

Contested Issues in Christian Origins and the New Testament

Collected Essays

Luke Timothy Johnson

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Contested Issues in Christian Origins and the
New Testament

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Collected Essays

By

Luke Timothy Johnson



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To my teachers, students, and colleagues, with deep gratitude

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“A Historiographical Response to Wright’s Jesus,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. Carey C. Newman (Downer’s Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 206–24.

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- “II Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers: A Re-Examination,” *Journal of Religious Studies* 6/7 (1978–79): 1–26.
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- “God Ever New Ever the Same: The Witness of James and Peter,” *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology*, ed. Andrew D. Das and Frank J. Matera (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 211–27.
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- “Proselytism and Witness in Earliest Christianity: A Study in Origins” *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism*, ed. John Witte, Jr., and Richard C. Martin (Religion and Human Rights 4; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 145–57, 376–84.
- “The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust: a Response to Emile Fackenheim,” in *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament After the Holocaust*, ed. Tod Linafelt (New York: Routledge, 2002), 216–231.
- “Law in Early Christianity,” *Christianity and Law: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 53–69.
- “Making Connections: The Material Expression of Friendship in the New Testament,” *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 158–71.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the New Testament and of Christian Origins is of perennial importance. The meaning of Christianity's first writings and the shape of Christianity's earliest developments are of more than antiquarian interest. They bear existential significance for both Christian believers and those who despise Christian belief. Because coming to right conclusions about Christianity's beginnings seems all-important, yet the evidence supporting any conclusion about those beginnings is elusive and debatable, the controversial character of the compositions and of the history to which they bear witness is unavoidable.

The 35 essays collected in this volume represent one scholar's sporadic and non-systematic contributions to a number of important and controversial issues in the study of the New Testament and Christian Origins, written over a period of 35 years, and presented without revision. Much has changed in scholarship over these three decades: the center of the academic study of early Christianity shifted definitively from Europe to the United States, and in this country, progressively toward the sociological and ideological framework of the secular university and away from the concerns of the church. With this shift has come as well the development of new methods intended to replace or supplement the formerly hegemonic historical-critical approach. The American university context has encouraged interaction with a variety of disciplines beyond those of history, philosophy, and theology (which had, for over two centuries, shaped European biblical scholarship). From the use of psychoanalytic categories to interpret the parables of Jesus to the rise of so-called ideological criticisms, recent decades have been marked by a spirit of liberation and experimentation. Perhaps the most significant and enduring of the new approaches have been the ones that have served to focus readers on the actual shape of the compositions: in the gospels, the development of literary or narrative criticism, and in the letters, the recovery of rhetorical analysis.

My own work falls squarely within these last developments, which agree on two critical points: first, the final stage of compositions is decisive for interpretation, and second, ancient compositions make arguments, whether through story or through discourse or through both. From the start of my work on Luke-Acts, then, I argued that the upshot of a

commitment to the literary unity of Luke's two-volume composition was a commitment to determining the rhetorical argument being worked out by the author across his entire story. Likewise in my earliest work on Paul, I searched for the rhetorical function of his polemic against false teachers. Such attention to the literary/rhetorical character of the New Testament compositions has also directed my explorations into contemporary Greco-Roman and Jewish materials; the point has consistently been either to provide analogies to the rhetorical turns of the New Testament, or to put the New Testament compositions into genuine conversation with ideas, symbols, and rhetorical tropes found in their cultural milieu.

As I survey the studies in this collection devoted specifically to the New Testament, therefore, I note three consistent features. The first is an exegetical focus: most of the essays stay close to the particularities of specific compositions, and refuse to take the accustomed way of reading them for granted; to the degree that the studies succeed in being genuinely exegetical, they approach being genuinely original. The second is a concern for methodological (or theoretical) precision and consistency: in a fairly large number of these studies I concern myself with what questions can appropriately be put to texts and what answers might appropriately be expected. The third feature follows from the first two: a willingness to question conventional wisdom (scholarly "consensus") concerning the meaning of New Testament texts and their putative place within early Christian history. Without a solid grounding in exegesis and methodological precision, the adoption of conclusions contrary to those held as dogmas by the guild might appear as odd or idiosyncratic; but based in methodological precision and solid exegesis, they deserve serious consideration. Perhaps I should add as a fourth feature of the essays, then, their contentious character. By my count, at least half of the studies devoted specifically to the New Testament in this book engage, and frequently challenge, the views of other scholars. In some cases, as in my reviews of N.T. Wright on the historical Jesus or of Elaine Pagels on the Gospel of Thomas, the engagement is direct, sustained, and vigorous. In other cases, as in my programmatic essay concerning the validity of seeking the Lukan community, or my review of the NRSV translation of Luke-Acts from the perspective of literary criticism, the discussion is slightly more detached. Nevertheless, these studies amply demonstrate, as do my books, that I have never shied away from intellectual combat, precisely because I am convinced that controversy in matters of great importance is the inevitable result of convictions independently reached and passionately held. I have never thought that academic consensus was much of a guarantee of anything, certainly not truth.

The essays in Part One (“Jesus and the Gospels”) divide nicely between the controversial and the constructive. The first three essays can be read in combination with my book, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (HarperSan-Francisco, 1996), and take up three aspects of that unfortunately titled effort: one aspect is the sustained critique of historiographical method; as *The Real Jesus* applied this to scholars widely regarded as liberal in tendency (above all the Jesus Seminar), so my historiographical response to N.T. Wright applies it to a scholar who has self-designated himself an opponent of the Jesus Seminar. Bad historical method is bad historical method, whatever the ideology driving it. A second aspect (“What’s At Stake”) interrogates the impulses driving a “historical” quest that has yielded such widely various and unsatisfactory results yet never seems to quit, reaching the (fairly obvious) conclusion that the quest has never been about history, but about theology, the quest for a theologically satisfactory Jesus. The third aspect makes the argument that better access to knowledge concerning the human Jesus is available through another sort of criticism, namely literary criticism of the canonical gospels (“Learning the Human Jesus”).

The final three essays in Part One have a more constructive character. In “The Jesus of the Gospels and Philosophy,” I sketch the ways in which the character of Jesus in the canonical gospels can give rise to the sort of serious intellectual inquiry concerning existence that we traditionally associate with the term philosophy. Each mode of engagement involves a reading choice: engaging Jesus as a sage among other ancient sages means reading primarily the words ascribed to him; engaging him as moral exemplar through character ethics means dealing with the depiction of Jesus’ ethos through the gospel narrative; engaging the mythic language of the gospels, in turn, gives rise to ontology; and finally, philosophical reflection can be turned to the ontological implications of reading itself. One of the previously unpublished essays in this collection (“Jesus among the Philosophers”) takes up the challenge of the first option, and places the Matthean beatitudes of Jesus in conversation concerning the nature of happiness with three ancient philosophers. The final essay in this section plays with the notion of a “theology of the synoptic gospels” and presses the methodological issues such a notion raises.

The studies dealing with Luke-Acts in Part Two can be read in conjunction with my books, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Scholars Press, 1977) and *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church* (Eerdmans, 2011), as well as my commentaries on *Luke* and *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 3 and 5; Liturgical Press, 1990, 1992). But each of the essays

deals with methodological issues left implicit in the monographs. Is Luke-Acts capable of providing a picture of the historical Lukan community (“Finding the Lukan Community”)? I answer in the negative: the larger literary and religious goals of the work, and its specific rhetorical shaping, disallows a simple movement from Lukan proposition or theme to a dimension of a Lukan community. How does taking Luke-Acts as a whole affect the study of its Christology? I respond by showing how the overall lukan concern for the “prophet and the people” throughout his narrative serves to focus and organize other Christological elements. How should parables be read within Luke-Acts? I take the “parable of the pounds” as a way of demonstrating that, consistent with his use of summaries and speeches, Luke also uses the parables of Jesus as a means of commenting on and interpreting the flow of his narrative (“Lukan Kingship Parable”). How should “salvation” be understood within Luke-Acts? By using Greimas’ analysis of narrative, I do a serious comparison of Luke-Acts and Paul on this question to show how, for both, salvation is fundamentally a this-worldly, social, phenomenon: salvation is understood in terms of belonging to a remnant community. How can narrative criticism of Luke-Acts serve as a framework for testing the adequacy of a contemporary English translation? I show how the NRSV consistently misses important thematic elements in Luke’s story. Is the value of literary criticism nullified by the history of reader-reception in the early Church? In an exchange with Kavin Rowe, I try to show the opposite, and argue against folding interpretation utterly into the history of interpretation. Finally, I add a short essay which presents some of the elements at work in the narrative analysis of a single Lukan passage.

Although the study of Paul has always been most important to me, and although my conception of the Christian reality is very much shaped by Paul, the actual published work I have done on Paul seems at first glance to be less than that devoted to other parts of the New Testament. There is the treatment of each of Paul’s letters in *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (3rd edition, Fortress, 2010), and a treatment of Romans in my small commentary, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Smyth and Helwys, 1996); there are also studies of Galatians, Colossians, and 1 Corinthians in my book, *Religious Experience: A Missing Dimension of New Testament Studies* (Fortress, 1998). In Part Three of this collection are four essays devoted to specific problems in the undisputed letters, two on Romans and two on 1 Corinthians. My essay on the faith of Jesus in Romans 3:21–26 is one that I regard as particularly important, not only for the contribution it made to the clarification of the debate—then

at a much earlier point—but for the fact that its specific argument linking faith and obedience, grounded in the rhetoric of Romans’ argument, has never been rebutted. The essay on the transformation of the mind and moral discernment, in turn, is closely linked to that on the faith of Jesus, arguing that “the mind in question” in Romans 12:1–2 is precisely “the mind of Christ,” and that Paul’s employment of virtue language for human behavior is more closely linked than at first appears to his language about being led by the Holy Spirit. The two essays on First Corinthians are also linked, as they take up a serious consideration of Paul’s language about the resurrected Christ as “Life-Giving Spirit,” and of the church as “the body of Christ.” Each essay presses the point that Paul’s language about both Spirit and Body requires of interpreters the willingness to enter into an imaginative world alien to their own. The essay on Paul’s ecclesiology, in turn, shows how the major metaphors for the Christian association used by Paul assume that alternative construction of reality.

I unapologetically include three essays on the pastoral letters under the rubric of “Paul,” because I understand these three letters to have been written under his authorization during Paul’s personal ministry. I have advanced serious arguments in favor of this position in my commentaries, *The Letters to Paul’s Delegates* (Trinity International Press, 1996), and *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Anchor Bible 35A; Yale University Press, 2001). The essays included here reveal, I hope, that I reached this position not out of an ideological proclivity—I have never had a theological issue with the Pastorals being pseudonymous, and the first of the essays here (“Second Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers”) actually proposes that 1Timothy and Titus were written pseudonymously on the basis of an authentic 2 Timothy. The other two essays represent the position I now hold. But all three essays are less interested in proving something about authorship than they are in clarifying the interpretation of the letters to Paul’s delegates by placing them in serious conversation, first with forms of ancient rhetoric, and second with letters that are universally accepted as Pauline.

Part Four contains five essays on other New Testament compositions. The two dealing with James (“Reading Wisdom” and “God Ever New”) were written after my commentary, *The Letter of James* (Anchor Bible 37A; Yale University Press, 1995), and a collection of some 15 essays devoted to this important composition, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Eerdmans, 2004). The two dealing with Hebrews can be read in connection with my commentary, *Hebrews* (New Testament Library; Westminster John Knox, 2006). The final study, devoted to John

and the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, is an exercise in canonical criticism with an edge: it asks about the effect of anthologization on interpretation; specifically, how would GT be understood if it were one of the compositions canonized by the church, and how would John be read if it were found in the Nag-Hammadi collection?

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to gather in one place the 9 essays in Part Five, which take up issues in Christian origins, for two reasons: first, one of them (“Marriage, Family, and Sexuality”) has not been published, and the other eight have appeared in publications that are not readily accessible; second, the essays make what I consider to be a real contribution to a number of important issues in earliest Christianity. In these essays, my focus is less on the exegesis of specific texts and more on broader historical themes. I have always been concerned with issues having to do with early Christian history—as is evident in my work on James and the Letters to Paul’s Delegates—and these studies provide further evidence of that concern.

The first of these essays is brief, but has an importance in my own eyes that I hope a wider readership will confirm. In it, I approach the issue of diversity and fellowship in earliest Christianity through an analysis of three distinct historiographical approaches: that of Catholic myth (in the beginning is unity and diversity results from heresy), that of the Tübingen School (in the beginning is diversity of ideas and unity results from a dialectic leading to early Catholicism), and that of contemporary scholars influenced by Walter Bauer (in the beginning is diversity and unity results from Roman political influence). Each approach focuses on different aspects of history, each has strengths, and each has weaknesses. Each also has a mythic character. Against this backdrop, I argue that a better historiography shows that both diversity and fellowship are there from the beginning and continue in different proportions through the first three centuries. This essay finds a complement in the essay “Making Connections: the Material Expression of Friendship in the New Testament.”

Three of the studies touch on the delicate issue of earliest Christianity and Judaism, first in general (“Anti-Judaism”), second in terms of the toxic character of the New Testament’s rhetoric (“The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander”), and third, in terms of hermeneutics (“The Bible after the Holocaust”). My study of the ancient rhetoric of vilification and its literary employment in the compositions of the New Testament is probably the essay of mine that has enjoyed the widest readership and approbation. I hope that its inclusion here will enable another generation of scholars to consider it, for the specter of anti-Semitism is constant within

this discipline. My response to Emile Fackenheim (“The Bible after the Holocaust”), in turn, seeks at once to honor the singularity of the experience of a witness—the holocaust is a *novum*—and to insist that for the historian, no event can be so designated. The issue is of real importance for Christians, and circles back to the question of the historical Jesus. As witnesses, Christians can and must claim a *novum* in their experience of Jesus as exalted Lord and giver of God’s Holy Spirit. But Christians cannot support or validate that witness through historical means.

This collection contains four essays that I have written as part of the Emory University center for Law and Religion, usually at the gentle prodding of my colleague, John Witte. In them, I represent the voice of the New Testament scholar to the larger intellectual community. The first deals with “Religious Rights and Christian Texts.” I argue that Christianity’s normative texts and history of interpretation alike have supported a stance inimical to religious rights for others than Christians, and that both a moral and hermeneutical conversion is required if Christians are to become full participants in a conversation concerning human religious rights. The second takes up the particularly difficult topic of proselytism—specifically the ethics of seeking to persuade others to abandon their convictions in order to accept one’s own. My analysis of the practice of witness in earliest Christianity—including the second century—suggests that proselytism in the morally problematic sense is not supported by Christianity’s earliest practice, and only becomes an issue when Christianity becomes the imperial religion. The third study locates earliest Christianity within the development of two ancient law systems (Roman and Jewish), shows the way in which the New Testament texts struggled to express its own distinctive convictions in tension with those systems, and then the stages through which this religion began to develop its own peculiar codes of law. Finally, this collection includes my unpublished essay (first delivered as a lecture at an Emory conference) on marriage, family, and sexuality in earliest Christianity. The distinctive feature of this study is how it shows the complexity of these issues within Christianity, compared to Judaism and Islam, and the reasons for that complexity.

