Prov 30:4b repeats verbatim Job 38:5.<sup>44</sup> The clause expresses incredulity when it asks regarding the foundations of the earth, "Who placed its measurements" and then berates, "Surely you know!" This assertion is likewise found in Prov 30:4bγ after it asks about the name of the holy one. That this phrase "surely you know" only occurs in Prov 30:4bβ and Job 38:5 is enough evidence for many to see a relationship between the two passages. The writer incorporates language similar to Job

<sup>43</sup> R. B. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 165–69. See also Franklyn, "The Sayings of Agur," 246–47.

<sup>44</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 273–74; Toy, *Proverbs*, 521–22.

38:5 in the same manner that he does “utterance of the man” in Prov 30:1 in order to comment upon a transcendent holy one involved in laying out the foundations of the earth.

Proverbs 30:4b teases, “What is his name, and what is the name of his son?” As for the first question, “What is his name,” few question that the obvious answer is YHWH.<sup>45</sup> The question appears to evoke a similar response as the assertions in Amos 4–5. There the writer asserts God’s control over creation while resolutely declaring that his name is YHWH. Amos 4:13 asserts, “Listen, the one forming mountains, creating the wind, declaring to man what his thoughts are, the one making dawn, darkness and treading upon the high places of the earth, YHWH God of hosts is His name”; or Amos 5:8, “The one making Pleiades and Orion, the one turning deep darkness into morning, turning darkening night into day, and the one calling to the waters of the sea and pouring them out upon the surface of the earth, YHWH is His name.”<sup>46</sup> These texts assert that the name of the creator, the transcendent One, is YHWH.

Isaiah 40:12–14 similarly inquires (מִי), “Who measured the waters in his hand, weighed the heavens by the span, gave the dust of the earth a measurement, and weighed the mountains with a balance and the hills with a pair of scales? Who directed the spirit of YHWH, or as his counselor made him know? With whom did he consult, brought him understanding, and taught him in a path of justice, taught him knowledge, and made him know a way of understanding?” These “who” questions concern the one responsible for creation and have the obvious answer that it was YHWH who had done such a thing. It would seem that the writer in Prov 30 queries in this same way.

The only problem with such explicit answers to the interrogatives in Prov 30:4 is the riddle-like formulation of the entire passage, in particular Prov 30:4aα. If the answer was as straightforward as “YHWH is the one who creates,” would there have been the need to state that he did not learn wisdom, had no understanding, and was stupid? If YHWH was the simple answer, would he state, “But I do have knowledge of the Holy One(s)” (v. 3)? Indeed, the passage is formulated as an oracle affirming that every word of God proves true (v. 5). If YHWH is the clear answer, how would that response be incogitable since books such as Job, Amos, Isaiah, Psalms, and other Proverbs express such things. Such assertions that deities were involved with creation or transcendent over it was ubiquitous in the ancient worlds. This riddle asserts more than merely YHWH created. The final interrogative will provide an answer.

<sup>45</sup> Franklyn, “The Sayings of Agur,” 274; Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 857–58; Van Leeuwen, “The Background to Prov 30:4aα,” passim.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Amos 5:27.

To answer such questions, we must consider the final interrogative in Prov 30:4b (“What is the name of his son?”). The third masculine singular suffix on the singular noun, “son,” divulges that the author asserts that it was indeed YHWH who was a responsible agent for creation. But who else the question refers to has caused consternation. In the history of interpretation, proposals have gone one of three ways. First, scholars have suggested that this question retreats to the teacher-pupil relationship, based on the lexemes father/son (Prov 1:8).<sup>47</sup> This interpretation is unlike the other uses of the father/son relationship in Proverbs. These occurrences that refer to training and teaching through familial relationships in Proverbs always involve other elements such as commands to do or not do something (e.g., “Listen to . . . !”), inclusion of the mother along with the father, or references to a fool in contrast to a wise or righteous son.<sup>48</sup> Thus, this interrogative (“What is the name of his son?”) would be unique if it referred to the proverbial teacher-pupil relationship.

A second interpretation follows from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It translates the “his son” with a plural “his sons.” This interpretive gloss accords with the notion that the community of Israelites were the sons of God; YHWH expresses as much to Moses in Exod 4:22. Moreover, Ps 82:6 flatly states, “You are gods; and sons of the Most High are all of you.” Thus, the Greek version may have interpreted the theologically-difficult, singular noun “son” as a plural in accordance with other Scripture, likely referring to Israel as sons of the creator, God.<sup>49</sup> For this interpretive gloss, the translator was not after two names, the name of the creator and the name of the creator’s son, but was really only inquiring about the identity of the greater being. The second question (“What is the name of his sons?”) would be, in this case, just another effort to name

<sup>47</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 474, who goes on to propose that this interpretation implies YHWH’s relationship to Israel, thus “son” indicating Israel in Prov 30:4bβ in a typological way, referring ultimately to the true Israelite son, in Waltke’s opinion, Jesus. For teacher-pupil, see also James Crenshaw, “Clanging Symbols,” in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson*, ed. Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 57.

<sup>48</sup> See Prov 1:8; 3:12; 4:1, 3; 6:20; 10:1; 13:1; 15:5, 20; 17:6, 21, 25; 19:13, 26; 20:20; 22:28; 23:22, 24; 27:10; 28:7, 24; 29:3; 30:11, 17. Proverbs with only the lexeme “son” are mostly found in Prov 1–9 and also contain commands to listen or a jussive not to do something. This form returns in Prov 23–29 in which the only occurrence of this form without a command accompanying the lexeme “son” is Prov 23:15.

<sup>49</sup> Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 276.

YHWH because of his relationship to the nation, Israel. Besides the singular reference to “son” and without any reference to “Israel” in the context, this interpretation ignores the riddle of the name of the second party. In other words, it ignores a significant development in the passage/book that becomes transparent with the “utterance of the man” in Prov 30:1, associated with the son of David through the relationship with 2 Sam 23:1 and the attention on David in the following book, Ruth.

Another proposal for “his son” accords with Job 38, a passage that we have already proposed has associations with Prov 30. Job 38:5–7 inquires about God’s audience when he laid the foundations for creation. After rebuking Job for his lack of understanding, vv. 5–7 say, “Who placed its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched over it a line? What were its bases sunk upon or who laid its cornerstone? When the stars of the morning sang together and all the sons of God shouted?” Some scholars have understood this passage in Job as referring to the starry host or to those angelic beings who were present when God created the heavens and earth.<sup>50</sup> Thus, because of the relationship between the two passages, these interpreters assume a similar connection with the “name of his son(s)” in Prov 30:4. The problem remains, however, that the Hebrew is singular (“son”) and not plural as it is in Job 38:7. Any observations from the point of view of text criticism would indicate that the singular “son” is the *lectio difficilior* and should be retained.

One can say more about the use of Job 38:5aβ, “Surely you know” in this context. It is interesting that the author here playfully asserts that the reader should know what “the name of his son” is. He does so not only with the borrowed clause—which could further condition, “If you know”—but also with the quote of Job 38:5 referring to YHWH’s statement to Job that he certainly knows that he, YHWH, was the one responsible for the universe. Regardless of whether it is a pure assertion or a conditional, the author himself professes some knowledge in Prov 30:4 if by no other means than his very questions.

### God and His Son

In this section, we will deal with the topic of a human being, who is called or likened unto a “son of God” in order to show that this topic is not unique to Prov 30:1–6. We will do so by analyzing texts of the Hebrew Bible that assert that Israel’s God has a son. Second Samuel 7:13–14 is an articulation of the so-called Davidic promise. YHWH promises that he would establish the throne of David’s son forever ( וְכִנְנִיתִי אֶת־כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ ) (עַד־עוֹלָם). Moreover, he says in 2 Sam 7:14, “As for me, I will be a father

<sup>50</sup> See Franklyn, “The Sayings of Agur,” 247–48.

to him, and as for him, he will be a son to me.” This promise in the Hebrew Bible indicates that David’s royal house would continue forever, and that YHWH had established his divine kingship. But the passage goes further than granting David’s house a divine right to rule Israel. The promise indicates that the seed of David would be a son to YHWH, and YHWH would be a father to him. The concept that a human king could relate to divinity is well-known from literature in Egypt from the third millennium BC.

Although 2 Sam 7 does assert a father/son relationship between the Davidic seed and YHWH, it does not describe the nature of this relationship or how it would come about in a particular context. Indeed, the doctrine of divine kingship in the ANE is quite complex and scholars are reticent to draw general conclusions from such a wide array of literature. And yet, its application in Ancient Egypt and other cultures demonstrates that a general notion would not have been unique in Ancient Israel.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of whether the author ascribes deity to David’s seed in 2 Sam 7, a discussion of a divine, Davidic son continues in the Hebrew Bible and beyond.

The book of Isaiah is also significant in this discussion. Isaiah 7 presents the famous virgin birth prophecy as Ahaz, the Davidic king, faces tumultuous enemies surrounding his kingdom. In Isa 7:2, 13, “the house of David” receives a sign that a virgin<sup>52</sup> would conceive and give birth to a son, even though the land would be destroyed (Isa 7:18–23). Isaiah 8 continues indicating that Israel would be subdued, and the battle would “sweep into Judah” (Isa 8:8). Both “houses of Israel” would stumble over YHWH and the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be trapped (Isa 8:14). It would be a time of destruction and upheaval. But in the midst of that destruction, Isa 9:5 indicates that a child would be born, “a son is given to us.” Moreover, Isa 9:6 indicates that the son would sit “upon the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it . . . forever” (עַל־כִּסֵּא דָוִד ) (וְעַל־מַמְלַכְתּוֹ לְהַכִּין אֹתָהּ ... וְעַד־עוֹלָם). It is not our purpose here to demonstrate a chronology between 2 Sam 7 and Isa 9, but the lemmata are the

<sup>51</sup> For a recent monograph on the state of the issue, see Nicole Maria Brisch, *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008). See also Allison Thomason, “The Materiality of Assyrian Sacred Kingship,” *RC* 10 (2016): 133–48.

<sup>52</sup> We translate “virgin” here not primarily because of the denotation of the underlying term in Hebrew (עַלְמָה, “young maiden”) nor only in view of the LXX/NT gloss, “virgin,” but because of the word play of עַלְמָה with the place from which the sign will come, מַעְלָה, that is, “from above.” This relationship was first pointed out in a conversation with a colleague, Seth Postell, April 2006.

same indicating, if nothing else, a relationship in content or tradition. Furthermore, in the midst of four descriptions of the child in Isa 9:5, the son is given a title of “God almighty” (אל גבור). Although much discussion has ensued from this title, one explanation is to understand the description as elevating the status of this son to deity within a developing exegetical tradition. The title is used again in Isa 10:20–21 to express that the remnant will return and depend upon YHWH, the holy one of Israel, “the mighty God” (אל גבור). Here, the title is used in association with the personal name of the God of Israel and the Isaianic appellation for Israel’s God, “the Holy One of Israel.” The “remnant will return ... to God almighty,” which relates to Isa 10:20 in which the remnant would lean on “YHWH, the holy one of Israel.” Isaiah 9:6 develops the Davidic promise that not only would YHWH establish the throne of David’s son and that he would be a father to this son, but that the Davidic son would be called God (אל). It appears that Isa 9:5–6 takes up the promise of YHWH to David that he would raise up his “seed” and establish his kingdom’s throne forever” and develops that promise.

Psalm 89 is another passage that develops the status of the Davidic son. This passage expressly considers the Davidic promise.<sup>53</sup> Psalm 89:20–21 says, “Then you spoke in a vision to your godly one(s) and you said, ‘I gave help for the mighty, I exalted a chosen one from the people. I found David, my servant. I anointed him with my holy oil.’” The psalm continues by describing YHWH’s presence and strength with him, assuring him defeat over enemies. It would be in YHWH’s name that “his horn will be exalted” (vv. 25). But Ps 89:26 further elevates the notion of the Davidic king. YHWH says that he will “place his hand on the sea and on the rivers, his right hand.” Consequently, the Davidic king takes on a cosmological role, one that was absent in 2 Sam 7 and latent, at best, in Isa 9.

Immediately after the psalm articulates the chosen servant’s transcendence in v. 26, Ps 89:27 echoes 2 Sam 7 as the Davidic king says, “He will call to me, ‘You are my father,’ my God, and the rock of my salvation.” The psalmist continues by quoting YHWH, “Indeed, I, I will make him the firstborn, the most high of the kings of the earth.... I will place his seed forever and his throne like the days of heaven.” Again, echoes of 2 Sam 7 and Isa 9 reverberate in the psalmist’s understanding of this Davidic king, who now becomes YHWH’s firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Moreover, his days will now be like the “days of heaven” and in v. 37, “His seed will be forever and his throne like the sun before me.”

<sup>53</sup> Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 769–82; Robert L. Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73–89)*, JSOT 307 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 218–19.

It is not merely that “the throne of his kingdom will be forever” but that he himself “will be forever.” The concept of the Davidic king, which initially was likened unto a father/son relationship, developed in the Hebrew Bible. Not only did he have a special relationship to YHWH, but he was called God, described as transcendent over creation, and his days are infinite.

Another important biblical text to consider is Ps 2. Verse 2 recounts that the kings of earth and rulers set themselves against YHWH and against his “messiah.” Meanwhile, he sits in the heavens. The scene is similar to Dan 7, which we will consider next, in that the Ancient of Days takes his seat among the thrones and throngs who attempt to rebel against him. In Ps 2:6, YHWH responds to them in anger that he has, “[S]et my king upon Zion, my holy mountain.” Then in language that suggests a quotation of 2 Sam 7:14 in view of his reference to a “decree,” the psalmist states, “Let me recount in a decree, YHWH said to me, ‘You are my son and I, today, I have begotten you’” (Ps 2:7). The development upon the familial themes in 2 Sam 7 and Isa 7–9 seem clear.<sup>54</sup> Not only is he called a son, but he is “birthed.” And he is birthed not by David but by YHWH.<sup>55</sup> He continues that when asked, he would give him “the nations, the ends of the earth as a possession” (Ps 2:8). The king-son will have access to the nations as an inheritance; he will possess “the ends of the earth,” the same collocation that is found in Prov 30:4a<sup>e</sup>. Even here it appears that the psalmist expands the transcendence of the divinely born, Davidic son because of his inheritance of the earth itself and his “breaking and shattering them” in Ps 2:9.<sup>56</sup>

Psalm 2:10–12 continues by warning kings and judges to “Serve YHWH in fear and . . . kiss the son” (Ps 2:11a–12a<sup>x</sup>). The “son” can be no other than the Davidic son given the Zion language in the psalm, the allusion to the Davidic promise, and proximity to the psalms of David that make up Book 1 of the Psalter. It appears that the psalmist is commanding the reader to venerate the son after he commands, “Serve YHWH in fear.” Additionally, the “son” in Ps 2:12 occurs in Aramaic, the language of Dan 7 and the “son of man.” Thus, it is possible that the

<sup>54</sup> Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Atlanta: SBL, 1985), 209; Robert Luther Cole, *Psalm 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 111–14.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Vol. 1 (1–41)* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 207.

<sup>56</sup> The traveling language and transcendence theme seems the strongest connection between Psalm 2, Proverbs 8, and 30.

psalm conflates the Davidic promise with the “son of man” from Dan 7.<sup>57</sup> Psalm 2 ends as Ps 1 began, “Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.” Likewise, Prov 30:5 shares the collocation “those who take refuge in him” as it quotes 2 Sam 22:31/Ps 18:31 (“The word of YHWH is pure; it is a shield to all those taking refuge in him”). Psalm 2 not only develops the concept of the son of God, but also demonstrates an association with Prov 30:1–5.

Finally, Dan 7 takes on special importance in non-biblical literature.<sup>58</sup> Whether in Ezekiel the Tragedian or literature from Qumran, the image of the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven became an important text for messianic hopes. We have already considered Dan 7 above but for the purpose here, it is instructive to consider how the chapter relates to the Davidic promise from 2 Sam 7. As we noted above, an important clause in the Father/Son promise to David in 2 Sam 7:14a is found in 2 Sam 7:12b and 13b. These clauses indicate an enduring kingdom for the seed of David saying in v. 12b, “I will establish his kingdom,” and reiterating in v. 13b, “I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” Second Samuel 7:16 concludes YHWH’s speech by affirming to David, “Your house and your kingdom will be confirmed forever before you and your throne will be established forever.” Daniel 7 contains language that likewise asserts the everlasting rule of the son of man. Daniel 7:14 says of the son of man, “To him was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom, and all peoples, nations, and tongues will serve him. His dominion will be a dominion forever, which will not pass away and his kingdom will not be destroyed.” The language regarding the enduring nature of the Davidic

<sup>57</sup> For the possibility that a manuscript from Qumran, 1Q28a, alludes to Ps 2 and the “begotten” Messiah, see Craig A. Evans, “Are the ‘Son’ Texts at Qumran ‘Messianic’? Reflections on 4Q369 and Related Scrolls,” in *Qumran–Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 138.

<sup>58</sup> For analyses on the relationships of these texts and full bibliography, see Johannes Zimmerman, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran*, WUNT 104 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 128n255; Zimmerman, “Observations on 4Q426–The ‘Son of God,’” 177; for an analysis of the Aramaic Apocalypse, see Seyoon Kim, “*The ‘Son of Man’ as the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 20–22, 79–80, 84. More recently, see Kuhn, “The ‘One Like a Son of Man’ Becomes the ‘Son of God,’” 22–42, 27 in particular. See Kim for a full bibliography on the discussion, including J. A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Essays*, SBLMS 25 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1979), 84–113, who does not think the manuscript is messianic.

kingdom is true also of the kingdom of the son of man.

### Textual Production and Theological Construal

The author of Prov 30:1–6 has used a number of texts and traditions to provide an amalgamation in the passage.<sup>59</sup> The author has incorporated an expression of prophetic pronouncement; an excerpted phrase from Num 24:3, 15 and 2 Sam 23:1; multiple clauses from Ps 18:31/2 Sam 22:31; and a clause from Deut 4:2.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, he has drawn from traditions of important figures in the Hebrew Bible and the ANE and traditions of cosmology within those same spheres. This phenomenon fits entirely into the situation of current studies in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and writings from the Second Temple period. In an article dealing with wisdom literature and the literary milieu of the Second Temple period, Menahem Kister concludes that authors/scribes picked up and incorporated terminology and traditions of classical wisdom into literature of the period for purposes beyond that of classical wisdom, including for purposes of eschatology.<sup>61</sup> He writes, “The Second Temple period was, above all, the period of interpretation, and its major project was amalgamating, through interpretation, concepts from diverse biblical strata in a Hellenistic environment. It is true, for instance, that ‘wisdom functions for post-exilic writers as a hermeneutical construction to interpret the Torah,’ but it is equally true that the Torah functioned as hermeneutical construct to interpret wisdom, and probably to a larger extent.”<sup>62</sup> Why has the author of Prov 30 incorporated this material?

First, Prov 30:1–6 draws upon these items and incorporates them into

<sup>59</sup> Menahem Kister, “Wisdom Literature and Its Relation to Other Genres: From Ben Sira to Mysteries,” in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 20–22 May 2001*, ed. John J. Collins et al., STDJ 51 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 13–47, quoted in Bernd U. Schipper, “Wisdom and Torah—Insights and Perspectives,” in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of “Torah” in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Bernd U. Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, SJSJ 163 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 307–19, quote from 317.

<sup>60</sup> Schipper, “When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs,” in *Wisdom and Torah*, 55–79, in particular, 80–71.

<sup>61</sup> Kister, “Wisdom Literature and Its Relation to Other Genres,” 19.

<sup>62</sup> Kister, “Wisdom Literature and Its Relation to Other Genres,” 19. The internal quote is from G. T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament*, BZAW 151 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 118.

the book of Proverbs in view of its relationship to a purported speaker of proverbs, Balaam. Knowing that Balaam spoke in proverbs about the last days (Num 23:7, 18; 24:3, 14, 15, 20, 21, and 23), the writer juxtaposes texts and traditions in Prov 30:1–9 in order to provide a Torah-guided interpretation within the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs already had an association with a “seed” of David, namely Solomon. Through his use of “utterance of the man,” the author draws upon the “seed” of David language (2 Sam 22:51–23:1) and conflates it with the Balaam oracle. Moreover, through this “proverb,” Prov 30:4b draws upon “son of God” texts or tradition while v. 4a itself comments that the son is transcendent (30:4aβ–δ) and a Moses-type mediator (30:4α).

Second, the writer has incorporated these items as a means of balancing wisdom literature with the prophetic word from God, namely, an oracle. He does so by incorporating four statements regarding prophecy. He includes: (1) “oracle,” (2) “utterance of the man,” (3) Ps 18:31/2 Sam 22:31, which emphasizes the purity and refuge of the “word of God,” and (4) Deut 4:2, which warns against adding to the “word.” Moreover, he diminishes the importance of wisdom by stating that he does not have “wisdom” or “understanding,” but rather is “stupid.” The focus on a “word” becomes obvious. In Num 24:16, Balaam “hears the words of God” (אָמַרָה) while the writer of Prov 30:5a and 6a says, “Every word of God is true... Do not add to his words . . .” (אָמַרָה, דְּבַר). Only God can reveal his word. His incorporation of Ps 18:31/2 Sam 22:31 and Deut 4:2, “Do not add to the word . . .” reveals that he does not see his amalgamation of texts as adding to God’s word but rather clarifying its meaning. Thus, Prov 30:4 takes on the effect of commentary, or even theology.

Third, although it is difficult to draw absolute conclusions, it is hard to imagine his incorporation of “utterance of the man” (Num 24:3, 15) if he was not aware of the wisdom terminology in Num 24:16. There Balaam acknowledges that he has heard the “words of God” (cf. Ps 18:31/2 Sam 22:31) and “knows knowledge of the Most High.” In Prov 30:3b, Agur “knows knowledge of the holy one(s).” Moreover, given the issues surrounding apocalypticism and mysteries in Second Temple literature, the phrase in Num 24:16bβ (“Falling and eyes opened”) likely spurred on his use of “utterance.”<sup>63</sup> Through the use of these amalgamations, the writer combines the content of the “utterance” and “vision” from Num 24:17, the “star from Jacob,” a well-known, messianic title from the period, and the promise to David from 2 Sam 7:13–16.

The incorporated phrase “utterance of the man” serves double-duty

as it also draws upon 2 Sam 22:51–23:5. The poetry of 2 Sam 22:51 reiterates the promise to David before it leads to the “utterance,” saying, “He will make great the salvation of his king, he will do a *hesed* to his anointed, to David and to his seed forever.” It comes as no surprise that the author of Prov 30:1–4 then combines the promise to David and the “proverb” of Balaam as he awaits a “star from Jacob,” “a scepter from Israel,” who would “smash the heads” of the enemy and “act with valor” (Num 24:17–18).

## Conclusion

Proverbs 30:4α–β, with maddening ambiguity and polysemy, invites a connection to a Moses-type man, who interceded for his people and was a lawgiver. Additionally, the clause leads one to imagine a “son of man,” who, because of his humanity, must ascend from the earth to the heavens before descending again. Proverbs 30:4γ–ε draws from cosmological language to establish that this human “son of God” is transcendent; he is not created but stands over creation and in fact “established all the ends of the earth” with his father. Agur asks: Who is this transcendent being who gathers wind, wraps water, and establishes the ends of the earth? Who could do that besides God and his son? Surely you know!

<sup>63</sup> See Alexander Rofé, “Revealed Wisdom: From the Bible to Qumran,” 1–11; Kister, “Wisdom Literature and Its Relation to Other Genres,” 19.



## Did Jesus Quote the Apostles? The Possible Intertextuality and Significance of Revelation 2:24<sup>1</sup>

Paul A. Himes

Baptist College of Ministry, Menomonee Falls, WI

*This article examines the significance of the phrase “no other burden” (οὐ . . . ἄλλο βάρος) in Rev 2:24, including its relationship to ὡς λέγουσιν shortly before it. A full analysis of these phrases has been mostly lacking in modern commentaries, which has not prevented many from taking dogmatic positions on whether or not Jesus might be alluding to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. This article defends the possibility that ὡς λέγουσιν is meant to point forward, thus making an allusion to Acts 15 highly probable. This article then explores the theological significance of such an allusion in light of the situation in Acts, and then closes by briefly discussing the practical significance of this thesis.*

*Key Words:* Acts 15, Bible translation, intertextuality, Jerusalem Council, New Testament ethics, Revelation 2, Thyatira

Ἰμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος.<sup>2</sup> (Rev 2:24)

A seemingly trivial phrase in Rev 2:24 has managed to polarize commentaries, despite the almost complete lack of technical analysis. Specifi-

cally, the issue centers around whether Jesus’s reference to “no other burden” is meant to allude to the Jerusalem Council (and the letter it produced) in Acts 15, essentially providing his audience with a rare type of intertextuality, Jesus citing the apostles instead of vice versa.<sup>3</sup> Related to this question is the issue of whether or not ὡς λέγουσιν, “as they say,” could be taken to refer to what follows rather than what precedes.

A large number of commentaries are at least sympathetic to the idea that Jesus alludes to the Jerusalem Council. These range from the more recent German commentary by Gerhard Maier to the influential NIGTC by G. K. Beale to the classic one-hundred-year-old commentary by H. B. Swete.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, most of these commentaries merely assume the

<sup>3</sup> This writer acknowledges that the term “intertextuality” is fraught with problems, and its usage in biblical studies is far removed from its original meaning *vis-à-vis* literary studies, where “the intertextual relationship was primarily defined as the conflict where the new text was seeking to replace the old” (Kulli Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22*, LNTS 526 [London: T&T Clark, 2016], 21; Töniste’s discussion in this section is helpful, as is the article by Thomas R. Hatina, “Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship?,” *Biblical Interpretation* 7.1 [1999]: 29). However, words are notorious for taking on a life of their own, and as Töniste well notes, “There is nothing extraordinary about borrowing a methodology from a different field and appropriating it in a new fashion” (*Ending of the Canon*, 23). Consequently, I am following Stefan Alkier’s description that “*Intertextual* investigation concerns itself with the effects of meaning that emerge from the reference of a given text to other text” (“Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts,” in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, ed. Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy A. Huizenga [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009], 3).

<sup>4</sup> The reader should note the following: G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 266; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:74; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 404; E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Hengstenberg*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1851, reprinted 1972), 163–64; Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, International Theological Commentary (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 176; Gerhard Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Kapitel 1–11*, Historisch Theologische Auslegung (Brunnen, Germany: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2018), 194; Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 73; William R. Newell, *The Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1935), 59–60; Pierre Prigent, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, CNT 2nd series (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1981), 59; Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, 2nd ed., Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay was read at the Bible Faculty Summit at International Baptist College in Chandler, Arizona (August 2019). I am grateful to the two STR peer-reviews for their comments and suggestions, which have helped strengthen this essay. I am grateful to my research assistant Alex Rohof for feedback and helping make sure I addressed the reviewers’ concerns. Any mistakes or misrepresentations are the sole responsibility of this writer.

<sup>2</sup> No significant textual variants impact this topic either way. In fact, most critical Greek texts (including the NA<sup>27</sup> and the SBL 2010), as well as the Byzantine text (Robinson-Pierpont 2005) and the Majority text (Hodges-Farstad 1985), all perfectly agree (not counting a solitary movable *nu*). I have deliberately omitted punctuation here.

allusion (some dogmatically so) without defending it. On the other hand, a significant number of commentaries express skepticism or disagreement with the possibility, though Isbon T. Beckwith is almost unique in discussing the issue from a syntactical perspective.<sup>5</sup>

What has been neglected in this discussion is the role that ὡς λέγουσιν might play in resolving the ambiguity, specifically whether or not the phrase refers to what precedes or what follows. Arguably the phrase may point backward and yet still allow for an allusion to Acts 15.<sup>6</sup> If the phrase

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1996), 31; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977, reprint of the 3rd ed. [1911] by London: Macmillan), 46; Frederick A. Tatford, *The Revelation* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1985; reprint of the 1983 edition), 169; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 76 (interestingly, the posthumously revised edition does not discuss the issue; see John F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries, rev. and ed. Philip E. Rawley and Mark Hitchcock [Chicago: Moody, 2011], 73).

<sup>5</sup> The reader should note the following: David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1997), 207–8; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), 92 (to be fair, Beasley-Murray does not even mention the possibility of an allusion to Acts 15. However, he clearly sees a different referent to “no other burden”); Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1919), 469–70; Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Regensburg, Germany: Friedrich Pustet, 1997), 121–22; F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John I–III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), 31; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 301 (Koester sees “similar concerns” but rejects the idea of a direct allusion); Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, HNT (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1926), 27; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 163–64; and Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 229–30. Finally, some significant commentaries do not discuss the issue at all. These include G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: A&C Black, 1966), 45; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 53; and Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 95.

<sup>6</sup> One can see this, e.g., in Beale, *Book of Revelation* 256–56; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 193–94; and Morris, *Revelation*, 72–73. On the other hand, Hort (*Apocalypse of St. John I–III*, 31) seems to be unique in arguing that ὡς λέγουσιν points forward but that “no other burden” is *not* a reference to the Jerusalem Council. For Hort, ὡς λέγουσιν refers to how “these teachers professed the deliverance from superfluous burdens.” Yet this is utterly inexplicable, since it is Jesus, not the false teachers, who is promising freedom from any “other burden.”

points forward, however, it virtually guarantees that “no other burden” would have to be understood as an allusion to the Jerusalem Council, as will be demonstrated.

Consequently, there are two interrelated questions at play here. First, can an exegetical case be made that ὡς λέγουσιν points forward, thus alluding to the Jerusalem Council? Second, if “no other burden” were an allusion to the Apostolic Council, what is the point that Jesus is making? What would be the theological significance of such an allusion? Very little has been written regarding these questions.<sup>7</sup>

In light of those two questions, the goals of this essay are as follows: (1) provide a strong case for why ὡς λέγουσιν probably points forward in the sentence; (2) discuss why this matters theologically; and (3) briefly discuss the practical ramifications of the previous two points in regard to both Christian ethics and Bible translation.

## The Role of ὡς λέγουσιν in Rev 2:24

### Introductory Considerations

Revelation 2:24 contains a number of ambiguities. First of all, the expression “have not known the deep things of Satan,” though clearly parallel with the phrase “this teaching” that precedes it, raises the question as to whether or not this was an actual slogan of the heretics (e.g., something like “We are learning the deep things of Satan, of which we need not be afraid!”) or, rather, Jesus’s own “parody of the expression ‘deep things of God.’”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Though an unsurprising exception (given the theological focus of his commentary) is Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 176–77.

<sup>8</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 300. In defense of the idea that this was the false teachers’ actual slogan, see Ignaz Rohr, *Der Hebräerbrief und die Geheime Offenbarung des heiligen Johannes*, HSNT (Bonn: Pter Hanstein, 1932), 85; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 228; Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches*, 154. In defense of the idea that this is a parody, see Koester, *Revelation*, 300; Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2012), 117; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of St. John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2005), 76. A thorough comparison of the two views is given by Prigent, *L’Apocalypse*, 59–60. In addition, one should note that a number of commentators see a gnostic or proto-gnostic background to “the deep things of Satan” (e.g., Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 27; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 76; Sales Tiefenthal, *Die Apokalypse des hl. Johannes* [Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1892], 192). Hort (*Apocalypse of St. John I–III*, 31) makes note of what

Second, and central to this essay, the expression “no other burden” needs clarification: no other burden than what? Some commentators see the next verse as key: no other burden than to hold on to what they already have, though this still begs the question: what is it they “have”?<sup>9</sup>

Third, and closely linked to the second point, what exactly does the expression ὡς λέγουσιν refer to? One cannot deny the possibility that it refers to a slogan of the heretics (“deep things of Satan”). Indeed, a case can be made that the third person plural referents of λέγουσιν are the same as τοὺς μοιχεύοντας . . . μετανοήσωσιν . . . τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς in vv. 22–23,<sup>10</sup> though it should be noted that the closest third person plural verb before v. 24 is v. 23’s γινώσκονται, where the expression “all the churches” is the subject.

If, on the other hand, Jesus meant ὡς λέγουσιν to point forward to the subsequent clause, then one is forced to consider an older background to “no other burden.” In other words, who, exactly, said “no other burden” before Jesus did? At this point the answer becomes obvious, simply because no other candidates exist: The Jerusalem Council is the only entity in the entirety of Scripture, within a context discussing abstinence from idolatry and immorality, to declare that the church should not place a “burden” on its members (Gentile Christians). This point is amplified by the rarity of βάρος in the Greek Bible: only 6x in the NT (Matt 20:12; Acts 15:28; 2 Cor 4:17; Gal 6:2; 1 Thess 2:6; and Rev 2:24) and 3x in the LXX, all in the apocryphal books (Jdt 7:4; 2 Mac 9:10; Sir 13:2).

A neglected corollary of this question is that if ὡς λέγουσιν actually does not refer to the “deep things of Satan,” then one is forced to question whether or not any of the Thyatira heretics were actually saying something like that (either “deep things of God,” which Jesus parodies, or actually “deep things of Satan”). Could not Jesus simply be making a derisive comment about the content of their teachings without reference to one of their slogans? To claim that somebody is going after “the deep things of Satan” is, after all, an obvious rebuke, regardless of whether or not

“later Gnostics” believed but is careful to avoid anachronism. Similarly, Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1845), 2:83 notes the possible link between “deep things of Satan” and “the Gnostic μυστήρια, the leaven of which sect [Gnosticism] would seem to have already begun its fermentation.” That a form of “proto-gnosticism” was developing amongst some of the churches Jesus speaks to is certainly within the realm of possibility.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Giesen, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 122; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 89; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 230.

<sup>10</sup> As noted by one of the anonymous peer-reviewers.

Jesus is quoting Jezebel or her minions. Furthermore, one must also not ignore the possibility that ὡς λέγουσιν might have been meant to simultaneously point forward and backward, a deliberate ambiguity that would simultaneously contrast what “they (the false teachers) say” with what “they (the apostles) say.” Space prohibits an examination of this third possibility, however, and this writer is not aware of any commentator who defends that position.