I owe thanks to many who have helped in the production of these essays over a period of 35 years. In first place, my teachers: I surely would not have been able to work the rich vein that is rhetoric among ancient teachers without the guidance of Abraham J. Malherbe. In second place, colleagues who invited me to participate in a number of colloquies and conferences and *festschriften*, thus forcing me to think through substantive issues; chief in this category is John Witte, who is responsible for at

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Emory University
June 27, 2012

PART ONE

JESUS AND THE GOSPELS

CHAPTER ONE

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS: WHAT'S AT STAKE IN THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS?

The quest for the historical Jesus is itself a most peculiar historical phenomenon. Despite the impression that might be given by the news media and even some contemporary questers, this form of intellectual inquiry has been going on with varying degrees of intensity since the early eighteenth century.¹ Albert Schweitzer's classic 1906 account of the quest from Reimarus to Wrede was itself a very large book, even though his survey was by no means complete.² Schweitzer's analysis of the quest also seemed for a time to end it.³

¹ C. Allen, *The Human Christ: The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New York: Free Press, 1998) 92–119, shows the way such late-seventeenth-and early-eighteenth century freethinkers as Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindale, John Toland, and above all, Thomas Chubb anticipated most later versions of the historical Jesus.

² A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: MacMillan, 1968). Schweitzer concentrated primarily on the quest within German scholarship, with a side glance to such French productions as Renan's *Vie de Jesus* (1863). To augment Schweitzer's account, see M. Goguel, *Jesus and the Origins of Christianity*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena to the Life of Jesus*, (1932; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960) 37–69; Allen, *The Human Christ*; and D. Pals, *The Victorian "Lives" of Jesus* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 1982). The peculiar manifestations of the American scene are well catalogued by P. Allitt, "The American Christ," *American Heritage* (November 1988) 128–141.

³ Schweitzer had shown on one hand that much of the earlier Jesus research was a form of projection in which investigators found in Jesus an idealized version of themselves. On the other hand, he concluded that genuine historical research must choose between two unhappy options: either the gospels are utterly unreliable regarding the identity and ministry of Jesus, or (if they are reliable) the Jesus they present is so totally different from the present as to be unassimilable. In suggesting, however, that what has eternal validity in Jesus is his speech that can communicate to each individual at any time his own eschatological vision of reality, Schweitzer also pointed the way to a renewed search (see *Quest*, 401–402).

But the quest began again as a small trickle in the 1960s,⁴ eventually became a major tributary,⁵ and is now again in full flood, with new versions of Jesus available at Barnes and Noble almost monthly.⁶

⁴ Within German scholarship, the influence of Bultmann and Barth helped delay a renewed quest, even though Bultmann's *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), was a significant response to Schweitzer's implied invitation. Within the Bultmann school, E. Käsemann's 1953 lecture, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" (see *Essays on New Testament Themes*, [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964] 15–47), was pivotal. Käsemann sought a position between the skepticism of Bultmann and the positivism of such questers as E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Knopf, 1960), and J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1971); see E. Käsemann, "Blind Alleys in the 'Jesus of History' Controversy," *New Testament Questions Today*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 23–65. The Prospects for a new quest were sketched for American scholars by J.M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 23 (London: SCM Press, 1959), who also provided valuable bibliographical information on the search between the time of Schweitzer and Käsemann (see pp. 9–25).

⁵ More accurately, perhaps, a series of tributaries that intersected and interconnected in several ways and at several stages. Two can be noted in particular. The first has specialized in dissecting layers of narrative materials in order to find those sayings of Jesus that are regarded as authentic. Here we find the work of Jeremias and his successors on the parables (see, e.g., J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* [New York: Scribner's, 1963]; J.D. Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* [New York: Harper and Row, 1973]; D.O. Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967]; and R. Funk, *Parable and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982]); of Perrin on the other sayings of Jesus (see *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus* [New York: Harper and Row, 1967]), and eventually the work of Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar (see R.W. Funk and R. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* [New York: Macmillan, 1993]). The other has developed out of Schweitzer's eschatological emphasis and has sought to interpret Jesus' mission within the context of a reconstructed Judaism. Here we find among others the work of E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, 1993); G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1983); J. Riches, *The World of Jesus: First Century Judaism in Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); R.A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); J.H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archeological Discoveries* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1988); and N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). For a helpful guide, see B. Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1995).

⁶ In L.T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), I survey the work of the Jesus Seminar and the productions of B. Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secrets of His Life Story* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); J. Spong, *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); A.N. Wilson, *Jesus* (New York: Norton, 1992); S. Mitchell, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) M. Borg, *Jesus, a New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: the Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary*

The question I want to pose is the simplest one imaginable. Why is there such a quest for the historical Jesus? The question is simple but has several parts. Why, after some seventeen centuries of Christianity, did it suddenly seem important to inquire historically into the figure of Jesus? Why did so many presumably meticulous scholars using the same methods applied to the same materials come up with such dramatically different results? Why after so much attention, energy, and intelligence devoted to the quest does it not appear to have reached a conclusion much to anyone's satisfaction? And finally, in the light of the quest's obvious inherent difficulties and failure of all previous efforts, why does the quest not only continue today but flourish to an extent that, to some observers, makes it seem a topic uniquely capable of generating passion among biblical scholars?

Schweitzer's powerful analysis of the first quest provided some answers to these questions. The historical study of Jesus began due to Enlightenment in Europe. At the time, two related convictions became popular among those considering themselves to live in an age of reason.⁷ The first was that for religion to be true it had to be reasonable;⁸ the second was

Faith (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); Crossan, *The Essential Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995); and J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: vol. 1, The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), and *vol. 2, Mentor, Message, and Miracle* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). Because of the decision to restrict my focus, I was not able to touch on such other fascinating examples as J. Bowden, *Jesus: The Unanswered Questions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); and H. Boers, *Who Was Jesus? The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989). For a more positive view of many of these same books, see R. Shorto, *Gospel Truth: The New Image of Jesus Emerging from Science and History, and Why It Matters* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1997).

⁷ The task is provided impetus, of course, by the realization that the "biblical world" is not coextensive with "the real world," a realization that was forced on consciousness both by science and by world exploration. The presumption that the biblical world was simply descriptive of the real world could no longer naively be maintained; in some fashion, faith was now required to respond to the discourse of science and history in a more fundamental manner. On this, see H. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁸ The first casualty was the miraculous element in biblical stories, challenged by the rationalists and decisively jettisoned by D.F. Strauss in his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835). What was not appreciated for a considerable length of time was the way that the definition of "miracle" in terms of the breaking of the "laws of nature" was already a fundamental capitulation to a Newtonian universe that is itself challengeable on a number of grounds; see, e.g., W. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking*

that history was the most reasonable measure of truth.⁹ The claims of Christians about Jesus must therefore also meet those standards. Not surprisingly, the quest for Jesus was driven most by those deeply dissatisfied with a Christianity that grounded its supernaturalism and sacramentalism in the figure of Jesus, and who therefore sought in a purely rational Jesus the basis for a Christianity purged of its superstitious elements.¹⁰ The deist Thomas Jefferson perfectly represented this desire in his scissoring out of the gospels anything that smacked of the superstitious or supernatural in order to find in its pages a Jesus who was a simple teacher of morality applicable to all humans.¹¹ That first search yielded such unsatisfactory results because there are major obstacles to determining what is historical about Jesus.¹² Although generous compared to what we have for some ancient figures, the evidence concerning Jesus is still slender and fragmentary. From outside observers we have only enough to support the historicity of his place and time, mode of death, and movement.¹³ The rest of our evidence comes from insiders, all of whom considered Jesus not to be a figure of the past alone, but above all a presence more powerfully alive and active because of his resurrection than before his death.¹⁴

about God Went Wrong (Louisville, KY.: John Knox/Westminster Press, 1996), and S. Maitland, *A Big-Enough God: A Feminist's Search for a Joyful Theology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).

⁹ See Schweitzer, *Quest*, 13–57; Allen, *The Human Christ*, 92–119. Once more, a legitimate premise—history has to do with human events in time and space and can therefore speak only about such events—can imperceptibly turn into an illegitimate inference: what history cannot speak about does not or cannot exist. To take only the most obvious example, if the resurrection cannot be demonstrated historically, the resurrection must not be real. There are actually two fallacies here. The first makes the historian's capacity to demonstrate an event of the past the test of its occurrence. The second makes history the sole legitimate way to apprehend reality.

¹⁰ For examples, see P. Gay, *Deism: An Anthology* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1968), and in particular, T. Chubb, *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted* (London: Thomas Cox, 1737). See also W. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1, *From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 31–57. For the most explicit contemporary expression of the same position, see R. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 23–29, 300–314.

¹¹ Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (Washington D.C.: USGPO, 1904; New York: Henry Holt, 1995).

¹² See my *The Real Jesus*, 105–26.

¹³ The primary Jewish sources are Josephus, *A.J.*18.3.3, 18.5.2, and 20.9.1: and scattered references in the *Babylonian Talmud* (e.g., *Sanh.*43a and 106a). The Greco-Roman sources are Suetonius' *Claud.* 25.4, Tacitus' *Ann.*15.44.2–8, Pliny the Younger, *Ep.*10.96, and Lucian of Samosata, *De mort. Peregr.*11–13. By the late second century, the attack on Christians by Celsus' *True Word* reflects knowledge of earlier sources.

¹⁴ The point deserves underscoring: noncanonical writings are, if anything, even more “mythological” in their view of Jesus than are the canonical. By no means do they dimin-

Everything they wrote about him was colored by these convictions. There are seemingly intractable limits to the degree any search can disentangle what really happened from such biased sources.¹⁵ The two basic options are to use the narrative framework of the gospels while trying to correct them for bias and implausibility, or to abandon the gospel framework and salvage some of the more historically plausible pieces from the wreckage. Since the gospel narratives themselves disagree both in content and sequence, the first option requires making choices between them.¹⁶ Disregarding their narrative altogether, however, means that some other plausible framework must be found for the pieces of the Jesus tradition which one has deemed authentic.¹⁷

The first option was followed by most classical historians and early questers.¹⁸ The procedure raises the question whether one has been sufficiently critical, or whether one has simply retold the biblical story.¹⁹

ish the “resurrection/faith” perspective, even though they may understand it differently. In none of these extracanonical sources is Jesus regarded as merely human. Even the Jewish-Christian gospel fragments associated with the Ebionites or Nazoreans have explicit mention of the resurrection (see E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, *Gospels and Related Writings*, ed. W. Schneemelcher [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963], 117–165).

¹⁵ For a short discussion of the criteria used to sift authentic from inauthentic among the sayings of Jesus, see my *The Real Jesus*, 20–27, 128–133. In addition to the intrinsic difficulties attending any effort to trace the stages of any tradition in the absence of controls, it is too seldom noted that the entire selection of material now available to scholars derives from those who shared the resurrection perspective. The best such methods can do, furthermore, is determine the earliest form of a tradition, not whether a specific saying actually derived from Jesus. Finally, the results of such demonstration do not themselves constitute the set of all that Jesus might have said and done, but only a subset of a preselected body of sayings. Even if *their* authenticity is demonstrated, that does not by itself disqualify the authenticity of other sayings that the investigator cannot verify by such criteria.

¹⁶ There is no need here to demonstrate what is immediately evident to anyone opening the pages of a synopsis: the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke share a substantial amount of material, language, and order of presentation, but they also vary substantially in all three; John’s gospel differs so markedly that it ordinarily does not appear in a synopsis.

¹⁷ A collection of sayings does not by itself constitute a coherent identity; for that, some sort of narrative framework is required. Once the narrative of the gospels has been dismissed as an invention of the evangelist, and once the construal of Jesus offered by the New Testament epistolary literature had been dismissed as irrelevant, then the way is open to using some other sociological or anthropological model as the framework within which the “authentic pieces” can be fitted.

¹⁸ Thus, the first quest eliminated John in favor of the Synoptics and then sought (through the solution of the “Synoptic Problem”) to determine which of the three Synoptics was likely to have been the earliest—and presumably, best—source for the life of Jesus.

¹⁹ An egregious example is A.N. Wilson’s *Jesus*, which basically moves through the four accounts, picking from them eclectically to construct what seems to the author to be a

The second option, favored by more recent questers, raises the question whether the selection of certain pieces and the fitting of them to new patterns is anything more than an imaginative exercise that reveals much more about the arranger than about Jesus.²⁰

This brings us to the question why so many scholars using the same methods on the same materials have ended with such wildly divergent portraits of Jesus. To list only a few that have emerged: Jesus as romantic visionary (Renan), as eschatological prophet (Schweitzer, Wright), as wicked priest from Qumran (Thiering), as husband of Mary Magdalen (Spong), as revolutionary zealot (S.F.G. Brandon), as agrarian reformer (Yoder), as revitalization movement founder and charismatic (Borg), as gay magician (Smith), as cynic sage (Downing), as peasant thaumaturge (Crossan), as peasant poet (Bailey), and as guru of oceanic bliss (Mitchell).²¹ The common element seems still to be the ideal self-image of the researcher. It is this tendency that led T.W. Manson to note sardonically, "By their lives of Jesus ye shall know them."²²

In the light of such difficulties and such mixed results it is appropriate to ask why historical Jesus research, far from ceasing in fatigue or frustration, is flourishing. The answer cannot be simply that, like the Matterhorn or Everest for the mountain climber, Jesus is simply "there" as a subject who must be considered by any self-respecting historian. Historical Jesus research, in fact, is not primarily carried out by professional secular students of antiquity. For the most part, they show themselves remarkably ready to follow the storyline of the gospels as a reliable sketch of Jesus'

plausible sequence of events. The absence of any criterion for selection beyond personal taste does not appear to embarrass the writer.

²⁰ The main examples here are J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, who tries to get as much mileage as possible out of the designation of Jesus as "a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant," and M. Borg, who invokes the categories of "charismatic *chaside*" and "Revitalization Movement Founder" to provide controls for his selection of evidence.

²¹ S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (New York: Scribner's, 1967); J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973); G.F. Downing, *Christ and the Cynics: Jesus and Other Radical Preachers in First-Century Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988); Crossan's *Jesus: A Revolutionary Life*, where the thaumaturgic element is stressed much more; K.E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant, and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983).

²² T.W. Manson, "The Failure of Liberalism to Interpret the Bible as the Word of God," in *The Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. C.W. Dugmore (London: SPCK, 1944), 92. See also M. Kähler: "What is usually happening is that the image of Jesus is being refracted through the spirit of these gentlemen themselves," in his *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (1892; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 56.

ministry, and the account of Christian origins in the Acts of the Apostles as at least fundamentally credible.²³ The need to keep scratching at these sources seems to be an itch felt mainly by Christian scholars, who mix a considerable amount of theological interest into their history.²⁴

Perhaps the renewal of historical Jesus research in the past two decades has derived from a sense that the advance of knowledge now makes success more likely than it had been in the previous quests.²⁵ This century, after all, has been one of unparalleled growth in discoveries about the ancient Mediterranean world. All this information, however, while wonderfully illuminating virtually every aspect of life in Jesus' world, does not add substantially to our knowledge of his life in that world.²⁶ The archeological discoveries at Qumran and at Nag-Hammadi created those expectations at first, but most scholars today regard them of limited value for knowledge about Jesus.²⁷ It is also true that many of the contemporary

²³ See, e.g., M. Grant, *Jesus: A Historian's Review of the Gospels* (New York: Scribner's, 1977), and A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

²⁴ Schweitzer noted of the first quest: "The historical investigation of the life of Jesus did not take its rise from a purely historical interest; it turned to the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma" (*Quest*, 4). In this respect, the first quest was simply one aspect of the self-understanding of historical criticism as carried out by Christian (and above all, Protestant) scholars, namely to complete the Reformation by isolating by means of historical analysis that essential core of Christianity by which all forms of Christianity should be measured. Built into this perception are two premises that were seldom challenged: that the origins of a religion define its essence, and that the nature of religion can be defined by historical criteria. On the presence of Protestant theological tendencies in the study of earliest Christianity, see J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1–35, and L.T. Johnson, *Religious Experience: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

²⁵ According to J.M. Robinson, *New Quest*, the availability of "new sources" is one of the reasons for a new quest (59–63).