### The Positioning of ὡς λέγουσιν and Its Referent

In general, is ὡς λέγουσιν more likely to refer to that which precedes or that which follows? This question will be explored in the following manner: (1) A general examination of the NT, LXX, and Josephus via *Accordance* with the following command line: “ὡς <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> λέγω”<sup>11</sup>; and (2) A more specific examination of the exact phrase ὡς λέγουσιν within the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (an examination which will, of necessity, be more selective).

In the New Testament, running this search yields thirteen hits across sixteen verses. Ignoring those hits where ὡς has no clear relation to λέγω, we end up with the following results: Mark 14:72, Luke 20:37; 22:61; John 18:6; Acts 11:16; 1 Cor 10:15; 2 Cor 6:13; and Heb 7:9.<sup>12</sup>

Out of those relevant texts, both 1 Cor 10:15 and 2 Cor 6:13 seem to deal broadly with what the author is speaking of throughout the general context, simultaneously pointing forward and backward. Of the remaining texts, however, not a single time does ὡς + λέγω point backward; rather, it always points forward. For example, in Acts 11:16, ὡς ἔλεγεν points forward to the next phrase, which refers to what Jesus had said in the past, a close parallel to what we are suggesting might be the case in Rev 2:24.

In the LXX, that same search surprisingly garners only one hit, LXX Gen 44:10. In this text, ὡς λέγετε does not introduce a direct quote as does Acts 11:16, but it does introduce the general content of something

<sup>11</sup> *Accordance* 11.2 (Oaktree Software, 2016). I have deliberately set the command line to “within 2 words” rather than “within 1 word” to allow for the possibility of an article or noun or post-positive δέ being positioned before the verb. Also, it is important with such command lines in *Accordance* to specify the search across “book” instead of “verse,” since otherwise relevant hits may be omitted due to the verse divisions.

<sup>12</sup> For Mark 14:72, a textual variant (the replacing of ὡς with a relative pronoun) means that not all Greek editions will contain this reference.

Joseph's brothers had just said. Nonetheless, rhetorically ὡς λέγετε still points forward—the reiteration of the general content of Judah and company's statement follows ὡς λέγετε in the discourse structure.

In Josephus, however, the situation becomes more complicated. There are clear examples of both backward-looking and forward-looking ὡς + λέγω clauses.<sup>13</sup> For the former, *Antiq* 7.91 (alt. 7.4.4) has ὡς Μωυσῆς εἶπε, “as Moses said,” clearly referring to the previous clause (the topic of building a temple for God). Similarly, in *Antiq* 16.182 (alt. 16.7.1) ὡς ἐλέγετο points backwards to the previous clause, detailing what happened to two of Herod's guards when they intruded on the sepulcher of David and Solomon.

Yet in *War* 7.134 (alt. 7.5.5), the expression ἀλλ'ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις clearly points forward to a proverbial expression ῥέοντα ποταμόν (“but rather as certain people say, ‘flowing [like] a river’”).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in *Antiq* 8.97 [alt. 8.3.9] Josephus uses the expression ὡς δὲ εἰπεῖν to introduce the idea that that the beauty of Solomon's temple exceeds even what could be believed if one saw it for themselves, with their own face (καὶ τῆς ὀψεως, though note that the μεῖζον precedes the ὡς δὲ εἰπεῖν; however, the essence of the point Josephus is making occurs after the expression we are examining).

Next, we will briefly consider the exact expression ὡς λέγουσιν within broader first-century usage via the *TLG*.<sup>15</sup> The results support both possibilities. We will provide here a few examples that demonstrate that ὡς λέγουσιν can point either forward or backward, depending on the context.

First, ὡς λέγουσιν can point forward. Ptolemaeus the Grammarian, in his dictionary, when distinguishing between the terms ἀποκήρυκτος and ἐκποίητος, closes out his entry by stating, “ὡς λέγουσιν «εἰσποίητος γέγονεν».”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, in Plutarch's *Themistocles* 1.1, Plutarch begins the

<sup>13</sup> The relevant hits are: *Antiq* 7.91 [alt. 7.4.4], 8.97 [8.3.9], 15.387 [15.11.1], 16.182 [16.7.1], 16.313 [16.10.3], 18.17 [18.1.4], 19.123 [19.1.15]; *War* 7.134 [7.5.5], 7.404 [7.9.2]; *Life* 355 [65]; *Apion* 1.7 [1.2], 1.167 [1.22].

<sup>14</sup> All translations from primary Greek sources and secondary German sources are this author's own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>15</sup> Utilizing the online *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (University of California, 2013), <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/index.php>. I performed a “textual search” for the specific string “ὡς λέγουσιν,” and then focused more narrowly on texts in the first century AD.

<sup>16</sup> Ptolemaeus, *De differentia vocabulorum* 32. It is not certain exactly when Ptolemaeus the Grammarian wrote; *TLG* lists a range of second century BC to second century AD.

book with a reference to Themistocles's mother and what was commonly known about her,<sup>17</sup> indicated by ὡς λέγουσιν and followed immediately by a quotation: Ἀβρότονον Θρήισσα γυνὴ γένος ἀλλὰ τεκέσθαι τὸν μέγαν Ἑλλησὶν φημι Θεμιστοκλέα (“[I am] Abrotonon, a woman of the Thracian race, and yet I give birth to the great Greek called Themistocles!”).<sup>18</sup> This second example is key since it demonstrates that ὡς λέγουσιν can refer to a saying that is, at least in theory, well-circulated and accessible to the author's audience.

On the other hand, as evidence that ὡς λέγουσιν can point backward, we see that Plutarch, in *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat*<sup>19</sup> 15.C, when discussing the effects of eating the octopus (or cuttlefish), states, “. . . φαντασίας παραχῶδεις καὶ ἀλλοκότους δεχόμενον, ὡς λέγουσιν,” where clearly the words before ὡς λέγουσιν refer to the negative effects one can receive from eating the octopus, negative effects which are quite well known, “as they say.” Similarly, in *Pericles* 13.13 (alt. 13.7), when discussing how Pericles set up a statue of Athena Hygieia near the altar of the local goddess, Plutarch notes that the local goddesses' altar was there first, “ὅς καὶ πρότερον ἦν,” followed by ὡς λέγουσιν, indicating that this was common knowledge.

As we have seen, the specific expression ὡς λέγουσιν (with no intervening words) in *Koine* Greek can definitely refer to a well-known expression or piece of knowledge, but structurally can point either backward or forward. When examining the broader construction of ὡς + λέγω within the New Testament and LXX, however, it is more likely to point forward.

### The Case for οὐ βάλλω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος as an Allusion to Acts 15:28

Having discussed ὡς λέγουσιν, we can now examine the lexical and contextual links between Jesus's letter to Thyatira and the Apostolic Council. Here, in order to avoid “parallelomania,” we will use Samuel Sandmel's classic article as a guide.<sup>20</sup> Sandmel, concerned with the rise of

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Bernadotte Perrin's old Loeb translation attributes the quote to “her epitaph,” though that is not explicitly stated in the Greek text.

<sup>18</sup> Author's translation.

<sup>19</sup> In English, *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81.1 (March 1962): 1–13. Note that Sandmel popularized, but did not coin, the term “parallelomania.”

“extravagance” when it came to positing literary parallels to Scripture, argued that one must be able to demonstrate specificity and context.<sup>21</sup> In other words, overly-generic parallels are not true parallels, and supposed parallels must contain similar contexts.

Consequently, we begin by noting the specific lexical links between Rev 2 and Acts 15 in chart 1, while acknowledging that this will not be enough to establish an allusion without studying the context. Nonetheless, the lexical links alone are significant, especially once the reader is reminded of the rarity of *βάρος* in the NT and LXX.

Chart 1<sup>22</sup>

The Apostolic Council	Letter to Thyatira
Acts 15:28—μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρος, πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες	Rev 2:24b–25a—οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος, πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε

Yet in order for Jesus’s statement to make sense as an intertextual allusion, the contexts must be similar. Significantly, both Jesus’s letter to the Thyatira Christians and the Apostolic Council are concerned with Christian ethics. Furthermore, the Apostolic Council prohibits immorality and idolatry (the latter is narrowed a bit in v. 29 as *εἰδωλοθύτος*, food offered to idols), the two issues that Jesus himself focuses on in Rev 2:24. In addition, both the Apostolic Council and Jesus himself in his letter see their message as mediated through the Spirit. Thus, we have three points of contact within the broader context of each text, of which the first two are especially significant.

Chart 2

The Apostolic Council	Letter to Thyatira
Acts 15:20—ἀλλὰ ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος. [cf. 15:29 and 21:25, εἰδωλοθύτων . . . καὶ πορνείας and εἰδωλόθυτον . . . καὶ πορνείαν, respectively]	Rev 2:20b–21—καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμούς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα. καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

<sup>21</sup> Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” 2.

<sup>22</sup> Text taken from the Nestle-Aland 27th ed. (*Novum Testamentum Graecae*, eds. Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993]).

Acts 15:28a—Ἐδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν, . . .	Rev 2:29—Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.
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Based on these parallels, it is inexplicable that Osborne could argue, “. . . there is no hint in the context [of Rev 2] of apostolic teaching.”<sup>23</sup>

In summary: the following points can be made in defense of an allusion to Acts 15: (1) at least a significant likelihood exists that *ὡς λέγουσιν* points forward rather than backwards in Rev 2:24, which would necessitate looking for somebody or some group that had previously made a similar point to that which Jesus made;<sup>24</sup> (2) it cannot be proved conclusively that “the deep things of Satan” is either a statement by the heretics or Jesus’s parody of the statement, since this assumes precisely the point under consideration, whether or not *ὡς λέγουσιν* points forward or backward; (3) key points of Rev 2:24–25 resemble Acts 15:28 lexically; and (4) the activities that Jesus wishes the Thyatira Christians to avoid are identical to two of the four practices that the Apostolic Council wishes Gentile Christians to avoid.<sup>25</sup>

### Counter Arguments

A thorough lexical argument in support of “no other burden” as a reference to Acts 15:28 has hitherto been lacking. For those skeptical of the idea, however, Isbon T. Beckwith’s argument takes pride of place and has clearly influenced others (most prominently Osborne and Thomas). Beckwith states,

After *ἄλλος* with a negative, instead of the usual construction *i.e.* the gen., ἢ, *πλὴν* with the gen., etc., an independent clause is sometimes found introduced by *πλὴν*, . . . That gives the simplest explanation of the present case; *i.e. other than* that contained in the clause introduced by *πλὴν*. *Burden*, then, is not the proper rendering of *βάρος*, which, like its adj. *βαρύς*, does not always denote something to be burdensome, but often what is *weighty*, or *important*, . . .<sup>26</sup>

Regarding the use of *πλὴν*, Beckwith gives key examples from older literature, to which might be added both Mark 12:32 and Josephus, *War* 1.451 [alt. 1.23.2] where we see examples of *πλὴν* introducing a word or phrase

<sup>23</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 163.

<sup>24</sup> As noted earlier (see n5), one can believe that the phrase points backward and yet still hold to the idea that “no other burden” is an allusion to Acts 15.

<sup>25</sup> And, as noted below, “things strangled” and “blood” are probably both closely linked to *εἰδωλόθυτος*.

<sup>26</sup> Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 470.

(though not a clause) that interacts directly with ἄλλος a few words earlier. The function of πλὴν, however, is not being disputed here.

Beckwith's argument must not be glossed over quickly, and it is a pity that in the nearly one hundred years since his comments, it is difficult to find commentators that have considered the Greek syntax here as closely as he has. Nonetheless, Beckwith's argument cannot overturn the strong possibility of an allusion to the Apostolic Council for two reasons. First, granting Beckwith's syntactical argument that πλὴν probably, or at least possibly, introduces a clause to contrast with ἄλλο βάρος does not exclude the possibility of an intertextual allusion. In other words, as we shall argue, "no other burden" may simultaneously evoke memories of the Apostolic Council's decision (that Gentiles are not under the Torah) while at the same time reminding the Christians at Thyatira that they are nonetheless under Jesus's and the apostles' teachings ("what you have").<sup>27</sup> A reminder of the Apostolic Council would be very relevant at multiple levels, as will be argued in the next section.

Secondly, Beckwith does not at all consider whether ὡς λέγουσιν is more likely to point forward or backward, which should certainly factor into one's interpretation. If it points forward, then as noted one has no other option but to suggest that Jesus is referring to the Apostolic Council. Once again, there is no reason then why "no other burden except" cannot simultaneously function as an allusion to Acts 15:28 while linking to "what you have" (i.e., Apostolic doctrine); after all, Acts 15:28 is "Apostolic Doctrine."<sup>28</sup>

Third, Beckwith's argument that βάρος should be understood as "that which is important" is certainly a possibility, though this use occurs only once in the NT (2 Cor 4:17) and never in the LXX. Practically speaking, for Jesus to declare "I will put on you no weightier [more important] thing

<sup>27</sup> Regarding this latter point, see Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 92; Morris, *Revelation*, 73; and Maier, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 195.

<sup>28</sup> I feel that Beasley-Murray goes a bit too far when he sees in the phrase "the traditions they received in their baptismal instruction (cf. Rom. 6:17, 1 Th. 4:1, 2 Th. 3:6ff., and the common tradition reflected in the New Testament letters" (*Book of Revelation*, 92). Nonetheless, that "what you have" refers to the broad category of apostolic teaching seems a likely suggestion, since the context of Jesus's letter to Thyatira deals with teaching (v. 20, διδάσκω; v. 24, διδαχή). As Meier (*Offenbarung des Johannes*, 195) well states, "ἔχετε [ho echete], was ihr habt, ist eben die Ablehnung der Irrlehre und die Treue zur Lehre Jesu and der Apostel" ("[The phrase] 'What you have' is simply the rejection of the false teaching and faithfulness to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles").

than these . . ." differs very little from "no other burden," and the supposed difference in usage between, e.g., 2 Cor 4:17 and Gal 6:2 may merely be a matter of modern sensibilities. It is doubtful that the apostles in Acts 15:28 intended βάρος with negative connotations, as if abstaining from fornication was a "burden" akin to a child's cleaning up their room.<sup>29</sup> The potential allusion functions quite effectively regardless of how one wishes to translate ἄλλο βάρος into English.

From a different angle, Osborne brings up the objection that ". . . one must wonder what the 'no other burden might be'—the other two elements of the apostolic decree, abstaining from blood and the meat of strangled animals?"<sup>30</sup> Oddly enough, some have indeed argued this very point.<sup>31</sup> This would, however, bring up the odd situation of Jesus saying, "Do not fornicate or go after idolatrous perversions, but you may eat food with blood in it and eat things strangled," thus undermining both the Apostolic decree and the Noahic covenant. However, this is by no means a necessary interpretation.<sup>32</sup> To the contrary, one could make a strong case that both "blood" and "that which has been strangled" are subsumed under the expression "that which has been offered to idols," and left out for the sake of conciseness.<sup>33</sup> If so, then there is no reason to assume that Jesus's "what you have" would not also include James's "these necessary things" from Acts 15:28. In the end, "Christ is placing on them no other burden (βάρος) than what was placed on gentile Christians in general by the apostolic decree of Acts 15:28."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This is not to deny that βάρος can have negative connotations, as seen a couple decades later in Lucianus's *Dialogi mortuorum* (*Dialogue with the Dead*) 20.10, when Hermes states, "... καὶ τὰ ἄλλα βάρη τῶν λόγων" ("... and other burdens of words"). The point is merely that since it is unlikely the apostles meant for βάρος to be viewed negatively, then obviously neither would Jesus if he were alluding to them.

<sup>30</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 163.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Swete (*Revelation*, 46) states, "The rest of the prohibitions imposed in the year 49–50 (ἀπέχεσθαι. . . αἵματος καὶ πνικτῶν) are not reimposed. . . . Contrast this wise concession with the exacting spirit of the Pharisees: Mt. xxiii. 4 . . ."

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Thomas who argues that if "no other burden" is a reference to Acts 15 (a point which he contests), then "With this identification of *baros*, the adjective *allo* ('another') points to the other two parts of the apostolic decree, . . ." (*Revelation* 1–7, 229).

<sup>33</sup> On the link between the three, see Bock, *Acts*, 505–6.

<sup>34</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 266.

Thomas further argues, “Similarities to the earlier Jerusalem decree could be accidental. (Hort; Beckwith; Mounce). The fact is, the faithful in Thyatira were not perplexed because of a restriction of their Christian freedom by the earlier conciliar action. This was probably the furthest thing in their minds (Beckwith).”<sup>35</sup> Yet what is at stake in Jesus’s letter to the church at Thyatira is the boundaries of Christian behavior. Since Jesus has had to forcefully remind them that all forms of immorality and idolatry are off limits, surely it makes sense to additionally remind them that, for Gentile Christians, the limits are set by the teachings of Jesus and the apostles (“what you have [received]”), rather than the Torah.<sup>36</sup> Thus, a reference to Acts 15 fits well both with Jesus’s point and the experiences of his audience.

Finally, David E. Aune objects against the idea that Rev 2:24 alludes to Acts 15 because “. . . the letter in Acts 15:23–29 is part of Luke’s editorial work, and it is extremely doubtful that John of Patmos knew and used the Acts of the Apostles (Räsänen, *ANRW* II, 26/2:1611), . . .”<sup>37</sup> In response to Aune, if the Jerusalem Council was a real significant event, it is hard to imagine how John of Patmos (whoever he might be) could not have heard of its decision and even some of the terminology utilized in it (even if John was not actually there himself). To what extent the letter of Acts 15 depends on “Luke’s editorial work” is, of course, a matter of critical methodology and presuppositions, and space does not permit further discussion here.

### The Background of the Apostolic Council and Its Relevance for Rev 2:24

To further explore that question of why the Apostolic Council is relevant for Jesus’s letter to Thyatira, a brief examination into the background and theology of the Apostolic Council is necessary. The Council originated in reaction to what appears to be two different groups in Acts 15:1 and 5 united by a similar message: the necessity of the Torah for Gentile

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1–11*, 229.

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, Colin J. Hemer sees all this theological debate as taking place against the backdrop of the guilds in Thyatira: “But I think the point is that membership necessarily involved contradiction of the Apostolic Decree and the needed repentance must necessarily involve repudiation of the guilds” (*The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, The Biblical Resource Series [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 123).

<sup>37</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 208.

Christians.<sup>38</sup> “Those from Judea . . . apparently meant that one *cannot* be a Christian without first becoming a Jew because the Kingdom of God is inseparably bound to Israel as a race, culture, and religion.”<sup>39</sup> Circumcision (as a synecdoche for the entire Torah) was being demanded both for salvation and for sanctification. Consequently, what was at stake is precisely what it means for a Gentile to be in a right relationship with God.

In response, the Apostolic Council clarified and solidified the true nature of how Gentiles can be right before God. James spoke on how “God is doing something new in raising up the church; it is an event of the last days and therefore the old rules of the Jewish religion no longer apply.”<sup>40</sup> The Apostolic Council, with its central place in Acts, “forcefully highlights a theological message, that God’s purpose for the Gentiles is salvation without circumcision.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, “When Acts 15, and the Apostolic Decree in particular, are examined in relation to the whole of Luke-Acts, it becomes apparent that for Luke another ethic, one based on the messianic status of Jesus, has replaced the Mosaic law as the imperative which is incumbent on both the believing community and the world at large.”<sup>42</sup>

Luke assigns the Apostolic Council a pivotal role in his narrative, and its significance for Gentile Christianity as a whole must not be minimized. Furthermore, the decrees of the Apostolic Council “were not merely suggestions.”<sup>43</sup> To the contrary, “The form of the words that is used, ‘it has been resolved,’ [Acts 15:9] is authoritative enough: it was a form widely used in the wording of imperial and other government decrees.”<sup>44</sup> F. F. Bruce’s statement here is further supported by the use of the first person

<sup>38</sup> For the point that there are two different groups in view, see, e.g., Hyung Dae Park, “Drawing Ethical Principles from the Process of the Jerusalem Council: A New Approach to Acts 15:4–29,” *TynB* 61.2 (2010): 275.

<sup>39</sup> J. Julius Scott Jr., “The Church’s Progress to the Council of Jerusalem according to the Book of Acts,” *BBR* 7 (1997): 219.

<sup>40</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1980), 253.

<sup>41</sup> Timothy Wiarda, “The Jerusalem Council and the Theological Task,” *JETS* 46.2 (June 2003): 245.

<sup>42</sup> M. A. Seifrid, “Jesus and the Law in Acts,” *JSNT* 30 (1987): 40.

<sup>43</sup> Charles H. Savelle, “A Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” *BibSac* 161 (Oct–Dec 2004): 466.

<sup>44</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 299 (note that Bruce clearly sees this passage referred to later by Jesus’s letter to Thyatira); cf. also Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1–23:35*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 3:2259.

κρίνω in Nebuchadnezzar's decree of LXX Dan 3:96 [English 3:29].

Yet despite declaring Gentile Christians to be free from the Torah (at least in regard to the minutia of regulations), James added four behaviors that they are to avoid. The four prohibitions in Acts 15:20 are "idolrous pollutions, fornication, that which is strangled, and blood." These are reiterated in v. 29 with two changes: (1) the substitution of εἰδωλοθύτων ("things offered to idols") for τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων ("things polluted by idols") and (2) the alteration of the order so that "fornication" comes last.<sup>45</sup>

A divergence of opinion exists on what, precisely, the four prohibitions are based on. Most scholars either argue the Noahic covenant of Gen 9:4 or rules for Jewish proselytes given throughout Lev 17:7–19:26.<sup>46</sup> In addition, of those four prohibitions, πνικτός ("that which is strangled") has especially caused difficulty for interpreters.<sup>47</sup> The best solution, however, sees this is as somehow linked to both "blood" and pagan cultic ritual, since an animal killed via strangling retains its blood.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> The list occurs a third time in Acts 21:25 when James expresses concern over the rumors that Paul may be teaching Jews to abandon the Torah (v. 21); "fornication" is kept in the last position, but "blood" now precedes "that which has been strangled."

<sup>46</sup> For the former position, see Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 296; Keener, *Acts*, 3:2263 (Keener notes the strong Rabbinic tradition that Gentiles would be held accountable for the "Noahic laws"); Zachary K. Dawson, "The Book of Acts and *Jubilees* in Dialogue: A Literary-Intertextual Analysis of the Noahide Laws in Acts 15 and 21," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 13 (2017): 25, 39–40 (and assumed throughout the article); and Todd R. Hanneken, "Moses Has His Interpreters: Understanding the Legal Exegesis in Acts 15 from the Precedent in *Jubilees*," *CBQ* 77 (2015): 705 (interestingly, Hanneken argues that Acts 15 draws on the Noahic prohibitions as further "explicated by *Jubilees*"; however, Dawson's article pushes back at Hanneken's thesis). For the latter position, see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 506; Stewart Custer, *Witnesses to Christ: A Commentary on Acts* (Greenville, SC: BJU, 2000), 222; and thoroughly defended by Terrane Callan, "The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)," *CBQ* 55.2 (April 1993): 284–97.

<sup>47</sup> A. J. M. Wedderburn states, "In any consideration of the purpose and meaning of the Decree the vexed problem of the meaning of πνικτόν looms very large" ("The 'Apostolic Decree': Tradition and Redaction," *NovT* 35.4 [1993]: 379).

<sup>48</sup> See *Acts*, 505–56; Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 296; Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 456–57. Also, Wedderburn ("Apostolic Decree," 387–88) helpfully discusses how, in light of ancient Greek magical texts "the soul of

Charles Savelle has provided a helpful survey of the strengths and weaknesses of both the "Noahic" view and the "Leviticus" view of the prohibitions, as well as the view that "rabbinic teaching" may have formed the background of the prohibitions.<sup>49</sup> Savelle ultimately concludes, "Rather than seeking a single source of the prohibitions, it seems preferable to see each of them as contributing something to the origins of the prohibitions."<sup>50</sup> In addition, Savelle argues that ultimately all four prohibitions are linked to pagan cultic activity, with the result that "Gentile Christians were being asked to refrain from activities that even *resembled* pagan worship, thereby avoiding even the appearance of evil."<sup>51</sup> This interpretation is supported by the fact that in each list (Acts 15:20, 15:29, and 21:25), despite other variations, either τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων or εἰδωλοθύτων always comes first.

If Savelle is generally correct, then one can understand why "blood" and "that which has been strangled" are not mentioned in Jesus's letter to the church at Thyatira. It is not that Jesus is repudiating two out of the four apostolic prohibitions; it is simply that both are subsumed under the broader term εἰδωλόθυτα (Rev 2:20), of which Jesus disapproves (after all, the pagan cultic offerings are the most likely settings that one would eat an animal with blood still in it). It was simply not necessary to mention them specifically once the broader category of "things offered to idols" was condemned. One may reasonably assume that Jesus's reference to "what you have" in Rev 2:25 may include the Apostolic teaching regarding "these necessary things" (Acts 15:28).

We cannot, of course, discount the original context of the Apostolic Council's decree nor fail to consider how the state of the church might have changed in forty-five to fifty years (assuming a 90s date for Revelation); the issue of food offered to idols becomes less important in the

an offering strangled is offered to demons intact." In other words, there is demonic association in the act of strangling an animal. However, for a minority position that "things strangled" refers to the pagan practice of smothering babies that had been exposed to die, see David Instone-Brewer, "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15," *JETS* 55.2 (June 2009): 301–21. For a measured critique of Instone-Brewer's thesis, see Charles H. Savelle Jr., "Infanticide in the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 Revisited," *JETS* 62.3 (2019): 533–42.

<sup>49</sup> Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 461.

<sup>50</sup> Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 461.

<sup>51</sup> Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 464–65 (emphasis original); cf. 468.



writings of the Apostolic Fathers<sup>52</sup> (though Did. 6.3 does briefly mention εἰδωλόθυτος). In Acts 15, “The idea seems to be that keeping the prohibitions would be spiritually and relationally beneficial. By keeping the prohibitions, Gentile Christians would be in harmony with the Holy Spirit, the Jerusalem church, and other Jewish believers.”<sup>53</sup> Most likely Jew-Gentile relations within the church were less of an issue in AD 90 than earlier, since by then the church was most likely predominantly Gentile and quickly approaching the tragic “parting of ways.”<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, the significance of the Apostolic Decree (including the prohibitions) for the later church must not be downplayed. At stake is not merely cordial relations between Christian Jews and Gentiles, but rather the ethical boundaries of Gentile Christian conduct. James and the council decisively declared that for Gentiles such boundaries are not set by the Torah, but rather by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The four prohibitions remind Gentile Christians of the fact that anything linked to immorality and idolatry is off-limits.<sup>55</sup> The Gentile Christians did not resist James’s prohibitions and they did not consider them “overly burdensome”; to the contrary, they “rejoiced” (15:31) and embraced them.<sup>56</sup>

Decades later, the church at Thyatira faced its own issues that necessitated a reminder of the Apostolic Council.<sup>57</sup> The strong presence in Thyatira of guilds may especially explain the pressure that would have

<sup>52</sup> As noted by one of the reviewers.

<sup>53</sup> Savelle, “Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” 467.

<sup>54</sup> The fact that the Apostolic Decree was concerned with relations between Jews and Gentiles is reinforced by James’s odd statement in Acts 15:21 (see Marshall, *Acts*, 254). Interestingly, a textual variant arose in v. 20 in later manuscripts, demonstrating that the later church forgot the original Torah-oriented context of the four prohibitions (by interpreting “blood” as a reference to murder, for example). See the helpful discussions in Marshall, *Acts*, 253–54n1 and Savelle, “Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” 450.

<sup>55</sup> One should also remember that, years before the Torah was given to Moses, the Lord himself established a reason for not eating blood: the blood contains the life of the flesh (Gen 9:4).

<sup>56</sup> Savelle, “Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” 466–67.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the background of Thyatira, the reader should begin with W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1905) and Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 116. Of more recent works, Maier (*Offenbarung des Johannes: Kapitel 1–11*, 181–82) and various points in David A. deSilva (*Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009]) are helpful.

been felt by many Christians to theologically compromise; guild feasts were not neutral from a religious standpoint, but rather the place where syncretism dominated.<sup>58</sup> This was a syncretism which Jezebel strongly encouraged, mimicking her OT namesake.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, one must not be surprised by the appearance of εἰδωλόθυτος in Jesus’s rebuke (since “the feasts of such bodies as trade-guilds” would have naturally included food offered to idols).<sup>60</sup> Mixed in with all this would be the constant specter of the imperial cult.<sup>61</sup>

One may suggest, then, that Anatolia in general and Thyatira specifically offered a truer test of the Gentile Christians’ ability to cling to the Apostolic Council’s decree than Antioch or Syria (Acts 15:23). While Jew-Gentile relations within the church were no longer as significant an issue, the council was about more than that: it “also determined the limits of participation in Greco-Roman culture and worship,” limits that Jezebel was determined to stretch.<sup>62</sup> Hemer aptly summarizes the significance of Jesus’s response to Jezebel:

Presumably Jezebel argued that a Christian might join a guild and participate in its feasts without thereby compromising his faith. He was initiated into a superior wisdom. He knew the idol was nothing and he could not be defiled by that which did not exist. Pauline phrases insisting on the Christian’s liberty from the law might be pressed into service: our letter replies in the terms of the Apostolic Decree to which Paul, according to Acts, had assented. This was just such a *modus vivendi* as was required, but Jezebel’s version contravened its accepted principles. The local situation favoured the accommodation of incompatible beliefs and practices: the letter

<sup>58</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 111, 120.

<sup>59</sup> Allan J. McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, LBTS 438 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 107–8.

<sup>60</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 120; cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 156–57.

<sup>61</sup> David deSilva notes how “by the end of the first century CE,” every city in Rev 1–2 possessed a “cultic site” (of emperor worship); though Thyatira did not have a temple, it was one of the cities that “had imperial altars and priests” (*Seeing Things John’s Way*, 41–42). Also noteworthy is the fact that in just a few short years, Pliny the Younger (governor of the region of Bithynia and Pontus in Asia Minor) will utilize worship of the emperor’s image as a test of whether or not one was a true Christian (see *Letters* 10.96–97). Significantly (as one of the reviewers pointed out), Antipas was killed in Pergamum (Rev 2:13), one of the most significant and earliest locations of the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor.

<sup>62</sup> Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 176.

insists on individual devotion to a Lord who searches the hearts of men and demands a consistency of life.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, contra the libertines, the Apostolic Council had already set the boundaries of what was acceptable for Gentile Christians; as far as Jesus is concerned, those in Thyatira would do well to remember it.

### Practical Considerations: Ethics and Translation

If *ὡς λέγουσιν* does indeed refer to what follows, thus solidifying an allusion to the decision of the Jerusalem Council, this opens the door for further discussion on the practical relevance of such an interpretation. Two points will be briefly discussed here.

First, it has been suggested that Revelation “names surprisingly few specific sins to be avoided or virtues to be cultivated, and even these are usually expressed so metaphorically or so generally that almost any known moral rule could be included” (and, to be fair, Wayne Meeks does note this verse as an exception to the above statement).<sup>64</sup> Yet if Rev 2:24 is an allusion to the Apostolic Council, then we have a clear example of a concrete, specific ethical rule from Jesus to the churches, namely that both fornication and meat offered to idols are outside the boundaries of accepted Christian behavior.<sup>65</sup> Such an ethical principle is reinforced by Jesus’s rebuke of the church of Pergamum for tolerating *φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι* (2:14; see also 21:8, *πόρνοις . . . εἰδωλόθραις*). Consequently, Revelation offers a robust exhortation to avoid immorality and associations with idolatry, even in the face of external social pressure (or, sadly in the case of Thyatira, internal social pressure). The student of Scripture has no choice but to assert that both in the formative years of the church and at the end of the canon, both sexual immorality and idolatry in a broad sense, which included *eidōlothutōn* (“food offered to idols”), are emphasized as off-limits for the faithful Christian.<sup>66</sup> Those concerned

<sup>63</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 123.

<sup>64</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 146.

<sup>65</sup> I am indebted to one of the reviewers for stressing this point and pointing me to the quote by Meeks.

<sup>66</sup> In an earlier issue of this journal, Andrew David Naselli has argued that, according to Paul’s logic in 1 Cor 8–10, there could be times when a Christian could eat meat offered to idols in a temple with a clean conscience (“Was It Idolatrous for Corinthian Christians to Eat *εἰδωλόθυτα* in an Idol’s Temple? (1 Cor

with living out the commands of Jesus and the apostles would do well to grapple with the proper application of these commands in modern society.<sup>67</sup>

Second, the expression *ὡς λέγουσιν* exemplifies the difficult decisions that face Bible translators. Since *ὡς λέγουσιν* could either point forward or backward, a translator is faced with four possible options: (1) interpret it as pointing forward; (2) interpret it as pointing backward (so most modern English translations, e.g., the ESV—“what some call the deep things of Satan”<sup>68</sup>); (3) retain the ambiguity (the CSB is almost unique in this last category: “. . . the deep things of Satan—as they say—I do not put any other burden . . .”); or (4) choose one interpretive option while offering the other in a footnote.<sup>69</sup> There is no clear-cut “right” answer here, and often times the receptor language itself will dictate the result. In addition, to a certain degree, the decision will depend on the *skopos* (“goal”) of the translator.<sup>70</sup> In other words, does the goal of the translator place more emphasis on clarity, readability, or on presenting multiple interpretational options when possible? Any critique of a translation, then, must take into account the translator’s *skopos* and how consistently he or she follows that stated *skopos*.

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8–10),” *STR* 9.1 [Spring 2018]: 23–45). Space prohibits an interaction with Naselli’s article, but the reader concerned with application of Scripture *vis-à-vis* “food offered to idols” should at least be aware of it.

<sup>67</sup> Having grown up in Japan, this writer can attest to the relevance of this second command today for many (perhaps the majority) of Japanese Christians. It is worth noting that in my father’s opinion (who served in Japan as a missionary for 30+ years), the Japanese Christians that he was familiar with would not have been able, in good conscience, to enter a Buddhist temple for a meal, even if it were (hypothetically) a non-religious setting.

<sup>68</sup> See also the RSV, NASB, NET, NIV, the French Louis Segond (1910, les profondeurs de Satan, comme ils les appellent, je vous dis), the German Gute Nachricht (1997, und die so genannten ‘Tiefen des Satans’) and the Japanese Shin-kai Yaku (3rd ed., 2004, karere no iu satan no fukai tokoro [this is the Bible that the present writer grew up with in public worship]).

<sup>69</sup> I am grateful to one of the reviewers for reminding me of this option.

<sup>70</sup> *Skopos* is Greek for “goal” (Phil 3:14) or “purpose” (Josephus, *War*, 1.7 [0.3]). Katharina Reiß and Hans J. Vermeer write, “The highest rule of a theory of translational action is the ‘*skopos* rule’: any action is determined by its purpose, i.e., it is a function of its purpose or *skopos*” (*Towards a General Theory of Translational Action: Skopos Theory Explained*, trans. Christiane Nord [Manchester, UK: St. Jerome, 2013], 90).

Furthermore, it is not at all clear to what degree the potential referential ambiguity of *ὡς λέγουσιν* can be retained in any language, including English, without sacrificing some element, such as clarity. Translation often involves a tradeoff between clarity and precision; i.e., if one emphasizes a more precise rendering of the source text, this may be less clear or smooth in the translation, but if one emphasizes smoothness and clarity in the translation, one may lose some of the nuances of the source text.<sup>71</sup>

In regard to Rev 2:24, if ambiguity is impossible, then obviously an interpretive decision must be made (though, as noted earlier, the other interpretive option may be placed in a note).<sup>72</sup> Yet even if ambiguity is achievable, one must still ask whether or not stylistic smoothness should trump interpretational ambiguity. In other words, is retaining both interpretive options preferable if the result is a slightly more awkward style? In this way Rev 2:24 provides a helpful test-case to introduce students to the difficulties of Bible translation.

### Conclusion

A strong case can be made that *ὡς λέγουσιν* in Rev 2:24 points forward to “no other burden.” This would mean that Jesus cites the Jerusalem Council both in continuity with his own teaching and as a rebuke to those straying into syncretism under Jezebel. To such people in Thyatira, Jesus declares, “This issue has already been dealt with. Pay attention to church history!” In other words, one can appreciate the powerful link between what the apostles said (*λέγουσιν*) and what Jesus says (*λέγω*) in Rev 2:24, a theological message that continues to be relevant 2,000 years later.

If taken this way, Rev 2:24 opens up the door to further discussion in two areas: (1) Rev 2:24 offers a very specific ethic, in continuity with the

early stages of the church (Acts 15), which then demands careful consideration and modern application; (2) the occurrence of *ὡς λέγουσιν* in Rev 2:24 provides an interesting test-case for any discussion of ambiguity and interpretive options in Bible translation. Regardless of what position one takes, however, the point of the passage is clear: the One with flaming eyes will tolerate no syncretic compromise of the faith which has been delivered to his church.

<sup>71</sup> As Reiß and Vermeer state, “[I]f a translator emphasizes *one* aspect of the source text, he will have to suppress others” (*Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, 38). Indeed, Cicero famously bemoaned the fact that “If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator” (trans. H. M. Hubbell and cited in Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 4th ed [London: Routledge, 2014], 54).

<sup>72</sup> An example of this elsewhere in Scripture, where an interpretive decision must be made, would be Jas 4:5, where whether or not one capitalizes “Spirit/spirit” will determine which interpretation one favors. It is impossible to translate this in modern English in a way that preserves ambiguity (the same problem also occurs in Rev 19:10, as a reviewer pointed out). Finally, for a lighter look at the possible consequences of trying to translate an ambiguous statement, see the discussion in [Author redacted], “Mokusatsu: One Word, Two Lessons,” *NSA Technical Journal* 13.4 (1968): 95–100.

## Augustine's View of Justification and the Faith That Heals

Peter Dubbelman

*Apex Baptist Church, Apex, NC*

*Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia has no entry entitled "Justification."<sup>1</sup> This void, in an otherwise thorough work, draws attention to the tension that still exists between Catholics and Protestants with respect to the doctrine of justification. Many from these two groups root their theology in Augustine. This essay contributes a missing piece to current Protestant discussions on Augustine's view of justification, ones that do not extensively integrate his sanative theology with this doctrine (e.g., work by Alister McGrath and David Wright). The Augustinian view of justification presented below—a justification that heals, one that is an event and a process—contrasts with a typical reformational understanding of it. The latter emphasizes a forensic declaration by God that confers upon the believer by the imputation of Christ a new and permanent status of righteousness.*

*Key Words: Augustine, justification, sanative theology, spiritual formation*

The thesis defended here is that Augustine understood justification as ontological and sanative, an event and a process where “to justify” meant “to make righteous.”<sup>2</sup> Four sections defend this thesis. Section one, “Current Perspectives,” summarizes three recent views of Augustine's doctrine of justification. This section places this essayist's thesis within contemporary discussions on Augustine's doctrine of justification by Alister McGrath, Dongsun Cho, and David Wright. It also makes two points: (a) None of these theologians expound Augustine's doctrine of justification as it relates to his sanative theology. (b) If this thesis is correct, McGrath's and Wright's interpretation of Augustine's view of justification is bolstered and Cho's is disputed. Section two, “The Spirit and the Letter,” presents an Augustinian view of justification found in a treatise whose historical reception has been central to the Christian tradition. This section identifies an aspect of Augustine's doctrine of justification that is central to the above thesis—namely, a justification that heals. Section

three, “Further Illustrations,” presents this sanative aspect of justification in other parts of Augustine's works. These examples witness that Augustine held a sanative, ontological view of justification throughout his ministerial career. Section four, “An Objection,” addresses a central concern to the aforementioned thesis by way of various Augustinian prooftexts. These texts, it is argued by some, support the idea that Augustine did not understand justification as a process that actually makes the ungodly godly. This argument is refuted in section four.

### Current Perspectives

The works of McGrath, Cho, and Wright helpfully set the thesis of this essay within current deliberations on Augustine's doctrine of justification. A summary of their applicable thoughts now follows.

In *Iustitia Dei*, McGrath defines Augustine's doctrine of justification in order to “relate [this term's] subsequent influence upon the medieval period and beyond.”<sup>3</sup> This book traces the history of the Christian doctrine of *iustitia Dei* (“righteousness/justice of God”; cf. Rom 1:17). Resultantly, he primarily defines Augustine's view of justification in order to discuss its relevance to the time period of the Reformation and the modern period. This allows McGrath to examine the historical acceptance and rejection of Augustine's doctrine of justification. This examination includes a discussion of Augustine's emphasis of the “love of God” (*amor Dei*) versus the Reformer's emphasis on “faith alone” (*sola fide*).<sup>4</sup>

During this process, McGrath makes two significant, defining statements with respect to Augustine's doctrine of justification:

- (1) There is no hint in Augustine of any notion of justification purely in terms of “reputing as righteous” or “treating as righteous”, as if this state of affairs could come into being without the moral or spiritual transformation of humanity through grace. The pervasive trajectory of Augustine's thought is unambiguous: justification is a causative process . . . which includes both the *event* of justification (brought about by operative grace) and the *process* of justification (brought about by cooperative grace). Augustine himself does not, in fact, see any need to distinguish between these

<sup>3</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38. For a similar work as McGrath's, see James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of Its History in the Church and of Its Exposition from Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1867).

<sup>4</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 41–48.

<sup>1</sup> Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> The word sanative is derived from the Latin *sanitas*, “health” and *sano*, “I heal.”

two aspects of justification.<sup>5</sup>

McGrath recognizes a forensic aspect to Augustine's doctrine of justification, but it also concerns the "spiritual transformation of humanity." Within this framework of thought for justification, McGrath understands that, for Augustine, "what later became the Reformation concept of 'sanctification' is effectively subsumed under the aegis of justification."<sup>6</sup> This dual aspect of justification allowed Augustine to view justification as both an event and a process.

(2) McGrath further states,

For Augustine, it is love, rather than faith, which is the power which brings about the conversion of people. Just as *cupiditas* ["greed"] is the root of all evil, so *caritas* ["love"] is the root of all good. Personal union of individuals with the Godhead, which forms the basis of their justification, is brought about by love, and not by faith.<sup>7</sup>

This, however, does not mean Augustine does not value a key term of the Reformation—namely, *sola fide*. For he acknowledges that summarizing Augustine's doctrine by either *sola fide iustificamur* ("justification by faith alone") or *sola caritat iustificamus* ("justification by love alone") is understandable. If he is forced to choose between these two phrases, he would pick the latter.<sup>8</sup>

In 1986, McGrath noted "a virtual absence of studies dealing with [Augustine's] doctrine of *justification*."<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, a plethora of essays, but no monographs, have been written on this topic.<sup>10</sup> The key thoughts

<sup>5</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47 (emphasis original); see also p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 38–54.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Gerald Hiestand, "Augustine and the Justification Debates: Did Calvin Step Too Far in the Right Direction?" (Moody Bible Institute, 2000); Martin W. Hedman, "Augustine on Justification: Made Righteous or Declared Righteous?" (presented at the Far West Region Annual Meeting of the ETS, Sun Valley, CA: Evangelical Theological Studies, 2003), 1–19; Matthew Heckel, "Is R. C. Sproul Wrong About Martin Luther? An Analysis of R. C. Sproul's Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification with Respect to Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Catholic Luther Scholarship," *JETS* 47.1 (2004): 89–120; Gerald Hiestand, "Augustine and the Justification Debates: Appropriating Augustine's Doctrine of Culpability," *TJ* 28.28 (2007): 115–39; Michael M. Ramos, "In Between St. Augustine and Luther: Grace and Justification," *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 2.6 (2014): 34–39.

from these works are captured by Cho's "Divine Acceptance of Sinners: Augustine's Doctrine of Justification" and Wright's "Justification in Augustine."<sup>11</sup> Both of these men launch their essays from and interact with McGrath's work on this topic.<sup>12</sup>

Cho argues that Augustine "taught *sola fide*, declarative justification, and the divine acceptance of sinners based on faith alone although he presented these pre-Reformational thoughts with a strong emphasis on the necessity of growth in holiness (sanctification)."<sup>13</sup> Within this framework of thought, Cho claims that though Augustine perhaps emphasized the "indissoluble and simultaneous relationship between justification and sanctification," he initially did so to combat antinomian abusers. Then, against the Pelagians, Augustine used ". . . the same terminologies in a way that he could preserve the same degree of gratuitousness of grace in gradual growth in righteousness as in instantaneous justification."<sup>14</sup> Cho also observes that, in contrast to Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, Augustine's "explicit categorical distinction, not separation, between justification and sanctification" was later defended by reformer Martin Bucer.<sup>15</sup> He also notes that Augustine understood justification in a twofold way, that is, as an imputed righteousness and "the newness of life within believers or the image of God assisted by the Holy Spirit who helps them participate in the holy God."<sup>16</sup>

However, Cho's interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of justification differs from McGrath's. Though Cho understands Augustine to teach that Christians have "some real righteousness within themselves simultaneously when they are justified. The inherent righteousness of justifica-

<sup>11</sup> David Wright, "Justification in Augustine," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 55–72; Dongsun Cho, "Divine Acceptance of Sinners: Augustine's Doctrine of Justification," *PeC* 12.2 (2014): 163–84. David Wright states, "the fullest and best [English] treatment" of Augustine's justification is Stanislaus J. Grabowski, *The Church: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957). Wright, "Justification," 69n51.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Wright, "Justification," 55, 63, 66–67, 69; Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 164, 168, 172, 175, 179.

<sup>13</sup> Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 163.

<sup>14</sup> Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

<sup>15</sup> Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 164.

<sup>16</sup> Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 164, 180–81.

tion refers to the initial sanctification that occurs at the moment of forgiveness."<sup>17</sup> To be clear, and perhaps with the intent of keeping Augustine's view in line with what became an accepted Reformed view of justification, Cho states Augustine's justification is "not a process but an event," as it is "not to be equated with the growth of righteousness in us." For "the sole ground" of Augustine's "divine acceptance is declarative or imputed righteousness by faith in justification."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in Cho's view, Augustine gave an initial but not ongoing ontological sense to justification.

Wright agrees with McGrath and Cho that there is much agreement between Augustine and the Reformers. For Augustine "unmistakably preserved the distinction between faith as a free grace-gift of God and the fruitful life of good works to which it must give rise."<sup>19</sup> And, he understood salvation as a gift of grace (1 Cor 4:7) that is "safeguarded" by divine election and a faith that receives the unmerited gift of justification.<sup>20</sup>

Three key thoughts set apart Wright's essay from McGrath's and Cho's: (1) Wright's essay is primarily concerned with defining *justifico* ("I justify"), *justitia* ("justification"), and faith's role in the reception of justification. Toward this end, his essay ends with a plea. Augustinian translators should interpret *justifico* and *justitia* "not by 'justify, justification' but by terms that obviously express the ongoing change by which the ungodly become godly."<sup>21</sup>

(2) Wright (so also McGrath and Cho) understands an event aspect of Augustine's view of justification that is both declarative and accomplished in Christ. However, Wright also states,

Augustine in fact teaches something close to a declarative justification by faith, perhaps even faith alone, but does so as part of a more comprehensive righteous-making that embraces what most evangelicalism has called sanctification and that hence necessitates faith effectively operative through love and hope. The key to understanding this is to fasten on *justification as both event and process*, as both beginning and growth.<sup>22</sup>

This view is in contrast to Cho's but in agreement with McGrath's.

<sup>17</sup> Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

<sup>18</sup> Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, "Justification," 66.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, "Justification," 71.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, "Justification," 72.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, "Justification," 70 (emphasis added); see also 62–63, 72.

Wright, it appears, understands Augustine's justification to be an event and a process that identifies with "to make righteous."

(3) Wright states, Augustine's justification displays a "fair balance" between *sola fides iustificamur* ("we are justified by faith alone") and *sola caritate iustificamur* ("we are justified by love alone"); as such, he mediates McGrath's and Cho's rival views on the role of faith and love in God's justifying act.<sup>23</sup>

To summarize the above thoughts of this section: Neither McGrath, Cho, nor Wright deny a forensic element in Augustine's doctrine of justification. Further, McGrath, Cho, and Wright agree that Augustine consistently gave an ontological aspect to this doctrine; throughout his works he understood it to mean "to make righteous." McGrath and Wright understand Augustine's view of justification as describing an event and a process that means "to make righteous." Their position in this matter is within the majority opinion held by Augustinian scholars. According to Willem Van Asselt, this understanding of Augustine's doctrine of justification, which stresses "the actualization or 'ontological' change in the person who is justified," is still held by modern Roman Catholic theologians.<sup>24</sup> Cho accepts that Augustine understood the event of justification in terms "newness of life" and "some real righteousness." However, in contrast to McGrath and Wright, Cho argues that Augustine's view of justification is "not a process but an event."<sup>25</sup> His portrayal of Augustine's doctrine of justification, therefore, fits more closely with the view of justification held by the majority of contemporary Protestants.

The defense below has implications to these views presented by McGrath, Cho, and Wright. None of them elaborate on Augustine's doctrine of justification with respect to his sanative theology.<sup>26</sup> If the thesis

<sup>23</sup> Wright, "Justification," 63, 66. For Oliver O'Donovan, "The core of [Augustine's] doctrine of justification is not expressed in the tag 'by faith' (important as that might be) but in the *solus Christus*, 'that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21)." Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, rev. ed. (Leicester: Eerdmans, 1994), 255.

<sup>24</sup> Willem Van Asselt, "Justification," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1246–54.

<sup>25</sup> Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

<sup>26</sup> McGrath alludes to this connection but never develops it. He states in passing, "The free will is not lost, nor is it non-existent; it is merely incapacitated, and may be healed by grace. In justification, the *liberum arbitrium captivatum* becomes the *liberum arbitrium liberatum* by the action of this healing grace." McGrath, *Iustitia*

by this essayist is properly defended, the thoughts of this essay bolster the view that both McGrath and Wright share with respect to Augustine's doctrine of justification—namely, Augustine understood justification as an event and a process that means “to make righteous.” It also challenges Cho's claim that this is not the case. And, it suggests that in Cho's case, presentism may have led him to an anachronistic view of Augustine's doctrine of justification.

A thought by Wright now moves the argument of this essay forward to an influential treatise of Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* (henceforth *SL*). Wright states, “Augustine never addressed the topic of justification in a precise and focused way in any of his works and certainly never devoted a treatise or a sermon or a letter, and barely even a whole chapter or section of one of these, to it.”<sup>27</sup> Additionally, with respect to *The Spirit and the Letter* (AD 412), he states, Augustine “interpreted *iustifico* [‘I justify’] . . . en passant [‘in passing’].”<sup>28</sup> Given what follows, this essayist is not sure Augustine would agree with Wright's use of “en passant.” Regardless, Augustine offers enough material within his extant literature for the defense of the above thesis, of which *SL* is an excellent starting point.

### The Spirit and the Letter

This section begins to elaborate upon Augustine's view of justification. In AD 427, Augustine states, “In [*SL*], I fiercely argued . . . [about] the grace of God by which the sinner is justified.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, he ends a section of this work (i.e., *SL* 4.6–12.20) with a reminder of his intent:

Nor have we undertaken a commentary on this letter [i.e., Romans] in this work; rather, we are striving, as best we can, to show, especially by testimony from it, that we are helped by God to act with righteousness, not insofar as God gave us a law full of good and

*Dei*, 42. So also William Van Asselt who states, “[T]hus, justification of the sinner is not primarily a declaratory-forensic act of God but rather an infusion of charity (*inspiration dilectionis*), a healing activity of God.” Van Asselt, “Justification,” 1247.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, “Justification,” 55.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, “Justification,” 56.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *Retractions* 2.37 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 2:144). For the last twenty years of Augustine's life, *SL* became his key tool against Pelagius, the latter of whom insisted that strict morality, attainable by free will and observance of the Law, is the condition for salvation. See also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 340–77). New City Press has published Augustine's works in a series entitled *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. This series is abbreviated in this essay as WSAT.

holy commandments, but insofar as our own will, without which we can do nothing good, is raised up through the gift of the Spirit of grace. Without this help that teaching is the letter that kills, because it holds persons guilty of transgression rather than justifies the sinner.<sup>30</sup>

Augustine here confesses that he very much strove in *SL* to elaborate on the theme of justification. Further, he concludes *SL* with an admission: “This long discussion” is about whether a person can be “without sin” and have “perfect righteousness in this life,”<sup>31</sup> concepts that are integral to Augustine's view of justification. In this treatise and against Pelagius's view of justification, Augustine argues that people are not able by themselves to achieve righteousness or advance in it.<sup>32</sup> As such, it appears (contra Wright), Augustine does at least attempt to address “the topic of justification” in more than an incidental way (i.e., Wright's “en passant”). In fact, *SL* contains several units that mainly discuss justification. They are *SL* 8.14–9.15; 13.21–22; 26.45; 27.48–30:52. The first and last units of thought on this list are now discussed by way of the following two subsections. A following third subsection explains the basis for Augustine's view of justification presented in this section.

### The Spirit and the Letter 8.14–9.15

The first sentence of *SL* 8.14–9.15 sets its tone. By it, Augustine refutes a Pelagian thought that placed the will of a person as central to salvation. Augustine states, “but we also praise God as the source of our justification inasmuch as he gave the law so that by considering it, we know how we ought to live.”<sup>33</sup> The essence of Augustine's answer of what it means to understand that “God is the source of our justification” follows.

[Paul] said: *But now the righteousness of God* . . . (Rom 3:21). . . . This is the righteousness that those who want to establish their own do not know. . . . He said: *The righteousness of God* . . . which he clothes a human being when he justifies a sinner. . . . Human beings are

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 12.20 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:156). Augustine here testifies that this act that “justifies the sinner” helps him or her “act with righteousness”—a concept elaborated below.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 35.62–36.64 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:185–87); Augustine, *Retractions* 2.37 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 2:144).

<sup>32</sup> Roland J. Teske, “Introduction to The Spirit and the Letter,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* 1:23 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1997), 136.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 8.14 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:151).

justified by the gift of God through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. . . . *But the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ* (Rom 3:22) . . . is not the . . . righteousness by which God is righteous. . . . God bestows this righteousness upon the believer by the Spirit of grace without the help of the law. . . . God shows human beings their weakness through the law in order that they may take refuge in his mercy through faith and be healed. . . . For what do they have that they have not received [cf. 1 Cor 4:7]? . . . [Christians] *have been gratuitously justified by his grace* (Rom 3:24). They were not, then, justified by the law; they were not justified by their own will, but *gratuitously justified by his grace*. . . . The law shows that our will is weak so that grace may heal our will and so that a healthy will may fulfill the law, without being subject to the law or in need of the law.<sup>34</sup>

That Augustine emphasizes “God as the source of a person’s justification” should not surprise anyone, for Augustine consistently builds his theology around 1 Cor 4:7.<sup>35</sup> However, to read in the above quote “clothes a human being” and settle on the idea that Augustine only believed in a forensic, imputational view of justification is to miss Augustine’s full thought on this topic. By the above quote, Augustine also provides a foundational thought for the defense of the above thesis—namely, God’s gracious act of justification heals the will of a Christian by the Spirit such that the healthy will is capable of fulfilling God’s law. How this is possible is now further explored by an examination of *SL* 27.48–30.52.

### The Spirit and the Letter 27.48–30.52

Section 27.48–30.52 of *SL* is understood within the flow of this treatise as follows:<sup>36</sup> By way of *SL* 4.6–25.42, Augustine presents the treatise’s

<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 9.15 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:152; emphasis original; underlining added). This quote resides within a unit of thought (i.e., *SL* 4.6–12.20). In this section, Augustine explains what Paul means when he states, “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).

<sup>35</sup> An electronic search of New City Press’s forty-three volumes of WSAT for 1 Cor 4:7 produces 147 hits in thirty-five volumes. Paul states in 1 Cor 4:7, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (NIV 1984).

<sup>36</sup> The following argument adopts the perspective of *SL* as presented by Teske, “Introduction to The Spirit and the Letter.”

main argument. Subsequent to this section, he then addresses two anticipated objections to his argument. The first objection is attended to in *SL* 26.43–29.51.<sup>37</sup> Augustine concludes this section with thoughts that focus on justification. These views are found in *SL* 27.48–29.51. A following transition paragraph (i.e., *SL* 30.52) allows his first answer to flow into his explanation of and answer to the expected second objection (*SL* 30.52–34.60).

Four statements adequately summarize the applicable thoughts of *SL* 27.48–30.52. (A) This section’s first sentence announces that it will address “those whom the grace of Christ justifies.”<sup>38</sup> (B) For the justified, “the heart is effected by renovation” and “renewed by grace.”<sup>39</sup> (C) That is, “the very image of God, . . . is renewed in the mind of those who believe . . . the law of God . . . is surely written in the soul, *when it is renewed by grace . . . this writing of the law upon hearts, which is justification.*”<sup>40</sup>

(D) By winning favor through faith with the one who justifies, [Christians] attain righteousness, observe it, and live in it. . . . But justification is obtained through faith. . . . We are righteous to the extent that we are saved. . . . By faith, then, in Jesus Christ we obtain salvation both to the slight extent that its reality has begun for us and to the extent that we await its perfection with hope. . . . Let the soul take refuge through faith in the mercy of God so that he may give what he commands. By the inspiration of the sweetness of grace . . . he will make what he commands more delightful.<sup>41</sup>

By these four statements Augustine identifies justification with “the writing of the law” upon the Christian heart. He declares that a Christian lives “in it,” such that justification is observable and ongoing. By this act of justification, God makes what “he commands more delightful.”

The above two subsections note a sanative aspect to Augustine’s view

<sup>37</sup> In this section and by way of Rom 2:14–15, Augustine primarily discusses the renewal of nature by way of the “law written on a Christian’s heart.” Augustine did not understand Rom 2:14–15 as a reference to non-Christians who because of natural law do what the law requires. Rather, he understood Paul to reference here gentile Christians.

<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.48 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:173).

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.48 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 5:103; WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:174).

<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.48 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:174; emphasis added).

<sup>41</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 29.51 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:176–77). For similar thoughts as presented by these five points, see *The Spirit and the Letter* 12.19; 14.24; 26.44, 45; 28.49; 29.50 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:155, 159, 170–71, 171–72, 174–75, 175–76).



of justification. This ongoing act of God heals the will and enables a believer to embrace the lifestyle God desires. This view of justification is rooted in an important biblical verse for *SL* in particular, and for Augustine's extant works in general—namely, Rom 5:5.<sup>42</sup>

### Romans 5:5

With respect to Rom 5:5 Augustine states in *SL*, “The law by which [Christians] are justified was given inwardly. . . . This love is not written on stone tablets, but *has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). The law of God, then, is love.”<sup>43</sup> This “new condition of the Spirit . . . heals the new human being from the wound of the old condition. . . . He says, . . . *I will write my laws upon their minds* (Jer 31:33).”<sup>44</sup> For Augustine, by a divine gift there is a “change of affections [*affectuum*],” and the “will” (*velle*) of a Christian is granted the “ability” (*posse*) to love God affectionately and their neighbor efficaciously.<sup>45</sup> Why? God’s “love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5) enables the Christian to “embrace the righteousness of the law with an interior love” that comes by the “infusion of the Spirit of grace” (*infuso spiritu gratiae*).<sup>46</sup> In this regard he states elsewhere in *SL*, “Faith obtains the grace by which we fulfill the law. . . . Grace heals the will by which we freely

<sup>42</sup> Romans 5:5 and Gal 5:6 are central to both Augustine’s theology and to *The Spirit and the Letter*. *The Spirit and the Letter* follows this trend, referencing Rom 5:5 more than any other verse (i.e., fourteen times), which exactly doubles the usage of 2 Cor 3:6. Cf. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 3.5; 4.6; 5.7; 14.25; 16.28; 17.29; 21.36; 25.42; 26.46; 28.49; 32.56; 33.57; 33.59 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:146, 147, 160, 161, 162, 166, 170, 173, 175, 181, 182, 184).

An electronic search of New City Press’s forty-three volumes of WSAT for Rom 5:5 and Gal 5:6 produces the following results: Romans 5:5 is used forty-three times in thirty-nine volumes; Gal 5:6 is used ninety-nine times in twenty-seven volumes. T. J. van Bavel believes Augustine cites Rom 5:5 most frequently in all his works. T. J. van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart: Augustine’s Doctrine on Prayer* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 144. As noted above in footnote 35, Augustine quotes 1 Cor 4:7 more than any other verse (contra Van Bavel).

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 17.29 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:162; emphasis original).

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 20.35; cf. 14.25–26; 27.48; 33.59 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:165; cf. 23:160–61, 173–74, 183–84; emphasis original, underling added).

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 31.53 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:178–79); Augustine, *Christian Instructions* 1.17.16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 2:527); Augustine, *Sermons* 212.2 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 6:149).

<sup>46</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 26.46; 36.66; cf. 8.13; 10.16 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:172, 189; cf. 150–51, 153).

love righteousness. . . . faith says, *Heal my soul*.”<sup>47</sup> Augustine knows the faith that justifies as grounded in and continued by the renewing work of *caritas* (“love”) and the act of prayer. God loves a person such that this person, by the infilling love of God poured into their heart, can in turn love God and neighbor. This act of love by God “heals the will.”

This sanative aspect of Augustine’s theology is also emphasized in his other anti-Pelagian works.<sup>48</sup> It is likewise found in his topical treatises (e.g., *Christian Instruction*, *Confessions*, *The City of God*, *The Trinity*, and *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*) as well as his personal letters and sermons, whether from the OT or the NT.<sup>49</sup> Augustine consistently held to a view that God heals the Christian from the wound of the old condition such that the unjust are made just. Within this framework of a God who “heals

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 30.52 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:177–78; emphasis original, underlining added). Augustine consistently mentions in his works Psalm 41:5 (41:4): “Have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.” E.g., Augustine, *Confessions* 4.3.4 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 1:94); Augustine, *Sermons* 16B.1, 2; 20.1, 2, 3; 29.3; 125.2; 153.10; 254.4; 397.5; 29B (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 1:240, 241; 2:15, 16, 17–18, 117; 4:253; 5:63; 7:152; 10:549; 11:67); Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.47; 30.52 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:173, 178); Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 19.21; 49.57 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:226, 245); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 30.2.16; 31.2.18; 40.6; 45.1–6; 42.7; 101.2.7; 118.11.1; 128.9 140.9, 11 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 15:333, 381; 16:231–32, 263, 310–15; 19:67, 387–88; 20:123–24, 309, 312); Augustine, *Contenance* 7:18 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 9:204); Augustine, *Faith and Works* (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 8:254); Augustine, *Letters* 157.3.16 (WSAT<sup>2</sup> 3:26); Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichean* 12.9 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 20:131); Augustine, *On Genesis Literally Interpreted* 11.35.48 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 13:457).

<sup>48</sup> E.g., Augustine, *Guilt and Remission of Sins* 1.18.23; 3.4.8 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:46, 120–21); Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 19.21; 21.23 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:225–26, 227); Augustine, *Perfection in Human Righteousness* 21.44 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:303–4); Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscence* 2.3.9; 33.56 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 24:58, 89–90); Augustine, *Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.5.18; 4.10.27; 11.30; 12.34 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 24:126, 207, 211, 215–16); Augustine, *Against Julian: Opus Imperfectum* 2.170; 3.138, 141, 149, 151, 153; 6.20 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 25:238–39, 344–45, 345, 351, 352, 650–52).

<sup>49</sup> Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 1.10.10–14.13 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 11:114–16); Augustine, *Confessions* 8.1.2, 7.17, 11.27; 10.30.42 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 1:186–87, 198, 205, 264–65); Augustine, *The City of God* 14.6 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 7:105–6); Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.3; 4.18.24 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 5:65, 209–12); Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 28.108; 31.118 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 8:336, 341); Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John* 2.1; 4.4; 5.5; 6.5; 8.2, 10, 13; 10.1 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 14:37, 67–68, 79–80, 91–92, 116–17, 124–26, 128, 145–46); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 109.3 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 19:263); Augustine, *Letters* 145.8 (WSAT<sup>2</sup> 2:314–15); Augustine, *Sermons* 20.1; 261.1, 3–5, 9; 365.3 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 2:151; 7:206, 207–9, 211; 10:349).

the will," Augustine places his doctrine of justification.

Two observations summarize this section (viz., *The Spirit and the Letter*). First, in *SL* Augustine presents a sanative element of justification (i.e., spiritual health and well-being of the inner person). By doing so he tethers to his doctrine of justification a key theme in *SL* in particular and his works in general—namely, a Christian is “healed by grace.”<sup>50</sup> He also parallels “to justify” with “to make righteous” and describes these acts as real and observable. This view of justification describes an unmerited, ontological event and process that is accomplished by the Spirit. By it a person's will is healed. Second, justification includes “the writing of the law upon” a Christian's heart. By this act a Christian is both righteous before God and undergoing a renewal to the image of the Son. He or she becomes in reality what they already are by God's righteous declaration over their lives.

If these two observations are true, they support the thesis defended in this essay: Augustine understands justification, which the Spirit accomplishes by grace through faith, as ontological and sanative—an event and a process that associates with “to make righteous.” For these observations to gain viability, this question must be answered affirmatively: “Is this above understanding of Augustine's doctrine of justification found both in his other documents and outside his anti-Pelagian years?” Five examples both answer this inquiry favorably and explain further Augustine's view of justification.

### Further Illustrations

(1) Many theologians understand Augustine to have experienced a conversion in the garden of Milan (AD 386). When he discusses this event, he states being aware of “a sickness . . . [since] being willing was not the same as being able. . . . God changed me, for you began by healing me of the itch to justify myself.”<sup>51</sup> He further describes this healing as “justice created in us by the act of justification.”<sup>52</sup> This illustration is from

<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 19.34; cf. 6.9; 8.13; 9.15; 19.34; 30.52 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:165; cf. 148, 150–51, 151–52, 164–65, 177–78).

<sup>51</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.36.58; cf. 37.61 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 1:275; cf. 277–78). See also Henry Chadwick, “Self-Justification in Augustine's Confessions,” *EHR* 118.479 (2003): 1161–75.

<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.15.20; cf. 10.2.2 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 1:323; cf. 238); see also *Enarrations on the Psalms* 110.3; 119.5 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 19:287–88, 502–4); Augustine, *Letters* 194.3.6–7 (WSAT<sup>2</sup> 3:291–92). For an excellent work that defends an Augustinian

Augustine's greatest work on salvation and spiritual formation, *Confessions* (AD 397–401); it identifies justification not only with healing a sickness but with justice (i.e., a righteous lifestyle) created in us “by the act of justification.”

How Augustine understands this creative act is perhaps described in his fourth exposition of Psalm 103 (Ps 104). In this sermon he mentions four aspects of *spiritus* (“spirit/breath”) that relate justification to the Creator, creation, sin, and new creation life.<sup>53</sup> These aspects are as follows. The Creator's life-giving *spiritus* is withdrawn from a self-sufficient person and replaced by the *spiritus* of pride (aspects one and two). The *spiritus* of the penitent, who no longer claims to be the “author of their justification” (i.e., the poor in spirit; Matt 5:3), receives God's *spiritus* of new creation life—namely, the Spirit of God (aspects three and four). “Having renounced their own spirit, they will have God's Spirit.” This is because God breathes forth his Spirit upon the humble, penitent person who trembles at God's words (Isa 66:2).

Augustine then elaborates on what he means by this exchange of a person's spirit with God's Spirit:

Having renounced their own spirit, they will have God's Spirit. . . . You will breathe forth your Spirit and they will be created. You will take away their spirit and send forth your own. . . . The apostle reminds us, *We are his own handiwork, created for good works* (Eph 2:10). From God's Spirit we have received the grace to live for righteousness, for it is he who justifies the godless [see Rom 4:5]. . . . [This is for] new men and women, who confess that their righteousness is nothing of their own but rather that they have been justified by God so that his grace may be in them.<sup>54</sup>

Augustine here parallels the reception of God's Spirit with justification.