²⁶ From the side of the Greco-Roman world, this new knowledge is most impressively displayed by Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, and from the side of Judaism, by Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*.

²⁷ The presence of an eschatologically defined community of Jewish sectarians within a few miles of the place of John's baptizing ministry remains tantalizing, just as the presence of the Hellenistic city of Sepphoris just a few miles from Jesus' home town of Nazareth remains intriguing. But it is no more provable that Jesus was connected to Qumran (though he may have been) than it is that he worked as a carpenter in Sepphoris and thereby learned Greek aphorisms (though he may have). Historians, fortunately or unfortunately, cannot automatically move from "could have" to "should have" to "would have" to "did," without specific evidence supporting such links. For the most enthusiastic embrace of the notion that the Nag Hammadi writings should be read (as a whole) as providing access to Jesus fully on a par with the canonical Gospels, see M. Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996).

questers place great stock in the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas* found at Nag-Hammadi as a new source of information for Jesus,²⁸ but they have convinced each other more than they have the rest of scholars that the *Gospel of Thomas* truly is a source for the sayings of Jesus as early as the canonical gospels rather than a composition dependent on them.²⁹

Help also seemed to be available from the use of social scientific models applied to the first-century Mediterranean world.³⁰ Once more,

²⁸ See, for example, S.J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1993); J.S. Kloppenborg, et al., *Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1990); R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London: Routledge, 1997). This approach has been exploited most fully by Funk in *The Five Gospels* and by Crossan in *The Historical Jesus*.

²⁹ Caution concerning the overly optimistic use of the *Gospel of Thomas* as a source for the historical Jesus derives from four considerations. First, the possibility that the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* resembling those in the canonical Gospels are in some fashion dependent on them cannot easily be dismissed. Among studies holding out this possibility are R.McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Mowbray, 1960); B. Gaertner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins, 1961); F.M. Strickert, "The Pronouncement Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptics," diss., University of Iowa, 1988; J.-E. Menard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, Nag Hammadi Studies 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1975); W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: A. Toepelmann, 1964); H. Montefiore and H.E.W. Turner, *Thomas and the Evangelists* (London: SCM Press, 1962). A particularly discerning analysis is provided by Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:123–39. Second, an adequate account of the *Gospel of Thomas* as a whole must take into consideration not only the links with the canonical tradition but also those with the larger Nag Hammadi corpus. For example, *Gospel of Thomas* 75 and 104 speak of a "Bridal Chamber," a phrase that finds contextualization in the *Gospel of Philip* 75:25–76:5; likewise, the woman with the "broken jar" in the *Gospel of Thomas* 97 finds its most compelling contextualization in the *Gospel of Truth* 26:4–25. Third, the issue of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the canonical gospels must take into account the clear evidence that many of the other Nag Hammadi writings make use of the canonical literature (see C.M. Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Traditions*, ed. J. Riches [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986]). Fourth, the methods of determining layers of redaction must, in any case, be subjected to the most serious scrutiny because of their inevitable circularity; see C.M. Tuckett, "Q and Thomas: Evidence of a Primitive 'Wisdom Gospel'? A Response to H. Koester," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 67 (1991): 346–360.

³⁰ J.M. Robinson considered a "new concept of history and the self" as a reason for legitimating a new quest after the failure of the old. What he meant, however, was a highly theologized attempt to discover the church's *kerygma* in the sayings of Jesus as revelatory of his "self-understanding." The results of this approach are shown most dramatically in G. Bornkamm's *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). The new quest, in contrast, makes explicit use of social-scientific models as a means of arguing by analogy and of amplifying and clarifying the sparse data from antiquity. For the general perspective of this approach, see B. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), and R. Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996). For the use of such models, see especially Crossan's use of Harold Lenski's class analysis in *The Historical Jesus*, 43–46.

however, no matter how theoretically interesting, models are only as good as the data to which they are applied. They cannot by themselves supply the deficiencies in specific information.³¹ Thus, even if we were to grant the accuracy of the category “Peasant” as applied to Jesus,³² the classification is of limited use in determining what a specific historical person so designated could or could not have done or thought in that world.³³

Finally, many scholars trained in the methods of source and form criticism had become convinced that by means of stylistic and thematic analysis they could discriminate between layers of redaction within a single composition and, on that basis, virtually “discover” new sources within old ones.³⁴ Paying little heed to those who thought such methods highly subjective and arbitrary, they considered themselves to have found the alchemist’s stone that could finally break through the barrier that had stymied the earlier quest.³⁵ They could sort through the various strands

³¹ See, e.g., the way in which theory tends to trump evidence in W.R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive: Jesus as Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

³² See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 45–46, 124–136; In contrast, Meier provides nuanced comments on the difficulty of sorting out Jesus’ precise socioeconomic status in *A Marginal Jew* 1:278–315.

³³ Two observations are in order. The first is that the Roman empire was, in truth, a highly stratified social system, but it was equally one of social mobility and change (see W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983]). The second is that even in stratified worlds, the performance of individuals is distinctive and cannot be deduced from the supposed norm. Crossan himself notes the pertinence of Petronius’ character Trimalchio (*The Historical Jesus*, 53–58).

³⁴ Source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism are all variations of the same sort of diachronic approach that was formerly called “literary criticism,” namely, the effort to create a historical sequence out of extant literary compositions by means of literary detection. For an accessible survey of such approaches, see S.L. McKenzie and S.R. Haynes, *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 29–99. Such procedures operate on the premise that literary “seams” (changes in vocabulary, perspective, theme) are invariably indicators of “sources” that have been stitched together over the process of time rather than rhetorically shaped “signals” within the composition itself. The detection of “layers” is usually based on the premise that distinguishable ideological strands are incapable of being held simultaneously. Thus, both Bultmann and the Jesus Seminar insist that “sapiential” and “eschatological” elements within the gospels (or Q) must come from different periods of time, even though there are extant noncanonical writings (e.g. the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*) in which they comfortably coexist.

³⁵ The quest described by Schweitzer was in reality the pursuit of the literary composition that gave best access to Jesus. When Markan priority had been established, then it seemed imperative either to accept its portrayal of Jesus as an eschatologically motivated prophet, or to challenge its historical accuracy. The new quest follows on the challenge to Mark by Wilhelm Wrede that led to the development of form criticism. All of the gospels (including the *Gospel of Thomas*) are taken as theological constructions by the evangelists—the task of the historian is to assess the pieces used by each evangelist.

of discrete tradition and find those that went back to Jesus himself as opposed to those that betrayed the influence of the early church.³⁶ New information, new models, and new methods encouraged the new questers, who believed that their efforts would yield more scientifically respectable results.³⁷

By 1999, however, it has become abundantly clear that these hopes are not to be realized, and that the old circularity, far from being transcended, is only more obvious. It is surely not entirely a coincidence that the liberally inclined academics of the late twentieth century have found a Jesus who is not embarrassingly eschatological, not especially Jewish, not offensively religious, a canny crafter of countercultural aphorisms who is multicultural, egalitarian, an advocate of open commensality, and a reformer who is against the exclusive politics of holiness and for the inclusive politics of compassion. And best of all, he is all this as a charismatic peasant whose wisdom is not spoiled by literacy.³⁸ What more perfect mirror of late-twentieth-century academic social values and professional self-despising could be imaged? Nor is it surprising that at the opposite end of the cultural and religious spectrum, more evangelically oriented Christians are finding a Jesus who is precisely eschatological, devoted to purity and holiness, and a champion of the politics of restoration within Judaism.³⁹ Clearly, scholars' preunderstanding of Jesus deeply affects their way of assessing the data.⁴⁰

³⁶ There is a direct line of continuity here between the methodological principals of the very conservative Joachim Jeremias in *The Parables of Jesus* and those employed by the Jesus Seminar in *The Five Gospels*. The gospels are seen as fundamentally distorting the memory of what Jesus said; in order to get back to the "real Jesus," one must peel away those parts of the gospel that reflect the tradition's perspective. What in Luther had been an appeal to the gospels against the tradition of Catholicism became in critical scholarship an appeal to Jesus against all tradition. What has characterized the new quest is that this opposition is carried to the gospel narratives themselves. The only sources available for learning about Jesus are themselves fundamentally unreliable in what they report about Jesus.

³⁷ Although not formally associated with the Jesus Seminar, the work of Burton Mack shares the same methodological assumptions and, in the analysis of the hypothetical document Q, posits an earliest stratum of Jesus traditions that are fundamentally sapiential in character, unaffected by eschatology; see B. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), and my comments in *The Real Jesus*, 50–54.

³⁸ This portrait is an amalgam of those in Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*; Borg, *Jesus, a New Vision*; and Funk, *Honest to Jesus*.

³⁹ See the portraits drawn by Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; and B. Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996).

⁴⁰ Robert Funk is simply the most transparent example. In his opening address to the newly formed Jesus Seminar in 1985, Funk already enunciated the image of Jesus that was

If neither the intrinsic interest of the subject matter nor the possibility for success accounts for the perpetuation of the quest for the historical Jesus, then perhaps the searchers are driven by some sense of compulsion. They work at this difficult and discouraging task out of a sense of necessity. To turn it another way, they will not give up on this task, no matter what its odd permutations, for to give it up would mean to lose something of essential value. This conclusion makes a lot of sense to me and corresponds to the almost fierce dedication I sense in conversation with questers, a devotion that survives any criticism of their perspectives, procedures, or results.⁴¹

It is tempting to attribute such futile expenditure of time and energy to nonintellectual motives. It may be that the compulsion in some cases is economic and professional. Scholars need to publish to keep their jobs. And publishers have found that nothing in the field of religion sells like Jesus books. Those who have been educated only within these methods and know how to pursue only this one task are likely to keep publishing in it and are likely to find ready outlets for their productions, no matter how much the entire enterprise is challenged.⁴²

The compulsion may, in some cases, also be deeply personal. Is it accidental that many contemporary questers were raised in a fundamentalist context that demanded an unswerving loyalty to the "literal" meaning of

required (see *Forum* 1, no. 1 [1985]: 10–12). It is no surprise, then, to find precisely that Jesus "determined" by the votes of the Seminar in *The Five Gospels* (1993). But the degree to which Funk was willing to ignore the very criteria established by the Seminar in order to "find" the Jesus he desired only became apparent in *Honest to Jesus*, 143–216.

⁴¹ In the various debates and discussions I have had with questers after the publication of *The Real Jesus*, I have been struck by the elusiveness of the conversation. When I challenged the quest on the grounds of historical method, the response tended to be in terms of theological legitimacy of the quest; when I challenged the theological premises on the basis of classic Christian belief, the response tended to be in terms of historiography. For a sample, see the published form of the exchange at the 1996 AAR/SBL meeting, in C.A. Evans, A.Y. Collins, W. Wink, and L.T. Johnson, "The 'Real Jesus' in Debate," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 225–54.

⁴² Statements such as this one are guaranteed to generate resentment, as I discovered in response to the observation in *The Real Jesus* 2–3, that the members of the Jesus Seminar were not drawn from the most notable research institutions in the United States. My statement was taken by readers as elitist, when in fact it was intended as the most sober sort of qualification of the Seminar's own posture as representing the best in critical scholarship. Therefore, I want to stress here that I am not, in making the observation in the text, questioning either the intellectual ability or the moral integrity of questers. I am rather asserting something important about the shape of New Testament scholarship today. The proliferation of the premises and procedures exemplified in the search for the historical Jesus points to a crisis in biblical scholarship that I try to address in *The Real Jesus*, 57–80.

the text in support of doctrine?⁴³ For some, the pursuit of critical scholarship has literally been a conversion to another faith system. The freedom given by the doctrines and practices of scholarship offers salvation from the bondage to the literalism of a narrowly defined tradition. But a world defined by literalism is difficult to escape. Repulsed by the Jesus they associate with their own oppressive rearing, some still cannot break free of Jesus or of the texts of oppression and must spend their lives, like obsessives unable to get past a primordial trauma, walking the same small circle again and again.⁴⁴

Such explanations clearly do not, however, apply to all those engaged in historical Jesus research,⁴⁵ and I raise them only to say that even if such motivations were at work it would still be necessary to consider the overt reasons given (when they are given) for engaging in this search. And it is to these overt—if often unexpressed—motivations that I now turn.

In one way or another, the quest of the historical Jesus appears to rest upon the twofold conviction that (a) the humanity of Jesus is important, indeed, essential for Christians to maintain and (b) historical knowledge is the best way to apprehend Jesus' humanity. If this is so, then it is pertinent to inquire more persistently and precisely into this conviction. In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider some of the possible permutations, asking whether the double premise of the questers is, in fact, either necessary or correct.

At the most basic level, it might be argued, the historical study of Jesus is required in order to ensure that Christianity is not based simply in myth. Thus, if we can show that Jesus was a Jew of the first century, then he can be called "real" in the sense that Socrates is real, as opposed to, let us say, Osiris or Attis, namely, the religious figuration of natural processes. Jesus cannot thereby be reduced either to a societal ideal or mass neurosis. This is certainly a legitimate aim. But several observations are in order.

The first observation is that securing this much historicity is extraordinarily easy. Only the truly eccentric mind can fail to draw the appropriate

⁴³ To some extent at least this must account for the scarcely controlled rage against "Televangelists" and "Fundamentalists" expressed, for example, by *The Five Gospels*, 1–35, and J.S. Spong, *Born of a Woman*, 1–14—and more or less equated with "creedal Christianity."

⁴⁴ This impression is most vivid in R. Funk's *Honest to Jesus*, in which Funk's personal story, reconstruction of Jesus, and vision for Christianity connect in the theme of "leave-taking and homecoming."

⁴⁵ Indeed, the monumental research of Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, seems to be singularly lacking in such factors.

conclusion from available evidence, namely, that Christianity is linked to a Jew who was legally executed under Roman authority.⁴⁶ Establishing that much historicity is a half hour's work. It does not account for the extraordinary efforts of the Jesus questers.