To summarize the thoughts of this first example: In *Confessions*, Augustine mentions a “justice created in us by the act of justification” that heals a person's “sickness.” In his exposition of Psalm 103, he states this act of justification as possible because of an exchange. “God's Spirit” that

tinian view of God's spoken word that cures the soul, see Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 17 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009). Kolbert believes this view is a major theme in Augustine's theology.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 103.4.13–16 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 19:179–81).

<sup>54</sup> Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 103.4.14 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 19:179–80; emphasis original; underlining added).

allows a person "to live for righteousness" is exchanged for a person's spirit that is given to "pride" and self-justification. This exchange creates "new men and women," who "have received the grace to live for righteousness." Those so "justified by God" have "grace . . . in them."

(2) In *Nature and Grace* (AD 413/414) Augustine writes, "God himself spiritually heals the sick and restores the dead to life, that is, justifies the sinner through the mediator between God and human beings."<sup>55</sup> For "faith in the mediator . . . faith in his blood, faith in his cross, faith in his death and resurrection . . . heals us," such that Christians "have been justified by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord (Rom 7:25)."<sup>56</sup> For Augustine, this healing process happens (1) to the person "whom robbers left half-dead on the road" but is now convalescing in the inn paid for by the Samaritan; (2) by Christ who is the "kindly Samaritan," the great physician (Matt 9:12–13).<sup>57</sup> Here, Augustine defines justification as "concerned about the cure, not the institution of natural functions" (*ubi de sanandis, non de instituendis naturis agitur*).<sup>58</sup> For the convalescing Christian, this healing of nature only fully comes about in the next life. He elaborates,

Injured and seriously wounded, he cannot rise up to the peak of righteousness . . . he is still undergoing treatment. God, then, does not command what is impossible; rather, by his commandment, he warns you to do what you can and to ask for what you cannot. . . . I say, "A human being certainly is not righteous as a result of the will, if one can be by nature, but one will be able to be as a result

<sup>55</sup> So also Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 26.29 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:231).

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 44.51 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:241).

<sup>57</sup> Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 11.12; 43.50; 52.60 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:221–22, 241, 245–46); cf. Augustine, *Sermons* 365.3 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 10:349). In similar fashion Augustine states in *JL*, "The Spirit of grace acts to restore in us the image of God, the image in which we were created in terms of our nature. . . . Because of this grace we say to God, *Have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you* (Ps 41:5). . . . Once that wound has been healed, the law is written there, and they naturally do what pertains to the law. . . . Nature has been repaired through grace. . . . By that grace there is written in the renewed interior human being the righteousness that sin had removed, and this mercy came upon the human race through Jesus Christ our Lord." Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.47; cf. 30.52 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:173; cf. 177–78; emphasis original).

<sup>58</sup> Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 11.12; cf. 19.21; 21.23 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:222; cf. 226, 227).

of medication what one cannot be because of one's injury."<sup>59</sup>

Only on that Day does a Christian "rise up to the peak of righteousness." Until then, the believer undergoes "treatment." Until then, God's justification continues its restoration of "the dead to life." During this process and "as a result of medication," God enables what one could not do "because of one's injury."

In *Nature and Grace*, then, aspects of both summary points of the last section are also noted, albeit with extra illumination: Augustine's doctrine of justification is about an act that heals the human nature by way of the "kindly Samaritan." It is an event and process that continues until "the next life."<sup>60</sup> This act of the Spirit is rooted in Jesus's blood, his cross, his resurrection. For he is the mediator. Augustine's identification of the healing of the nature of a person with justification is equally noted in the next illustration.

(3) In AD 417, Augustine preached back-to-back sermons over two days on Rom 8:30–31.<sup>61</sup> Both sermon 158 and sermon 159 portray someone that identifies with the convalescing Christian noted in our last example. In Sermon 158, Augustine describes this person as one who is in exile from God, on a journey, often fatigued and deprived, in danger of being robbed, unjust because of "weakness," and led to sin "by delight" for what is sinful.<sup>62</sup> This same person, but now as a Christian, is exhorted to

<sup>59</sup> Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 43.50 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:241); Augustine, *Against Julian*: *Opus Imperfectum* 6.8 Aug. 5 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 25:616).

<sup>60</sup> See also Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 3.3; 19.21; 21.23; 23.25; 49.57; 54.63; 54.64; 55.65; 64.76 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:218, 225, 227, 228–29, 244, 247–48, 248–49, 249–50, 255). Augustine's response to Julian's *To Turbanius* (AD 422) adamantly declared what he said en passant: only Christians can do righteous works, for they alone have the new nature, the new condition; they alone have been justified. Augustine, *Against Julian* 4.3.23 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 24:394); cf. Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 2.2–3.3 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:217–18); Augustine, *Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.11.24 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 24:128–29); Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 25.42–27.48 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:169–173); Augustine, *The City of God* 5.19 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 6:17–73). For supportive thoughts on this point, see Simon J. Gathercole, "A Conversion of Augustine. From Natural Law to Restored Nature in Romans 2.13–16," in *Engaging Augustine on Romans: Self, Context, and Theology in Interpretation*, ed. Daniel Patte and Eugene TeSelle (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2002), 147–72; Augustine, *Augustine: Later Works*, ed. John Burnaby, LCC 8 (London: SCM, 1955), 188–89.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, WSAT: *Sermons* III/5, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. and notes Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 114, 121, 127n1.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 158.8; 159.2, 6 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:118–19, 122, 124).

"love justice as you loved iniquity," "die to oneself, to come to God," and "mourn what you used to be, so that you may be able to become what you are not yet."<sup>63</sup> In Augustine's view, how is this change possible?

Near the beginning of Sermon 158, he comments on four topics (predestination, calling, justification, and glorification); he assumes a Christian already possesses the first two items.<sup>64</sup> He then asks, "What about being justified? What does it mean being justified? Have we got the nerve to say we already have this third thing? And will there be any of us bold enough to say, I am just . . . I am not a sinner. . . . Do we have some [justice], but not the whole of it?"<sup>65</sup> Augustine continues,

We certainly do have some [justice]. Let us be grateful for what we have, so that what we don't have may be added to it, and we don't lose what we do have. So this third thing is already happening in us. We have been justified; but this justice can grow, as we make progress. And how can it grow . . . by receiving the forgiveness of sins in the washing of regeneration, by receiving the Holy Spirit, by making progress day by day.<sup>66</sup>

This advice is to those "already established in the condition of justification." Augustine extensively explains this condition as a spiritual circumcision that allows a person to delight in justice.<sup>67</sup> With the strongest of terms, Augustine here declares justification as by the Spirit and as an event and a process. He also connects it with the New Covenant promise of heart circumcision and renewal of the inner being.

Wright helps tie these concepts of justification together by observing, "We must extract as one strand in Augustine's teaching on *justificatio* a declarative event that warrants a perfect passive verb."<sup>68</sup> For Augustine, this means that Christians are "justified after the measure appropriate to [their] present journey in exile, . . . [Christians] are still imperfect and yet partially justified [*ex parte justificatis*]."<sup>69</sup> Because of the God who justifies,

<sup>63</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 159.6, 7, 8, 9 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:124, 125, 126).

<sup>64</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 158.2 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:114). According to Augustine, Sermon 158 is about justification. He states, in Sermon 159, "Yesterday, on the subject of our justification, which we receive from the Lord our God, a sermon was delivered by my ministry." Augustine, *Sermons* 159.1 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:121).

<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 158.4 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:116).

<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 158.5 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:116–17).

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 158.6; 158.7; 159.2–8 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:116, 117, 120n9, 122–125).

<sup>68</sup> Wright, "Justification," 71.

<sup>69</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 159.1 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:121).

Christians who before Christ were weak and sinful can "love justice as you loved iniquity." Again, both aspects of the summary points of the last section are also noted in Sermons 158 and 159, with a wonderful phrase that emphasizes Augustine's view of justification as an event and a process. By God's ongoing act of justification Christians are "able to become what you are not yet."

(4) On the occasion of John the Baptist's birthday and against the Donatists, Augustine preached Sermon 292. It concerned the baptizer, the baptized, and the topic of justification.<sup>70</sup> In this sermon he states,

It's Christ who heals, Christ who cleanses, Christ who justifies; man doesn't justify. What is it to justify? To make just; as to mortify is to make dead, to vivify to make alive, so to justify is to make just. . . . That, you see, is the meaning of, "I [Jesus] am the good tree; let anybody who wishes to be good fruit be born of me." . . . Whoever believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, who makes a godly person out of the ungodly . . . his faith is counted as justice. . . . As a person is such are the actions he has. If he is good he has good actions. . . . The forgiveness of sins is accomplished in [the catechumen]. So the ungodly has been justified, good fruit has been born [in the catechumen]. . . . [Jesus] baptizes in the Holy Spirit. So it's he that justifies.<sup>71</sup>

The assumption here is that Augustine expresses one thought by three very similar phrases: "Christ who heals, Christ who cleanses, Christ who justifies." He then explains what this one thought means. For Augustine, justification includes the forgiveness of sins. It also means "to make just," as in to "make alive." This fourth illustration especially correlates Augus-

<sup>70</sup> Augustine preached this sermon arguably very early in his ministerial career. Augustine, WSAT: *Sermons* III/8, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. and notes Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 146n1 presents AD 399 "as the mean" date for Augustine preaching this sermon and one between the suggested dates of 393 and 405. For Augustine, baptism included the singing of Psalm 41 with its petitionary cry for healing (Ps 41:5). Baptism was understood by him to begin the start of an ongoing renewal of the heart in the catechumen that continued until that Day, an act by which a person became a part of the "single body of Christ." Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 41.1 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 16:239); so also William Harmless, "Baptism," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 86, 90.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 292.6–8 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 8:142–45).

tine's view of justification with water baptism. For Augustine, this baptism that Jesus accomplishes by the Spirit "makes a godly person out of the ungodly." Baptism "bears good fruit" that Augustine identifies with "good actions." It parallels Jesus's baptism of the believer "in the Holy Spirit." This Holy Spirit reconstitutes what "a person is." This view of justification fits nicely within an important concept of Augustine's view of spiritual formation. A healthy person is a well-ordered person, whose centering weight is the "love of God" made available by the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>72</sup> Again, both aspects of the summary points of the last section are also noted in Sermon 292. As a reminder, these two aspects in abbreviated form are justification as an event and a process that heals the will and justification as "the writing of the law upon" a Christian's heart.

(5) By his propositions on Romans (AD 394), Augustine comments on a phrase found in Rom 4:5—namely, "faith is credited [*deputetur*] to righteousness." One, of course, recognizes this as a well-discussed verse during the Reformation; one that many sixteenth-century European reformers strictly identified with a forensic view of justification.<sup>73</sup> Augustine states with respect to Rom 4:5, "A man is justified that he might be just, not that he might suppose he is permitted to continue to sin."<sup>74</sup> This is Augustine's usual interpretation of Rom 4:5. For example, in AD 406–407 he states, "You were bad, but believed in the one *who justifies the godless* (Rom 4:5)—what does *justifies the godless* mean if not 'makes godly people out of godless ones'?"<sup>75</sup> Years later (AD 414), but again with reference to Rom 4:5, Augustine explains how this happens: "When the soul . . . becomes just, it becomes a participant in the life of another, in a life which is not what it is itself . . . clinging to God, it is justified by him . . . by withdrawing from him it becomes wicked."<sup>76</sup> By way of discussions about Rom 4:5, Augustine associates justification with "to make righteous" and in AD 414 specifically correlates this verse to a believer's lifestyle.<sup>77</sup> By

<sup>72</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* 19.13 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 7:368–370); Augustine, *Confessions* 13.9.10 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 1:348). So also O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 228, 239.

<sup>73</sup> E.g., John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 158–59.

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *Augustine on Romans: Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Paula Landes, Texts and Translations: Early Christian Literature Series 23.6 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 22 (9).

<sup>75</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 3.9 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 12:29, 75).

<sup>76</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 19.11 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 12:30, 344).

<sup>77</sup> In the following examples Augustine identifies "God makes us righteous"

this fifth illustration, aspects of the first and second summary points of the last section are noted, again. Of special note, here, is Augustine's way of understanding Rom 4:5 that contrasts with how it is typically understood today within the Reformed tradition.

The above five illustrations contribute to an Augustinian understanding of justification as a healing, new creation act of God that is an event and a process—a dynamic also noted in *SL*. For Augustine, as the mind is renewed toward its *telos* ("end"), disorder becomes order. Within this dynamic, knowing, willing, and doing continue to align themselves together in oneness.<sup>78</sup> This can be said two ways: by an ongoing and justifying act of God, the fallen, natural order of a person wanes; by a healing and justifying act of the "kindly Samaritan," a new, just person arises. This justifying event and process allows a person to grow in his or her ability to no longer be a slave to sin; here, reason starts to shed old habits and more frequently choose freedom and life over sin and death.<sup>79</sup> Within this framework of thought, *concupiscentia* ("disordered desire") resists the ordering of the Spirit and is known as a "disease" that needs "the medicine of grace";<sup>80</sup> *caritas* never fully arrives in a person's life and *concupiscentia*, while it recedes to the background, "still remains until all our weakness is healed, as the renewal of the interior self-progresses from day to day until that day."<sup>81</sup> As such, for Augustine, justification is very much a sanative

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with "works of righteousness." Augustine, *Confessions* 10.2.2 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 1:238); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 30.2.6 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 15:325); Augustine, *Diverse Questions* 2.4 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 12:188); Augustine, *Sermons* 169.9, 10; 292.6–7 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 5:228, 229; 8:142); Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 15.31 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:29). This same correlation, albeit identified solely with grace, is noted by Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 11.18 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:154); Augustine, *Diverse Questions* 1.2.3 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 12:187); Augustine, *Sermons* 131.9; 160.7; 292.6 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 4:231; 5:133; 8:143); Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 6.13 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:15); Augustine, *Letters* 140.30.71 (WSAT<sup>2</sup> 281); Augustine, *Diverse Questions* 1.2.3 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 12:187).

<sup>78</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, 9.1.1–3.18 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 5:337–57) as noted by O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 110.

<sup>79</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* 19.13 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 7:16–17); so also O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 37. This perspective of justification allows ethics to be metaphysical, ontological, and teleological. For a defense that ethics is metaphysical and teleological, see O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 38–45.

<sup>80</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* 13.13 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 7:79); Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscentia* 1.29.32 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 24:48). This *concupiscentia* is known by the Greek fathers as *φίλαυτος* ("self-centeredness"; cf. 2 Tim 3:2).

<sup>81</sup> Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscentia* 1.25.28; cf. 30.33 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 24:46; cf. 24:48). For Augustine, this means *concupiscentia* "... is not now a sin in those who

event and a process.

### An Objection

Typically, one objection to the above understanding of Augustine's view of justification arises. This objection is captured by two questions: What about the thief on the cross?<sup>82</sup> Does not Augustine present faith as the ground of justification and good works as the necessary evidence of this faith?<sup>83</sup> Both questions challenge Augustine's view of justification as a process that makes the ungodly godly.<sup>84</sup> Even if one ignores all the above thoughts that identify Augustine's understanding of justification as both a sanative event and a process, three important factors remain that address this one objection.

First, Augustine's grace that justifies is not strictly a forensic concept. He mentions in *Enchiridion* (AD 421) that Christians "are both freed from their sins and justified by the very grace which made Christ the man unable to have any sin."<sup>85</sup> He upholds this incarnational, transformational perspective of justification in several places. His thoughts in *Against Julian*

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have been reborn, provided they do not consent to it for acts that are forbidden and the mind, remaining sovereign, does not hand over the members to it to carry out those acts" (Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscence* 1.23.25 [WSAT<sup>1</sup> 24:44]). This last point on *concupiscentia*, as is well noted by Aidan Nichols, lies at the heart of the seventieth-century Catholic-Protestant divide and their different understanding of justification, namely, does it just involve an imputed righteousness or an impartation of righteousness that starts from the baptismal waters (Aidan Nichols, "The Lutheran-Catholic Agreement on Justification: Botch or Breakthrough?" *NBf* 82.967 [2001]: 81–82)?

<sup>82</sup> This thief is noted in Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*, 51.17; 67.41; 110.3 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 17:29, 360; 19:288); Augustine, *Sermons* 2.9 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 1:16–17). Augustine knows the justified thief on the cross as "endowed with righteousness, independently of any righteous actions" but also as one who has "fervor in the heart" that easily associates with worship to God and the good of his neighbor. This heart of wellbeing is understood by Augustine as an expression of good from the justified thief to the second thief on the cross.

<sup>83</sup> E.g., Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 175–78.

<sup>84</sup> Within these discussions certain Augustinian quotes are often elevated at the expense of others to win the argument. E.g., Cho, "Justification," 167–75 mentions several references that support his argument that justification for Augustine is "not a process but an event," but he does not address most of the references noted in the sections one through three of this essay.

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 11.36; cf. 12.40; 28.108 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 8:296, 296–97, 299, 335–36).

*Opus Imperfectum* (AD 430) adequately summarize this view. In this treatise he writes, "Human beings who are reborn in Christ are made righteous by the same grace by which Christ was born a righteous man. . . . He is an example of grace so that by believing in him we may hope that we will become righteous through him. . . . [God] produces by the Holy Spirit righteousness in human nature."<sup>86</sup> In these two quotes, the grace that justifies is not foremost forensic nor merited but rather efficacious, ontic, and incarnational.

From Augustine's earliest teaching days until his last, he maintains that God's cure of nature comes about by a Christian's identification with Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.<sup>87</sup> The Christian lives within these four mysteries, which are not simply mystical expressions. With respect to Christ, they are historical facts; with respect to a Christian, they are ontic realities by a Christian's faith-filled union with Christ.<sup>88</sup>

Second, there is consonance with this incarnational aspect of God's justifying grace and Augustine's doctrine of *totus Christus* ("the whole Christ"). By his doctrine of *totus Christus*, Augustine teaches that Christ and his church are united as one single body, "one person" (*unus homo*). He states, "We are Christ too, because in some sense the whole Christ is Head and body."<sup>89</sup> He incorporates within his doctrine of *totus Christus* his understanding of Christian transformation—a transformation as noted above that occurs by the God who justifies. For he writes, "This is the wonderful exchange," Christ "takes us up into himself . . . to transfigure

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<sup>86</sup> Augustine, *Against Julian Opus Imperfectum* 1.138–40 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 25:144–46); besides what is mentioned in this paragraph, see also Augustine, *The Predestination of the Saints* 15.31 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:124); Augustine, *Admonition and Grace* 11.30 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:75); Augustine, *Against Julian Opus Imperfectum* 4.84 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 25:450); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 49.2 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 16:381); cf. Augustine, *Sermons* 192.1 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 6:34); Augustine, *The Trinity* 14.12.15 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 5:491).

<sup>87</sup> E.g., Augustine, *Christian Instructions* 1.15.14–21 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 11:116–17); Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 14.52–53 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 8:304–5).

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 14.53; 31.118 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 8:305, 341).

<sup>89</sup> Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 26.2.2 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 15:275). Not only did Augustine's doctrine of *totus Christus* ground his entire soteriology and ecclesiology, but it also grounded his exegesis of Scripture: ". . . the head and the body . . . Christ and his Church, that total mystery with which all scriptures are concerned." Augustine, *Enarrations of the Psalms* 79.1 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 18:141).

us into himself.”<sup>90</sup> And, in *Grace and Free Will* he states a Christian receives “the grace of God to justify the sinner, that is, to make him righteous from sinful.”<sup>91</sup> This ontological transformation is made possible, in Augustine’s view, by God’s grace that justifies. This is so that “Christ might be the head and [Christians] might be his members” so that faith may work through love.<sup>92</sup> This love progresses by “a will fully aflame with divine love.”<sup>93</sup> New life “has originated in us,” for “the eternal [i.e. the Son] allied himself to us.”<sup>94</sup> And, “healing is produced with our cooperation *by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord* (Rom 7:25), . . . by the Holy Spirit, by whom in a hidden manner *love is poured out in our hearts* (Rom 5:5).”<sup>95</sup> Here, Augustine does not explain the “wonderful exchange” in terms of the law court. Rather, he uses concepts related to ontology, healing, participation, and the gift of the Holy Spirit’s love made possible because of Christ.

Third, Augustine’s thoughts should not be removed from their Nicene context and his acceptance of the Nicaean Creed.<sup>96</sup> The authors of this creed—as well as those who influenced them and followed them—insisted on the importance of the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation.<sup>97</sup> These

<sup>90</sup> Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 30.2.3 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 15:323).

<sup>91</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 6.13 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:15); cf. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 29.6 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 12:493–94).

<sup>92</sup> Augustine, *The Gift of Perseverance* 24.67 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:196).

<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 17.34 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:32); Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 1.6 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 8:275); cf. Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 17.33–39; 20.41 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:31–36, 37–39).

<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity* 4.18.24 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 1:212).

<sup>95</sup> Augustine, *Perfection in Human Righteousness*, 20.43 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 23:303; emphasis original); see also Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 17.33 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:31–32); McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47; Wright, “Justification,” 70, 72. Admittedly Augustine mentions, “Good works do not precede [a Christian’s] justification as an entitlement but follow it to demonstrate what he has received.” *Enarrations on the Psalms* 110.3; cf. 31.2.3, 7 (WSAT<sup>3</sup> 19:288; cf. 15:364–65, 370). These sermons from Psalms could refer to justification as an event without diminishing it as a process. How is this possible? Augustine does not dissociate the event of justification from its process; e.g., “One begins to be a child of peace at the point when he obeys and believes this good news and when, having become righteous on the basis of faith, he begins to have peace with God.” Augustine, *Admonition and Grace* 15.46 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 26:89).

<sup>96</sup> John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2.1 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s seminary Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>97</sup> E.g., Justin Martyr (AD 100–165), Theophilus of Antioch (AD ? –183/5),

theologians wholeheartedly allowed this doctrine to inform their understanding of the transforming effect of divine grace for the Christian. This emphasis was later summed up by Athanasius of Alexandria: “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God” (Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν).<sup>98</sup> As per Khaled Anatolios, this dynamic represented for Augustine a “purificatory process of knowing God.”<sup>99</sup> Within this context, Augustine understood the “starting point of faith” (*initio fidei*) not as a punctiliar event only but rather as the beginning of an ascent, a way (*via*) toward the full vision of God, a reordering of faith that makes the “diseased” person’s “ailing mind well for the perception of unchanging truth.”<sup>100</sup> Here, how a person starts their journey is how a person continues it. This view of soteriology is only possible for Augustine, it is argued here, when the grace that justifies, at its core, represents a continuum toward its *telos*.

## Conclusion

I have argued above that Augustine understood justification as ontological and sanative, an event and a process that associates with “to make righteous.” This perspective of justification is illustrated above in several of Augustine’s sermons as well as three treatises of his: *The Spirit and the Letter*, *Confessions*, and *Nature and Grace*.

Augustine incorporated into his view of justification what became familiar reformational terms—namely, *sola fides* (“faith alone”) and *sola gratia* (“grace alone”). To these concepts, it is argued above, Augustine equally discussed a sanative aspect of justification that allowed him to include within this doctrine the concept of *sola caritate* (“by love alone”). This allowed him to inseparably connect two equally important concepts: justification as a forensic declaration of righteousness and justification as a healing of the inner being. Augustine would emphasize the former aspect of justification, many of the sixteenth-century Reformers the latter. His

Irenaeus (AD 130–202), Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), Hippolytus of Rome (AD 170–236), Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 300–373), Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 329–390), Basil of Caesarea (AD 330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (AD 331/40–395), Augustine (AD 354–430), Cyril of Alexandria (AD 375–444), and Maximus the Confessor (AD 580–662).

<sup>98</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, ed. John Behr, Popular Patristics Series 44a (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 166–67.

<sup>99</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 244.

<sup>100</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.1; 2.4 (WSAT<sup>1</sup> 5:63, 66–67); cf. Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 242–45.

view of justification fit his historical context, the reformers' theirs.

Prior to the Reformation, the European church primarily taught salvation as only through the cradle of the church and her sacraments. Further, a person was never fully assured of their salvation. The reformers wrote against this model. Steeped in ideas from the Middle Ages of heaven and hell and purgatory, their driving question became, How do I find a gracious God? Melancthon and Calvin insisted on five key points with respect to the doctrine of justification: it was "by faith alone" (*sola fide*), "outside of us" (*extra nos*), not "in us" (*in nobis*), the determinative factor of who was a part of the church, and "the article by which the church stands or falls."

Contrastingly, though Augustine's latter works argued against a Pelagian understanding of salvation, all of his works fit within a time period of Patristic theology very different from these reformers. The theologians before and immediately after Augustine developed a soteriology grounded in the view that healing and salvation took place through participation, solidarity, and exchange.<sup>101</sup> Augustine's thoughts on justification, it is argued in this essay, fit within this stream of thought.<sup>102</sup>

God's truth is not relative. However, theologians must properly discern both God's truth and their own time. They then endeavor to teach doctrine to the people of their times. Everyone does this imperfectly and with bias. Many of the reformers, who per Martin Luther recognized that Augustine's explanation on justification lacked "detail" and with respect to imputation was "imperfectly" explained, paved their own way forward on the doctrine of justification.<sup>103</sup> These reformers served their generation well, as did Augustine. Will the theologians of today achieve a similar reputation?

Fifteen years ago, Augustinian scholar and ethicist Oliver O'Donovan warned about a justification that dissociates from "to make righteous."

<sup>101</sup> Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, 75; T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 62.

<sup>102</sup> Irenaeus (AD 130–202) is credited as launching this ontological, incarnational view of salvation that eventually crystalized in the Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451). He states, "The word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through his transcendent love, became what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5 preface (ANF 1:526).

<sup>103</sup> Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. H. T. Lehman, *Luther's Works: American Edition* 34 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 334; cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, *Library of Christian Classics* 20 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 3.11.16 (1:746).

He then stated,

The correlate of a "justification" which has nothing to do with "righteousness" is a righteousness which has nothing to do with justification, and this soon presented itself to Protestant thought under the heading of "sanctification." The improper divorce of sanctification from justification bequeathed Protestant churches their characteristic tension between the gospel with no concern for life in the world and a concern for life in the world which has lost touch with the gospel.<sup>104</sup>

If the thesis of this essay has been properly defended above, Augustine's perspective of justification, at its core, challenges the theologians of today to take O'Donovan's noted problem seriously.

<sup>104</sup> O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 254.



## Breathe on Us, O Breath of God: The Pneumatological Grounding of Ecclesial Identity

Daniel L. Hill

Dallas Theological Seminary

*While modern theologians have frequently decried the lack of focus on pneumatology in theological inquiry, recent years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the Spirit's procession and work. Additionally, contemporary theologians have tended to focus on Christological or Trinitarian approaches to theological anthropology, paying considerably less attention to how the Spirit informs our understanding of the human person. Beginning with a discussion of the Spirit's role in constituting the church, this essay explores the Spirit's fundamental role in grounding a coherent account of human identity. In it I argue that the Spirit is the one who grounds our conception of the good life, reorients our perspective of our pasts, situating them within the greater story of God's redemption, and enables our proper worship in the present, forming us rightly as worshippers of God.*

*Key Words:* ecclesiology, Holy Spirit, identity, pneumatology, theological anthropology

While there has been a resurgence of interest in theological anthropology in recent years, especially its Christological or Trinitarian contours, there is still ample room to explore how ecclesiology and pneumatology inform our understanding of the human person. While the question of “who am I” has plagued philosophers and novelists alike, I contend that if we approach this question pneumatologically and ecclesiologically, we will see that the Christian’s “identity” is situated within a community on the road to fellowship with God.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, we find ourselves presented with the dogmatic question: *how does the missio of the Spirit, the one*

<sup>1</sup> This is certainly not to suggest that a pneumatological or ecclesial approach to theological anthropology is the only or best approach to theological anthropology. Rather, I am suggesting that Christian reflection on the human creature will be enhanced when significant attention is paid to ecclesial and pneumatological considerations. For Trinitarian approaches to theological anthropology see

*gathering this community, inform our understanding of human identity?* In other words, how does the unifying, sanctifying, and worship-orienting work of the Holy Spirit help us to articulate a coherent account of human identity? This essay will argue that a coherent account of human identity must be robustly constituted through the mission of the Holy Spirit as he grounds our conception of the “good life” and gathers the disparate events of our lives within the greater story of God’s redemption.<sup>2</sup> It is the presence of God through the dwelling of the Spirit that makes the Christian community unique and, consequently, grounds human identity.<sup>3</sup> This essay will

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Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). For Christological approaches to theological anthropology, see Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018); Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key, Current Issues in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). And for a pneumatological approach to theological anthropology, see Marc Cortez, “Idols, Images, and a Spirit-ed Anthropology: A Pneumatological Account of the Imago Dei,” in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, ed. Myk Habets (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 267–82.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this essay the “good life” will refer to the *telos* that motivates human action. Christian Smith argues that human persons “are able . . . to identify and rank those states, conditions, and experiences they believe will serve their well being or the well being of others they prize” (Christian Smith, *What Is a Person?: Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010], 46). Human persons then act in order to realize this state or condition of well being. The “good life,” then, describes this vision of the future which motivates human action.

<sup>3</sup> While I will return to this in greater detail later, the phrases “human identity” and “personal identity” will be used in this essay to refer to that which distinguishes one person from another. It is comprised of our self-understandings, the “facts of our existence,” and is further developed through our actions. On the one hand, as Christian Smith argues, these identities are “self-understandings derived from occupying stable locations in social, behavioral, mental, and moral space that securely define who and what somebody is, for themselves and for others” (*What Is a Person?* 50–51). However, at the same time, identity consists of more than just our self-understandings. As Rowan Williams notes, “what makes a person, and what makes me *this* person rather than another, is not simply a set of facts. . . . [I]t’s the enormous fact of my being here rather than elsewhere, being in these relations with those around me, being a child of these parents, a parent of these children, the friend of x, the not-so-intimate friend of y” (*Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018], 31). In other words, there

unfold in three stages. First, I will examine the Holy Spirit's mission as he gives the ecclesial community the gifts of holiness and divine love. Second, I will argue that the covenant community is uniquely identified as the place where God dwells by his Spirit. It is the presence of God in the Spirit that marks the people of God as unique. Finally, I will argue that such a pneumatological emphasis demands a "Spirit-ed" account of human identity as the Spirit reorients and re-narrates our lives, enabling them to find coherence in light of God's redemptive work.

### Divine Election and the Mission of the Spirit

While there are many other passages of Scripture that could prove fruitful in understanding the manner in which God's presence reconstitutes the identity of his chosen people, I will root this study on the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is particularly pertinent to our present task. Paul continually adjures his readers to understand themselves in light of God's redemptive work. He begins Ephesians with a description of the Triune God's redemptive work as he has chosen a people for himself.<sup>4</sup> Much has been made of the nature of God's act of election. But regardless of whether God has elected particular people, a group, or all of humanity in Christ, God elects for the purpose of gathering the church into holy fellowship with himself. Simply put, God's people have been elected for a specific end: "to be holy and blameless before him" (1:4). Having already described his audience as "holy ones" (1:1), Paul illustrates how the ecclesial community's identity is predicated upon divine action. "Before the

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is an objective component to identity, part of which notably includes our status as creatures before the Creator and image bearers of God. Finally, as Williams goes on to observe, as we speak, act, respond, and change the manner in which we relate to others, we add to the "facts of our existence" and, consequently, continue to develop our identities over time (*Being Human*, 32).

<sup>4</sup> Many other texts of Scripture might warrant consideration when discussing the relationship between the Spirit and the church. Certainly, Rom 8 and John 14–17 have a great deal to say about the mission of the Spirit and how this relates to the reorientation of the individual's identity. Additionally, the book of Acts contains the most references to the Spirit out of any book in the Bible. However, it seems that Ephesians is particularly unique in its *communal* and *existential* emphases. We would also do well to remember that it is not merely the number of references that is important, but the nature of those references and the theological judgements that are being made in and through those references. Consequently, for those reasons and the necessary limitations of space and scope, this essay will focus predominantly on the Spirit's work in the book of Ephesians.

foundation of the world," the Triune God determines to realize holiness in a particular people: the church.<sup>5</sup> Holiness emerges as a key theme throughout the book of the Ephesians, which is understandable given its ecclesiological focus. As Greg Lyons observes, "Ephesians has sixteen occurrences of the Greek word-family (ἅγι-/ἁγν-) translated, holy, holiness, sanctify, sanctification in holiness. The church is defined in terms of holiness."<sup>6</sup> But what does it mean for the church to be holy? And what are the implications for how its identity is constituted? To answer this question, we must turn to investigate the mission of the Spirit.

Paul begins his letter to the Ephesian church with an articulation of the victory God has accomplished through Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension. Timothy Gombis argues that Eph 1:20–2:22 serves as a depiction of divine warfare where God defeats evil powers, exalts Christ as cosmic Lord and King, and sets apart the church as the gathered temple that manifests and celebrates his victory.<sup>7</sup> He writes, "The basic thrust of

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<sup>5</sup> Carey C. Newman is wary of understanding election as a pre-temporal act, arguing that it undermines the historicity of the cross. "Painting election as simply, or even primarily, a pre-temporal (and therefore decidedly *unhistorical*) decree devalues or ignores a *real* incarnation, a *real* Gethsemane, a *real* cross, and a *real* resurrection" ("Election and Predestination in Ephesians 1:4–6a: An Exegetical-Theological Study of the Historical, Christological Realization of God's Purpose," *Review & Expositor* 93.2 [1996]: 239). While Newman is right to be wary of any proclivities to ignore the historicity of the resurrection and the negation of God's historical-salvific acts, Otfried Hoifus helpfully observes that the notion of a pre-temporal, pre-creational selection of a people was present in Jewish thought. Drawing from Jub. 2.16–19, Midrasch Tehilim's commentary on Ps 74:2, and *Joseph and Aseneth*, he observes that all three contain references to a pre-temporal election of Israel. He helpfully concludes, "In Eph 1:4 the words *πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* are given a wholly different, indeed a completely new emphasis: solely and only God's free and sovereign grace, which radically excludes any performance and worthiness, is the basis of the election constituting the church" ("Erwählt vor Grundlegung der Welt [Eph 1:4]," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 62.1–2 [1971]: 128). Divine election can then serve as a bridge from the processions of the Triune God to the missions of individual persons of the Trinity as they are played out in history. God's actions *ad extra* reveal their origin in divine life *ad intra*.

<sup>6</sup> Greg Lyons, "Church and Holiness in Ephesians," in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 242.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 90.

Paul's story is that God has defeated the fallen powers and authorities in Christ Jesus and has installed Christ Jesus as cosmic ruler over all of reality. God is manifesting his victory by creating the church, in which he is overcoming the effects of evil powers on his world."<sup>8</sup> For Paul, Christ is Lord over creation and is the one to whom all things will be subjugated. In Eph 1:10, Paul states that all of creation has been "brought under the headship of" (*ἀνακεφαλαιῶ*) Christ. Arnold suggests that this term signifies that Christ stands as the agent of bringing all of creation under God's sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> Since creation was thrown into a state of disharmony because of the fall, *ἀνακεφαλαιῶ* also communicates the re-integration of creation through the rule of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The church, as the body of Christ, relates to Christ's rule in a unique way: it is the community that is shaped by his rule and to whom he communicates the blessings of redemption.<sup>11</sup> The church's status as a monument of Christ's victory differentiates it from the surrounding world and its communities.<sup>12</sup> However, as Christine Gerber notes, we must remember that Christology and soteriology play a

<sup>8</sup> Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians*, 86. Frank Thielman also sees this narrative arc of God's triumph in Christ over the enemies of God's people, particularly in Paul's quotation of Ps 68:18 in Eph 4:7–8. He writes, "Paul's interest in Ps. 68:18, therefore, lay not only in the 'gifts' that the psalm mentions and that . . . were given to people, but also in the psalm's expression of God's triumph over his enemies" ("Ephesians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 823–25).

<sup>9</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 89.

<sup>10</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 221. Thielman argues that this reading overlaps with how the verb *ἀνακεφαλαιῶ* and noun *ἀνακεφαλαιῶσις* were used in antiquity, citing the Roman rhetorical theorist Quintilian. He writes, "If Paul used the term in Eph. 1:10 with this common oratorical and literary meaning, then he is metaphorically describing God's plan to sum up the disparate creation in Christ. Just as an orator or writer draws together the elements of an argument and shows how they demonstrate the chief point of the speech or composition, so Christ will bring order to the universe" (Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 67).

<sup>11</sup> The language of the church as the body of Christ appears frequently in Ephesians (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:29–30). Gerber argues that the "head-body metaphor" is used by Paul to communicate the unique, hierarchical relationship between Christ and his church ("Die alte Braut und Christi Leib: Zum ekklesiologischen Entwurf des Epheserbriefs," *NTS* 59.2 [2013]: 207–8).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel K. Darko, *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17–6.9*, LNTS 375 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 32.

prominent role in Ephesians. She argues that these two loci set the foundation for the letter's ecclesiology in that the disparate individuals of the church are gathered together into one body of reconciled members united under their one Head.<sup>13</sup> While Christ is the Lord of all creation, the church is that community that rightly recognizes the world as belonging to God.

But how does this recognition and reformation according to the rule of Christ actually occur? The answer lies, at least partly, in the mission of the Spirit. As Balthasar rightly observes, the Spirit of God "is that by which God discloses himself as God, to what is not God."<sup>14</sup> Sent from the Father and Son, the Spirit has a mission to serve as the self-communication and self-revelation of the love of the Living God to his people (cf. 1:17; 4:20). As the revealer of the love of God, the Holy Spirit unites the lost to the one who rules over all, communicating the self-revelation of God to his people both cognitively and covenantally. In so doing, the Spirit makes the ecclesial community holy, that is, he sets them apart as the people to whom God has revealed himself and called to right living (cf. 5:14). Additionally, this love and call is effectual: the Spirit stirs their hearts in loving adoration of their Creator and Redeemer, enabling this holiness to be concretized in specific action in the present. The Spirit, as the Love of God poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), sanctifies and proleptically conforms the ecclesial community in the present, progressively realizing its eschatological nature. He cultivates a love for God that leads to right living in the present. Christopher Holmes writes, "The Spirit's mission of fostering love for the Son is commensurate with the Spirit's procession as the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. The creature's joy is to share in the love that is proper to the Holy Trinity."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the Spirit makes the church holy and blameless, both positionally (vis-à-vis union with Christ) and proleptically (vis-à-vis the concretization of God's redemptive plan in the present).

However, there also seems to be a priestly or cultic aspect to the church's holiness.<sup>16</sup> The church is identified as the place where God

<sup>13</sup> Gerber, "Die alte Braut und Christi Leib," 218.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Spirit of Truth*, vol. III of *Theo-Logic*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 63.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher R. J. Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 75.

<sup>16</sup> Markus Barth argues that the language of *ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ* conveys strong thematic parallels to the Old Covenant sacrificial systems. "The adjective 'holy' has a strong priestly element. . . . The attributed 'blameless' alludes to the indispensable quality of sacrificial animals (Exod 29:1, 38; Levi

dwells and where people offer him the kind of worship he seeks, worship grounded in Spirit and in truth (cf. John 4:23). Put differently, the church is a community that has been gathered and washed in the Son before the Father, offering worship empowered by and grounded in the Spirit as a proleptic realization of their eschatological end. Additionally, it appears that Paul's letter, particularly in Eph 2–4, intentionally builds upon temple imagery to illustrate how the new covenant community's identity is grounded in the presence of God. In so doing, Paul seems to develop concepts from the function of the temple in Israel's history.

### The Temple and the Presence of God

In 1 Kgs 8, after finishing the construction of the temple, Solomon gathers the people of Israel to watch as the Ark of the Covenant is brought into it. After the priests carry the ark into the most holy place, “a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (vv. 10–11 ESV). The description of God's descent upon the temple in 1 Kgs 8 invokes images of God's descent at Sinai and the tabernacle. As Lissa Beal notes, “YHWH's glory chases the priests from the temple. The miracle of the exodus tabernacle is repeated (Exod 40:34–35) in the astounding proof of YHWH's presence in his people's midst.”<sup>17</sup> In all three places, YHWH manifests his presence in the form of a cloud (*anan*).<sup>18</sup> This pattern establishes continuity between the exodus from Egypt, the Sinai event, and the conquest of Canaan.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the

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22:19–26); perhaps also to the exclusion of cripples from priestly office (Lev 21:17–23; cf. II Sam 5:8)” (*Ephesians*, The Anchor Bible Commentary [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974], 1:113; cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 49). If that is indeed the case, then Paul is building a theme which he will continue to elucidate throughout the letter, namely, the relationship between the church as the new temple and the proper worship of God.

<sup>17</sup> Lissa M. Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 135.

<sup>18</sup> John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd rev. ed., The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 210; Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Anselm Hagedorn (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 89.

<sup>19</sup> This connection is enhanced further when 1 Kgs 8 is read in light of Exod 33:1–6, 15–16. Following the people's failure at Sinai, God threatens to leave them lest their sin lead to their destruction (v. 3). Moses responds by imploring the Lord to accompany them since it is his presence that marks them as distinct

same God who delivered them from enslavement is present with them now. Block argues that YHWH's movement “from the holy of holies in the tabernacle to the holy of holies in the temple” establishes the temple “as YHWH's dwelling place and [marks] it out for sacred space.”<sup>20</sup> The temple becomes the new tabernacle: the place where God's presence is manifested and where right worship is offered. The spectacular nature of this event does not go unnoticed by onlookers as evidenced in Solomon's prayer. Not only does he rejoice in the uniqueness of experiencing God's *hesed* (1 Kgs 8:22–26), but he celebrates the gift of God's presence (vv. 27–30). In other words, Solomon recognizes that Israel is unique insofar as they are the people with whom God has chosen to dwell.

Based on 1 Kgs 8, the temple serves as the progression of the Sinai event and the culmination of Israel's liturgical life. It is there that the presence of God is manifested in a qualitatively unique manner, differentiating Israel from the nations.<sup>21</sup> In fact, it is God's presence that establishes the temple *qua* temple. As Walter Brueggemann notes, “the cult, in its many forms and expressions, mediates Yahweh's ‘real presence.’ In worship, Israel is dealing with the person, character, will, purpose, and presence of Yahweh.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, because God is present, that is, because the transcendent God has covenanted to imminently dwell with his people in a unique way, he must be worshipped properly. However, the commission to worship God rightly moves beyond cultic actions and into a life of witness. Beale notes that the tabernacle is repeatedly described as a “witness” against or for Israel, signifying Israel's vocation “to accept God's ‘testimony’ and then bear witness to God's saving presence with her.”<sup>23</sup> The story of Israel, in many ways, becomes the story of the presence of

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from the other nations (vv. 15–16). Here, Moses ties the identity of the people of Israel with the presence of God. Christopher J. H. Wright notes, Moses “knows that without the presence of the Lord God, Israel would be no different from the rest of the nations. And *only by Israel being distinct from the nations was there any purpose in being Israel at all*” (*The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006], 335, emphasis original).

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 205.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 334–35.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 650.

<sup>23</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 118.

God with a particular people in a particular place and how God's presence reorients their life and their worship.

This theology of temple is appropriated and developed throughout the New Testament where a greater emphasis is placed on God's presence with his people by virtue of the Spirit. Joseph Greene observes, "The temple was the place of God's presence. Cloud, glory, and eventually Spirit were all terms used to depict God's presence in the temple. . . . The Spirit represented God's working presence among his people and, by implication, was related to his manifest presence in the temple."<sup>24</sup> He notes a transition in Second Temple literature wherein the Spirit increasingly becomes the preferred term to refer to God's presence among his people, particularly noting its eschatological dimensions. Greene contends that in both the Qumran community and the book of Jubilees, the pouring out of the Spirit marked the inauguration of God's new creation.<sup>25</sup> Beale argues that Exod 40 and 1 Kgs 8 are alluded to in Luke's account of the Spirit's descent at Pentecost, which is particularly insightful given that passage's relationship to the emergence of the church.<sup>26</sup> In Eph 2:18–22, Paul explicitly invokes temple imagery, describing the church as the place where Gentiles and Jews together "have access in one Spirit to the Father" as both groups enjoy the status of "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" as they grow "into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:18, 19). As Beale notes, "If Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God because they are in the one Christ, then they are also reconciled to and have peace with one another because their identity as 'one new man' in Christ surpasses any nationalistic identities."<sup>27</sup> And since the Spirit is now the means by which God manifests his presence on the earth,

<sup>24</sup> Joseph R. Greene, "The Spirit in the Temple: Bridging the Gap between Old Testament Absence and New Testament Assumption," *JETS* 55.4 (2012): 739.

<sup>25</sup> Greene, "The Spirit in the Temple," 737–38. One might also argue that the absence of God's presence amongst the people of Israel gives rise to a sense of existential crisis during the time of the exile as they are forced to wrestle with their identity in light of his absence. Here, the promise of God's return serves as a ballast in the midst of turmoil. God promises that once more, they will be his people and he will be their God (cf. Ezek 36:28).

<sup>26</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 211.

<sup>27</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 260.

it is also the Spirit's presence that distinguishes the Christian community.<sup>28</sup> This is similar to how the glory cloud signified God's unique presence among the people of Israel. In other words, just as God's presence amongst the people of Israel in the glory-cloud signified their unique identity as God's covenant people, now the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church sets her apart as the new covenant community and directs her toward eschatological fellowship with God. In many ways, then, the church is elected as that community with whom God has chosen to dwell by his Spirit.

As the new temple, the new covenant community of the Spirit is the place where the omnipresent God exists in a qualitatively distinct and unique manner.<sup>29</sup> And it is God's presence in the midst of his people that grounds their identity as the people of God. But so far we have only argued that the presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit constitutes the church as unique community. We have not yet explored how he does so for her individual members. What does the Holy Spirit's presence accomplish and how does it inform the identity of the particular members of the ecclesial community? Furthermore, what does this illustrate about the nature of human identity as a whole?

### A Spirit-ed Account of Identity

In virtue of the Spirit's presence within the church, constituting it as the place where God uniquely dwells among his people, the Spirit re-identifies the individual members of that community. The Spirit grounds our conception of the "good life" in the presence of God and gives our identities coherence and stability. Furthermore, he enables us to *in-form* one another so that together we might attain the holiness to which we have been called.

### Identity and Story

From a narrative account of human identity, humans are acting crea-

<sup>28</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 681–82, 689.

<sup>29</sup> Paul S. Minear writes, "The temple was a heavenly-earthly reality through which human community received its ultimate context in the glorification of God and God's glorification of men" (*Images of the Church in the New Testament*, The New Testament Library [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004], 98).

tures who “have their being in time,” existing in communities that significantly shape their self-understandings.<sup>30</sup> Personal identity, consequently, consists of at least three components. First, an individual’s personal identity is understood by virtue of the individual’s own story. This story consists of their actions, beginning with their birth and ending with their death, actions they are responsible and accountable for.<sup>31</sup> The identity of the individual is tethered to their past actions. Second, the individual’s personal identity is constituted by the manner in which they relate to other persons. MacIntyre avers that each individual story is part of a larger story which precedes its existence: “We enter upon a stage which we did not design and find ourselves part of an action that was not of our own making.”<sup>32</sup> Upon this “stage” are other persons and other creatures with whom we relate in various and sundry ways.<sup>33</sup> As Robert Spaemann notes, “a person . . . can only be thought of in relation to other persons.”<sup>34</sup> We exist in communities and these communities have their own “history of actions.” Thrust upon this stage, an individual member’s conception of how to “relate properly” is partly established by the other members of this community. Additionally, these communities are teleological, encouraging their inhabitants to orient themselves in different ways and act toward a particular desired end, that is, a future conception of the “good life.”<sup>35</sup> Our identities are then constituted by present and past actions that seek to realize this “good life” in the immediate future. This series of actions comprises a “story” or “narrative” that we interpret in order to give our lives coherence. Third, the individual’s identity is constituted by how

<sup>30</sup> Colin Gunton, “The Church as a School of Virtue? Human Formation in Trinitarian Framework,” in *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. Mark Nation and Samuel Wells (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 211.

<sup>31</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 217.

<sup>32</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 213.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between “Someone” and “Something”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 27.

<sup>35</sup> James K. A. Smith provides a helpful description here. He writes, “we are teleological creatures. . . . In other words, what we love is a specific vision of the good life, an implicit picture of what we think human flourishing looks like” (*Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies 1 [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 52). This vision includes a vast swath of ideas ranging from recreational activities to social relationships which we seek to realize through our actions.

that individual subjectively interprets how they relate to other persons and their own story. It is not enough to simply relate in various ways. As reasoning creatures, the manner in which we interpret our actions as well as how we relate plays a significant role in shaping who we are. Consequently, personal identity is constituted by how an individual objectively relates to other persons as well as how that individual subjectively understands their personal histories (e.g., how we have related) and the ends they seek (i.e., what we aspire to attain in relating).

How, then, are we to understand ourselves? What “good life” should we seek? And how might the disparate events of our lives find coherence in one, particular identity? It is precisely the Spirit’s work within the church that provides a stable conception of the “good life,” re-narrates the individual’s story, and reconstitutes them within a community of true worshippers of God. In other words, in virtue of his presence we become a new people homeward bound.

### The Holy Spirit as *arrabon* of the “Good Life”

First, the Spirit’s role as *arrabon* tethers and unites the Christian community to a single conception of the “good life”: fellowship with God. On the one hand, the term *arrabon* signifies a destination. Olga Sigurdson notes that this *telos* and orientation is one of the primary distinctives of the Christian community.<sup>36</sup> Paul describes the Holy Spirit’s work in Eph 1:13–14 as the one who seals us and the one who serves as our *arrabon* for our future inheritance.<sup>37</sup> Since one can only seal that which they own, the Spirit’s presence marks the church as the people who belong to God.<sup>38</sup> He is, in a sense, their unique identifying marker. But sealing also includes the hope and promise of protection.<sup>39</sup> Since this particular people belongs

<sup>36</sup> Ola Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*, trans. Carl Olsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 596.

<sup>37</sup> The use of  $\tau\tilde{\omega}$  πνεύματι . . .  $\tau\tilde{\omega}$  ἁγίῳ in the dative case illustrates that the Spirit is the means through which the believing community is sealed by God (cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 92; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 239; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998], 151).

<sup>38</sup> Arnold writes, “A seal was indeed a mark of ownership in the ancient world. . . . All of a person’s significant possessions were marked with impression of the seal” (*Ephesians*, 92; cf. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 669).

<sup>39</sup> Relying on early Christian sources, Talbert notes that the notion of sealing may also have carried the notion of protection as seals sometimes served as amulets in Asia Minor, protecting the wearer from magical influence and demonic oppression (Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Paideia Commentaries

to God, the church can trust that he will safely bring them to his presence. On the other hand, as Janet Soskice avers, this “good life” also involves personal transformation as we become the kind of people capable of dwelling with God.<sup>40</sup> Kilner notes that the members of the ecclesial community stand in need of the renewal and, while it has begun in the present, its full realization is eschatological.<sup>41</sup> The Spirit progressively draws the individual members of the church to realize the holiness to which they have been destined. This is further communicated by the Spirit’s function as a down payment, the first installment paid by God.<sup>42</sup> As a deposit, the Spirit directs the ecclesial community to look forward to the day of redemption when God will “complete the transaction.” The Spirit serves as an eschatological marker of the ecclesial community’s future inheritance and is the means through which it is realized.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the “future” of the ecclesial community is eternal fellowship with God on the day of redemption, the day in which their identity as a holy and blameless people will be fully realized. While Christians may disagree about what precisely

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on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 49).

<sup>40</sup> Janet Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 181.

<sup>41</sup> John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 299.

<sup>42</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 241; Peter Arzt-Grabner, “Gott als verlässlicher Käufer: einige papyrologische Anmerkungen und bibeltheologische Schlussfolgerungen zum Gottesbild der Paulusbriefe,” *NTS* 57.3 (2011): 412.

<sup>43</sup> Arzt-Grabner argues, “Paul does not mention a term of payment for the balance. However, the examples from antique business life suggest that the entire business is expected to close soon” (Arzt-Grabner, “Gott als verlässlicher Käufer,” 413). Consequently, for Arzt-Grabner, the term ἀρραβών itself does not carry an eschatological dimension. However, it is important to note that the term does not appear by itself, but within a particular context in which it is linked not only to the eschatological inheritance of the Christian, but also to the future day of redemption, the day when God will realize the Christian hope and consummate his Kingdom. It seems, then, that Paul is reworking the concept of *arrabon* to fit the context of this particular passage. Consequently, as Beale notes, “the Spirit himself is viewed as the very beginning of this inheritance and not just a guarantee of the promise of its coming. The Spirit . . . has entered in part into believers, so that they have begun to obtain the inheritance of the new earth” (G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011], 763). Furthermore, Beale notes that since the Spirit is the agent of the resurrection, his presence inaugurates a participation in this eschatological resurrection existence.

this fellowship entails, Christians together look forward to the resurrection of the dead and life in the world to come. In fact, it is the Spirit himself who reveals to us that our “good life” is a life with God. As Hans Schwarz avers that the Christian community can now “rest assured that human beings are not lonesome wanderers at the fringe of the universe staring into eternal nothingness, but children of the heavenly Father who has provided for them an eternal destiny of joy and fulfillment.”<sup>44</sup>

The Spirit is the ecclesial community’s *arrabon* and thus his presence communicates their robustly eschatological nature thereby setting their narrative arc. More specifically, his presence tethers the church to the *eschaton* and fellowship with the triune God upon the appearing of Christ (cf. 1:13; 4:30).<sup>45</sup> Paul seems to intend that this language, when viewed in conjunction with the promised inheritance and the future day of redemption, serves as an anchor for the identity of the ecclesial community. Their future is not merely subjectively wished by individual members but is objectively promised by God. It is absolute and certain.<sup>46</sup> The church as a whole hears and believes in this promise of God as the Spirit directs them eschatologically.<sup>47</sup> The Spirit continually and progressively enlightens us, reminding us of our hope in this eschatological future (cf. 1:14). The ecclesial person knows the end of their story, that is, they know the *telos* to which they are intended and the common hope they share with other Christians (cf. 4:4).

### The Holy Spirit as Re-Interpreter of the Personal Story

Second, the Holy Spirit serves as the re-interpreter of our stories. Through the Spirit’s illumination, the Christian confesses that their his-

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<sup>44</sup> Hans Schwarz, *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 382.

<sup>45</sup> Thielman writes, “If we allow Paul’s other use of the sealing metaphor in Ephesians to guide us to the proper meaning, then it seems to have a stronger orientation toward the future” (*Ephesians*, 80–81).

<sup>46</sup> O’Donovan describes the absolute future as that future which has an ontic status of a promise, one given by God which is only “partially accessible to knowledge as the promise is heard and believed” (Oliver O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, Ethics as Theology 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013], 16). Consequently, the individual looks to God to fulfill this promise while lacking the fundamental ability to bring it about.

<sup>47</sup> Smith writes, “when we describe the human person or consciousness as *intentional*, we mean that it is always ‘aimed at’ something; it *intends* something as an object” (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 48). For our purposes, the Spirit is the one who orients us properly and aims us toward life with God.

tory, a life of sin and rebellion, was a result of their estrangement, alienation, and rebellion against God (cf. Eph 2:1–4, 11–13; 5:8). But now, believers are those who are being washed, whose blemishes are being removed, and who possess the hope that they will one day be resurrected to eternal life with God (cf. Eph 1:16–18). The re-interpreting work of the Spirit is illustrated in Paul's own transformed self-perception. In retrospect, Paul describes his personal history as wrongly persecuting Christ's church and sinning against God (cf. 1 Tim 1:13–15). Furthermore, he sees the vanity of this pursuit in comparison to the worth of Christ (cf. Phil 3:7–8). Yet after his conversion Paul rightly understands not only his past but also his present. He accurately perceives himself as a servant of God and God's church. This stands in contrast to how Paul interpreted these same actions prior to his conversion (cf. Acts 22:3–5; 24:14–15). In a sense, the Spirit provides corrective lenses that enable us to see ourselves rightly.

Furthermore, not only is the Christian's individual story rightly interpreted in light of the Spirit's work, but Christians find their own "stories" within the larger, overarching redemptive work of God. Christians are no longer required to reinterpret their pasts and re-tell their histories. Instead, the Christian's identity emerges in light of the redemptive work of Christ and is grounded in its promised consummation. Or, put differently, their "story" finds its place in the greater story of God's redemptive work.<sup>48</sup> He shows us our place within the greater story of God's redemption, namely, our contingency. The church only exists because God wills it. However, while all of creation is dependent upon the sustaining and providential power of the Creator, the church is a community that corporately recognizes its dependence. As members of a new man, new creation, and new temple, Christians confess that the God they worship and glorify precedes their own existence.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the church is a contingent community or, rather, it is the community of those who have been awakened to their contingency (cf. 5:13–14).<sup>50</sup> The Spirit's presence reaffirms this truth as he gathers living stones into the "household of God" and sets them

<sup>48</sup> James William McClendon, "Story, Sainthood, and Truth: 'Biography as Theology' Revisited," in *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.*, ed. Ryan Anderson Newson and Andrew C. Wright (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 216.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Sherman, *Covenant, Community, and the Spirit: A Trinitarian Theology of Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 61.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 157.

"on the foundation of apostles and prophets" (cf. 2:19–20).

Finally, the Spirit reorients our stories doxologically.<sup>51</sup> The Spirit's presence calls us to look outward and upward to the Creator as we acknowledge our place as his creatures. We begin to see ourselves as those who relate to him rightly, adopting a humble posture of worship. Our "good life" is not merely fellowship with God, but also eternal worship of God. The Spirit, as the Love of God, enables us to comprehend the depth of Christ's love leading the church to glorify God as we direct this love back to him in praise. Both of Paul's two prayers in Ephesians beseech the Lord to enable the believing community to better understand the depth of God's work in Christ through the Spirit (cf. 1:15–21; 4:14–21). In Eph 1:15–21, Paul's prayer is that the Spirit would grant the believing community insight into God himself.<sup>52</sup> Focusing on God's historical-redemptive work in Christ, Paul prays that the Spirit would lead the church to contemplate and delight in the life of the Triune God. Paul extends this thought in his second prayer (cf. 3:14–21). Again, the emphasis is on the Spirit's mission of uniting the Christian community in union to Christ (vv. 17, 18–19) and to have their lives grounded in the love of God. Not coincidentally, Paul's final prayer leads him to doxology.<sup>53</sup> As Fred Sanders notes, "Trinitarian praise points back to that triune source. This is the matrix of Trinitarian theology: wonder, love, and praise that God has done for us and our salvation something that manifests and enacts what he is in himself."<sup>54</sup> The same holds true for pneumatology. The Spirit points the church to the person and work of Christ. And in leading us to behold and marvel at our Savior, he is leading us in worship.

### The Holy Spirit as One Who Empowers and In-Forms

Finally, the Spirit rightly orients our actions in the present toward the maturation and formation of the body of Christ. If personal identity is dependent upon how we relate to other persons, we now begin to relate rightly within the ecclesial community. In other words, the Spirit works

<sup>51</sup> The phrase "to the praise of His [God's] glory" occurs three times in the first chapter of Ephesians (1:6, 12, 14). Thielman argues that this illustrates how God's salvific work is intended to result in praise and gratitude from those he has redeemed (*Ephesians*, 53). Yet even this appears to be the Spirit's work (cf. 5:18).

<sup>52</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 259.

<sup>53</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 10:219; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 492.

<sup>54</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 27.



to cultivate an ethical life.<sup>55</sup> As the Spirit reveals to us our place within the drama of redemption, he teaches us to make the best use of the immediate future and to act in a way consistent with the story he tells (Eph 5:15–16).<sup>56</sup> Christian action is distinctive in that it is done under the ministry and guidance of the Spirit in response to the gift of God's grace for the purpose of the formation in holiness. In Eph 4:11–16, it is only in virtue of Christ's gift that the members of the community are able to act in a way that leads to maturation and Christlikeness. In this passage, Paul describes how particular Christian vocations relate to Christian formation, vocations that are "Spirit-ed" vocations. Said differently, it is the Spirit's work in granting wisdom and enlightenment that enables any member of the Christian community to serve and minister rightly (cf. Eph 1:17). Since the Spirit enables human responses to divine grace and serves as the pedagogical guide for the human subject, his work ensures that members of the Christian community are rightly formed through Christian practice. As the Love of God, he enables us to love one another with the love of God (Eph 5:1–2) and to serve one another with the gifts he gives (Eph 4:11–16). The Spirit directs the Christian community in "other-oriented" action and mutual edification, equipping the believing community to communally "form" one another in accordance with the image of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

The Son ascends, sending the Spirit who equips the members of the church to serve and strengthen one another (Eph 4:13).<sup>58</sup> The Spirit reveals the person and work of Christ, calling the Christian community to

<sup>55</sup> Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 879.

<sup>56</sup> Paul describes the task of walking wisely immediately after he gives a call to awaken. Phrases such as "the days are evil" and the call to walk in wisdom reminds us that this knowledge is derived from the Spirit's revelatory work in our lives. If the wise recognize their need for divine grace as well as the gift that God has given to them in self-revelation, they seek to order their lives accordingly. In a sense, these two concepts are inseparable. "Because the days are evil, Paul says, his readers should not be foolish but understand the Lord's will" (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 357).

<sup>57</sup> This is not to imply that Christian action is always immediately positive. As David Kelsey reminds us, finite human creatures inevitably damage one another simply in virtue of their finitude (David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009], 208–9).

<sup>58</sup> Gerber argues that the interdependence between members of the body is built into the very nature of the "body" metaphor in Ephesians, a metaphor which links soteriology and Christology. "As in the homologumena, the idea of the multiplicity of limbs is united with the 'metaphor of the body'." The body

awaken and walk in holiness.<sup>59</sup> Yet the Spirit's work is not privatized or subject to the individual. We are "thrown into" this existing community, yet somehow this community is affected by our presence. The Spirit directs the Christian toward the other as we are gathered together in one building as one people, striving together toward maturity and holiness. Through their Spirit-ed gifts, the members of the church participate in the mission of the Spirit as they rebuke, exhort, correct, encourage, and serve on another in love. This too is an "other-oriented" aspect of the Spirit's mission as he orients us "other-ward." The Spirit equips us to love one another with the love of God, conforming the community to Christ, the one from whom he proceeds and to whom he testifies (cf. Eph 5:1–2).<sup>60</sup> In other words, he enables our lives, by virtue of his presence, to attain the holiness and blamelessness to which we have been elected.

If this is indeed the case, what benefit does it have for those outside of the church? If the Spirit rightly reinterprets our stories and stabilizes our conception of the "good life" as eschatological fellowship with God, he is essential for a coherent identity. Apart from his work, our perceived eschatological *telos* is transitory and unstable.<sup>61</sup> And if the only thing which provides an account for the individual's actions is the pursuit of perceived goods which lead to personal fulfillment, it seems that the individual's identity is only as stable as their commitment to a particular good. In other words, if a specific action (*x*) must be interpreted in a way that is consistent with story (*y*) in order to cohere with a particular idea of the good-life (*z*), what happens when this ideal changes (e.g., from *z* to *a*)? All of the previous actions (*x*) must then be reinterpreted in light of this new conception of the good-life (*a*). But, with such a fragile and constantly shifting self-understanding, in what sense can we say any of these stories

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must grow as the individual members mature and remain united in love" (Christine Gerber, "Die alte Braut und Christi Leib: zum ekklesiologischen Entwurf des Epheserbriefs," *NTS* 59.2 [2013]: 218).

<sup>59</sup> Turner writes, "it is the Spirit's gifts of wisdom and revelation that enlighten the 'heart' with understanding of the dramatic scope of the Christ-event and its consequences, and so enable the believers to walk in new-humanity ways" (Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Formation in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22.2 [2013]: 204).

<sup>60</sup> As Holmes observes, "The Spirit makes us like Christ to whom the Spirit belongs and from whom the Spirit proceeds. The shape of the Spirit's working indicates the shape of the Spirit's own procession in God. The Spirit as the 'Love of God' conforms us to Christ; this is what the Spirit does" (*The Holy Spirit*, 89).

<sup>61</sup> This is not to say that a non-Christian perceives rightly the end to which they are headed, but merely states that they do have an end in mind. It is a "perceived" *telos*, not their actual *telos*.

or descriptions of action are true? If this is the case, apart from the Spirit's anchoring work, we cannot fully understand "who" we are as our self-perceptions are too unstable.

Perhaps more importantly, even in the event that a human creature's perceived *telos* does not change, it still does not correspond to their actual *telos* unless they are recipients of the Spirit's illuminating work. The individual subjectively believes that they are pursuing specific ends, but in actuality they are striving in a different direction altogether. In so doing, the individual's identity fragments. For example, Manasseh engages in "despicable practices" such as institutionalizing idolatry in the temple, consulting mediums and necromancers, and shedding innocent blood (2 Kgs 21:2–6). Yet presumably such actions were directed toward a specific end: perhaps to secure the nation's deliverance from enemy forces or even procure divine favor for agricultural success. Similarly, Saul offers sacrifices in pursuit of God's favor and aid as his troops' morale plummets in the face of an impending battle (cf. 1 Sam 13:7–8, 11). Although Saul proclaims that his actions were intended to unify his troops and seek the favor of the Lord (1 Sam 13:12), the prophet Samuel rebukes the king, revealing that his actions are instead the very embodiment of folly and rebellion (1 Sam 13:13–14). Furthermore, Saul's and Manasseh's engagement in despicable worship practices leads to deformation. Saul eventually becomes a king who seeks to destroy God's chosen ruler and suffers a string of humiliating military defeats (cf. 1 Sam 19:11; 31:6–7). Manasseh offers his own heirs as sacrifices and is forcibly removed from his kingdom, becoming the personification of Judah's wickedness (cf. 2 Chr 33:6, 11). Manasseh and Saul are helpful illustrations as they both engage in liturgical practices that seem to deform them in fundamental ways. Consequently, they fail to fulfill their designated vocation as king, pursuing a perceived *telos* in perverted ways. Their actions, actions intended to achieve this perceived *telos*, are personally and socially destructive. In a sense, then, apart from the Spirit's work we are being pulled in two directions, leading to a fragmentation and deformation.

If what we have argued above is correct, the Spirit's mission is essential for a coherent account of human identity. He reconstitutes and stabilizes our conception of the "good life," reorients our actions and worship, and tells the story of God's gracious redemptive work in Christ. Additionally, our past and present are reinterpreted in light of his presence. The Spirit grounds our identities in the presence of God, reshaping our stories so that they find their culmination in fellowship with God. Still, there are questions that remain. While I have argued that the Spirit does indeed play a constitutive role in a coherent account of human identity, Jennings and Radner have rightly questioned the efficacy of the church's liturgical

life given the historical atrocities it has committed.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps greater attention must be given to philosophies and theologies of action, particularly as it pertains to the liturgical life of the church and the Spirit's supervening purposes. However, space does not permit us to attend to such matters here.

### Conclusion

It is the Spirit who makes the church unique. This is not over against the church's Christological foundation as indeed Christ Jesus is the cornerstone, head, and redeemer of his body. However, it is the Spirit's presence which constitutes the ecclesial community as a new temple, concretizing their identity as the holy people of God. An ecclesiology grounded in pneumatology highlights the pneumatological aspect of a coherent account of human identity. Consequently, we argued that the members of the ecclesial community possess a "Spirit-ed Identity" wherein their past is reinterpreted, their present actions are reoriented, and their future is tethered to the *eschaton* as holy people on the road to fellowship with God.

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<sup>62</sup> Jennings argues that, in part, the Christian teaching developed a distorted account of creation devoid of Christology, compromising itself in the face of colonial powers and adopting destructive discursive practices (Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010], 106–8, 248). Radner, in contrast, places a greater point of emphasis on how the church in Rwanda is not merely compromised by extrinsic powers, but directly responsible for and an active participant in oppression, violence, and genocide (Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* [Baylor, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012], 19–37).

meaning from non-Christian religious systems?