The second observation is that the history-versus-myth distinction is itself a bit dangerous, if it is then taken as equaling "real" versus "unreal."⁴⁷ A more sophisticated sense of myth recognizes that the mythic is language seeking to express a depth of meaning that transcends the categories of analysis. In this sense, the statement "God is at work in history" is as surely mythic as is the statement "God was at work in Jesus." If history demands that the subject studied be reduced entirely to its categories of cognition, then history must disallow all religious language.⁴⁸ Another motivation for pursuing the historical Jesus is to save Christianity from Docetism. Docetism refers to the conviction among some early Christians, particularly the Gnostics, that Jesus' humanity was not real but only an appearance; the divine word simply inhabited some available human flesh in its sojourn on earth.⁴⁹ This is in reality a variation of the previous motivation, except that it involves an explicitly theological concern. Whether Jesus' humanity was real or not, a divine artifice is of no concern to the secular historian, who is content if Christianity is based on illusion. Still less should a secular historian worry if what Christians proclaimed about Jesus was not in continuity with what Jesus himself proclaimed.⁵⁰ Such

⁴⁶ An outstanding example of such a mind is J.M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Near East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970). The title pretty much says it all.

⁴⁷ It was precisely this easy and deceptive equation that led to my (ironic) title, *The Real Jesus*. John Meier makes important distinctions between the "reality" of any figure of the past and the limited capabilities of any historical reconstruction; see *A Marginal Jew* 1:21–40; 2:340, 682, 778.

⁴⁸ For a (not entirely satisfactory) response to this premise, see C.S. Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

⁴⁹ The claim that the quest for the historical Jesus was necessary as a protection against docetism was made explicitly by J.D. Crossan in the first of his entries in the Spring 1996 Internet debate sponsored by HarperSanFrancisco and involving Crossan, Borg, and myself ("Jesus 2000"). Crossan claimed that my strong position concerning the resurrection as the basis of Christian faith was in effect a variation of Gnosticism. I found this a classic example of historical reductionism, in which a theological conviction concerning the humanity of Jesus (which I strongly affirm) is identified with a process of historical reconstruction (which I strongly reject as the appropriate path to that Humanity).

⁵⁰ This is a concern especially of the Second Quest, associated with Ernst Käsemann, who stated candidly, "The clash over the historical Jesus has as its object a genuine theological problem" ("The Problem of the Historical Jesus," 34), which he identifies as "enthusiasm," or the tendency of a resurrection faith to dissolve the preached Christ "into the

concerns derive from a faith commitment that makes the human figure of Jesus the measure for Christian confession.

Again, some observations are in order. It is not at all clear, in the first place, that if Jesus' humanity *were* docetic, history would be in a position to detect it, since history, like all empirical disciplines, depends entirely on the observation and analysis of phenomena. It cannot declare on the ontic status of things, only on their appearance; history gives no access to the noumenal. And since history can only negotiate that set of "appearances" of Jesus recorded in the gospels, it is not able to declare whether those appearances were of a "real human" or only of an "apparent human." This motivation for doing historical Jesus research is also somewhat odd in that it is based on the same sort of creedal premise that questers frequently castigate for "theological tyranny" and the suppression of the historical Jesus. Here is a case where the creed seems to give even as it takes away.

But is the charge accurate in the first place? Does the Christian creed actually diminish the humanity of Jesus? Certainly it does not do so explicitly. The Nicene Creed, for example, declares that Jesus was "conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried." The only transcendental element in this summary is the mode of conception by the Holy Spirit. That Jesus was conceived, however, and born of a specific woman, suffered, and died a form of violent execution under a specific historically locatable Roman prefect, and finally was buried—these seem to stress rather than diminish Jesus' humanity.⁵¹

Perhaps, however, I am being overtly literal. Perhaps the real complaint about the creed or "Creedal Christians" is that, despite their protestations to the contrary, their explicit conviction concerning Jesus' divine nature,

projection of an eschatological self-consciousness and becoming the object of a religious ideology" ("Blind Alleys," 63). For Käsemann, therefore, the quest for the historical Jesus was the quest for "criteria" as a "discerning of the spirits" ("Blind Alleys," 48), namely, to discover "whether the earthly Jesus is to be taken as the criterion of the kerygma, and if so, to what extent" ("Blind Alleys," 47). For this aspect of Käsemann's work, see B. Ehler, *Die Herrschaft des Gekreuzigten*, BZNW 46 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1986), 161–269.

⁵¹ Not least because the creed, as a *regula fidei* drawn from the canonical scriptures themselves, points to the fuller narrative expression of these convictions in the New Testament gospels and letters. It is certainly true that these notes on Jesus' humanity are preceded and followed by thoroughly mythic claims concerning his ultimate origin in God and his future role as judge of humanity, but these contextualize Jesus' humanity rather than suppress it.

or their conviction that he continues to live as the resurrected one as life-giving Spirit, means that *in effect* his humanity is not taken sufficiently seriously: Jesus' humanity is just a sort of abstract proposition, without any specificity.

Is this claim true? Have creedal Christians made the humanity of Jesus a mere cipher? The evidence, I suggest, is mixed. There is considerable evidence that the humanity of Jesus receives scant attention in much contemporary Christian preaching, especially the forms that portray Christian existence not as a path of discipleship in the way of the cross, but purely as a salvation from psychic troubles and a placement on the path to worldly success. Indeed, the lack of attention to the humanity of Jesus in the church is in all likelihood the strongest element in the popularity of current historical Jesus research. People are eager to hear about the person of Jesus of Nazareth and do not hear about him often enough within the community of faith.

But it should also be emphasized that such neglect is not the necessary corollary of a creedal faith. Here is where the easy equation between creedal Christianity and "fundamentalism" and "literalism" becomes most obviously distorting. The very same patristic theologians who spun such fine distinctions concerning Nature and Person preached sermons that meditated on the gospels in great and specific detail. To take but one example, hear this Christmas sermon from Leo the Great. After speaking of Jesus' humility and service to humans, Leo concludes:

The works of our Lord, dearly beloved, are useful to us, not only for their communication of grace, but as an example for our imitation also—if only these remedies would be turned into instruction, and what has been bestowed by the mysteries would benefit the way people live. Let us remember that we must live in the "humility and meekness of our Redeemer," since, as the Apostle says, "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." In vain are we called Christians if we do not imitate Christ. For this reason did he refer to himself as the Way, that the teacher's manner of life might be the exemplar for his disciples, and that the servant might choose the humility which had been practiced by the master, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.⁵²

⁵² See Leo the Great, *Sermon* 25:5–6 (25 December 444); citation from St. Leo the Great, *Sermons*, The Fathers of the Church 93 (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 103–4. See also *Sermon* 37:3–4; 46:2–3; 59:4–5; 66:4–5; 70:4–5; 72:4–5; likewise, Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon* 11; Jerome, *Homily* 88; Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 20:5; 29:5–7; 34; 38:1–3.

And if the high Middle Ages can be called the apex of abstract and propositional theology, it can also legitimately be called an age of unparalleled devotion to the humanity of Jesus in prayer, meditation, music, and art.⁵³ The frescoes of Giotto were not made by someone unappreciative of Jesus' humanity.

But such attention to Jesus' humanity within the tradition, it may be claimed, focuses on his universal human characteristics rather than the historical particularities of his time and place. Most specifically, some object, it is the Jewishness of Jesus that creedal Christianity suppresses.⁵⁴ Before taking up this issue, it should be recognized that the ground of objection has shifted once more. Not simply the humanity of Jesus but *what aspect* of his humanity is now at question. The ancient church focused on the character of Jesus as exemplary of virtue. Contemporary questers focus on his social and ideological location in antiquity as a Jew. It is not immediately obvious, however, why one focus is more serious about Jesus' humanity than the other.

Why should Jesus' *Jewishness* be of such signal importance apart from specific theological convictions concerning special revelation within Israel? The obvious answer is that in a post-Holocaust world the neglect of Jesus' Jewishness is considered as fundamental to the long and tragic story of Christian anti-Semitism.⁵⁵ And it is certainly true that, to the degree Jesus' humanity has either been subsumed into his status as God's Son or has been abstracted from his Jewish identity, Christians have found it easier to distance themselves from and stand in hostile opposition to Judaism. For these reasons, all of the historical data concerning Judaism in the first century which has become available within the past forty years has had the most positive effect in contextualizing Jesus, the nascent Christian movement, and the very language of the New Testament. Like all other critical scholars, I affirm the absolute necessity of learning as much about the historical circumstances of the New Testament as possible in order to

⁵³ Among countless examples, see Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ* 4:7–12; Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, Sermon 20; Francis of Assisi, *Rules of 1221*, chaps. 1–2, 9; see also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁵⁴ See in particular G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 15–17, and *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, 49–51.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974); A.R. Eckhardt, *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). The concern is explicit in Crossan's *Who Killed Jesus*.

understand its symbolic structure and its claims.⁵⁶ Not least among the values of such historical study is the relativization of the rhetoric of the New Testament concerning the Jews.⁵⁷

The pursuit of historical knowledge in order to place the New Testament in context is not the same thing, however, as pursuing a historical reconstruction of the figure of Jesus. As I mentioned earlier, none of the new knowledge (or reexamined old knowledge) concerning Judaism in the first century appears to touch directly on Jesus himself. The primary result of this knowledge is to increase our sense of the complexity of Jewish life both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, and to engender a sense of caution about simple declarations concerning what it meant to be a Jew.⁵⁸ To construct a single narrative or portrait of Judaism in first-century is to distort the evidence of history.⁵⁹

A further historical distortion occurs when a single strand within the complex world of Judaism is isolated and stabilized (or, one might say, hypostatized) in order to provide a coherent framework to place the Jesus traditions salvaged from the deconstructed gospel narratives. This is, in fact, what is done in several recent historical Jesus publications: Judaism is used to provide a norm against which to measure Jesus.⁶⁰ Such studies claim to root Jesus in Judaism, but in reality one or the other aspect of that complex and living tradition is singled out and reified as a category into which Jesus can be placed. He is a charismatic Jew, or an eschatological Jew, or a Jewish peasant.

⁵⁶ See L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), especially the introduction and epilogue.

⁵⁷ These convictions are displayed in a number of my own writings, including "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 419–41, and "Religious Rights and Christian Texts," in *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective*, ed. J. Witte and J.D. van de Vyver, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1996), 1:65–95.

⁵⁸ See Johnson, "New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander," 423–430.

⁵⁹ This is the major flaw in the otherwise impressive effort of N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992). His concern to construct a single narrative framework leads to a tendency to speak in terms of "mainline Jews" (see p. 286), in much the same manner as G.F. Moore spoke of "Normative Judaism" (in his *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 2 vols. [1927; New York: Schocken Books, 1971]).

⁶⁰ In a 1987 lecture called "Jesus within Judaism" at Christian Theological seminary in Indianapolis, I demonstrated this tendency in H. Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*; and Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*.

Such categories, in turn, are used as boundaries to what Jesus could and could not have done as a human person. A charismatic Jew would not be interested in observance of the law, an apocalyptic Jew must have been committed to the restoration of the temple, a peasant Jew could not read and write. But history has to do precisely with the way actual living people in the past have drawn attention to themselves for the strange and wondrous ways in which they have confounded their settings and conditioning. Julius Caesar is not every Roman, nor is Socrates every Athenian. To reduce Jesus' possibilities to what was available to a hypothetical Jewish construct is not to do history but to engage in sociological typecasting. So much does recent historical reconstruction tend to stabilize and hypostatize fluid and complex traditions in the service of "finding" a specific and comprehensible Jesus, in fact, that I propose reversing the charge that the questers customarily make against the tradition: Do they not end up being just as abstract as the creeds of Christianity ever were?

The final motivation for Jesus research is the conviction that Jesus' humanity is in some fashion or other normative for Christian identity. There are three different ways of articulating this conviction. Two of them lead to some sort of historical reconstruction. The third does not.

The first way to express this has been the most consistent within historical Jesus research from Reimarus to Robert Funk.⁶¹ It begins with a triple conviction: first, that Christianity is not a uniquely or divinely revealed truth but is rather, like all religions, a cultural construction elastic in its capacity to reinvent itself; second, that Christianity in its present state distorts its important humane values by various forms of superstition, beginning with the notion of divine revelation; third, that as the central symbol of Christianity, Jesus must be the repository of the positive humane values without the distortions of the supernatural claptrap.⁶²

The quest for a purely human Jesus is, then, the search for a purely human Christianity, the desire for a Jesus without dogma is a desire for Christianity without dogma, the conviction that Jesus must have been a simple moral teacher a reflection of the conviction that Christianity ought to be a matter of simple morality without sacrament or institutional superstructure.⁶³

⁶¹ See Allen, *The Human Christ*, 92–119.

⁶² See Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 300–314; see also the final sentence in Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*, "If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in" (426).

⁶³ See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 417–426.

Questers of this sort suffer the agonies of unrecognized reformers and prophets. They can't stand the Christianity practiced in the churches, but can't stand to leave it either; they regard the Jesus portrayed in the gospels to be as corrupted as the Jesus preached from the pulpit, but they cannot imagine their lives without reference to Jesus. Most of all, they cannot understand why other Christians do not want to accept the liberation they offer.⁶⁴ Their solution is to craft a Jesus who suits their sense of what Christianity ought to be. And since images of an ideal Christianity differ according to personal perspective, so do such questers come up with the bewildering variety of "historical" Jesuses that I have catalogued above. The most recent versions clearly represent a reaction against the supposed individualism and otherworldliness of present Christianity; thus, in one way or another, Jesus and his mission are defined in social or political rather than in religious or spiritual terms.⁶⁵

The second articulation of the conviction that Jesus' humanity is normative for Christians is the conviction that what Jesus said and did before his death, indeed his vision of reality, is normative for Christians because in those words and actions and perceptions God was expressing the norm for human life. This is, in effect, a way of expressing the doctrine of the incarnation. The resurrection of Jesus only validated what was there all along but could not be seen: that Jesus was the unique revelation of God.⁶⁶ A traditional enough understanding in many ways—why should it demand a historical reconstruction?

⁶⁴ Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 11–14.

⁶⁵ The sort of sociopolitical renderings of Jesus offered by Borg and Crossan need to be challenged historiographically in terms of the adequacy of the portrayal of the historical/social situation and the selection of the evidence from the gospels. But in terms of their theological agenda, such reconstructions can be challenged as well on two counts: (1) Their tendency to reify Judaism and—contrary to their good intentions—perpetuate the picture of a good Jesus (for a politics of compassion/unbrokered kingdom) against a bad Judaism (which has a politics of holiness or participates in a brokered kingdom). This is a mild form of the Marcionism that has long infected forms of Christianity that focus on what is unique about Christianity/Jesus as what is essential to Jesus/Christianity. (2) Their reduction of religious sensibility to the level of political position, which represents an impoverished view of reality, not to mention traditional Christianity, which has based itself on the conviction that Jesus was less about the rearrangement of the structures of society than the transformation of the very structures of existence.

⁶⁶ Ernst Käsemann ("Blind Alleys," 27, 29, 31) quotes Joachim Jeremias ("The Present Position in the Controversy Concerning the Problem of the Historical Jesus," *Expository Times* 69 [1958]: 333–339) to this effect: "The incarnation implies that Jesus is not only a possible subject for historical research, study, and criticism, but that it demands all of these... according to the New Testament, there is no other revelation of God but the Incarnate Word... The Historical Jesus and His message are not one presupposition

It does so if the gospels are taken as inadequate historical sources for the “real Jesus” rather than as witnesses and interpretations of him in the light of faith. If the way to get at what God was expressing in Jesus demands “getting behind” the gospels, in order to reach that elusive human person in whom was embodied revelation, then some sort of sifting and rearranging of the gospel materials seems to be required. The theological character of this motivation is immediately apparent. History is put in service of the search for a pure revelation that is all the more mythic because it is presumed to be available somewhere beyond the contingent perspectives of the sources.