## Christ in the Scripture of Islam: Remnantal Revelation or Irredeemable Imposter?

Matthew Bennett  
Cedarville University

*The Qur'an endorses and reveres Jesus, providing Christian missionaries with communicative traction as they can lean into a shared Messiah. Or does it? This article compares the qur'anic Jesus ('Isa) and the biblical Jesus (Yasua') in order to investigate whether or not the apparent similarity extends beyond superficial similarities. By employing Daniel Strange's categories of "remnantal revelation" and "subversive fulfillment" as a helpful heuristic for assessment, this article contends that the two Jesus characters are not compatible. In fact, the Qur'an's use of 'Isa appears to be an attempt to subvert the message and work of the biblical Yasua'. As a result, it recommends rejection of the missiological impulse to utilize the qur'anic nomenclature in evangelism, discipleship, and Bible translation. Such attempts at contextualization are counter-productive since this name is inextricably tied to a character whose intent is to subvert the message and work of the biblical Jesus.*

*Key Words:* Arabic, contextualization, evangelism, 'Isa, Islam, missiology, Qur'an, translation, Yasua'

When Lesslie Newbigin arrived as a missionary in India, he quickly identified a major communication problem. Since the local language was permeated by Hindu theological presuppositions, the danger of syncretism attended any and all communication of biblical teaching. Newbigin reports,

I saw how, inevitably, the meaning of sentences spoken by my Christian friends was shaped by the Hindu background of the language. The words used, the only available words for God, sin, salvation, and so on, are words that have received their entire content from the Hindu religious tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Newbigin's observation reveals a perennial missionary problem: How does one communicate biblical truths using language that derives its

### Two Competing Missiological Realities

One of the realities that cross-cultural communicators around the world encounter is the one that presented itself to Newbigin in India: language is not a value-neutral communication vehicle. In the quote above, Newbigin highlights the fact that Hindus use the word "god" to refer to one of the many deities in a polytheistic pantheon. When a Christian is forced to use the same word to identify YHWH, intentional labor is required to distinguish and define the term Christianly since the default understanding of the word is neither monotheistic nor biblical.

Whereas the polytheism of Hinduism allows a Christian to readily distinguish a biblical use of the word "god" from one informed by the Vedas, such distinction is not as easily communicated when the concepts are less apparently divergent. In fact, the danger of miscommunication and even syncretism is far higher when the difference between the concepts carried by shared vocabulary is less pronounced. Hence the perennial conflict over the question, "Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?"<sup>2</sup>

In tension with this vocabulary difficulty, a missionary also encounters the need to find some point of contact or common ground with the host culture. If one is unable to make the biblical story connect with the life, experience, concerns, and hopes of a people, it is difficult to imagine how biblical truths will present themselves as relevant. Therefore, missionaries desire to find inroads into a culture that capitalize on shared concepts and ideals as vehicles by which to introduce biblical truth.

Cross-cultural communicators thus face the Scylla and Charybdis of the need to communicate clearly and biblically on the one hand and the need to communicate meaningfully and contextually on the other. Over-correction to either side threatens the success of the communication process. When communicating the gospel of Jesus to Arabic-speaking Muslims, missionaries must chart a course between these two dangers.

Among the first decisions one must make in this process is to consider what posture one will take towards the Jesus character in the Qur'an. In other words, is 'Isa in the Qur'an a bridge or a barrier to understanding the biblical gospel? Though many missiologists argue that it is crucial to recognize the qur'anic 'Isa as a shared prophet, this essay argues that the biblical Jesus (Yasua') should be presented in contrast to—rather than compatibility with—the Jesus character in the Qur'an ('Isa). In order to

<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, "The Cultural Captivity of Western Christianity," in *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 689.

<sup>2</sup> For example, one might consult the twenty-plus articles arguing the same-god question as published in the 2016 Special Edition of the EMS Occasional Bulletin.

provide some context to this contextualization discussion, however, let us first consider our overall approach to a Christian philosophy of religions.

### Daniel Strange: Categories of Revelation

As our world is increasingly hyperconnected, it is all but impossible to ignore the questions that arise from exposure to religious plurality. For Christians—such as myself—who hold an exclusivist perspective on soteriology and who understand the Bible to be the sufficient, inerrant, inspired, and authoritative revelation of God to humanity, the questions become more pronounced. Specifically, how are we to understand non-Christian religions when they espouse similar ethical ideas, they tell similar stories, and their sacred texts contain biblical characters?

This is the question that prompted Daniel Strange to write a Christian theology of religions entitled *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock*. In this book, Strange employs two unique phrases as he argues for his theology of religions that prove helpful to this essay's task: "remnantal revelation" and "subversive fulfillment."<sup>3</sup> Employing these two concepts in the task of assessing the Jesus character in the Qur'an will provide a helpful heuristic structure for missiological assessment by offering one of the most optimistic approaches to the religious other available among exclusivists. If, then, even such a positive approach to the phenomenon of Islam yet reveals basic incompatibility between the Yasua' of the Bible and the 'Isa of the Qur'an, this essay's thesis that the two characters should be contrasted will stand.

### Remnantal Revelation

In order to utilize these categories in our assessment, we must first define them. In *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock*, Strange builds upon Wilhelm Schmidt's convincing argument for original monotheism. Schmidt's single-source theory of religious pluralism helps Strange to describe and define remnantal revelation, as he writes, "There is a historical *remnantal* revelation within religious traditions, which, though entropically distorted over time . . . gives us a comparative theological explanation of 'commonalities' and 'continuities' between religious traditions, for example certain events, themes and archetypes."<sup>4</sup> Thus, Strange anticipates finding bits of dislocated special revelation stemming from a single-source and carried on collective memory and scattered within non-Christian religious teaching and practice.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 104, 267.

<sup>4</sup> Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock*, 120 (emphasis original).

The Bible indicates that at various points in history—notably during the first three chapters of Genesis and then again after the flood—every human on the face of the earth was privy to some measure of special revelation by virtue of having interacted with God himself. Over time—particularly following the Babel account—human sinfulness, dispersion, and historical distance allowed true knowledge of God to comele with superstition and sin, and eventually produced a variety of idolatrous faiths. While some may contest the wisdom of Strange's argument that this "remnantal revelation" be recognized as a separate theological category of revelation, the basic concept appears to be plausible given the biblical narrative.

This posture towards non-Christian belief systems has inherent missiological value in that it optimistically inclines a Christian to discover biblical teachings embedded in other faiths. In Strange's words, "While such revelatory material is always sinfully corrupted, distorted and degenerates to the point of being salvifically useless, it has to be factored into the phenomena of religion in general and therefore of the 'religions' in particular."<sup>5</sup> Believing that remnantal revelation might exist—though displaced and re-appropriated—within non-Christian cultural stories and mores positively predisposes a Christian to find such common ground upon which one might gain momentum for communication of the biblical gospel. Since such remnantal revelation is dislocated from the biblical narrative, however, the missionary task involves resituating this material within the proper revelatory setting of the biblical canon.

### Subversive Fulfillment

It is at this juncture that Strange's book makes its second missiological contribution. Building a case for viewing the gospel as the subversive fulfillment of non-Christian religion, Strange contends that recognizing bits and bobs of genuine truth is evangelistically helpful only insofar as one is able to demonstrate how such truth fits more appropriately within an original, biblical context than it does in the non-Christian metanarrative in which it is found.

Strange readily admits that this concept precedes him in the works of authors such as Herman Bavinck, who writes, "Christianity is not only positioned antithetically towards paganism; it is also paganism's fulfillment. . . . What is sought there, is found here."<sup>6</sup> He assumes that there

<sup>5</sup> Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock*, 104.

<sup>6</sup> Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock*, 267; Quoting from Herman

are certain religious expressions that, though they are directed at idolatrous ends, are provoked by proper human desires and longings.

Again, whether or not one adopts this language, Strange's proposal appears congruent with the biblical testimony. For example, as Rom 1:25 concludes Paul's teaching on human depravity, Paul states, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever." Thus, Paul sees the inclination to worship as essential to humanity, yet under the influence of sin, worship is misdirected to the created rather than the Creator.

The helpful categories of "remnantal revelation" and "subversive fulfillment" encourage a Christian analyzing a non-Christian religion to expect to find evidence—or remnants—of dislocated biblical revelation embedded in the stories and ethics of the religious other. Yet they also remind the Christian that this shared content is not beneficial unless it is exposed as belonging more properly within the canon of Scripture and fitting within the narrative of the biblical gospel. Having defined these terms, this essay will now turn from the theoretical to the practical by applying these two fruitful aspects of Strange's theology of religions to the specific case of missiological engagement with Muslims.

### Remnantal Revelation and the Case of Islam

In particular, this essay's attention is focused on the purportedly shared character of Jesus. As one publication puts the matter, "Among the major world religions, Islam is the only non-Christian faith that recognizes the person of Jesus."<sup>7</sup> For a Christian eager to find common

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Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 319–20. On the same page, Strange quotes Hendrick Kraemer, "Continuity or Discontinuity," in *The Authority of Faith: International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras*, ed. G. Paton (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 5, who provides Strange with the phrase "subversive fulfillment" as he writes, "Only an attentive study of the Bible can open the eyes to the fact that Christ, 'the power of God' and the 'wisdom of God', stands in contradiction to the power and wisdom of man. Perhaps in some respects it is proper to speak of contradictory or subversive fulfillment."

<sup>7</sup> "A Comprehensive Listing of References to Jesus ('Isa) in the Qur'an," *NAMB Apologetics*, March 30, 2016, <https://www.namb.net/apologetics-blog/a-comprehensive-listing-of-references-to-jesus-isa-in-the-qur-an/>. This statement, however, assumes that 'Isa and Yasua' are the same undifferentiated character. This same assumption can be seen in secular books, such as John Kaltner and Younus Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition* (New

ground with a Muslim neighbor, an Islamic Jesus provides an apparently obvious point of contact. In fact, many missionaries have adopted the qur'anic name 'Isa to refer to Jesus over and against the name Yasua' as it appears in the Arabic Bible.<sup>8</sup>

In so doing, such approaches view the Jesus character of the Qur'an positively as dislocated remnantal revelation waiting to be relocated into the biblical narrative. Taking a potentially redemptive approach, then, they intend to demonstrate 'Isa in his proper setting to subversively fulfill his role in the Qur'an. However, before making the positive assessment that 'Isa is remnantal revelation, one must inquire if, in fact, the Qur'an has already employed 'Isa in its own attempt to subvert the biblical gospel. To do this, we must investigate 'Isa in the Qur'an.

### 'Isa In the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, 'Isa is a character who was born of a virgin named Miriam (Q 19:19–22), known as a prophet and messenger of God (Q 4:171), and whose ministry confirmed the Torah given before him (Q 5:46). These biographical similarities—in tandem with the Qur'an's claim to continue prior revelation—indicate that 'Isa is the qur'anic referent for the biblical Jesus.

As a result, Christians working among Muslim populations often view the name 'Isa as being interchangeable with the Arabic Bible's name for Jesus, Yasua'. Furthermore, many advocate for the strategic value of intentionally using the qur'anic Arabic name for Jesus. For example, John Travis contends,

Although the Qur'an contains only portions of the accounts of [biblical figures'] lives, these Arabic names clearly refer to the same historical figures that are described in the Bible. For the sake of recognition and religious acceptability, it is crucial that [qur'anic]

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York: T&T Clark, 2018), 76. When Jesus is paralleled with 'Isa the implied assumption is that 'Isa is the Arabic name for Jesus when it is in fact an explicitly qur'anic Arabic name.

<sup>8</sup> See Muhammad Sanavi, "The Insider Movement and Iranian Muslims," in *Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts*, ed. Ayman Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 443. It should be noted that Sanavi is speaking about Farsi-speaking Iranian Christians who have a long history of having used the name 'Isa to refer to the biblical Jesus. One of the limitations of this essay, then, is that it is focused on Arabic-speaking populations where Arabic-speaking Christians are known.

names be used in translations of the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

As Travis's quote demonstrates, the choice of vocabulary doesn't merely occur at the level of interpersonal conversation but has also been incorporated into various Muslim Idiom Translations (MIT) of the Bible in Arabic.<sup>10</sup> We will return to the question of vocabulary when we consider the missiological ramifications of this discussion. For now, we must consider the teaching that the Qur'an attaches to the name 'Isa before making any recommendations.

### Biblical Similarity

As noted above, the author of the Qur'an clearly intends the reader to connect the person of 'Isa to the biblical Jesus. That this is the case can be seen in at least five different ways. First, the Qur'an recognizes 'Isa as the son of the virgin Miriam (Mary).<sup>11</sup> In fact, 'Isa is known throughout the Qur'an in connection with his mother as *'Isa bin Miraim*.<sup>12</sup> On the surface, 'Isa's virgin-birth to a woman named Mary appears to parallel the biblical account of Jesus's birth.

Second, the Qur'an regularly attributes to Jesus the role of continuing and confirming prior revelation. For instance, Qur'an 5:46 reads, "And in their footsteps We followed up with Jesus, son of Mary, confirming what was with him of the Torah, and We gave him the Gospel, containing guidance and light, and confirming what was with him of the Torah, and as

<sup>9</sup> John Travis, "Producing and Using Meaningful Translations of the Taurat, Zabur, and Injil," *IJFM* 23.2 (Summer 2006): 74. It is worth noting that Travis—along with most of those who advocate for the use of Islamic names and vocabulary—works among populations whose first language is not Arabic.

<sup>10</sup> For a helpful discussion of the wide-ranging translation decisions that often attend Muslim-sensitive translations, see Adam Simnowitz, "Appendix: Do Muslim Idiom Translations Islamicize the Bible? A Glimpse Behind the Veil," in *Muslim Converts to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 501–23.

<sup>11</sup> Qur'an 19:19–21: "He said, 'I am only a messenger of your Lord (sent) to grant you a boy (who is) pure.' She said, 'how can I have a boy, when no human being has touched me, nor am I a prostitute?' He said, 'So (will it be)! Your Lord has said; 'It is easy for Me. And (it is) to make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. It is a thing decreed.'"

<sup>12</sup> John Kaltner and Younus Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition* (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 76, write, "The prophet and messenger Jesus/'Isa is mentioned by name twenty-five times in the Qur'an. On nine occasions the name appears by itself, and the other sixteen times it is found in combination with the descriptors 'son of Mary' and/or 'Messiah.'"

guidance and admonition to the ones who guard (themselves)."<sup>13</sup> This, too, appears to be consonant with the biblical testimony of Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's scriptures.

Related to this, the third connection between 'Isa of the Qur'an and the Jesus of the Bible is that he is known as a moral teacher and example.<sup>14</sup> For instance, in Qur'an 43:63 Jesus discloses his mission as one sent to clarify prior revelation, saying, "I have brought you the wisdom, and (I have done so) to make clear to you some of your differences. Guard (yourselves) against God and obey me." Immediately following this verse, Jesus reminds his audience that he is teaching them the straight path that will please God. As a teacher of the law and one who instructs in the ways of God, 'Isa parallels the role of Jesus as teacher in the Gospels.

A fourth way that 'Isa in the Qur'an might be seen to exhibit biblical similarity is his eschatological role. In Qur'an 43:61, according to some readings, 'Isa returns as a sign of the hour of judgement.<sup>15</sup> Thus, for many commentators, 'Isa's return is one of the signs that the day of judgement is imminent.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, in the Qur'an 'Isa is known for having performed miracles. In Qur'an 5:110, God addresses Jesus, saying, "[Remember when you] healed the blind and the leper by My permission. And when you brought forth the dead by My permission."<sup>17</sup> Since signs of this nature are predicted in the Old Testament and also recorded in numerous places throughout the gospels, 'Isa as a miracle worker also appears to have a counterpart in the Jesus of the Bible.

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise noted, English renderings of the Qur'an are drawn from A. J. Droge, *The Qur'an: A New Annotated Translation* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Kaltner and Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an*, 79. Kaltner and Mirza cite Qur'an 43:57 and 59 where Jesus is seen as a moral exemplar (*mathal*).

<sup>15</sup> One could render the pronoun "he/it" in this verse as a reference to Jesus—and subsequently his return—as a sign of the hour of judgement. However, one could also read the pronoun as a reference to the Qur'an. See Droge, *The Qur'an*, 332n61.

<sup>16</sup> Al Tabari, "Qur'an 43:61," in *Tafsir Al-Tabari*, <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabari/sura43-aya61.html>. See also, Ibn Katheer, "Qur'an 43:61," in *Tafsir Ibn Katheer*, <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura43-aya61.html#katheer>. See also, Jalalalayn, "Qur'an 43:61," in *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=43&tAyahNo=61&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>. See also, Ibn 'Abbas, "Qur'an 43:61," in *Tannir al-Miqbas min Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas*, <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=43&tAyahNo=61&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Qur'an 3:49 for a similar list of Jesus's signs, though here he declares his own works.

These five similarities are often assumed to be sufficient to prove that the Qur'an is describing the biblical Jesus. Taken positively, many Christian communicators are encouraged to leverage the similarities listed above to provide good momentum for describing the gospel of the biblical Jesus. Yet, these are not the only instances in which the Qur'an features 'Isa.

### Non-Biblical References

In addition to the biblical themes mentioned above, several examples of extrabiblical material have also woven their way into the qur'anic story of 'Isa. First, in Qur'an 19:30–33, 'Isa speaks to Mary miraculously as a newborn baby, explaining his own calling, saying,

Surely I am a servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He has made me blessed wherever I am, and He has charged me with the prayer and the alms as long as I live, and (to be) respectful to my mother. He has not made me a tyrant (or) miserable. Peace (be) upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive.

Apparently prior to this event, an angelic messenger had prophesied to Miriam regarding her infant 'Isa, saying that he will speak from the cradle in Qur'an 3:46.<sup>18</sup>

The second event that the Qur'an records that does not have a biblical equivalent involves 'Isa forming birds from clay and then bringing them to life by God's permission. This story is recorded in Qur'an 3:49 and referenced again in Qur'an 5:110. Both of these accounts appear to have parallels in several second-century documents, among which are the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these accounts, the Qur'an also includes apparent references to 'Isa clarifying his role that neither directly fit with biblical material nor do they flatly contradict it. One such example comes from Qur'an 5:116, which records a dialogue between God and 'Isa:

(Remember) when God said, "Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to

<sup>18</sup> Qur'an 3:46 states, "He will speak to the people (while he is still) in the cradle and in adulthood, and (he will be) one of the righteous."

<sup>19</sup> Mark Anderson, *The Qur'an in Context: A Christian Exploration* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 209–10, notes that the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew includes a speaking infant Jesus counseling his mother. Also, Kaltner and Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an*, 79, connect the clay birds event with a very similar account in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. This connection is also recognized in Droge, *The Qur'an*, 35n73, where Droge specifically cites the Infancy Gospel of Thomas 2:2–4 as the apparent parallel account.

the people, "Take me and my mother as two gods instead of God (alone)?" He said, "Glory to You! It is not for me to say what I have no right (to say). If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within me, but I do not know what is within You. Surely You—You are the knower of the unseen."

Though this passage is often drawn up into Islamic polemic against the Christian understanding of the Trinity, it is treated here as extrabiblical material due to the fact that it is not representative of any conception of the Trinity known within Christianity.<sup>20</sup> Finally, we must turn our attention to the elements in the Qur'an that depict 'Isa as a character in conflict with the biblical Jesus.

### Anti-Biblical Elements

While the preceding material is often viewed positively by Christian communicators as potential common ground to leverage in evangelism, perhaps the most important material about 'Isa contained in the Qur'an is that which contradicts the Bible. In several places throughout the Qur'an, 'Isa explicitly functions as an opponent of Christian teaching.

The first example is found in the presentation of 'Isa as decidedly nothing more than a prophet and messenger. One reads this contention clearly in Qur'an 5:75, which states,

The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger. Messengers have passed away before him. His mother was a truthful woman. They both ate food. See how We make clear the signs to them, then see how deluded they are.

Likewise, Qur'an 2:136 equates Jesus with the prior prophets, saying,

Say: "We believe in God, and what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit."

These references, along with Qur'an 4:171 and 42:13, demonstrate that the role of 'Isa as a prophet, messenger, and bringer of religion is no different than that of his predecessors.

Second, the Qur'an is ambiguous in its presentation of 'Isa's death. In

<sup>20</sup> Kaltner and Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an*, 78, comment, "This passage appears to claim that Christians worship Mary/Maryam as a deity and that they consider her to be a part of the Trinity."

some places, 'Isa anticipates the day of his death, such as Qur'an 19:33. Likewise, some take the several qur'anic references to God's assumption of Jesus to the heavens to be a parallel idea to resurrection and ascension found in the Bible, and therefore to presuppose his death.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, scholars such as Gabriel Said Reynolds have argued convincingly that the most natural reading of the Qur'an does not deny Jesus's death.

Historically, however, most Muslim commentators have understood Qur'an 4:155–159 to deny that 'Isa was killed at all.<sup>22</sup> Such a denial comes primarily from verses 157–158 which state,

And for [the Jews'] saying, "Surely we killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of God"—yet they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it (only) seemed like (that) to them. . . . Surely they did not kill him. No! God raised him to Himself.

Interpretive difficulty presents itself perennially over the issue of how to understand the phrase, "it (only) seemed like (that) to them." Many exegetes explain the phrase to mean that someone who looked like 'Isa was crucified in his place while God spared 'Isa from such an ignoble death by assuming him to heaven. Thus, 'Isa does not serve his followers as a substitutionary sacrifice. In fact, to the contrary, one of his followers substitutes himself in 'Isa's place.

Regardless of how one understands this passage, the Qur'an elsewhere prevents one from believing that 'Isa's death—if it occurred—could have substitutionary or atoning value for those who follow him. This is because Qur'an 17:13–15a teaches that each person is inescapably responsible for

<sup>21</sup> See Qur'an 3:55 and 5:117 as alternative passages that speak of God taking Jesus to the heavenly realms, though the Arabic verb translated by Droge and others as "took you" and "took me" respectively (*mutawaffik/tawaffayitni*) is elsewhere in the Qur'an understood to be a reference to death.

<sup>22</sup> For the argument against reading the Qur'an to imply that Jesus never died, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?" *Bulletin of SOAS* 72.2 (2009): 237–58. For historical Islamic interpretations, see the various explanations given in Al Tabari, "Qur'an 4:157," *Tafsir Al-Tabari*, <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura4-aya157.html#tabary>. These accounts variously suggest that either one of Jesus companions volunteered or Jesus chose one of his friends to be made to look like him and to take the honor of being martyred in his place. Still other accounts say that Judas was made to look like 'Isa and crucified in his place. Most all of the accounts recorded by al Tabari, however, show that Jesus was not crucified or killed, but was assumed into heaven by God. For an English summary, see Kaltner and Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an*, 81.

his or her own deeds, and none can bear away personal responsibility for another:

And every human—We have fastened his fate to him on his neck, and We shall bring forth a book for him on the Day of Resurrection, which he will find unrolled. "Read your book! You are sufficient today as a reckoner against yourself." Whoever is (rightly) guided, is guided only for himself, and whoever goes astray, goes astray only against himself. No one bearing a burden bears the burden of another.<sup>23</sup>

If no one can alleviate or carry the burden of another, there is no room for substitutionary atonement for sins. Thus, even if one contends that 'Isa died, it was not in the place of sinners.

Finally, in Qur'an 61:6, 'Isa predicts that there will be one named Ahmad who will follow him: "And (remember) when Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'Sons of Israel! Surely I am the messenger of God to you, confirming what was before me of the Torah, and bringing good news of a messenger who will come after me, whose name will be Ahmad.'" Nearly all Islamic commentators understand this to be a direct reference to Muhammad.

Reading the qur'anic prediction backwards, then, Abdullah Yusuf Ali expresses a common contention that the biblical Jesus also anticipated a coming prophet named Muhammad. Those making such an argument rely on a theoretical corruption of the Greek word *perichylos* to read *paracletos* in three places throughout John 14–16. Ali summarizes the position, writing,

"*Ahmad*" or "*Muhammad*," the Praised One, is almost a translation of the Greek word *Perichylos*. In the present Gospel of John 14:16, 15:26, and 16:7, the word "Comforter" in the English version is for the Greek word *Paracletos*. . . . Our doctors contend that *Paracletos* is a corrupt reading for *Perichylos*, and that in their original saying of Jesus there was a prophecy of our holy Prophet *Ahmad* by name.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, not only does the Qur'an indicate that 'Isa expected Muhammad,

<sup>23</sup> See also Qur'an 6:164, which teaches that every person will be responsible for their own deeds.

<sup>24</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2005), 1540n5438. See also Droge, *The Qur'an*, 383nn8–9. Droge illustrates a common Islamic teaching that connects 'Isa's prediction of a coming messenger to the biblical references to the *paraclete* that Jesus anticipates in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7. Many such commentators claim that the biblical Jesus predicts Muhammad's advent using the *paraclete* reference in the same way as the qur'anic 'Isa predicts it using Ahmad.



but traditional Islamic theology teaches that the Jesus of the Bible also pointed to his coming.

In summary of the Qur'an's teaching about 'Isa, then, one sees that the superficial similarities this character shares with the Jesus of the Bible prove less important to defining the character than do the deep-seated antitheses. 'Isa is a virgin-born prophet, yet his virgin birth does not have any bearing on Adamic headship, nor does his ontology extend beyond his prophetic role. Most damningly, however, 'Isa does not declare from the cross, "It is finished." Rather, avoiding the cross completely, 'Isa prophesies, "Ahmed is coming."

### Missiological Implications

The discussion of remnantal revelation presented in this essay up to this point proves to be much more than mere theory. How a person views the material—ethical, historical, and biographical—found in the Qur'an that is ostensibly shared with the Bible radically shapes the approach to ministry among Muslims that one takes. For example, in an effort to build bridges with Muslims and to gain communicative momentum, many have taken the approach of affirming the basic idea that Muslims and Christians both revere Jesus, though in different ways.

Out of the good desire to connect with Muslim neighbors, some missiologists have advocated for giving preference to the name 'Isa over and against the biblical Arabic name Yasua'. One such advocate, Harley Talman, states his position; "Workers desirous of communicating Christ to Muslims need to learn the distinctively Islamic language."<sup>25</sup> However, Talman does not only recommend that Christian communicators understand Islamic language, he goes on to say that it should be employed and given preference in gospel presentations. Talman even claims that, "Islamic language is needed for clear communication."<sup>26</sup> Talman's support for this strong claim is limited to two observations.

First, Talman states that Islamic language is necessary because using Christian vocabulary identifies a speaker with a Christian subculture. By giving deference to Islamic vocabulary, one then communicates respect for Islamic heritage.<sup>27</sup> Second, Talman notes that some Christian words and names are foreign to Muslims. Thus, using unknown terminology will

<sup>25</sup> Harley Talman, "Comprehensive Contextualization," *IJFM* 21.1 (Spring 2004): 7.

<sup>26</sup> Talman, "Comprehensive Contextualization," 7.

<sup>27</sup> Talman, "Comprehensive Contextualization," 7.

cause psychological and emotional barriers to arise as they consider the message.<sup>28</sup> What Talman assumes, however, is that Islamic vocabulary is interchangeable with and conceptually equivalent to Christian vocabulary. He does not address whether or not using the Islamic idiom obscures the biblical message.

Nonetheless, this preference for the qur'anic nomenclature has been the operating principle behind many of the MIT such as the *Kitab al-Sharif* translation of the Bible.<sup>29</sup> Prior to offering criticism of this translation principle, it is important to consider how advocates best articulate their commendation of 'Isa language. To do so, we will utilize Strange's categories of remnantal revelation and subversive fulfillment in order to determine what posture a missiologist should take in regarding the missiological value of the Qur'an's 'Isa character.

### Is 'Isa Remnantal Revelation?

The first step is to consider whether or not 'Isa provides an instance of remnantal revelation. Certainly, one might see the apparent similarities listed above as opportunities to extract and reframe elements of 'Isa's biography according to the biblical account. For example, one might view the fact that both 'Isa and Yasua' were virgin-born as an instance of remnantal revelation.

Moving from this affirmation to the demonstration of biblical subversive fulfillment, then, one might ask what reason the Qur'an would have for affirming the virgin-birth of a prophet who is ontologically identical to other naturally-born prophets? Turning to Rom 5:12–21, one might then demonstrate that biblically speaking, Jesus's virgin birth allows him to escape the original affliction of Adamic headship and sin-guilt. Thus, in its larger biblical setting, Jesus's virgin birth allows him to take up the vocation of both a spotless sacrifice and a blameless high priest.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in this portion of 'Isa's biography, one finds fertile ground for affirming

<sup>28</sup> Talman, "Comprehensive Contextualization," 7.

<sup>29</sup> Some arguments in support of these types of translations can be found in Travis, "Producing and Using Meaningful Translations," 74; Talman, "Comprehensive Communication," 7. For a devastating critique of these models, see Adam Simnowitz, "Appendix: Do Muslim Idiom Translations Islamicize the Bible? A Glimpse behind the Veil," in *Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts*, ed. Ayman Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 501–23.

<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 7–10 shows Jesus to be the sacrifice and high priest that the Levitical system anticipates.

a shared concept, exposing divergent theology underlying the shared concept, and evangelizing in light of the more fitting role the shared concept enjoys within biblical narrative.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the potential for leveraging parts of 'Isa's biography as subversive fulfillment, the anti-biblical aspects of 'Isa yet remain a part of this qur'anic character and are inextricably embedded in the distinctly qur'anic signifier 'Isa.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, missiologists such as Talman continue to commend 'Isa as fertile common ground, citing statistics that claim that the biggest factor in Muslims deciding to follow Christ is that which is written about 'Isa in the Qur'an.<sup>33</sup> Here again, as above, Talman leans on subjective reports as support for capitalizing on the conversational momentum that comes from affirming 'Isa as a shared character.

If, however, such reports are admitted as providing sufficient warrant to commend the use of Islamic terms, one cannot help but reach a point of confusion when detractors produce their own statistics and data that expose the use of Islamic terms as untenable. For instance, Fred Farrokh

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<sup>31</sup> See the article by Christopher Flint, "How Does Christianity 'Subversively Fulfil' Islam?" *SFM* 8 (2012): 776–822. Flint provides multiple such examples following a progression of affirming common ground, exposing contradiction, and evangelizing through subversive fulfillment.

<sup>32</sup> Travis, "Meaningful Translations," 7, attempts to dislocate the name 'Isa from its qur'anic appearance, saying, "When translators learn that the term *Isa* predates Islam and that it was derived from Christian sources, they are much more inclined to use it." However, Travis's presentation of this concept obscures the fact that there is no scholarly consensus as to the origins of the Arabic word, 'Isa. Consulting the sources that Travis footnotes as evidence of his claim merely reference the theory of Syriac Christian origins of 'Isa. Travis's presentation of 'Isa as a pre-Islamic Christian name for Jesus as a settled fact is misleading at best. Compare the renowned scholar, Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 83–84n64, who demonstrates the lack of scholarly consensus, writing, "Of the many explanations for the form of Jesus's name as it appears in the Qur'an, the most reasonable one from this writer's point of view is that it reflects an Arabic speaker's spelling of what he hears in an Arabic articulation of the common East Syrian form of the name: *Isbo*." Even apart from noting the hypothetical nature of Griffith's proposal, it is academically irresponsible for Travis to suggest that 'Isa is established as a pre-Islamic referent to Jesus.

<sup>33</sup> Harvey Talman, "Muslim Followers of Jesus, Muhammad, and the Qur'an," in *Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts*, ed. Ayman Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 130.

conducted a series of interviews with Muslims and believers from a Muslim background in his PhD dissertation. Farrokh found that 95 percent of the interviewees understood the Jesus of the Bible to be a different character than 'Isa in the Qur'an.<sup>34</sup> Given the conflicting subjective perspectives, we cannot decide this question merely by referring to reports of success or failure. Lest we entrust our missiological strategy to anecdotal observations, as Christian communicators we must reach beyond receptor responses to consider the inextricably Islamic baggage that comes with the name 'Isa.

### Is 'Isa Already an Attempt at Subversive Fulfillment?

As 'Isa appears in the Qur'an—and as his role is traditionally interpreted within Islam—this character is overtly at odds with gospel of the biblical Jesus. 'Isa is neither the Son of God nor does he die an atoning death accompanied by a victorious resurrection.<sup>35</sup> Still, some scholars believe that one can liberate this character from traditional Islamic understanding while retaining the missiological advantage of preexisting Islamic reverence for 'Isa through a christocentric reading of the Qur'an.<sup>36</sup>

To respond to such a claim, we must first ask if it is possible to provide such a reading of the Qur'an. It is possible to proof-text sections that discuss *Isa al-Masih* and isolate them from the rest of the Qur'an. However, this is hardly a christocentric reading. At best, such a project would be a christo-exclusive reading of the Qur'an.

In fact, if one isolates the qur'anic references to Jesus, it becomes apparent that the Qur'an will not admit of such an 'Isa-centric reading because 'Isa is simply not the center of the Qur'an's message. As Sidney Griffith insightfully notes, "The recollections and reminiscences in the Qur'an of the biblical and para-biblical narratives of the patriarchs and

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<sup>34</sup> Fred Farrokh, "Will the *Umma* Veto SITO? Assessing the Impact of Theological Deviation on Social Acceptability in Muslim Communities," *IJFM* 32.2 (Summer 2015): 74.

<sup>35</sup> See the necessity of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection according to Paul's gospel in 1 Cor 15:3–5.

<sup>36</sup> Talman, "Muslim Followers," 124. Citing Bradford Greer, Talman casually dismisses any critique by accusing Western Christians of "theolonialism" when they deny Muslim followers of 'Isa the right to interpret the Qur'an in such a way as to make its teaching accord with biblical Christology.

prophets are not random . . . they are selected according to Islam's distinctive 'prophetology.'"<sup>37</sup> In other words, the apparently shared prophetic characters are made to play different parts in the Qur'an than they do in the Bible. Thus, to interpret 'Isa in such a way as to make him the focal point of the Qur'an's teaching is to fight against the grain of the entire Qur'an.

Rather, the distinctive prophetology Griffith identifies dismisses the salvation-history of the biblical narrative in which these prophets feature, while utilizing de-historicized and dislocated biblical characters to promote the qur'anic idea that all prior prophets proclaimed the singular message of Islam.<sup>38</sup> Thus, when one attempts a christo-exclusive reading of the Qur'an, one encounters a character who—like Abraham, Moses, and David before him—lends credibility to Islam and Muhammad while undermining the Bible's historical-redemptive narrative.

The Qur'an has capitalized on Christian reverence for the Jesus character but recast him in a different role and a different story. It appears, then, that 'Isa in the Qur'an—along with Abraham, Moses, and David—is himself a qur'anic attempt at subversive fulfillment of the Christian concept of Jesus the Messiah. If 'Isa is a character whose purpose is already bound to the task of subverting biblical Christology, one wonders if it is wiser to attempt to subversively fulfill such a character or to expose the character as an irreconcilable imposter.

### Implications for Missionary Vocabulary

Finally, we come to the question of missionary vocabulary. We have seen that it is improper to view the entire character of 'Isa as remnantal revelation. Likewise, this essay has shown that the 'Isa character himself appears to be a qur'anic attempt at subversive fulfillment of Christian Christology. It remains to inquire as to whether or not the initial missiological traction one may gain through using the qur'anic name 'Isa gives sufficient warrant to the missionary to consider such a decision wise.

As we have seen above, there are aspects of the biblical Yasua' that appear to have benign counterparts in the qur'anic 'Isa. One might readily seize on these opportunities to demonstrate how Yasua' has some commonalities with 'Isa. But since this character cannot be extracted wholesale from the Islamic context without bringing along anti-biblical elements, and since he must be repositioned as the center to which the biblical story points in contrast to a mere mouthpiece for Islam, one wonders what missiological value remains in using such a baggage-laden name. The claimed similarity must ultimately give way to a contradiction if a

communicator of the gospel is to be true to the Bible.

Though the Muslim audience may respond with greater initial enthusiasm to hear and read more about 'Isa due to his status as a highly revered Islamic prophet, the biblically-faithful missionary will have to deconstruct the 'Isa character to the point that he will no longer be recognizable as he appears in the Qur'an. Having deconstructed the qur'anic character, then, the Christian will need to reconstruct a biblical understanding of this character that is even further afield of the Qur'an's prophetology and theology. At the point of actually communicating this character's role in the biblical gospel, then, he no longer bears any resemblance to the 'Isa of the Qur'an and the common ground that promised communicative traction has been eroded from beneath the communicator's feet.

### Conclusion

In the end, this essay has labored to demonstrate, using the categories of remnantal revelation and subversive fulfillment, that the Jesus character portrayed in the Qur'an is not the common ground that is often claimed by Muslims and missiologists alike. In fact, the Jesus of the Qur'an is neither remnantal revelation nor a displaced character to be rescued back into his biblical setting. Rather, 'Isa should be treated as an imposter to be exposed.

Furthermore, the distinctively qur'anic baggage that comes with this nomenclature is embedded in the name. For former Muslims who have cut their theological teeth on qur'anic vocabulary while following Islam, such language is likely to retain its former meaning long after a Christian evangelist has painted a biblical portrait of 'Isa. The difference between the biblical Yasua' and the qur'anic 'Isa is made much clearer theologically and narratively when one can maintain lexical distinction. Fortunately, the Arabic language provides the Christian missionary with just such an opportunity in the biblical name Yasua'.

In light of this argument, this essay concludes that it is unwise to refer to Jesus by the name 'Isa. To be faithful to the Bible, one will inevitably have to redefine this character in order to distinguish the biblical Jesus from the qur'anic 'Isa. Since the Arabic-speaking world already has both a Christian and a Muslim name for the Jesus character, the labor of making such a distinction benefits from the linguistic distance presented by the two different names.

Ultimately, it appears that the 'Isa character is designed to function as a trojan horse whose hidden freight purposes to infiltrate the biblical narrative and redirect it towards an Islamic *telos*. In our evangelism, discipleship, and Bible translation, we do well to leave all such wooden horses

<sup>37</sup> Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 63.

outside the gate.

## Book Reviews

David Marcus. *The Masorah of the Former Prophets in the Leningrad Codex*. Vol. 3, 1 *Samuel*. Texts and Studies 14. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018. vi + 506 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1463205973. \$182.00

Few Bible readers are overly concerned with the Masorah—the scribal notes surrounding the medieval manuscripts. The diminutive typeface appears to confirm its inconsequential status, and several new editions exclude it altogether.<sup>1</sup> The astute student may take note of the odd circellus (small ring) above uncommon words, spellings, or combinations of words in *Biblia Hebraica*.<sup>2</sup> She knows to find the appropriate accompanying Masorah parva (Mp) comment on the outside margins. A few of the more common abbreviations (ספ “defective,” ק “to be read”) and the numbers (ב “twice”) may be familiar, but many of the notes and Masorah magna (Mm) references are far from transparent.<sup>3</sup> While this Hebrew-Aramaic amalgam was crafted to ensure a particular, fastidious textualization, most modern readers are mystified by the minor textual comments, tallies, and cross-references. David Marcus addresses such issues in *The Masorah of the Former Prophets in the Leningrad Codex* [MFPLC].

Marcus’s research represents a recent revival of Masoretic studies. This trend is observable in the growing incorporation of these ancient textual notes into the *Biblia Hebraica* editions. With the Second Rabbinic

Bible of 1525 (*Migra’ot Gedolot*), which served as the basis of the KJV and nearly all printed Hebrew Bibles into the last century, an attempt was made to represent the Masoretic Text (MT) tradition, including the Mp and Mm, using various (unidentified) manuscripts. In the middle of the nineteenth century though, with the rediscovery of an early, complete manuscript, the Leningrad Codex (M<sup>L</sup>) or Firkovich B 19<sup>A</sup>, a shift from eclecticism to documentary representation began.

*BHK* includes a facsimile of the text of M<sup>L</sup> with eclectic Mp notes but no systematic treatment of the Mm. *BHS* adds an innovative catalogue of Mm notes as an apparatus below the text: Using a reference number from Mm 1 to Mm 4271, Gérard Weil indexed and standardized the M<sup>L</sup> lists in a supplemental volume. *BHQ* finally realizes “an essentially diplomatic representation” of the M<sup>L</sup> Masorah instead of favoring an aggregated “totality of data” of earlier diplomatic collations and corrected editions.<sup>4</sup> In addition to a glossary of common Masorah abbreviations, appendices include commentaries that translate and discuss the notes. Dotan and Reich recently published a comprehensive index of the M<sup>L</sup> Masorah as a digital resource.<sup>5</sup> And now we can add the six volumes of *MFPLC*.

The third *MFPLC* volume includes all annotations from M<sup>L</sup> 1 Samuel. Following each verse, the Mp and Mm notes for each lemma are transcribed and translated in their entirety, even if the information may be incorrect or inconsistent. Verse lists are provided both with the original “catchwords” and modern chapter-verse references. For example, the Mm at the top of M<sup>L</sup> folio 150 indicates that צופים (1 Sam 1:1) occurs ג' פעמים “three times, <once> plene (and) twice defective” (p. 2). The references are given with the Hebrew catchwords in order (Num 23:14; Jer 6:17; 1 Sam 1:1). This presentation is far superior to *BHS* which inverts the original Mm note and collapses it into the Mp with reference to Mm 1528. Weil correctly includes the verse list; elsewhere they are rearranged (cf. Mm 1529).

Accompanying this dizzying mass of data is Marcus’s clearly written commentary. These annotations are worth the not insignificant cost of these hefty volumes. Regarding 1 Sam 19:10, בלילה הוא ד שתה ודמך לה, is explained: “The Masorah notes the *four* occurrences of this phrase, without the expected def. article on הוא, as opposed to the regular phrase בלילה שהוא שתה ודמך” (p. 319). The list is enumerated with the corresponding Hebrew *Vorlage*: Gen 19:33 (וַיִּשְׁכַּב), 30:16 (וַיִּשְׁכַּב), 32:23 (וַיִּשְׁכַּב), and 1 Sam 19:10 (וַיִּשְׁכַּב).

<sup>4</sup> “Introduction,” *BHQ*, x–xi.

<sup>5</sup> Aron Dotan and Nurit Reich, *Masora Thesaurus* (OakTree Software, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Aron Dotan ed., *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001); Philip Brown and Bryan Smith, *A Reader’s Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Donald Vance, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: A Reader’s Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica* [BHK] (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937); Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* [BHS] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997); A. Schenker, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* [BHQ] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004–).

<sup>3</sup> See Gérard E. Weil, *Masorah Gedolah in xta codicem Leningradensem B 19 a* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1971); Mordechai Breuer, *The Biblical Text in the Jerusalem Crown Edition and Its Sources in the Masora and Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: Keren Ha-Masora, 2003); Israel Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1980); Page Kelley, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

*MFPLC* is an unparalleled *tour de force* but is not without suggested improvements. First, while including the entire front matter of the first volume may be unwieldy, an abridged version of Chapter 6 (“How the Corpus is Arranged”) would provide quick reference in each of the other volumes. As it stands, one must have Volume One handy if the differences between abbreviations, notations, bibliographic references, or underline/bold verse references must be queried. Second, a helpful addition would be an index of the disparities between *BHS* and *M<sup>L</sup>*, particularly the annotations not found in *M<sup>L</sup>* and thus not included in *MFPLC*. Examples include an *Mp* note with שתי נשים (1 Sam 1:2) indicating the only other occurrence of this sequence at Gen 4:17, and both an *Mp* and *Mm* note with the first word of 1 Sam 1:7. Third, a cross-referenced index to Weil’s *Mm* numbers would be beneficial for readers using *BHS*.

Had *MFPLC* merely represented and translated the *M<sup>L</sup>* Masorah, Marcus would deserve our appreciation (cf. the volumes of *BHQ* for several of these books, which are decades from completion). But his care to evaluate the textual wealth of these ancient scholars will most certainly bring life to their methods of text production and even to their impetuses for constructing the MT tradition. Marcus deserves wholehearted acclaim for moving forward the field of Masoretic studies. The value of *MFPLC* cannot be overstated for the study of the Former Prophets. And we await his (hopefully!) forthcoming series on the remaining books of *M<sup>L</sup>*.

H. H. Hardy II

Wake Forest, North Carolina

F. Dorie Mansen. *The Unremembered Dead: The Non-Burial Motif in the Hebrew Bible*. Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts 26. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018. xii + 340 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1463206963. \$120.00.

The handling of the dead reveals a society’s complex of beliefs regarding death and the afterlife. While the proper care of the body through burial and funerary rites generally shows that life does not end in death, its deprivation may indicate a range of meanings. The monograph under review, which is F. Dorie Mansen’s revised doctoral dissertation, is a methodical investigation of the non-burial motif in the Hebrew Bible, arguing that threats of post-mortem abuse functioned as a powerful rhetorical tool for various ideological ends.

Six chapters, which flow logically, comprise the examination of the non-burial motif. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, where non-burial,

as a threatened or enacted act of violence that results in post-mortem disgrace, is situated along a spectrum of honor that Saul Olyan identified: Denial of burial is the most disgraceful or dishonorable fate of the dead. However, instead of Delbert Hiller’s influential classification of non-burial as a “curse” in light of ANE treaties, Dorie Mansen proposes a revised typological description for the motif according to five socio-literary characteristics: (1) elements of post-mortem abuse; (2) reason for the abuse; (3) agent of abuse; (4) victim of abuse; and (5) intended result of abuse. This typology is employed to examine biblical references to the non-burial motif that appears across literary genres and traditions.

The second chapter contextualizes the stereotypical terminology for non-burial in the culture of Israel’s neighbors as points of contact. Archaeological, inscriptional, and literary evidence from Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, Egyptian, and Phoenician texts show that proper burial is critical to a peaceful existence after death, and threats or punishments of non-burial can result in shame for the living kin and the dead’s inability to rest with the ancestors. In some Mesopotamian contexts, post-mortem abuse and the disposal of the bodies of the defeated are tied to military victory. In Ugaritic references, post-mortem disgrace is an act of retaliation. In Egypt, the care for the dead is related to the preservation of a person’s identity in the afterlife. Though there is significant overlap between Israel and its neighbors with regard to burial ideology, there is nonetheless one difference in that the agent of abuse in Israelite texts is frequently God.

Chapter 3 surveys the archaeological and lexical evidence for the Israelite belief system on death and points out that the main concern is for a timely and honorable burial after death. Mourning rites that accompany a burial, and burial within the ancestral tomb or land, are desirable, ideal even, for they constitute proper burial. The emphasis on such elements shows the importance of familial kinship.

The fourth and fifth chapters form the heart of the argument of the monograph. Chapter 4 surveys some forty-nine references to the non-burial motif across thirteen books in the Hebrew Bible and identifies some variations in the way the biblical traditions employ stereotypical terminology associated with the non-burial motif. This terminology includes the threat of predatory birds and scavenging animals, the decomposition of the corpse, and post-mortem ignominy evident in verbs such as to “to cast” or “to fling” a corpse, “to cut off” from a community, “to bury” with the particle of negation, and “to scatter” instead of “to gather.” Using the five interpretive categories previously identified for examining texts that employ stereotypical terminology linked to the non-burial motif in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, Mansen shows the dynamism of this literary motif in the many ways it is used in these traditions.

Two examples should suffice: First, several texts present God as the active agent of post-mortem abuse. Although inanimate objects and natural calamities act as agents in others, God is implied as the instigator. Second, the victims of post-mortem disgrace include both the individuals and corporate entities.

The fifth chapter exegetically examines six specific passages that employ the non-burial motif: Num 14:28–35; Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44–47; 1 Kgs 14:10–11; Isa 14:18–20; and Jer 8:1–3. The goal is to shed light on the rhetorical function of the threat of non-burial within their socio-historical contexts. One of the important findings is that the threat of non-burial is often directed against those who display disloyalty to the covenant, which is meant to destroy or diminish the identity of the victim. The intended outcome though is knowledge of God as sovereign and just ruler.

The sixth chapter teases out the implications of the biblical use of the non-burial motif, specifically as it applies to how the identities of both agent and victim of post-mortem abuse are conceived. Insights from anthropology buttress the claim that post-mortem disgrace diminishes or destroys the identity and memory of the victim. Since Israel's identity depends on God's covenant with them, the literary use of the non-burial motif becomes a deadly weapon in the author's arsenal in reinforcing covenant fidelity and in showing the ultimate power of Israel's covenant partner.

The study is well done. Still, the treatment of identity, admittedly a complex subject, could use further exploration: If the view is correct that in Israelite anthropology individual identity is intimately intertwined with the collective, what would the differentiation between individual and communal victim of post-mortem abuse imply? In any event, while this volume tends to be repetitive at times and contains some typographical errors, misspelling of names and footnoting inconsistencies, it is nevertheless a welcome and valuable addition to the understanding of Israelite death and burial ideology.

Francis M. Macatangay  
Houston, Texas

Peter J. Williams. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2018. 153 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433552953. \$17.99.

Peter Williams, the principal of Tyndale House, Cambridge, devotes his attention to one question in this book: Can we trust the Gospels? He chose this question for the title of the book because of his focus on the

“trustworthiness” of the Gospels, namely his treatment of evidence that supports their reliability (p. 15). Williams recognizes that while the claims of Jesus demand a response, these claims depend upon the trustworthiness of the Gospels. He writes: “But before we consider such claims, we need to ask whether the Gospels show the signs of trustworthiness we usually look for in things we believe” (p. 16). For this reason, Williams presents a short volume that consolidates the necessary information that a general audience may study further.

In the eight chapters of the book, Williams surveys the historical records of Jesus in non-Christian sources such as Cornelius Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Flavius Josephus. He investigates the geographical references to towns, regions, and bodies of water and contrasts the data with non-canonical works such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Judas. He offers a statistical analysis of name usage in antiquity that demonstrates that the Gospels' writers most likely did not invent the stories and characters of the Bible. He discusses the text-critical reliability of the Gospels and interacts with claims of contradictions in Scripture. Finally, Williams concludes the book by treating the most contentious topic for the reliability of the Gospels—miracles, and particularly the resurrection of Jesus.

In addition to historical, statistical, and comparative data, Williams balances the presentation of evidence with an apologetic discussion about what claims may reasonably be concluded from the data. For example, as he discusses the early claims about Jesus, he highlights the logical improbability that such claims arose after AD 62 (p. 34). Additionally, Williams devotes a chapter to the criteria of “undesigned coincidences,” which are instances of agreement between writers that are most likely not deliberate (p. 89). Furthermore, when discussing the likelihood that the writers accurately preserved the words of Jesus, he suggests to his readers that they apply ancient conventions for truthful reporting rather than modern ones (pp. 98–99). Overall, Williams has written a book balancing data and deductions that offer reasonable certainty for the trustworthiness of the Gospels.

*Can We Trust the Gospels?* is the work of a seasoned scholar in biblical research. Williams tactfully exercises scholarly caution while presenting conclusions from the available evidence—never arguing more than what the data allows and never asserting less than what the data demands. As an example, when he discusses the geographical details in the Gospels, he suggests that the writers were most likely acquainted with the land themselves and do not demonstrate the qualities of a writer who would invent a story from a distance. While offering these conclusions, Williams provides the following qualification: “My argument is not that knowledge of

these geographical details demonstrates the Gospels to be true, but rather that the idea that they got the story wrong for lack of high-quality information on the location of events is false" (p. 62). He patiently builds his case on the totality of evidence rather than arguing more than is warranted. Furthermore, Williams demonstrates his commitment to evidence regardless of the popularity of his conclusions when he argues that the Gospels were most likely written before AD 70, a position that could support Jesus's ability to predict the future (pp. 47–49).

In addition to the Gospels' data and the book's apologetic nature, Williams occasionally interacts with the assumptions of skeptics who wish to argue the Gospels are untrustworthy. He exposes the hollowness of explanations from scholars like Bart Ehrman and also addresses those who are unmoved from an atheist disposition. For example, he appropriately points to those who are committed to atheistic assumptions, writing: "If someone is committed to a materialist atheist position on miracles, then no amount of evidence will be able to disturb this belief. He or she will encounter the lines of evidence presented in this book and will find alternative explanations" (p. 133).

*Can We Trust the Gospels?* is an excellent volume that will benefit the academy and the church. The book cannot address every detail in totality and Williams admits that more may be written than is presented in this book. However, he presents enough information necessary for a general audience to trust the Gospels and to investigate further, should they desire. In sum, he writes with the mind of a scholar and the heart of a disciple. This is clearly expressed in a concluding statement of the book: "If the picture of Jesus in the Gospels is basically true, it logically demands that we give up possession of our lives to serve Jesus Christ, who said repeatedly in every Gospel, 'Follow me'" (p. 140).

Lucas G. Moncada III  
Roseboro, North Carolina

Peter Enns. *How the Bible Actually Works: In Which I Explain How an Ancient, Ambiguous, and Diverse Book Leads Us to Wisdom Rather Than Answers—and Why That's Great News*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2019. 292 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0062686749. \$26.99.

*How the Bible Actually Works* (hereafter *HBAW*) seems to be an updated and expanded version of Enns's 2014 work, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It*. It is the most recent presentation of Enns's perspective on the nature of the Bible and biblical

interpretation. It is designed for popular consumption rather than an academic audience. Indeed, Enns laces its pages with humor (a plus in this reviewer's opinion!). To adequately assess *HBAW*, this review, first, commends *HBAW* for popularizing academic biblical studies and, second, engages and (largely) critiques the three primary claims of *HBAW*.

*HBAW* deserves praise for making many profitable points for a lay audience from the field of professional biblical studies. Topics Enns illuminates include: (a) Torah as wisdom (pp. 54–71), (b) critical scholarship on Deuteronomy (pp. 82–86), (c) YHWH's council of divine beings (pp. 129–31), (d) the influence of the exile on the production and message of Scripture (pp. 166–73), (e) the purpose of the Synoptics (pp. 205–12), (f) issues related to the New Perspective on Paul (pp. 218–38), and (g) the Quadriga—the ancient and medieval method of interpretation which views every biblical text from four angles (literal, allegorical, moral, and eschatological, pp. 274–75). *HBAW* thus deserves commendation for serving as an entree into the panoply of subjects which constitute academic biblical studies.

*HBAW* also contains three primary claims repeated multiple times throughout the volume. First, the Bible is an ancient, ambiguous, and diverse book, and these factors should influence the way that interpreters read it. Second, the Bible leads its readers to wisdom rather than answers. Third, the biblical authors constantly reimagined God based on their changing historical circumstances. The first primary claim is both insightful and incomplete. Throughout *HBAW* Enns demonstrates that interpreters must recognize the Bible's antiquity, ambiguity, and diversity to understand it properly. His examples are legion and, in a number of instances, helpful. However, Enns ignores the Bible's overarching unity. Interpreters will debate the nature and extent of the Bible's unity, but to ignore or even deny the Bible's unity altogether is a misstep.<sup>6</sup> The Bible tells one overarching story about God's plan to build his kingdom through his covenants, beginning at creation and ending at the new creation. Enns's triumvirate (ancient, ambiguous, and diverse) is incomplete. Adding the category of unity to his list paints a more accurate picture of the nature of Scripture.

Enns's second primary claim is astute but insufficiently nuanced. His subtitle states that the Bible, "leads us to wisdom *rather than* answers" (emphasis added). Enns offers numerous examples (outside the book of

<sup>6</sup> It is unclear whether or not Enns would overtly deny the Bible's unity. However, his emphasis on ambiguity and diversity leads me to think that he would.



Proverbs but much like the book of Proverbs) that lead the reader to wisdom rather than answers. So, should God's people submit to human governments at all times and in all circumstances? On the surface, a text like Rom 13:1 ("Let every person be subject to the governing authorities . . ." ESV) seems to answer in the affirmative. Enns points out, however, that interpreters must consider the Romans' context (i.e., the recent exile of the Jews from Rome under Emperor Claudius in 50 CE) and not necessarily read this injunction as a binding principle for all time. Perhaps, Enns suggests, Paul was encouraging this Jewish-Christian community to keep a low profile to avoid persecution. Moreover, he notes the stream of biblical teaching that anticipates the undoing of governmental oppression in history (Isa 9:4; 10:27; Jer 30:8, pp. 256–60). Enns's answer to the question, "Should Christians always obey Romans 13:1?" would probably be something like, "They need wisdom to answer this question and, by giving various options, the Bible is the source of such wisdom."

While the above example is relevant, Enns mistakenly applies this wisdom approach to every text of Scripture. In reality, some texts of Scripture do provide authoritative answers to religious questions: Scripture uniformly answers the following, "Do humans have inherent dignity?" (Yes); "Is there one, divine being who rules over the heavenly and earthly realms?" (Yes); "Is this divine being just or merciful?" (Both); and "How should humans respond to the revelation of this divine being?" (By receiving his grace and walking in obedience). These examples, at least, demonstrate that Enns inaccurately contends that the Bible only leads to wisdom rather than answers.

The third claim, that the biblical authors constantly reimagine God, is only partially true, like his other primary claims. To his credit, Enns attempts to account for the diversity of thought across the canon. For example, the differences between Abraham's view of God and the Apostle John's view of God appear to be a fecund example of the biblical author's reimagining God. However, Enns's perspective has, at least, two flaws. First, it ignores and undermines the continuity of the biblical authors' portrait of God across the canon, a weakness related to my earlier critique that Enns fails to recognize the overarching unity of the Bible because of his focus on its diversity. In both Testaments, God is both one and many (Gen 1:26–27; Isa 6:8; John 1:1–14). In both Testaments, he is just and merciful (Exod 34:6–7; Rom 3:21–26). In both Testaments, he plans to redeem the world through a descendant of Abraham and David (Gen 12:1–3; 2 Sam 7:12–16; Matt 1:1). In both Testaments, he personally enters into human history in miraculous ways (Gen 18; Luke 1–2).

Second, some of Enns's examples of reimagination are dubious. Considering the theme of resurrection in the Old Testament, he asserts, "No

one would arrive at a conclusion like that [i.e., future, universal resurrection] simply from reading the Old Testament. Rather, you have to start with seeing Jesus as the 'solution,' read the Bible backwards, so to speak, and reimagine God to account for this surprising turn of events" (p. 245). This statement ignores a number of Old Testament texts, such as Isa 25:7–8a, "And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever." Examples of inaccurately positing reimagination, like this one, abound in *HBAW* despite some productive examples.

In conclusion, *HBAW*, unlike *The Bible Tells Me So*, is a useful volume. I would cautiously recommend it to an educated audience, but I would also recommend that they read a critical review along with it.

Robb Coleman  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

James T. Turner. *On the Resurrection of the Dead: A New Metaphysics of Afterlife for Christian Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2019. 244 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1138350625. \$140.00.

Turner opens his innovative work *On the Resurrection of the Dead* by noting a problem for Christians. He asks, "What kind of a thing is a human being such that it can die, its parts dissolve, spread to the wider cosmos, and come back together again to form a body rising from the grave?" (p. 4). If Christians want to affirm a bodily resurrection, what must they believe about the human person and the time between death and resurrection? It is Turner's aim to clarify this relationship. He does so by setting forth three theological affirmations that all Christians should accept: (1) Bodily resurrection is not a superfluous hope of afterlife. (2) There is immediate post-mortem existence in Paradise. (3) There is numerical identity between pre-mortem and post-resurrection human beings. He then determines which anthropological positions can endorse them.

Therefore, he begins in Chapter 1 by arguing that substance dualism is both untenable for Christian theology and in fact false (p. 11). He thinks 1 Cor 15:12–19 demonstrates its falsity. For, if one affirms substance dualism, he denies Paul's premises and conclusion (p. 27). Here one finds Turner's most provocative claim. He thinks Christians should deny the intermediate state because it undermines the first theological affirmation (p. 11). If the intermediate state really exists, the bodily resurrection is unnecessary (p. 21). Next, he argues that physicalism too fails to meet the three theological affirmations sufficiently in Chapter 2. He primarily looks to versions offered by Peter van Inwagen, Kevin Corcoran, Dean Zim-

merman, and Trenton Merricks. He finds all the versions wanting for various reasons. Chapter 3 engages Lynne Baker's constitution view at length and advances extensive critiques against it. Chapter 4 explains hylemorphism (concrete material objects are a compound of matter and form, whereas being is strictly just existence) and asks whether it allows for disembodied souls. Here he critiques Thomas Aquinas and Eleonore Stump by claiming that it is flatly impossible to have a disembodied soul (p. 171). Chapter 5 is the hinge chapter in the book, providing the metaphysics of time that can account for all three theological affirmations. He calls his position "eschatological presentism," which is a form of compound presentism suggesting "that present realities are spread out across two adjacent temporal moments" (p. 200). Chapter 6 concludes by summarizing the argument of the book: He thinks a version of hylemorphism coupled with eschatological presentism is what fits with the biblical witness.

Having quickly summarized Turner's book, are there any weaknesses? I have several misgivings about his work that exceed the scope of this review. Suffice to say, I think he assumes a greater tension between the resurrection and the intermediate state than exists. He claims it is a "clear contradiction" (p. 28). He also thinks the bodily resurrection can't do anything more than what the intermediate state could do (p. 56). However, if Christians have believed it for nearly two millennia, I wonder if there isn't an alternative? But most devastatingly, his entire argument builds toward how one can affirm the immediate post-mortem existence of humans in paradise without affirming the intermediate state. And yet his positive construction of how this works is the thinnest portion.

The bulk of his work is deconstruction, showing how other positions fail to meet the test, but when it comes time for him to defend his own position he admittedly punts to mystery (p. 210). If anyone is to be convinced by his thesis, she needs to be convinced not only that alternatives are false, but that there is a position available besides them. To be fair, no view is without costs and all tend toward mystery at some point, but it appears his view has no fewer challenges than the ones he discards as unsustainable. To his credit, he does list several issues with his proposal (p. 205). He simply fails to address them substantially. He offers two potential rejoinders in the space of three pages (pp. 214–16). And it is precisely here that I have serious concerns about his theory of time that is supposed to solve the mystery. Nevertheless, his project is one of novel contribution, and what first pass at something truly original doesn't have weaknesses? He is to be commended for his attempt at consistency and creativity. And hopefully his work will spur more thought in the broader sphere on these issues.

To conclude then, Turner's book is far from all negatives. It is a fine work of analytic theology. He argues rigorously and attempts to be painstakingly clear. Few works of theology care to be as consistent or as honest about their warts as his. If for nothing else, this is a worthy reason to read Turner—he is a model of how precise theology should be done. It also is a unique response to the metaphysical problems associated with resurrection and the so-called intermediate state. Turner is to be applauded for his creativity and commitment to the core theological affirmations he provides. Even if one disagrees with his arguments, he will be instructed by them and come to a clearer understanding of the issues at hand. Based on positives like these, and many others, I find Turner's work to be invaluable for any student of the human person or afterlife.<sup>7</sup>

Jordan L. Steffaniak  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

W. Brian Shelton. *Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. xiii + 314 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0801098550. \$32.00.

This examination of the lives of the apostles by historian Brian Shelton goes beyond the biblical accounts (without ignoring them) and examines the extant post-biblical documents, legends, traditions, venerated locations, and icons and images for a thorough, even exhaustive exploration of the post-New Testament ministry of these men. With his title he deliberately evokes the various quests for the historical Jesus in New Testament scholarship, particularly the title of Albert Schweitzer's seminal work in its English translation, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. However, while Shelton acknowledges a kinship to the purpose of that work, he varies from it in two significant ways. The first is his avoidance of an attempt to write a biography of the apostles; instead he concentrates on what he terms their journeys. The second is his confidence in the veracity of the biblical accounts.

One of the most helpful features of Shelton's study is the introduction and first chapter, where a thorough explanation of the methodology he employs is provided. He addresses the difficulty of separating historical fact from myth and legend. His methodology is to begin with the biblical accounts of each of the twelve (including Matthias, Judas's replacement) and also Paul, then to examine their mention in various writings of the early church, and the apocryphal works attributed to them. An interesting

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Turner for his gracious interaction with this review and his helpful feedback to ensure it properly represents his work.

inclusion is his consideration of symbols, art, purported relics, and geographic traditions concerning each apostle, as further evidence to be weighed in evaluating the traditions concerning their lives and ministries. Shelton notes the difficulties of extracting historically reliable material from non-canonical sources. Yet by the careful use of the historical criteria of critical historical scholarship, he believes even the Gnostic sources can contain some plausible historical information. In particular, he places emphasis on tracing the geographical outreach of each apostle's ministry.

In his examination of each of the apostles, Shelton judiciously and consistently follows the methodology he has established. In sum, after tracing the New Testament accounts of their ministries, he turns his attention to the writings that have been attributed to or identified with them. He rejects the tradition of authorship of apocryphal works, while finding information which speaks to the reputation and tradition concerning them worth considering for his historical reconstruction of their ministries. He then looks at the traditions of their ministries in various locations, examines the images and symbols that have been preserved, and finally the tombs and traditions associated with their deaths.

The results of his examination of the extant evidence are complete and informative. He provides a thorough examination of each element, then cautiously weighs the historical likelihood of the claims. For example, in his assessment of Peter, for whom many apocryphal writings, legends, and symbols exist, Shelton rejects the claim of a ministry in Britain, while affirming his Roman ministry and martyrdom, noting the lack of any competing claims to the location of his tomb and martyrdom on Vatican Hill. However, he criticizes the popular acceptance of the tradition of Jesus's appearance to Peter on the way to his martyrdom by those who reject other claims made in the same source.

Shelton rejects the historicity of the apocryphal Acts associated with Andrew but accepts the tradition of his ministry in Greece. He notes the significant impact of Andrew on the culture of Scotland but sees little historical basis for his ministry there. He notes the wide diversity of legends concerning the ministry and martyrdom of Bartholomew. The various locales claimed for his ministry include Armenia, Africa, and India. Competing legends concerning the method of his martyrdom include clubbing, being skinned alive, beheaded, thrown into the sea and drowned, or crucified, with some of these having more than one location for the claim. Shelton deems it most likely he was clubbed to death after a ministry in Armenia.

The tradition of Thomas stands out for the solidarity of the claim of ministry in India. However, Shelton notes the complexity of ascertaining the precise area of his activity, which arises from the various locales within

that region with competing claims for Thomas's apostolic ministry. However, he accepts Jerome's dating of John's natural death as an elderly man, for the precise knowledge necessary to specify the timing as sixty-eight years after the death of Jesus.

These examples serve to show the value of Shelton's study. He is to be commended for his judicious handling of the evidence, rejecting the historically unlikely, while still constructing a plausible understanding of the ministry of each apostle. While one may not agree with all his historical conclusions, this study will inform the reader of the variety of sources available for each apostolic tradition which can be the threshold for further research.

David R. Beck  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Alan S. Bandy, ed. *A Greek Reader's Apostolic Fathers*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018. xvi + 300 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1625648631. \$37.00

The late first to mid-second century was pivotal for the development of early Christianity. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers (ca. 70–150 CE) are indispensable sources for understanding the institutions, theology, mission, and interpretive practices of the early church, as well as early Christianity's relationship to heretical groups, the larger Greco-Roman world, and Judaism. This corpus's inestimable value for scholarship makes the lacuna of complete Greek reader editions of the Apostolic Fathers remarkable. Into this lacuna enters Alan Bandy, Rowena R. Strickland Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek at Oklahoma Baptist University.

Motivated by the Apostolic Fathers' value for scholarship as well as the pedagogical success of reader's editions of the Greek New Testament, Bandy offers a new tool. He asserts that his *Greek Reader's Apostolic Fathers* (GR<sup>AF</sup>) will "help one develop the necessary skills for advanced familiarity and fluency in the Greek texts of early Christianity" (p. xiii). Bandy created this volume for those with at least one year of biblical Greek and suggests the "sustained immersion" in Greek texts of the Apostolic Fathers will yield "an extensive vocabulary" and "aid with observing complex patterns of syntax" (pp. xiii–xiv). Bandy envisions this volume as a useful textbook for an intermediate Greek syntax or advanced Greek readings course (pp. xiii–xiv), but it will be useful for students and scholars alike.