What is most paradoxical here, however, is the fusion of the contingent and the necessary. History has to do with contingent, the singular, and the unrepeatable. In what sense can the “history” of Jesus—the specifics of his place and time and words and gestures—be normative? How can these serve, that is, as a necessary frame of reference for all other “histories,” in the lives of those who live in quite different times and places, and who must interact with quite different circumstances, who must speak with different words and who must act with different gestures? This is, at root, the mystery of the incarnation, that Kierkegaard recognized as the absurd yet compelling conjunction of the necessary (eternal) and contingent (temporal).⁶⁷ Christians claim that in the contingent events of Jesus’ life, the “eternal” of God is revealed, yes. But it is not possible for the specifics of any (unrepeatable) human existence to be normative for others—by definition.

If the historical is to bear normativity, must it not be through some pattern found in the person of the past which is in fact applicable to all others? Here is the failure in logic in the well-meaning efforts of those believers who are also questers.⁶⁸

among many for the kerygma, but the sole presupposition of the kerygma”; the quest for the historical Jesus is therefore the gaining of revelation: “we can venture on [this road] with confidence, nor need we fear that we are embarking on a perilous, fruitless adventure.” Compare N.T. Wright, “A truly first-century Jewish theological perspective would teach us to recognize that history, especially the history of the first-century Judaism, is the sphere where we find, at work to judge and to save, the God who made the world” (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 662).

⁶⁷ S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton University Press, 1944), 498–515. I recognize that my use of the “eternal” here is not the same as Kierkegaard’s.

⁶⁸ It is also, of course, the failure of arguments such as those used to support the exclusion of women from ordained ministry on the grounds that Jesus and the apostles were male. The same logic could be extended to demand that all priests be Jewish, wear beards, and live in Palestine.

Marcus Borg says, “To follow Jesus means in some sense to be ‘like him,’ to take seriously what he took seriously,” which, he proposes, gives disciples “an alternative vision of life.”⁶⁹ He is partly right: to be a disciple must be to be like Jesus in some fashion, and that means having a different vision. But he is, I think, seriously in error when he explicates that as “taking seriously what he took seriously,” for it defines the pattern and vision in terms of the specific historical circumstances of Jesus’ unrepeatable life, which are not only largely unrecoverable but also largely irrelevant.⁷⁰

When Borg goes on to characterize Jesus’ historical mission as one in which he opposed the “politics of holiness” that dominated Judaism with a “politics of compassion,” he ends up with what turns out to be an abstract pattern that is applicable only to some humans in some circumstances. He is a bit like an engineer who tries to persuade us of the usefulness of bridges in general but is able to construct only a bridge capable of spanning one size river.

This brings us at last to the third way of thinking about Jesus’ humanity as normative for all Christians, a way that characterized Christianity from the time of the writing of the New Testament to the period of the Enlightenment, when the quest for the historical Jesus began in Europe. This classical form of Christianity based itself on belief in the resurrection, which means that the response of faith is directed not to a set of facts about a man of the past who had died but to a person who had entered into the life of God so fully that he continues to be present as life-giving spirit.⁷¹

It was this resurrection experience that shaped the church’s memory of Jesus’ words and deeds and that led it to understand the deeper dimensions of his humanity, so that it came to see that even before entering through into his glory this human person carried the full weight of the divine presence and was the incarnate revelation of God.

⁶⁹ Borg, *Jesus, a New Vision*, 17.

⁷⁰ Funk recognizes this when, after laboring to recover Jesus’ distinctive vision of reality, he then adds, “To accept Jesus’ sense of the real naively is also a potential mistake . . . [W]e must test his perceptions of the real by our own extended and controlled observations of the world. We need not and should not place blind faith in what Jesus trusted.” *Honest to Jesus*, 305.

⁷¹ See my *The Real Jesus*, 133–140, and *Writings of the New Testament* 1–20, 87–140, as well as my most recent book, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999). The position I develop in *The Real Jesus* bears a real resemblance to the classic argument of Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (1892; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), a point effectively made in a review of *The Real Jesus* by Sharon Dowd in *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1996): 179–183.

Yet within the writings of the New Testament this resurrection faith did not translate into a denial or neglect of Jesus' humanity. Just the opposite. It deserves repetition that, apart from the pathetically few scraps of information about Jesus found in Greco-Roman and Jewish sources, absolutely everything we know about the human person Jesus—including every bit of data used by every so-called historical reconstruction of Jesus—derives from these believers who met and worshipped in the name of the living Lord and said Amen to God through him. This information is contained not only in the gospels but in the earliest Christian correspondence dating from as early as twenty years after Jesus' death: the letters of Paul, of Peter, and the anonymous Letter to the Hebrews all contain specific historical information about Jesus.⁷²

It is above all, of course, the gospels that report on Jesus' deeds and words, with a specificity so detailed and acute that everything learned about Palestine in the last hundred years has served to support the portrait of life in that place found in the gospel narratives and the parables of Jesus.⁷³ Those who confessed Jesus as risen Lord can hardly be accused of neglecting his humanity if everything we know of his humanity derives from them!

At the same time, the New Testament writings and, above all, the gospels show no obsessive concern with an exhaustive record of Jesus' words and deeds, or even a preoccupation with getting the sequence of his deeds or the wording of his sayings perfectly accurate. This is so much the case that the entire quest for the historical Jesus has been confounded by the casualness of our primary sources on just these points.

There is one aspect of Jesus' humanity, however, on which the New Testament witnesses show remarkable unanimity, and that is Jesus' character, or what might be called the basic pattern of his life. They agree also that this pattern or character is also the norm for Jesus' followers.⁷⁴

⁷² For the information about the human Jesus found in the New Testament epistolary literature, see my *The Real Jesus*, 117–122, and more fully in *Living Jesus*.

⁷³ This remarkable convergence and confirmation has held out the tantalizing prospect of being able to push even further, to Jesus himself, when in fact it only enables us to better grasp the literary presentation of Jesus within the Gospels with the sense that—despite their diversity—they construct a figure that all historical investigation shows to be thoroughly at home in that world.

⁷⁴ My basic position here is in many ways similar to that of H. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

Notice the conceptual shift involved in recognizing this emphasis within the New Testament texts. To speak of character is to speak of persons—including historical persons—in a way that is different from that employed by historical Jesus researchers. According to questers at either end of the ideological spectrum, the person of Jesus can be located by the discovery of his authentic sayings, either apart from or in concert with his verifiable deeds. Each saying of Jesus, it is assumed, bears an “understanding of the world” or a “vision of reality” that either indicates or is constitutive of Jesus as a person. Likewise, each deed is an “enactment” of such a vision or understanding. Now, the importance of what people say and do should be obvious and can never be simply neglected. There is, therefore, a legitimacy to approaching the gospel materials with such an interest.

There is, however, the basic problem that an adequate inventory of Jesus’ sayings and deeds is simply not available. And even if the ones made available to us in the sources were all tested and found to be authentic, they would represent a tiny portion of what Jesus spoke and did. More problematic still, however, is the premise that a person can be understood even if one were in possession of all the facts about them—all their words and deeds.

It is far more adequate generally to think of persons in terms of their character, that is, in terms of those traits, dispositions, attitudes, and habits that underlie, generate, and are articulated by specific deeds and sayings. To be a person is less a matter of event than of existence. To a considerable extent, a person’s character is both what is more important about him or her—even historically—and what is often most elusive about him or her. The reason why “one’s story” is thought to be particularly revealing of self is not because such reportage is necessarily more accurate or comprehensive at the level of facts, but because narrative necessarily involves an interpretation of the facts. The continuous writing of biographies about figures such as Thomas Jefferson and John F. Kennedy has less to do with acquiring of new facts than with the need to assess character. And each new interpretation of character is accomplished by the placing of the “facts” into a different narrative.

Since the gospels were written from the perspective of faith in Jesus as the resurrected son of God, we might expect to find him consistently portrayed in the gospels as a triumphant, glorious figure. But the opposite is the case: Jesus is portrayed in the gospel narratives as the obedient one who gives his life in service for the sake of others, and who calls

others to follow him in the same path of obedient service.⁷⁵ So much is this portrayal common to the four gospels that in other respects differ so greatly—even in the Gospel of John, in which the resurrection perspective is all pervasive—that literary critics have no difficulty in discerning the “Christ figure” in works of literature such as Melville’s *Billy Budd* and Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*. This figure is, of course, that of an innocent person whose suffering is redemptive for others.

This portrayal of Jesus, I repeat, is found in the gospels, not in the individual sayings and stories but in their narrative shaping as such. It is an image of Jesus that is accessible not through historical analysis but through literary and religious apprehension.⁷⁶ The Jesus who moves through the pages of the canonical gospels can be located as a historical person of first-century Palestine, but his identity, his character as a human person, can be grasped only by grasping the literary presentation of him in these narratives.

More remarkably, this is also the character of Jesus found in Paul’s letters, our earliest Christian writings. It is well known that Paul’s appreciation of Jesus is entirely from the perspective of his resurrection; this is not surprising, since he did not know Jesus in his mortal life and encountered him first as powerful Lord mystically identified with the church Paul was persecuting. For Paul, then, Jesus is above all “Lord,” the one before whom every knee should bow. But by no means does Paul reject the significance of Jesus’ humanity.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See the development of this argument in *The Real Jesus*, 141–166, and in *Living Jesus*.

⁷⁶ See the helpful distinctions between the Jesus “of the text,” “behind the text,” and “before the text” in Sandra M. Schneider’s, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 97–179. I am speaking of the Jesus “of the text,” as the one who is literarily accessible. The Jesus “before the text”—that is, the Jesus confessed as resurrected—is accessible through religious response. As I argue in *Living Jesus*, the construction of the living person who is Jesus involves a complex conversation between religious experience and literary texts among believers.

⁷⁷ The exclusion of evidence from Paul as a possible control for the image of Jesus derived from the gospels is one of the most glaring ways in which much of the most recent quest for the historical Jesus reveals itself as driven by ideological as much as historical interests. To prefer the evidence from the (at best mid-second century) *Gospel of Thomas* to that available from our earliest datable witness to Jesus confounds all the rules of sober historiography.

In his letters Paul reports very few words of Jesus, though when he does he regards them as authoritative (see 1 Cor 7:10; 9:14; 11:23–25). And he tells no stories about Jesus' wonders.⁷⁸

It appears that Paul is not primarily interested in telling the story of Jesus as a narrative about a figure of the past.⁷⁹ His passionate concern is for the process by which the Holy Spirit replicates the story of Jesus in believers' lives in the present. Those who live by the Spirit, he says, should also walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:25). And the Spirit's work is the transformation of human into the new humanity created after the image of Jesus. Paul seeks to inculcate in his readers what he calls "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16) or what he refers to in another place as "the law of Christ" (or perhaps better, the "Pattern of the Messiah"), which he spells out as "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2).⁸⁰ In his letter to the Philippians, Paul presents the "mind that was in Christ" as the model for his readers to follow as they "look not only to their own interests but also to the interests of others," namely, that attitude of Jesus which led him to liberate himself from the need to cling to his equality with God in order to devote himself utterly to humble obedience to God, even to his death on the cross.⁸¹

And repeatedly in his letters, Paul exhorts his readers to lives of self-donation for the building up of others, appealing as support for such behavior to the one "Who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). It is entirely fitting that one of the very few direct quotations of Jesus provided by Paul is the perfect expression of the pattern I have been describing in Jesus' own words:

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup, also after supper,

⁷⁸ This is not, as sometimes supposed, because Paul has an aversion for the miraculous; just the opposite: he repeatedly celebrates wonderworking in connection with the mission (1 Thess 1:5; Gal 3:5; 1 Cor 2:2, 4:20; 2 Cor 12:12; Rom 15:18–19).

⁷⁹ Although allusions like that in Gal 3:1 remind us that Paul may well have told the story of Jesus' passion in his preaching.

⁸⁰ For the importance of an implied narrative about Jesus in the theology of Paul, see R.B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, SBLDS 56 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), and L.T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1997).

⁸¹ See S.E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor 11:23–25)⁸²

The gospels and Paul—and, we could add, Peter and Hebrews also—remember as most important in Jesus his character, the way he disposed his freedom toward God and his fellow humans.⁸³ And this pattern of the Messiah, this character of Jesus, was what they drew as normative for all those who sought to live by the Spirit of the one who now shared God's own life. But in Paul and Peter and Hebrews, this character of Jesus, this pattern of a certain way of being human which serves as a model for other humans, is also not accessible to history, but must be apprehended literarily and religiously.

The quest for the historical Jesus—in all its permutations—has provided no image that matches this one in particularity or life. The main accomplishment of the quest, both early and late, has been the discrediting of the gospel portraits of Jesus, at an enormous cost. The alternatives offered by historical reconstruction reveal themselves as fantasies and abstractions, held together by scholarly cleverness, incapable of sustaining even close examination, much less of galvanizing human lives. The Jesus they present is a dead person of the past. For those, in contrast, whose lives are being transformed by the Spirit of the Living One, the Jesus depicted in the literary compositions of the New Testament is recognized as true, both to his life and to theirs.

⁸² For discussion, see Johnson, *Religious Experience*.

⁸³ For the discerning of this pattern in the other New Testament writings, see *Living Jesus*, and for the understanding of Jesus' freedom, see L.T. Johnson, *Faith's Freedom: A Classic Spirituality for Contemporary Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

CHAPTER TWO

LEARNING THE HUMAN JESUS: HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND LITERARY CRITICISM

In the contemporary controversy over the historical Jesus—a controversy that, like a virus, tends to reoccur in Christianity under conditions of stress—there are some areas of agreement as well as areas of sharp disagreement. All participants in the discussion agree, for example, on the importance of knowing the human Jesus. Simply as the pivotal figure in the shaping of Western culture, the human being Jesus must be engaged. Ignorance of Jesus when studying the character of European or American civilization is as inexcusable as omitting consideration of Muhammad in seeking to understand the culture of the Middle East, or skipping over Confucius when trying to grasp Chinese culture.

All agree as well that Jesus demands engagement as the founding figure of Christianity, the largest world religion numbering some two billion members, and growing with particular impressiveness in Asia, Africa and Latin America, a lively corpse indeed despite all premature obituaries pronounced over it. Within the many rival parties that make up Christianity, furthermore, all agree that the humanity of Jesus somehow functions as the model and measure for Christian discipleship. Getting Jesus right, they agree, matters.