The sources and characteristic features of GR<sup>AF</sup> reflect Bandy's goal of offering a pedagogical tool for increasing Greek reading fluency. He

explains that the reader is “intentionally minimal” when offering lexical data, since his purpose is “to encourage the necessary skills for advanced familiarity and fluency in the Greek texts of early Christianity with as little English help as possible” (p. xv). The base text is from Kirsopp Lake’s translation in the Loeb Classic Library, with supplements from the texts of J. B. Lightfoot, Bart Ehrman, and Michael Holmes. Care was given in selecting appropriate English glosses as Bandy consulted other English diglots, as well as the standard lexicons by BDAG, Louw and Nida, and Liddel-Scott to “adjudicate the most appropriate contextual glosses and translation choices” (p. xiv). Furthermore, he provides additional glosses when the “sense and range of meanings may be more flexible or difficult to determine based on context” (p. xvi). Consequently, the *GRAF* offers English glosses and parsing data in footnotes for words occurring fewer than thirty times in the Greek New Testament (NA28) and indicates significant variant readings with an asterisk (\*), including them in footnotes. Bandy also offers a brief one-page introduction to each book following the format “Who,” “When,” “What,” “Texts,” and “Reading Difficulty” to discuss critical issues. Additionally, he arranges the texts from the lowest reading difficulty (2 Clement) to the highest (The Epistle of Diognetus).

A comparison with other Apostolic Fathers Greek readers should convince one of this volume’s strengths. Unlike the readers offered by Rodney Decker (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007) and Rodney Whitacre (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), Bandy’s work contains the entirety of the Apostolic Fathers. Furthermore, unlike Daniel B. Wallace et al., eds.’ *A Reader’s Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), this volume contains the Greek text, enabling the student to avoid referencing those all-too-helpful English diglots. Bandy’s volume also compares favorably to the only similar work in English. Published a year later, Shawn J. Wilhite and Jacob N. Cerone, eds.’ *Apostolic Fathers Greek Reader: The Complete Edition* (Willmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2019) is a massive 615-page volume. Wilhite and Cerone share Bandy’s goal of promoting Greek reading fluency, with a dictionary that addresses words occurring thirteen times or more within the NT (while their work has a comparable price listing of \$34.99). However, the texts are not arranged according to reading difficulty, making it less suitable for use as a graded reader.

In sum, Bandy provides both students and scholars a valuable tool for engaging the Apostolic Fathers in the original language. The glosses and parsing information guides are helpful aids for the reader; the page layout and font are visually appealing; and in particular, arrangement according to reading difficulty makes this volume ideal as a graded reader for the classroom. Approaching this corpus in the original languages is difficult,

and the temptation to rely on translations is ever-present. However, *GRAF* is tailor-made to offer the right amount assistance to alleviate confusion and promote Greek reading fluency. Hopefully this work will instill in students both a mastery of Koine Greek and an appreciation of the Apostolic Fathers.

Levi Baker

Wake Forest, North Carolina

Simon Gathercole. *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*. Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 11. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xii + 723. Paperback. ISBN: 978-9004273252. \$84.00.

Simon Gathercole is Senior Lecturer in New Testament Studies at the University of Cambridge. He has published research on a wide range of topics including Christology, the extent of the atonement, and ancient New Testament manuscripts. He has also written widely on the non-canonical Gospels including the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife, and especially the Gospel of Thomas. In 2012 he published *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Sources* (Cambridge University Press). Thus, the Gospel of Thomas is no new interest to him. He has labored in that field of study for at least a decade.

This commentary contains an extensive introduction to the Gospel of Thomas (GT) that examines its Greek and Coptic manuscripts and carefully compares the Greek and Coptic texts. Gathercole concludes that witnesses to the text are sufficient to restore the text of the GT using normal procedures of textual criticism. He concludes that the Coptic text, despite some differences, can be traced back essentially to the second-century Greek text.

Gathercole inventories the references to the GT in late antiquity. In the process, he significantly expands previous lists, roughly doubling the number of testimonia identified by Harold W. Attridge. He identifies thirty-nine clear references and an additional nine questionable references. He sees the main contributions of the testimonia as lying in their evidence for the original language, provenance, and date of the GT.

Gathercole explores the three major theories regarding the language in which the GT was originally composed: Western Aramaic, Syriac, and Greek. Six lines of evidence are offered as support for the view that Greek was the language of composition, such as correspondences between the Greek and Coptic texts, density of Greek loan-words in the Coptic text, the language of the earliest fragments and six earliest testimonia, and the correspondences between the GT and the Greek texts of the canonical Gospels.

His examination of the possible provenance of the GT focuses on Syria (the majority view) and Egypt (the minority view). Gathercole admits that the evidence is insufficient to reach a conclusion.

Gathercole argues persuasively that the GT was written sometime between 135 and 200 CE. Although the author cannot be identified based on present evidence, the established date of composition precludes claims of authorship by the apostle Thomas (since the GT is too late) and by a Manichaean (since the GT is too early).

Although he dismisses a handful of proposals regarding the structure of the GT, Gathercole recognizes three structural markers: the use of “Jesus said” to introduce each saying, an opening section (though its length is difficult to determine), and linkage of sayings by genre, catchwords, and shared themes.

After an overview of several theories regarding the genre of the GT, Gathercole suggests that the book is a mixture of two genres: gospel and *chreia* collection. He affirms Werner H. Kelber’s description of the book as a “sayings gospel.”

Gathercole argues that although the GT has a reasonably coherent religious outlook, it should not be labeled “Gnostic” since it does not have a “clearly demiurgic account of creation.” The GT cannot be assigned to any one religious group. However, it shares some themes with other early Jewish and Christian writings including Philo’s works, the Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas, the Gospel of Philip, the Dialogue of the Savior, the Epistle of Ptolemy to Flora, the Treatise on the Resurrection, and Justin Martyr’s works.

Although several scholars have relied heavily on the GT as a source for reconstructing the life and teachings of the historical Jesus (e.g., John Dominic Crossan), Gathercole holds that significantly earlier primary sources exist (i.e., the canonical Gospels) and that the GT “can hardly be regarded as useful in the reconstruction of a historical picture of Jesus.”

The commentary proper proceeds *logion* by *logion*. It first discusses the textual witnesses to the *logion* and reconstructs the earliest recoverable text by means of a Greek text, Coptic text, and English translation. It then interprets the text based on its place in the second century context. Although this is the traditional role of a commentary, this purpose is surprisingly distinct from that of most recent commentaries on the GT, which tend to pursue other goals such as exploring the pre-history of the text or comparing and contrasting the sayings of the GT to those in the canonical Gospels to determine which is most primitive. Finally, a “Notes” section discusses linguistic issues, catchword links, and parallels with other literature.

This commentary sets a new standard for the GT. Gathercole’s research is remarkably thorough. His bibliography includes fifty-five pages of scholarly research and the introduction and commentary suggest that Gathercole has digested the discussions in the vast majority of these resources. The entire introduction is marked by a scholarly caution that is atypical of Thomasine studies. Although several recent treatments of the GT seem devoted to promote some novel idea, Gathercole simply refuses to speculate or offer hypotheses when the evidence is insufficient to yield firm conclusions. In addition, readers will be grateful to Brill for issuing the earlier (2014) volume in a more affordable paperback format. Highly recommended!

Charles L. Quarles  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Ronald E. Heine, ed. *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew*. Oxford Early Christian Texts. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. 792 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0199669073. \$255.00.

If patristic scholars were a family, Ronald E. Heine would be a household name. Professor Emeritus of Bible and Theology at Northwest Christian University, Heine is perhaps best known for his work on the third-century theologian Origen of Alexandria. Heine has produced numerous books and articles on this ancient Bible scholar and systematician. No stranger to translating Origen, Heine now exhibits his seasoned command of ancient Greek and Latin with the *Commentary on Matthew*, providing yet another venerable contribution to the field of patristic scholarship.

The contents of the *Commentary* include only portions of Origen’s exegesis of Matthew. Heine translates the Greek manuscripts first, representing the more stable, though far from perfect, textual tradition (p. 29). Originally consisting of twenty-five books, the first nine books of the work now are missing. The English translation thus begins with Origen’s commentary on Matt 13:34, as Jesus dismisses the crowd and enters the house, his disciples asking him to explain the parable of the weeds. Through no fault of Heine, this late entry-point into the Gospel does leave the lover of St. Matthew desiring those cherished earlier portions of the story, such as the birth narrative and the Sermon on the Mount, and Origen’s thoughts thereon.

The Latin text that Heine translates overlaps some with the Greek text, providing the opportunity for comparison between the two. (The Greek commentary includes Matt 13:34–22:33; the Latin includes Matt 16:13–27:66.) Heine draws no definitive conclusion from this comparison, though the scholars he cites prescribe reading the Latin with caution and

“with the necessary reservations,” for it contains “errors, omissions, additions, and peculiarities” in relation to the Greek (p. 30). Unfortunately, the Latin text leaves a significant lacuna at the end of the Gospel, normally filled with the glory of Resurrection and Great Commission. Again, Heine is not to blame, for the Latin text is the only one available. Heine simply translates all the extant material, including, thankfully, many fragments of Origen’s thought gleaned from later church fathers and catena commentaries. These fragments partially fill—with glimmers of insight from the Alexandrian—the gaps at the beginning and end of the *Commentary on Matthew*. Heine includes this mass of translated fragments in an appendix.

The fact that the *Commentary* is the first (known) full-scale exposition of Matthew makes it shine in the history of Christian exegesis. But the importance of the *Commentary* for Origen studies lies chiefly in the work’s location within the chronology of Origen’s written corpus. The majority of Origen’s writings are lost to time, destroyed following an edict of heresy by Emperor Justinian I. Of the fraction surviving, the work *Contra Celsum* has long been considered Origen’s last and thus the most mature example of his theological thought. Heine, however, takes a different tack. He contends that the *Commentary on Matthew*, in which “Origen gives us his final word on many topics” (p. 1), is in fact one of Origen’s last penned extant works, to be dated after the *Contra Celsum*. Several factors lend credence to Heine’s argument. The most vital is Origen’s promise in the *Contra Celsum* to discuss, in a later work, Jesus’s burial, tomb, and the man (Joseph of Arimathea) who buried him—a promise which he fulfills in the *Commentary on Matthew*. Origen unpacks in detail the symbolic significance of the burial narrative in his comments on Matt 27:57–65. This revelation breaks new ground, not only for Origen studies in general but also for Heine himself, who admits to a change of mind in regard to an earlier published conclusion (p. 26n146).

Textual notes, largely consisting of cross references to Scripture, accompany Heine’s English translation throughout. The translation of the text is sober, communicating the underlying languages plainly and clearly, avoiding florid linguistic embellishments. This translation approach attempts to best illumine what the manuscripts are saying, but Heine also gives ample consideration to what he thinks the Alexandrian is doing, hermeneutically, as he reads the Gospel, since Origen’s preeminent life-work was the interpretation of Scripture (p. 7). Heine distinguishes several “methods” applied by Origen, including the unity of Scripture and figurative interpretation. The reader will encounter this figurative (i.e., tropological) approach employed frequently by Origen throughout the *Commentary* (p. 18). Heine emphasizes, moreover, that “Christ is at the centre of Origen’s hermeneutic” (p. 12).

With the *Commentary on Matthew*, Ronald Heine makes a first-rate contribution to Origen scholarship, moving the conversation forward through clear historical argumentation based on textual evidence. His examination of Origen’s method of reading Matthew deserves attention from those interested in patristic hermeneutics. Of course, for the general reader of the church fathers, Heine’s translation is a jewel, revealing dazzling facets of Origen’s most mature mind. Scholars of Matthew’s Gospel and historical theologians should also take notice. Because of the price, however, this two-volume set is best obtained through a good theological library.

Owen Kelly

Wake Forest, North Carolina

Will Brooks. *Love Lost for the Cause of Christ: Three Missionaries and Their Sacrifices for the Great Commission*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018. 116 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1532635595. \$16.00.

Learning from the lives of others is always helpful, particularly when those people are presented as normal, flawed men and women. In *Love Lost for the Cause of Christ*, Will Brooks uses missionary biography to address familiar areas of calling and sacrifice while also speaking to an oftentimes unaddressed area of relationships and missions. His goal, as he states it, is to “consider how missionaries have often made tremendous sacrifices for the sake for the gospel” (p. 7). These sacrifices are many, but Brooks places emphasis on missionaries’ sacrifices of romantic or earthly love in light of their call to take the gospel to the nations.

The outline of the book is straightforward. After an introductory chapter in which Brooks notes misguided emphases on love and companionship in both the church and contemporary culture, Chapters 2 through 4 provide a biographical sketch of missionaries Henry Martyn, Lottie Moon, and Hudson Taylor. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that both Martyn and Moon sacrificed companionship and marriage due to the priority of their calling to India and China, respectively. In fact, sacrifice is a normal aspect of the Christian life in general and the missionary life in particular. In Chapter 4, Hudson Taylor stands out since he did ultimately marry, not once but twice, while also continuing his service as a missionary in China.

The biographical data in each of these chapters is fairly standard and relies on known missionary biographies even if the sampling is small, which is a minor point of critique. However, Brooks gives enough information to emphasize the overall goal of the book while also allowing each

missionary life to show that these are genuine but flawed people, committed to Christ above all else.

Chapter 5 rescues the uneven introductory chapter of the book. In this chapter, Brooks clearly connects the recurring themes throughout Chapters 2 through 4 with the emphasis on sacrifice in light of calling, especially the sacrifice of earthly comfort and love. While there are varying perspectives on the usefulness or need for the category of calling, Brooks assumes the need for calling and clearly connects a believer's daily responsibilities to that calling. Brooks also explains that the Great Commission is not merely for a select few, but every Christian has a role to play. Each of these roles requires faithfulness, obedience, and, often, difficult decisions in order to keep one faithful and obedient to Christ. Similar to the introductory chapter, Brooks continues to insert personal stories strategically to illustrate his primary pedagogical points. In this chapter, he includes the story of an influential senior adult in his own life that helps introduce the key principles he hopes will encourage the reader toward Great Commission obedience (pp. 90–94).

Aside from the minor critiques already mentioned, this book is both familiar and refreshing. While brief, it packs a lot of useful information and fodder for self-reflection and discussion. Each chapter ends with a "Questions for Consideration" section that makes this book accessible to a wide audience. Overall, Brooks accomplishes his goal and I appreciate that he challenges individual believers and the church in areas of love, relationships, marriage, and ministry.

In conclusion, readers interested in missions or those considering their role in the Great Commission will enjoy *Love Lost for the Cause of Christ*. The discussion questions provided at the end of each chapter help this book to move beyond the quick read category to a helpful resource for individuals and groups. Brooks helps readers consider their motivations and commitments to Christ and his commission in light of their entire lives not just their intellects or emotions.

Gregory D. Mathias  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Rebecca McLaughlin. *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019. 237 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433564239. \$24.99.

Rebecca McLaughlin (PhD Cambridge University), former vice-president of the Veritas Forum, writes *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion*, an apologetic work on twenty-first-century

Christianity. Divided into twelve chapters or themes, each approximately fifteen pages in length, the book addresses contemporary issues that face Christians today. Scholars from MIT, Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge endorse this work, as well as evangelicals such as Russell Moore, Os Guinness, and Sam Allberry.

Much of *Confronting Christianity* concentrates on traditional questions people have asked throughout modern times: why God allows pain and suffering; why God sends people to hell; whether science has shown Christianity to be false; whether there is more than one way to God; and whether the Bible should be read literally. All of these may be found in other works of this nature. Where McLaughlin's work differs, and perhaps is most controversial, is in the chapters that contextualize Christianity to present-day culture: What about slavery in the Bible? Is Christianity homophobic? Does religion incite violence? What about cultural diversity in Christianity? Does Christianity degrade women?

It is the latter chapters that give her work a voice. In her chapter regarding religion and violence, McLaughlin's reminder that the Crusades were a "counteroffensive" to the Islamic invasion of the Middle East is justified, particularly since she admits and balances this against the atrocities committed by Christians during that time (pp. 77–78). Similarly, while acknowledging evils perpetrated by people claiming to follow the biblical understanding of manhood and womanhood, she explains that the early church was mostly female, and that Christianity was scorned by non-Christians for its feminine appeal (p. 144). In her chapter about Christianity and diversity, she admits the "regrettable" connection between Christianity and imperialism but explains that arguments claiming Christianity to be a white Western religion, connected to colonialism, betray an inaccurate Western ideological prejudice. Christianity, she points out, is "the most diverse, multiethnic, and multicultural movement in all of history" (p. 45).

McLaughlin's strongest chapter is on Christianity's relationship to homosexuality. Not only does she condemn all forms of sexual immorality (including sins of the mind) among both heterosexuals and homosexuals and recount the biblical narrative of the beauties of sex within the husband/wife relationship, she also examines same sex attractions (homosexual attractions) among Christians today, which seem to be getting more notice. The statistics she provides show that many homosexuals at one point or another become interested in the opposite sex, meaning that sexuality can be fluid and that the categories of heterosexual and homosexual may be too binary (pp. 169–70). Her reminder that Christianity was founded by many who had these struggles is an admonition for the church not to be homophobic (p. 167). "Blue-blooded heterosexuality is not the

goal of the Christian life,” she writes, “Jesus is” (p. 154).

These praises notwithstanding, there are areas where the work needs development. The inclusion of more theory and context (even if only in content footnotes) would have provided clarity and improved the work’s overall attractiveness—by defining certain terms, for example. Based on her lack of explanation, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses could be classified as Christians, as could others that are grouped into the general category of “Christian.” Not explaining the term “myth” is another concern. While only used a couple of times, myth is often confused with ideology, and myth and ideology are at times misinterpreted as fact. Another point needing disclosure: in her chapter on slavery, she fails to state that the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, was founded at least in part by slavery, something the Convention only apologized for recently.

The weakest feature of *Confronting Christianity* though, is not of McLaughlin’s doing. While understandable, the commendations provided in the beginning of the work by the publisher are similar to extravagant praises of a movie not yet seen: the high anticipation of the experience often outweighs the actual results. This is not to say that *Confronting Christianity* is a disappointment. McLaughlin’s writing style is lucid. Her positions are evangelical. Her choice of topics is warranted. Her vulnerability in admitting her same sex attraction is brave and commendable. Claiming “state of the art research” (front cover) though, gives the indication this is an academic treatise. Rather, her work falls within the sub-genre of “pop Christianity”: it is a short, sparsely-documented, theologically light work intended to encourage and educate a popular audience, although that is certainly needed too.

Philip O. Hopkins  
London, United Kingdom

Christina S. Hitchcock. *The Significance of Singleness: A Theological Vision for the Future of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. xxviii + 148 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1540960290. \$21.99.

When I was approaching my thirtieth birthday, I began to look for resources to help me understand and maximize my life as a single man. While I found numerous reflections on celibacy and singleness from the Catholic viewpoint, there was little written from an evangelical perspective. Thankfully, books like Christina Hitchcock’s *The Significance of Singleness* have begun to fill that void.

Hitchcock begins her book on a biographical note, explaining her personal experience as a single woman in an evangelical context. Her own experience frames the first part of the book, in which she critiques American evangelicalism’s understanding of marriage and singleness. Hitchcock argues that many evangelicals simply place the spiritual veneer of marriage over the same basic assumptions of contemporary American culture—that sexual activity is inevitable and central to human flourishing. A normative reading of Genesis 1 and 2 together with a version of natural law theory leads evangelicals to conclude that marriage is important, if not necessary, to experience the fullness of what it means to be human. In response, Hitchcock argues for an eschatological perspective that looks forward to our future, celibate state in order to define true humanity.

Hitchcock’s argument for a positive valuation of singleness leads into the second part of the book, where the lives of three single women—St. Macrina, St. Perpetua, and Lottie Moon—frame her theological reflection. Each woman’s biography is offered as inspiration for singles and as evidence for Hitchcock’s theological argument. For example, Hitchcock details St. Macrina’s life of celibacy in pursuit of Christ and virtue. Her life serves as an example of how singles can embody Gen 1:26–28, serving as the image of God and fulfilling the Creation Mandate. Hitchcock defines the Creation Mandate under the headings of righteousness, relationships, and ruling. All of these, Hitchcock argues, were epitomized by Jesus—a single man—and can be fulfilled by singles, often in ways that are more direct and powerful than possible for married Christians.

In the third and final part of the book, Hitchcock envisions what a positive evangelical view of singleness—as well as the presence of joyful, faithful singles within congregations—would provide for churches. One potential benefit that she discusses at length is the end of the church’s hypocrisy toward homosexual individuals. By including marriage in their understanding of human flourishing and at the same time holding to the traditional teaching that same-sex marriage is prohibited by Scripture, evangelicals have created a lose-lose situation for homosexual Christians. Embracing the theological significance of singleness creates a third way, beyond either rebelling against the Bible’s definition of marriage or living an unfulfilled life.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Hitchcock’s work is that she places the gospel in the center of her thinking about marriage and singleness. Her argument for a positive valuation of singleness is based in the gospel truths that God loves us based on our relationship to Christ, not to the opposite gender, and that the Church grows by evangelism, not by procreation. Her proposal for a more eschatological, New Creation-oriented



view of the person makes use of Jesus's statements to his disciples in Matthew 19 and to the Sadducees in Matthew 22, and of how that teaching is applied by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7—passages that are often underutilized in evangelical theological reflection on marriage and singleness. In contrast with the creation-oriented view that dominates evangelical thinking, Hitchcock's proposal is an encouragement to singles that they are able to please God and experience the fullness of humanity now, instead of waiting on marriage. The women Hitchcock discusses in the second part of the book show how powerful a positive view of singleness can be in the lives of singles and in the communal life of the Church.

One weakness of the book is that Hitchcock does not show her work, so to speak. She makes a number of interesting theological claims—e.g., her definition of the Creation Mandate and how singles can fulfill it—that need further defense and explanation. I hope she will provide fuller arguments for those theological moves in future publications. With that said, I am happy to commend this book to anyone wishing to think more deeply about the theological significance of singleness. It will certainly excite meaningful theological reflection on singleness, raise a number of questions for further study, and force churches to reexamine their teaching about and ministry to the singles in their midst.

Chris H. Smith, Jr.  
Louisville, Kentucky

John D. Street. *Passions of the Heart: Biblical Counsel for Stubborn Sexual Sins*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019. xix + 308 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1629954028. \$19.99.

Humanity's fall into sin corrupted every element of our psychosomatic experience, including our sexuality. The heart of every person is corrupted, and human sexuality particularly manifests the distortive effects of sin upon bearers of the divine image, as men and women abuse God's good gift of sex in a variety of ways. Technology has only increased easy access to illicit content, fueling temptations and compounding the need for churches prepared to counsel and care for the sexually broken. Anyone with experience in such counseling recognizes that stubborn sexual sins require more than cute anecdotes and proof texts, but a comprehensive understanding of the human heart and its sinful expressions.

John Street provides such a paradigm in his work *Passions of the Heart*, in which he labors to unveil the connection between sexual sin and heart idolatry. God created the human heart as a dynamic control center that would exist in a worshipful relationship with himself, submitted to his

revealed will for human flourishing (p. 30). The functions of the human heart—thinking, purposing, desiring—bear their fruit in actions, words, and desires. Now that humanity has replaced the worship of God with created things, our hearts are bent towards idolatry, which is “anything ruling your heart—whether an object or an idea, whether a statue or an intense longing” (p. 34). Street argues that sexual sins are the fruit of a covetous heart, a sinful response to experiences of hunger or hurt.

Street adds a major contribution to counseling resources with his paradigm for lustful enslavement. Along the axes of strength of temptation and surrender to lust, Street maps out the path towards sexual enslavement (pp. 61–86). Like any plant, sexual sin exists in seed-form long before the appearance of any fruit. He lists four stages of lustful enslavement based upon James's teaching on the birth of sinful desires (Jas 1:14–15). First, depraved desires are stirred by sinful thoughts or experiences. Second, lust conceives in a heart when the self willfully “agrees to entertain its enticements” (p. 65). Third, the lustful heart gives birth to sin through a visible act. Lastly, sin matures unto death where the individual gives in to his desires repeatedly, with the accompanying feelings of hopelessness and uselessness. As one consistently capitulates to one's own desires for sexual gratification, resistance to sin and craving for sin maintain an inverse relationship—when desire increases, resistance steadily falls. Once the desire for sin surpasses the matching resistance, the individual has reached the point of sexual bondage.

Victory over sexual sin focuses on unveiling and destroying the idols of the covetous heart. Street argues that all sexual idols stem from either a hurting heart (motivated by anger, self-pity, discontentment, and fear) or a hungry heart (motivated by self-reward, flattery, power/control, and comfort). After exposing the dynamics of the idolatrous heart, Street transitions into applying gospel grace to dethrone the various idols of the heart through repentance, humility, and the formation of the Christian fruit of holiness and Spirit-driven diligence against temptation. Also, Street offers personal counsel to both married couples and singles attempting to pursue sexual purity. Street counsels married couples to utilize the marriage bed as a weapon against sexual sin. He advocates for single Christians to prioritize heart habits of contentment and gratefulness, in order to disarm temptations to pursue personal satisfaction or promiscuity.

It is not an overstatement to say that this work will help many Christians find victory over sexual sin. The complexities of the human heart and the stubbornness of sexual lust require a comprehensive response from someone who has spent years in the counseling chair and in God's

word. Street combines a thorough taxonomy of sexual sins with convicting biblical truth, personal experience, and piercing application. This work will reveal the seeds of sexual sin in your own heart, waiting to entrap you in sexual bondage. In addition, counselors who are struggling to help their counselees mortify their sinful desires will benefit from Street's discussion concerning the connection between the fruit of sexual sin and the root desires driving the human heart.

While this work is perfect for a biblical counselor, pastor, or mature layman, its exegetical and theological depth may overwhelm a counselee thick in the throes of battle with temptation. Street's book would thus benefit from an accompanying "counselee" edition in which the main ideas are boiled down into a format suitable for counselee homework. Otherwise, the counselor should distill and transmit its material to the counselee. Nevertheless, I expect this work to be a frequently used resource for counseling, pastoral ministry, and seminary education for years to come.

Jared Poulton  
Seneca, South Carolina

Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones. *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018. xx + 268 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433671135. \$29.99.

Michael Wilder and Timothy Jones provide a biblically-based work on Christian leadership, with theologically-driven building blocks for church leaders. Its purpose is to provide a Christ-centered foundation for leadership, highlighting leadership patterns rooted in Scripture.

Wilder and Jones set out to explain Christian leadership as more than the sum of marketplace leadership principles backed up by a Bible verse. Rather, Christian leadership must be guided by the whole canon of Scripture, which reveals it to be Christ-centered followership. The Christ-following leader is thus one who "develops a diverse community of fellow laborers who are equipped and empowered to pursue shared goals that fulfill the creation mandate and the Great Commission in submission to the Word of God" (p. 16). Conservative, evangelical presuppositions are appropriately laid out near the start, as well as the authors' historical-grammatical hermeneutical approach which recognizes a place for Canonical Theology.

Christian leaders must be seen primarily as followers and always as servants. Chapter 1 acts as an introduction as it lays out definitions for

the Christian leader. Chapter 2 gives the foundation for how leaders are called to be followers, as seen in the Creation, Fall, and Exodus. God is the origin of all power and delegates his power to stewards of his creation. Hence, he has designed leaders to follow him (pp. 29, 45). Furthermore, leaders are shown to be followers as God faithfully goes before Christian leaders and is present with them through union with Christ in order to empower them to fulfill his mission.

Part Two examines how the Old Testament guides Christian leadership, with a focus on the Book of Deuteronomy. Jones, the primary author of this section, explores how the roles of prophet, priest, king, and judge are not a typology for leaders today, but offices whose functions "have been fulfilled in Christ and conveyed to the whole people of God through union with Christ" (p. 52). Even a godly king, priest, prophet, or judge functioned in humble submission to God as a servant. So, while all are called to follow as God's sheep, Christian leaders are exhorted to follow the call to lead in the way of the shepherd leader—one who leads among the people to provide for and protect them.

In Part Three, Wilder, the primary author here, explains how Jesus was "the perfect embodiment of prophet, priest, judge, and king" (p. 137) as he modeled what it means to lead as one who fears and follows God through submission to the Father and dependence on the Spirit, and in demonstration of humble servanthood among his followers (pp. 136–37). Next, Wilder examines the leadership example of Simon Peter. A chapter is provided on Peter's commission to lead, including his preparation for suffering and sacrifice, with a final chapter on how he fulfilled that commission through suffering and sacrifice.

Unfortunately, a weakness of the book is a lack of strong application, or relevant steps towards implementation, for Christian leaders. While the authors extend the principles presented to Christian leaders in the marketplace (pp. 8, 46), there is little directive outside leadership within the church or parachurch organization. To be fair, the church leader is the focus and primary audience (pp. 8, 13). However, the specific applications given to church leaders are basic at best, such as making time for personal and family development, putting one's identity in Christ rather than a leadership position, taking time for self-care, and scheduling time for prayer and Bible study (pp. 101, 124). For some readers looking intently for leadership practices, this aspect may distract, although it does not weaken the book's goal of showing the Christian leader's function and calling as one who is a Christ-follower leading among other Christ-followers in submission to God's authority towards God-given purposes.

In addition, a clear strength of the book is the authors' consideration in helping readers understand and synthesize the content. Summary charts

connect each chapter's content with the bigger picture of the Christian leader. Readers will find helpful sidebars with thorough definitions of important terms and with reflection questions for church leaders. The authors also provide key points at the beginning of each chapter. However, end notes are so thorough (and integral) that readers will miss out on necessary content if they do not flip to the back of the book.

To conclude, the book is a welcome addition to the library of church leaders who want a Christian leadership foundation that is more than a forced extraction of leadership examples and principles from the Bible. Such leaders should give it careful thought and attention in order to implement the humble, Christ-centered followership described therein.

Kevin S. Hall  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

C. Christopher Smith. *How the Body of Christ Talks: Recovering the Practice of Conversation in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019. 206 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1587434327. \$16.99.

C. Christopher Smith addresses a deficiency in modern culture that has serious implications for the church, namely our marginal ability to create and maintain conversation within the congregation and with the surrounding community. In his book *How the Body of Christ Talks*, Smith not only lays out his concerns about the church's capacity for conversation but goes on to provide advice and tools to help churches develop important conversations and learn skills to foster Christian growth through conversation. In the introduction, Smith ties church attrition to people's lack of connection, explaining that "one of our deepest human desires is to belong." It is through participating in conversation that individuals gain a sense of belonging, and Smith offers this book as "a field guide of sorts for the [conversational] journey toward belonging" (pp. 9–10).

The book is arranged in twelve chapters that work to encourage churches to grow in their conversational abilities. Smith is clear from the outset that the ultimate goal is not simply to become better conversationalists but that through conversation the church and the individuals within the church would become "a witness to the world of the loving and just character of God and the hope of belonging" (p. 10). The ultimate example of conversational community is found in the Triune God, and Smith compares the conversational community of the Trinity to God-honoring conversations among believers early in his discussion and revisits this comparison throughout the text.

The body of the book is divided into three sections. The first provides tips on ideal group sizes for conversation, possible topics to help churches get started, and three conversational methods. Having established why talking together is important for the church (with guidelines for healthy conversations), Smith shows how these methods can help churches understand broad topics (Open Space Technology), establish a vision (Appreciative Inquiry), or get to know one another better (World Café). The second section focuses on the spiritual preparedness of the individual participating in church conversation, while the final section instructs churches to cultivate a sense of mission and identity through conversation—and to sustain their conversations even in times of conflict. The concluding chapter reiterates the goal of conversation: for churches to bear witness to the abundant life available to everyone through a relationship with the Triune God (p. 185).

One of the strengths of this book is the varied way it encourages churches to recognize and welcome diversity both within the church and in surrounding neighborhoods. Even though modern American social networks tend to be noticeably homogenous, homogeneity does not reflect early church communities which included "women and men, rich and poor, highly educated and uneducated, native peoples and foreigners" (p. 18). Smith goes on to point out that the church should be like our physical bodies and like the Triune God, one unified body made up of diverse members. It is through conversation, Smith argues, that "we discover the particular functions that each member has been prepared by the Holy Spirit to enact in the life of our church body" (p. 23). He also argues that conversation is a discipline that helps us grow in patience, neighbor love, and in our witness to surrounding communities.

While Smith's undertaking to help churches grow in their conversational abilities is admirable, there are two areas that would benefit from more detailed discussion. He offers several examples of churches in conversation throughout the book; however, more successful and more detailed examples would help readers better understand how to begin conversations within a church body. For example, in Chapter 2, Smith offers a detailed example in the "What *Not* to Talk About" section but no example in the "What Then Do We Talk About?" section. When it comes to the implementation of suggested practices, more detailed examples would be immensely helpful to churches throughout the process of growing in their conversational skills. Another area that could use more explanation is in Chapter 1 in which Smith suggests that the Holy Spirit dwells only within a body of believers and "does not dwell *in* an individual" (p. 22). This statement raises several theological questions, and many evangelicals would disagree with the assertion. Nevertheless, Smith's goal to

help churches build Christian community through conversation does not hinge on this claim.

Despite these drawbacks, this book provides tips, suggestions, and guidelines for conversations within the church body. It challenges readers to learn “to listen and talk in the compassionate way of Jesus” (p. 181). In the increasing isolation that engulfs many twenty-first-century Americans, it has become difficult for people to converse with each other in a caring way. Smith is right to call churches to be leaders in building community through conversations covered in prayer, love, patience, and humility. Through such conversations, the church can demonstrate the love and goodness of God to the world.

Adrianne Miles  
Wake Forest, North Carolina