The persistence of the controversy both within and outside the church, furthermore, has made all participants agree that people are hungry to know Jesus. I mean ordinary people, those usually referred to as lay people by academic and ministerial professionals. As a human being, Jesus is compelling, fascinating and elusive; for believers and unbelievers alike, the man from Nazareth is worthy of serious consideration. Both seek to find out about Jesus through publications available at book stores more than in preaching from Christian pulpits. For non-Christians, this is a natural reflex, since the church has long since lost a substantial portion of its intellectual and moral credibility. For Christians, it is a necessary tactic, since preaching seldom takes up the humanity of Jesus in a manner that actually leads to real knowledge. To a remarkable extent the current stage of the controversy, despite generating some substantial scholarly

efforts,¹ has been characterized by the production of publications directed to a lay audience.²

The main point of disagreement concerns the best way of getting to know Jesus. One position holds that Jesus is best learned through the practices of faith in the church: through prayer, worship, the reading of Scripture, and encounters with saints and strangers. This position is based on the premise that Jesus is not a dead man of the past but a living Lord of the present, and that the tradition of the church, beginning in the Gospels, got Jesus right when they viewed all of his story from the perspective of his resurrection and exultation, for that is who he now truly is. The “real Jesus” in this perspective is not a figure of the past but of the present, not an object of scholarly research but the subject of obedient faith. Critical to this position is the conviction that faith is itself is a mode of cognition that makes contact with what is real even if empirically unverifiable.³

Such a strong position simply rejects the adequacy of historical study for getting at Jesus as he truly is. Not surprisingly in a world where even Christians are defined by the categories of modernity, not least in the assumption that only what is in principle verifiable can be the object of real knowing, it is a position that is seldom explicitly stated, although I

¹ Particularly deserving of respect for the clarity and rigor of their methods and for the degree of real historical knowledge they bring to bear on the subject are John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, and J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994, 2001).

² In addition to the two books I will mention below, my own thoughts on the issue can be found elsewhere in *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), and in the following articles: “The Humanity of Jesus: What’s at Stake in the Quest for the Historical Jesus,” in *The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict*, with John Dominic Crossan and Werner Kelber (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1999); “A Historiographical Response to Wright’s Jesus,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. C.N. Newman (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1999), pp. 206–224; “The Search for the Wrong Jesus,” *Bible Review* 11 (1995): 138–142; “Who Is Jesus? The Academy vs. the Gospels,” *Commonweal* 122 (1995): 12–14; “The Jesus Seminar’s Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus,” *Christian Century* 113 (1996): 16–22; “Response to Criticism of *The Real Jesus*,” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 249–254; “Learning Jesus,” *The Christian Century* 115 (1998): 1142–1146; “Is History Essential for Christians to Understand the Real Jesus?” *The CQ Researcher* 8 (1998): 1089; “Learning Jesus in Liturgy,” *Theology, News and Notes* 46 (1999): 20–23; “Knowing Jesus Through the Gospels: A Theological Approach,” *The World of the Bible* 3 (2000): 19–23; “The Eucharist and the Identity of Jesus,” *Priests and People* 15 (2001): 230–235; “The Real Jesus: The Challenge of Contemporary Scholarship and the Truth of the Gospels,” in *The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes*, ed. B.F. LeBeau et al. (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 51–65.

³ These are the positions I argued first in *The Real Jesus*, and more positively in *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

think it fundamentally correct and have argued it in another place. To be more precise, I think it the correct position for those who claim to be Christian in any meaningful sense of the term, for it is difficult to understand why the name “Christian” should continue to be claimed by anyone who did not confess Jesus as exalted Lord present in the Spirit. The main objection to the position, indeed, is that although it may be satisfying to Christians, it appears to close the conversation concerning Jesus for those who do not share such faith. It does so by unacceptably expanding the notion of “human” beyond ordinary usage. Perhaps it is appropriate for believers to speak of about the “living Jesus” in the present, but it is difficult for those outside such faith to accept that Christians are still speaking about the human being, Jesus of Nazareth.

An equally strong position directly opposes the first by claiming that the human Jesus is knowable only through historical reconstruction. The premise here is that Christian tradition got Jesus wrong from the beginning, above all in the Gospels, especially because they interpreted Jesus from the perspective of faith in his resurrection and exaltation even in recounting his human ministry. The Gospel accounts, and for that matter, all New Testament testimony concerning Jesus of Nazareth, must be corrected by critical historiography. In effect, if one is going to speak of the human Jesus in a manner that makes sense to all participants, he must be regarded solely as a dead man of the past rather than as an active subject in the present. In the classic form found in Christianity’s cultured despisers, more than a historical correction is involved: the recovery of the “real” (= “historical”) Jesus serves to discredit Christian claims concerning Jesus.

These strong and intellectually self-consistent positions, with their clear points of difference, are, alas, less often articulated today than are a variety of fuzzy mediating positions espoused by those calling themselves Christian yet seeking to ground their convictions concerning Jesus in some form of historical inquiry, either by way of confirming those convictions (by more conservative scholars) or by way of correcting them (by more liberal scholars). Such intellectually fuzzy positions are possible because the most fundamental critical questions concerning the nature of historiography (its goals, possibilities, limits) and the treatment of the sources (above all, let’s face it, the four canonical Gospels and secondarily the letters of Paul) are either bypassed or dealt with in careless fashion.

Thus we find “histories” of Jesus that are, on one side, little more than retellings of the Gospels of Matthew and John⁴ or the Gospel of Luke⁵ that offer no reflection on what the term “historical” might mean when applied to Jesus, and lacking even a rudimentary discussion of the literary relationships of the four Gospels. On the other side, we find reconstructions of the “historical Jesus”⁶ that proceed with blithe overconfidence in source criticism to dismantle the Gospel narratives in order to salvage certain “authentic” pieces, yet show little awareness of the dominating effect of ideological commitments (not least to the implicit image of Jesus found in the Gospel of Luke) in the subsequent reassembling of the pieces into a portrayal supposedly more historical than the Gospel narratives.

In this essay, I address the question of knowing the human Jesus apart from faith in his resurrection, that is, totally and completely as a historical figure. In so doing, I state what I consider the most responsible way of employing the Gospels as sources for that knowledge. I take up the legitimate uses of history for learning Jesus, arguing for a distinction between historical study that enables a fuller and more responsible engagement with the literary figure of the Gospels, called Jesus, and a project of historical reconstruction of Jesus that involves the deconstruction of the Gospels. Finally, I make the argument that a literary-critical engagement with Jesus in the Gospels actually leads to a fuller knowledge of him in his human character.

The Uses of History for Learning Jesus

I begin by straightforwardly asserting the legitimacy and importance—even for believers—of studying Jesus historically, for all of the reasons stated in the opening paragraphs of this essay. My assertion is especially vigorous because I have been understood by my critics to be an opponent of historical inquiry, whereas my concern has been only with the scholarly integrity of such inquiry. Jesus can and should be interrogated historically because he is a historical figure, a real human being whose mortal life covered roughly the first thirty years of the Common Era. As someone

⁴ See A. Schlatter, *The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997 [1923]).

⁵ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

⁶ See especially Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels*; and J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*.

who occupied time and space in the past, he is the legitimate subject of the discipline that inquires into events and persons in the time and space of the past.

If Jesus is the subject of historical inquiry, furthermore, he should be treated in precisely the same way as other human figures of the past, such as Socrates or Napoléon or Christopher Columbus. Historiography cannot be redefined because Jesus is its subject. If historiography cannot declare concerning the divine claims made for a Roman emperor such as Augustus, neither can it declare concerning Jesus as the incarnate one. If historiography cannot adjudicate claims to miracle-working by Apollonius of Tyana, neither can it adjudicate such claims in the case of Jesus. On this point, I agree wholeheartedly with the first great historical Jesus quester, David Friedrich Strauss: history must concern itself only with what falls within time and space as potentially verifiable.⁷

I also willingly agree that when appropriate historiographical methods are used, important things can be said about Jesus as a historical figure. By appropriate methods I mean those that are used by critical historians in the study of other events and figures: the identification of all plausible sources as primary and secondary, and first-hand and second-hand; the testing for bias; the evaluation of specific points of information; and finally, on the basis of the lines of convergence among all the sources, reaching tentative conclusions concerning the event or figure in question. The ideal, to be sure, is the construction of a narrative, especially one that contains motivations, but sometimes the evidence does not allow more than a set of probable statements. In all cases, the limits of the verifiable evidence must be respected. I consider as inappropriate the methods of source criticism that seek earlier sources within literary compositions and use such putative earlier sources as leverage against the literary compositions; the results yielded by such procedures are far too circular and arbitrary to be considered legitimate.

In the case of Jesus, the very slender evidence provided by outsider sources (the Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus, the Jewish historian Josephus, the indirect polemic of the Jewish Talmud)⁸ are important above all as providing some controls for insider sources (those written by Christians); the information provided by Paul and the Letter to the

⁷ D.F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973 [1835/1846]).

⁸ For evidence, see F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

Hebrews, in turn, is important both in itself and as providing further controls for the later gospel compositions. As everyone acknowledges, the most problematic sources are the narrative Gospels, because of their distinctive combination of literary interdependence (among the Synoptics) and independence (in John as well as in the distinctive portraits of Matthew, Mark, and Luke). It is simply impossible fully to harmonize these accounts while retaining any credibility as a historian. Nevertheless, when read within the controls provided by the other sources, the narrative Gospels also offer points of genuine convergence at the level of historical facts about Jesus that the historian can affirm with varying degrees of probability—probability being all that any history can yield.

The historian can assert, for example, with the highest degree of probability that Jesus existed as a Jew in the first century, that he was executed by Roman authority in Palestine, that a movement arose in his name and proclaiming him as risen Lord spread across the Mediterranean world within twenty-five years and finally, that beginning in that same time span and continuing for some decades, the writings that came to be called the New Testament were composed by believers in an effort to interpret their experiences and convictions concerning Jesus. All these assertions but the last are confirmed by converging lines of outsider and insider sources. The final assertion is a historical statement about the human Jesus because the production of such literature is incomprehensible if one denies the first three propositions, and it follows logically (and as a matter of verifiable fact) from the first three propositions.

There is more: the historian can affirm with a very high degree of probability some of the basic patterns of Jesus' activity: that he proclaimed God's rule as connected to his own words and deeds; that he performed healings; that he taught in parables and interpreted Torah; that he associated with marginal elements in Jewish society; that he chose twelve followers. The historian can even affirm with considerable probability that certain specific events reported in the Gospels occurred, for example, his baptism by John the Baptist, or his performance of a prophetic act in the Jerusalem temple, perhaps also that he interpreted a final meal with his disciples in terms of his impending death. This is not an insignificant yield of historical information concerning Jesus, but it reaches the limits of what proper historiographical method allows.

The significance of these results is considerable, even for believers. They show first that Christian faith is based in a real human person, rather than being based in nothing more than a sheer invention. They show second that this human person had very specific characteristics. One cannot

assert that Jesus was a Gentile rather than a Jew, for example, or a female rather than a male, or that he died comfortably in bed of old age rather than violently by execution, and remain within the bounds of historical plausibility. Insofar as the Christ symbol is attached to the historical person Jesus, about whom specific historical assertions can be made, that symbol is not infinitely malleable. And although Christians must, if they are to stay true to their convictions, use mythic language when they speak of Jesus—God was in Christ, he ascended into heaven—such language is applied to an actual historical figure, who “was crucified under Pontius Pilate”—rather than to the figment of individual or collective fantasy.

There is another way in which historical study is important for learning about the human Jesus. The more we know the historical circumstances of the first-century Mediterranean world, and in particular, the circumstances of Jews in Palestine during an uneasy period of Roman rule, the better readers we can be of the Gospel narratives. Although Jesus appears at the most in one paragraph of Josephus, for example, knowledge of Josephus' *Antiquities* and *Jewish War* are invaluable for the light they throw on the characters in the Gospels and the historical tensions within which they lived. Similarly, although Jesus has no demonstrable connection with the Essenes, knowledge of them gained from Josephus and Philo, not to mention the library of their writings discovered at Qumran, tremendously enriches the reading of all the Gospels. The greater one's historical knowledge, the greater is one's capacity to read the Gospels responsibly. Indeed, the refusal to engage such historical study amounts to a refusal to take the specific, culturally-determined, symbols of the Gospels seriously, and one might even say, a refusal to take the incarnation seriously.

I repeat the distinction I made earlier: such historical study is in service of the fuller appreciation of the Gospel narratives, rather than in service of the dismantling of the Gospel narratives in order to reconstruct a “historical Jesus.” In contrast to the slender amount of genuine historical fact that is available on the specific figure of Jesus, there is an abundant mass of historical data available to shed light on the meaning of the Gospel narratives.

The Limits of History

One of the disappointing aspects of recent historical Jesus research is the tendency in some quarters to trade on the self-designation of “scholar” and “historian” while at the same time failing seriously to take up the

entire difficult issue of history and the making of history (historiography), instead speaking loosely as though history was simply “the past” or “what happened in the past.” Those who do this simultaneously provide academic respectability to their reconstruction of Jesus while camouflaging the all-too-human process of reaching that reconstruction. At least four limitations inherent in any attempt to write history must be noted.

1. History is not simply “the past” or “what happened in the past” or a place that exists and to which the historian has access. It is the result, rather, of a human process of critical analysis and creative imagination. Historians construct history rather than simply find it. There are at least two stages to the process. The first consists in the critical evaluation of evidence from the past contained in sources; the second is the effort to provide a narrative account of events based on that critically assessed evidence. The fuller the evidence, the better is the chance of constructing a coherent narrative. The opposite is also the case: the more meager the evidence, the more difficult it is to provide more than a tentative sketch. Because of its constructive character, historiography is also properly revisionist. I do not mean that the historian simply imposes his or her views on the past; good historians always allow the evidence to push against such projection. But an appropriate revision occurs when new evidence comes to light that fundamentally affects an earlier portrayal. More subtly, the changing perspectives created by present circumstances (themselves always changing) inevitably causes the past to be seen in new light. The most obvious example is the evaluation of U.S. presidents: Truman left office among the most excoriated of chief executives; subsequent events as well as the evaluation of those events have led to a much more positive assessment of Truman among presidential historians.
2. History is inherently limited in its way of knowing (past) reality. Its subject is human activity (or events) in time and space, but only as these are made available to observation and recording. A history of Broadway musicals up to 1950, for example, must rely on diaries, advertisements, playbook, memoirs, theater receipts, reviews and scores. It cannot convey the actual music, the sense of drama, the excitement in the theater, the smell of greasepaint, the roar of the crowd. Even if the history takes the form of a documentary film that manages to use old recordings or pictures, the events cannot be summoned as they were, as they occurred. To show further what a clumsy instrument history is, the very phrase “as it occurred” obscures the complexity of sensation,

movement, perception, that goes into any event. And the noun “event” itself obscures the fact that, like a copyeditor snipping out a paragraph for analysis from a manuscript, or like a movie editor snipping out a frame of film for study, the historian also “creates” an event by constructing a frame that sets off certain elements in the constant flow of human activity in time and space. In one sense, there is simply too much happening for history to encompass. Even the most voluminous history of the American Civil War must restrict itself to battles sufficiently major to receive a name, and leave aside the countless skirmishes, sniper attacks and forays in which men died but in insufficient bulk to demand a historical plaque. In another sense, history’s own subject matter—human events in time and space—leaves out much that is “real” but not “historical.” This is so for the lower end of human existence: men in the civil war continued to shave and cut their nails and eat and sleep, but although part of each man’s existence, and possibly also a major part of every company’s conversation during the war, such realities seldom rise to the level of historical scrutiny. Likewise for the upper end of human existence: neither can history properly address the human states of alienation, reconciliation, compassion, forgiveness, loneliness and grief that were also most real to men separated from family and sometimes fighting former friends. It is simply not the case that “the historical” equals “the real.”

3. Historiography is limited most obviously by its total dependence on sources. The construction of a satisfactory narrative requires sufficient evidence resulting from the critical analysis of shared human memory preserved from the past. But how fragmentary and fragile are the sources bearing those memories! For ancient history in particular, sources are always partial. In many cases, our knowledge of an event or person depends on a single source. Sources are, in addition, inevitably biased. The bias may be a matter of physical perspective only, but it may also be ideological: demonstrators and policemen would give widely various accounts of the events at Chicago’s Grant Park in the 1968 Democratic Convention. What is critical to grasp. However, is that all present-day knowledge of the past is based on the subjective judgment of witnesses: somebody saw and had reason to preserve what they saw in a manner that could be transmitted to a later time. Such testimonies, especially from the distant past, are also unevenly preserved; the great Library of Alexandria was not the only storehouse of knowledge destroyed over the centuries. Single rather than multiple manuscripts are the norm for many great literary,

religious and philosophical works of the past. The historian, in short, is dependent on what was perceived in the first place, what was then recorded, what was saved and what is still available for scrutiny. A colleague who is a student of Indian religion once expressed amusement at the willingness of Western scholars to make sweeping generalizations about the religious practice of the subcontinent. He observed that at best a tenth of what had happened was recorded, and at best a tenth of what was recorded was preserved, and at best a tenth of what was preserved has been edited, and at best a tenth of what was edited has been translated for Western consumption! There are good reasons for historians to be modest about their craft.

4. A final limitation on history is that it can only describe (or construct) the past; it cannot prescribe for the future. Even though histories and biographies from the start have provided examples for imitation and thereby hoped to affect the present, their capacity to guide decision-making in the present is severely limited. Arguments from analogy go just so far. Politicians are fond of citing the “lessons of history,” but good historians know that such lessons are more obscure and ambiguous than sometimes supposed. History by itself is simply not normative for the present. No Englishman in 1945 would have disagreed with the proposition that Winston Churchill had saved the nation, the empire and possibly Western civilization. But that universal agreement did not keep the British electorate from dismissing him from the prime ministry and beginning the dissolution of the empire. Even when communities agree on their past, that is only one of the factors involved in their discernment of present need or future goals. Indeed, the better history is as a descriptive science (“what the war between the states was all about”) the worse it is at providing norms.

The Limits of History Concerning Jesus

All these limitations are present to such a degree as to make any scientifically respectable effort at constructing a “historical Jesus” daunting in the extreme. Take the problem of history’s scope: the insider sources are replete with accounts of “events” that in principle fall outside the ability of the historian to declare: virgin birth, voices from heaven, exorcisms, healings, transfiguration, resurrection. Speaking of the resurrection, all of the insider sources are deeply biased because of their conviction that Jesus is the present and powerful Lord within Christian communities.

The resurrection is not only a historically unverifiable “event” within the Gospel narrative; it is the perspective from which all of the earliest letters and all the Gospels were composed. When Jesus teaches in the Gospel of Matthew, for example, it is not as a dead rabbi of the past, but as the living Lord of the church who is “with them” through the ages. In this respect, the discovery of Gnostic gospels at Nag-Hammadi offers no help, for in them, the humanity of Jesus virtually disappears altogether in favor of the divine revealer.⁹

The importance of the resurrection perspective for the historian is that it affects not only the shaping of stories (such as the controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees and Scribes), but their very selection. Everything said about Jesus in the narratives of the Gospels derives (at least in principle) from some witness, and is therefore already a subjective report, limited in its perspective and comprehension by the nature of human witnessing. But in addition to that, such witness accounts have been shaped by years of oral transmission in the preaching and worship of early churches, as well as interpretation through the lens of Scripture, and are finally selected and arranged by the individual evangelists. On top of the individual subjectivity of the original witness—interpretation is inevitably present even if it were possible to determine “the earliest stage”—the explicit resurrection perspective (and engagement with the symbolic world of Torah) is at work in the second and third stages of transmission. Freeing a specific saying or story from its narrative context, in short, does not eliminate the resurrection bias that was at work in the entire process of selection and shaping.

Since the outsider sources available to the historian are so sparse and have their own bias, dependence on the narrative Gospels of the New Testament is both inevitable and problematic. The Gospels are most obviously limited in their scope. They cover at best one to three years of Jesus’ public life, with only two of the Gospels touching—in dramatically different ways—on his childhood. A “history” of a figure that deals only with one to three years is obviously severely limited. But their status as historical sources is complicated as well by the literary interdependence of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. However one solves the “synoptic problem,” it remains the case that, strictly as sources for a history of Jesus, they

⁹ See L.T. Johnson, “Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense?” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert Morgan*, ed. C. Rowland and C. Tuckett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 93–108.

represent on the major points one witness with variations rather than three independent sources.

If the majority view on the issue is accepted (and I do accept it), then Matthew and Luke have used the Markan plotline—extending from John the Baptist to the empty tomb—as the framework for their own narratives. At the level of plot, the variations each introduces (Matthew’s blocks of discourses, Luke’s long journey section) does not erase the fact that they share the same basic “story” they have derived from Mark. Thus, at the level of plot, the historian is presented with two starkly divergent witnesses, the Gospels of Mark and John. These witnesses disagree on the most basic points: the length of Jesus’ ministry, the main location where it took place, the sequence of critical events—quite apart from differences in specific deeds and modes of speech that are impossible simply to harmonize. The majority of historical Jesus scholars have chosen to privilege the Markan (Synoptic) version of the storyline over the Johannine, reducing John to a minor source for specific information rather than as a competing witness to the shape of the entire story. Yet close examination of the Markan narrative makes clear that it also is more a theological construction than a historical report; thus, Mark clusters temptations, healings, parables and teachings on discipleship topically rather than, we must assume, chronologically.

Such discrepancies at the level of plot are more than matched by an overwhelming number of smaller differences in the available sources. Even leaving aside the deeds and words of Jesus found only in John, close synoptic comparison reveals the impossibility of the historian asserting with confidence concerning any specific formulation, “Jesus said this.” The same applies to determining the historicity of any specific healing or exorcism, much less their occasion or sequence. Even in that part of the story where we find the greatest degree of agreement among all four Gospels—the passion accounts—the differences are sufficiently numerous and important to make the careful scholar assert as historically plausible only the bare bones of the events. These same factors, together with the degree to which stories about Jesus are also shaped by reflection on Scripture (not least in the passion narratives), make it impossible for the historian responsibly to declare on Jesus’ intentions or motivations, much less his internal states of mind. The state of the sources simply does not allow such access. Can inferences be drawn from verifiable facts, such as Jesus’ choice of the Twelve? Yes, but only with great care, and only to a limited extent.

Given the impediments presented by the factors I have enumerated—and I do not think I have overstated the case—it is all the more remarkable that historians can assert the not insignificant set of statements concerning the historical Jesus that I have listed earlier in this essay. Although modest in scope, these statements are supported by the most stringent analysis and do not overreach what the sources can support. It is also clear that this set of statements does not constitute a narrative. It is a set of historical facts rather than a historical account. Restricting oneself to such a set of statements may frustrate the historian's longing for narrative, but it preserves the historian from a narrative that is not responsibly historical.

The consequences of pushing beyond such limitations in order to construct a historical Jesus are evident in many contemporary publications that regularly distort historical methods and as a result distort the sources as well. The consequences are evident in the multiple images of Jesus offered in such publications, all claiming to be based on historical-critical methods, yet projecting the author's own ideals so powerfully on the ancient figure that their portrayals tell the reader far more about them than about Jesus. Finally, such publications consistently fall prey to the fallacious supposition that a historical reconstruction has normative force, so that a "recovery" of the historical Jesus should work to reform Christianity. Historical Jesus research all too frequently turns out to be, not historical research at all, but a theological agenda wearing the external garb of history.

Another Approach to Learning the Human Jesus

By no means does history's inability to adequately know the human Jesus mean that real knowledge of him is impossible. There is in fact another approach to the human Jesus—through the careful and critical literary engagement with the Gospel narratives—that is accessible to all who are capable of such close reading. It does not require knowledge of data or methods available only to specialists, but it does require intelligence, critical awareness, discipline and sensitivity to literary art. It does not, above all, require the elimination, harmonization or deconstruction of the Gospel narratives. Just the opposite, this approach requires that each Gospel be considered in its full literary integrity. It is controlled by the evidence offered by the Gospel narratives themselves, which means that it is constrained by evidence that is available to all other readers, so that

conclusions can be established or challenged on the basis of a shared analysis of those shared texts.

In this approach, the Gospels are treated not as limited and problematic sources for historical reconstruction but as invaluable witnesses to and interpretations of—precisely in their integrity as narratives—the human person, Jesus. The Gospels are read literarily rather than historically. Rather than ask first concerning a word or deed of Jesus, “did Jesus really do this or say that?” the reader asks first, “what does attributing this saying or that deed” do to shape the meaning of the character of Jesus within the narrative? The reader respects the narratives as the medium of meaning regarding Jesus, and engages the Gospel narratives in the way that literary critics engage other such narratives, with specific attention to the literary elements of plot, character and theme. Historical knowledge, not necessarily of specific events but certainly of social, cultural and linguistic possibilities, serves to enrich such a literary reading and to provide certain controls to the imagination. In sum, such a disciplined reading engages the human Jesus as a literary character in the narratives written about him within fifty to seventy years of his death.

If each of the narrative Gospels of the New Testament is read individually with attention to its use of the symbolic world of Torah, and its portrayal (through the narrative) of Jesus and his followers, the reader is immediately impressed by the marked diversity of their interpretations. I do not mean simply all those points of divergence in sequence and wording that have always impressed critics. I mean that such plot and verbal differences are parts of a larger deliberate literary crafting. Each narrative shapes a portrayal of Jesus and his followers that, when taken with full seriousness, is not reducible to the portrait found in any of the others. In this essay, I cannot develop a complete interpretation of each with supporting textual evidence, but I can offer only a thumbnail sketch by way of a reminder and an invitation to read.¹⁰

¹⁰ For a fuller development of the literary art and portrayal of Jesus and the disciples in each gospel, together with specific and detailed textual support for the assertions made here, see L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 155–257, 521–557, and *Living Jesus*, 119–194.

Narrative as Interpretation

In the Gospel of Mark, the larger historical world is barely evident before the passion account. The narrative is almost claustrophobically focused on the drama in which Jesus is the central character: his battle against cosmic forces at work in human distress; his conflicts with Jewish religious leaders; his call and instruction of followers. The narrative focuses above all on the drama of discipleship and on the portrayal respectively of Jesus and those he summons as his followers. Because of the compression and tension built into Mark's narrative, and because of the complex compositional techniques he uses to construct that narrative, Mark's is not the easiest and most accessible Gospel to read, but the most difficult and deflecting.

Mark's Jesus is a complex combination of power and weakness. On the one side, his proclamation of God's rule is enacted by powerful deeds of exorcism and healing that demonstrate the imminent collapse of Satan's captivity of humans. On the other side, Jesus is himself captive to the machinations of his human opponents, who finally have him arrested, tortured and executed under imperial authority. He is himself the *mysterion* of God's rule, who simultaneously attracts and repels even as it reveals power in weakness and weakness in power. In Mark's narrative, Jesus' teachings are correspondingly compressed and cryptic: his parables serve as much to confuse as to enlighten; his demands turn away followers as much as draw them; his declarations concerning his own destiny create fear rather than hope.

The depiction of the disciples in Mark's Gospel is, in turn, almost completely negative. Although they are summoned to carry forward his activities and to "be with him," they prove both mentally incompetent and morally deficient. Jesus declares that his parables are intended for insiders, yet these insiders do not grasp his parables; indeed, they react to his plain speech as though it was parabolic! They are as "hard of heart" and slow to understand as outsiders. Above all, they refuse to accept Jesus' declarations on the demands of discipleship. Their failure to understand is perhaps explicable because of Mark's portrayal of Jesus as *mysterion*. Their moral failure is more serious. They had been called to "be with" Jesus, yet as he moves toward his destined suffering and death, he is betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter and abandoned by all the rest. In their disloyalty, they failed in their most fundamental responsibility. In Mark's Gospel, readers are not to look to the disciples to learn but are rather to look to Jesus: "this is my beloved Son, listen to him."

Matthew follows the Markan storyline from the Baptist to the empty tomb, thus expressing a fundamental level of agreement with Mark's narrative. Both by the inclusion of extensive bodies of sayings material, however, and by the shaping of the narrative around the discourses arranged by the evangelist, Matthew has opened Mark's narrative up to a larger world. Matthew's Gospel shows unmistakable signs of a church in conversation and conflict with a formative Judaism that was organizing itself around the convictions of the Pharisees and the expertise of the Scribes into a religion centered in the symbol of Torah. Matthew retains the complex elements of Mark's portrayal of Jesus as one who is both powerful and weak, who conquers evil forces yet suffers from evil men. But in Matthew, Jesus not only teaches more extensively—and much less paradoxically—than in Mark, but his narrative portrays Jesus as the teacher of the church who fulfills Torah, who definitively interprets Torah and who personifies Torah.

The portrayal of the disciples in Matthew's Gospel corresponds to the portrayal of Jesus. They are no less problematic than the disciples portrayed in Mark: Judas betrays, Peter denies (with an oath that Jesus expressly forbids) and all abandon Jesus. Matthew characteristically has Jesus call them "you of little faith." In striking contrast to the disciples in Mark's narrative, however, those in Matthew are portrayed as intelligent. They are non-ironically the insiders who understand the parables; when Jesus asks them, "Do you understand these things?" they respond, "Yes," and the narrator does not deny that assertion. The reason for this change is also clear: Matthew's disciples must carry on Jesus' teachings in the world, as Jesus commissions them, "Go make disciples of all nations, teaching them all that I have commanded you." To carry out this mission, however morally flawed they are, the disciples must have intelligence.

The evangelist Luke also takes over the Markan narrative and follows it even more closely than does Matthew both in sequence and wording. But Luke opens up that narrative even more fundamentally than does Matthew, in two ways: he extends the Gospel narrative into an entire second volume that continues the story of Jesus in the acts of the disciples, to form a single, two-volume work (Luke-Acts); and he opens the story of Jesus and the church to the larger story of Israel within the world history then dominated by Greek culture and Roman rule. In the Gospel portion of his story, Luke's infusion of sayings material and his narrative redaction works to portray Jesus as the spirit-filled prophet who brings God's visitation to the people of Israel and, by his good news to the poor (enacted by his powerful deeds of liberation), divides the people from within, so

that the marginal elements in society come join the people constituted by faith in the prophet, while the powerful and pious find themselves excluded. It is small wonder that virtually every “historical Jesus” on offer today bases itself on Luke’s narrative; for the public, prophetic and political Jesus is one most deeply appealing to contemporary sensibilities. As for Luke’s portrayal of the disciples, in the Gospel they appear as prophets-in-training. They are not unintelligent or as faithless as the disciples in Mark, nor as puny in faith but intelligent as the disciples in Matthew. They are, rather, those who are prepared by Jesus to continue his mission of service after his death and resurrection, when they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is in the second volume that his portrayals of Jesus’ disciples is fully shown: filled with the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ resurrection, they continue Jesus’ prophetic mission within Judaism and in the wider Greco-Roman world, exemplified above all by extending Jesus’ provocative fellowship with sinners and tax collectors to the inclusion of Gentiles within the people.

I noted above how John’s Gospel diverges from the synoptic pattern in dramatic fashion. It does not follow the Markan storyline. As a result, Jesus’ ministry lasts three years rather than two, it is centered in Judea rather than in Galilee, and the cleansing of the temple occurs at the start rather than at the end of his ministry. Even more fundamental is the way John portrays Jesus. He does none of the exorcisms that dominate Mark’s account and performs only a few healings. Jesus’ manner of speech is even more divergent. Instead of short aphorisms and parables, he characteristically delivers long monologues that follow upon extended exchanges with his opponents. All of Jesus’ teaching of his disciples takes place at the Last Supper, which is notably lacking in any of the symbolic words found in the Synoptics.

As Matthew and Luke “open up” Mark’s story respectively to the larger social contexts of formative Judaism and Greco-Roman culture, so John also opens the story of Jesus to an explicitly cosmic dimension. John certainly affirms Jesus’ humanity as the word “made flesh”: his Jesus experiences fatigue and thirst, disappointment, friendship and grief; he asks for and receives love; he enters into real conflict with his human adversities. Yet John’s concern to show that Jesus is also the “Word” made flesh makes him portray Jesus above all as the Man from Heaven, the revealer whose deeds and words shines the light of God’s judgment into the darkness of the world’s sin, and who therefore experiences the hatred and rejection of the world that does not want to walk in the light. In the Fourth Gospel, individual disciples act as their counterparts in the Synoptics: Judas betrays

Jesus, and Peter denies him. But John includes “the disciple whom Jesus loved” as an example of one whose friendship with Jesus enabled fidelity even to the cross. As a whole, the portrayal of the disciples corresponds to John’s depiction of Jesus: they are his friends for whom he prays they be consecrated in the truth so that they can bear witness in the world as he has borne witness, even though they will experience the hostility of the unbelieving world just as Jesus has.

These brief sketches have suggested that the narrative Gospels of the New Testament present richly textured and distinctive portraits of Jesus. Each constructs a narrative that is recognizably that of first-century Palestine. Each displays characters that fit within that province during the time of its Roman occupation. In each, the portrayal of Jesus fits within that constructed world. The portrait of Jesus in each Gospel fits within its narrative, but would not fit within the narrative of another Gospel. In each Gospel, finally, the portrayal of the disciples corresponds to the depiction of Jesus: Mark’s unintelligent and faithless disciples are not the same as Matthew’s weak but intelligent disciples; the prophetic successors-in-training found in Luke are different from the friends of Jesus in John. The “literary character” Jesus whom the reader engages in each narrative is highly specific and distinctive to that Gospel.

Narrative as Witness

Precisely because of their obvious divergence in their interpretations of the human Jesus, the Gospels are all the more valuable as witnesses on those points where they agree—even if their understanding of the point differs. This is a principle of testimony basic to the demonstration of a case in law. If four neighbors offer distinct explanations for something they saw or heard the previous night, that difference in explanation (it was a thunderclap around 11:45, it was a gunshot exactly at midnight, it was a dog barking at 11:50, it was a truck backfiring at around midnight) tends to confirm the fact that there was a loud noise in that area between 11:45 and midnight.

I have already stated that the convergence of the Gospel narratives confirm only a few of these facts concerning Jesus. But there is another question of divergence and convergence on which they offer the most important sort of witness, namely the question of Jesus’ character (*ethos*). The question of character—what *kind* of person is this?—is at the heart of historical inquiry at the level of the individual, that is, of biography.

Even when all the available facts concerning a figure have long been available, new studies can be written precisely because the question of character remains open. Is the subject good or evil, a positive presence among other humans or negative, and in what fashion? It is a question that narrative is distinctively capable of addressing. Narratives, indeed, can get character right even when they get some facts wrong. It is possible, for example, to get every biographical fact about Mother Theresa correct, yet ascribe her life of (apparently selfless) service to nefarious motives. It is also possible to be mistaken on one or another biographical fact, yet accurately estimate and communicate Mother Theresa's character. As it happens, the four Gospels, which disagree on so many specific facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth, show a remarkable level of convergence in their witness concerning his character.

The character of Jesus as depicted in all four Gospels is not complex or filled with ambiguities. It is profoundly simple and straightforward, and is clearly displayed within the gospel story. I do not mean to suggest that it is an abstraction. The opposite is true: the Gospels agree on the factual elements identified earlier: he is a Jewish male of first-century Palestine who chooses twelve followers, who performs healing, proclaims God's rule, who teaches in parables and interprets Torah, and who is crucified by order of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate. He is baptized by John, and he "cleanses" the temple. Each of the Gospels, furthermore, renders Jesus still more concretely by using the symbols drawn from Torah, such as Son of Man and Prophet. The depiction of Jesus' character lies within all the dense specificity of description of him in each Gospel.

The most obvious element defining Jesus' human character is his obedient faith in God, whom he calls Father. Jesus is defined above all by his relationship with God. Negatively, this can be described in terms of the sorts of allegiance available to all humans that he eschews. Jesus is clearly not captive to the classic appetites for pleasure (although neither is he portrayed as an ascetic like John), possessions and political power. Neither is he driven by the need to meet the expectations of his followers or to thwart the hopes of his opponents. He responds rather to what he perceives to be God's will, as located in the specific circumstances of his life. The decisive expression of Jesus' obedience is found in the acceptance of his death as his Father's will even when, filled with anguish, he desired to live.

The second major element in Jesus' character as depicted in all the Gospel narratives is his self-disposing love toward other people. Because he is defined above all by obedience to the will of God, and that will is

disclosed moment by moment in the needs of others, Jesus is free to respond to others with the poverty of accessibility. The degree of availability ascribed to Jesus by the Gospels is literally astonishing: he approaches, touches, embraces persons of every status and situation, just as he is approached by and touched by persons of every sort of affliction and need. Ancient literature offers no real parallel to such human accessibility. Jesus' "meekness" and "lowliness" is not a matter of self-suppression, but a matter of self-giving without regard to self.

The Synoptic Gospels portray such availability to others through the narratives themselves—as in the Markan passages in which Jesus is repeatedly deflected from his own intentions by the needs of others—as well as by self-referential statements made by Jesus that speak of him as a servant who gives his life as a ransom for many and that interpret the bread and wine he shared with his disciples before his arrest as his body and blood given for them. In John it is expressed metaphorically in sayings about bread given for the life of the world, and the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep and the seed that must die for the sake of new growth. It is expressed narratively by Jesus' symbolic washing of his disciples' feet at the final meal he shared with them. In the Gospels, Jesus is innocent in the original sense that he does no harm to others and seeks only to do good to them. The depiction of his suffering in these narratives has both poignancy and power precisely because it comes on one who has done nothing to deserve it.

The Gospels also converge in their understanding of the nature of discipleship. I have shown how the portrayal of the disciples within each narrative differs significantly. In what respect, then, do they converge? Although they disagree concerning the degree to which Jesus' followers met the standard, they agree on what the standard is: discipleship is measured by the character of Jesus. To be a follower of Jesus does not mean doing the specific actions he did, or repeating the words he spoke. It means having the same sort of character as a human being, to be radically obedient to God alone and to serve fellow humans unselfishly. There is no hint in the Gospels of an understanding of discipleship as sharing in prosperity or success or power; indeed, these are explicitly rejected in favor of the image of the servant willing to suffer for the sake of others.

What is even more striking is the way in which the same character traits of radical obedience to God (faith) and self-disposing love toward others are ascribed to Jesus by the earliest Christian epistolary literature that speaks of the humanity of Jesus. The letters of Paul, the Letter to the Hebrews and 1 Peter all refer to the humanity of Jesus in terms of his

character, and the elements they single out are the same ones on which the Gospel narratives converge. In their exhortations to readers to “put on the Lord Jesus” (Paul) or “look to Jesus” (Hebrews) or “follow in his footsteps” (1 Peter), these compositions single out the same qualities for believers: faith in God defined in terms of obedience, and loving service toward the other. Despite all the obvious disparity among these compositions, as among the Gospels, the New Testament compositions taken as a whole agree most impressively on the point concerning the human Jesus we most need to know: what sort of character he had and the sort of character into which Christians seek to be transformed.

Conclusions

I have argued in this essay that although properly executed historical study can yield significant results—a set of highly probable facts concerning Jesus and a rich context for reading the Gospels more responsibly—history also has severe intrinsic limitations that are exacerbated in the case of Jesus. The effort to bypass or overcome these limitations has resulted in depictions of Jesus that lack historiographical integrity. I have argued further that although the canonical Gospels are problematic as sources for historical reconstruction, they are excellent witnesses to the humanity of Jesus precisely in the way the respective narratives diverge in their portrayal of Jesus and the disciples yet converge on the question of Jesus’ human character and the nature of discipleship. I conclude this essay with four observations concerning the advantages offered by this approach to the humanity of Jesus.

1. This approach is publically accessible to all who can read narratives intelligently and are willing to expose their readings to others in public exchange. It does not require a special methodology beyond attention to the simple and widely known literary categories of plot, character and theme. Most of all, it does not require the dismantling of the narratives that are our earliest explicit interpretations of the human Jesus; rather, it demands that those narratives be treated in their literary integrity and that meaning is sought in the narrative rendering of Jesus as such.
2. Such a narrative reading yields an understanding of Jesus that is far richer and more nuanced than the sociological reductions offered by many “historical Jesus” publications. The interplay of difference and

similarity is a positive invitation to contemplate a human being who could give rise to such complex interpretations and, at the same time, draw the reader to the perception of the same “character” within the diversity of each literary representation.

3. Paradoxically, approaching Jesus as a literary character within the Gospel narratives also provides out best access to history with respect to Jesus. It is the case, first of all, that the past two centuries of intensive archeological research have tended to confirm rather than disconfirm the details provided by the Gospels; indeed, the Gospels remain our best historical source for early information concerning important elements of Palestinian Judaism, for example, the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees. Even when the Gospel accounts most conflict with other historical knowledge, such as the dating of the imperial census at Jesus’ birth (in Luke) or the intricate legal process recounted in the passion narratives, they are sufficiently in line with that other knowledge to enable serious historical conversation. Most remarkable is the manifest rootedness of the literary character Jesus in the Palestinian Judaism of the first century under Roman dominance. Even though the traditions of Jesus’ sayings and deeds were transmitted orally within faith communities for some forty years before the first of these Gospel narratives was composed—passed on for decades, it should be noted, as much outside Palestine as within, for none of our evangelists seems to have had firsthand experience of that place or time—Jesus’ healings and exorcisms, his parables and his aphorisms all make most sense in that setting. Even more, it is impossible to imagine the Jesus of the four canonical Gospels as a character in any other time or place than the one these narratives imagine.
4. Finally, the Jesus whom we engage and come to know as a human character in the canonical Gospels is also the historic Christ. It is this fully-rounded literary character that provides the basis for the “Christ-Image” in literature, so recognizable a way of being human that it can be mistaken for no other. More important, it is the Jesus of the Gospels who caught the attention and won the deepest devotion of the saints and reformers throughout the history of Christianity, a Jesus far more radical and demanding than any conjured by the quester’s art. It was not a scholarly historical reconstruction but the Jesus of the Gospels that galvanized Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Mother Theresa. Historically, Christianity has never been renewed or reformed by a historical Jesus, but it has always been renewed and reformed by closer attention to the Jesus of the Gospels.

CHAPTER THREE

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RESPONSE TO WRIGHT'S JESUS

Assessing N.T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*¹ in any specific respect is daunting for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that its 662 pages offer a portrait of Jesus that is both highly detailed and extensively, perhaps even exhaustively, argued. Wright's exposition, furthermore, is intricately interconnected at every part. The explanation of each part depends on the overall construal, while the overall construction evokes in support the steadily mounting bits of evidence that have been adduced. Wright's approach is thoroughly synthetic rather than analytic. He thinks of his procedure in terms of testing a hypothesis (*JVG* 131–133). Others might think that Wright's search for a singular and simple explanation runs the risk of circularity and totalization. In either case, his presentation more easily invites affirmation or dissent with regard to the whole than it does a critical assessment of the parts.

Adding to the difficulty of response, the volume under consideration represents only the second part of a six-volume project whose overall target is purportedly the question of "God" in the New Testament. Evaluating Wright's historical reconstruction of Jesus must take into account the argument already established in *The New Testament and the People of God*² (as his constant references to that volume as support for positions in the present volume make obvious), but in principle it ought also to consider the further stages, which have yet to appear. The publication of *What Saint Paul Really Said*³ amplifies somewhat the brief sketch of Paul found in *The New Testament and the People of God*, but the interdependent character of Wright's argument means that the evaluation of any portion apart from the whole is hazardous.

In this essay I take up Wright's historiographical method and practice in his two major volumes already in print, because these are so critical to the fair evaluation of his overall project. It is in considering how he goes

¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 1996).

² Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

³ N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1997).

about doing history that the most searching questions might be raised concerning the adequacy of his reconstruction.

Placing Wright's Project

Recognition is due to Wright's accomplishment: the project thus far completed is marked not only by size and ambition but also by great energy and intelligence. This is by any measure a significant contribution to the entire historical Jesus debate. Nor is it the case that Wright develops his argument in a scholarly vacuum. His engagement with other scholars is lively if sometimes uneven. He gives a great deal of attention to what he calls the "traffic on the Wredebahn," represented by the Jesus Seminar, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan (*JVG* 28–82). In light of this, his failure give anything other than passing recognition to John P. Meier's monumental historical Jesus project⁴ is all the more striking and puzzling, particularly when Wright agrees with Meier in significant ways (e.g., the eschatological character of Jesus' ministry) and, especially, when in some cases (e.g., the miracle stories) Meier's general discussions are so rich and useful. In contrast, Wright's debt to the late Ben F. Meyer's work on *The Aims of Jesus* is frequently and gratefully noted.⁵

Wright's work is also remarkably consistent in its adherence to a theoretical model. The model was worked out in part two of *The New Testament and the People of God* (31–144) and is followed faithfully in Wright's reconstruction (see *JVG* 125–144). This model seeks to cover the complexity of the data and yet retain simplicity (*NTPG* 99–100). Simplicity is achieved primarily by a heavy emphasis on the "continuity of the person" or "consistency in thought" (*NTPG* 107–109). Wright's model demands coherence between story, symbol and praxis in an individual as well as in a specific culture, and it assumes that questions, controversies, aims and intentions equally reveal a consistent internal logic (*JVG* 139). The strength of the model is its simplicity and clarity. The weakness, I will argue, is that simplicity is achieved at the cost of a more adequate reading of the evidence. But Wright cannot be faulted for failing to present his theory from the start.

⁴ J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*; Wright's index lists only six references to Meier's massive project (*JVG* 55, 84, 147, 395, 615, 631).

⁵ B.F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979).

Wright's portrait of Jesus, finally, has considerable plausibility. He follows Albert Schweitzer rather than William Wrede in regarding the Synoptic Gospels as fundamentally reliable sources for the historical Jesus, and he follows Schweitzer rather than the Jesus Seminar in taking "Jewish eschatology as the key to understanding Jesus" (*JVG* 123).⁶ He differs from Schweitzer primarily in his this-worldly, political understanding of Jewish eschatology. Wright follows E.P. Sanders in taking Jesus' praxis as the starting point for historical reconstruction and agrees with Sanders on the pivotal importance of Jesus' symbolic action in the temple.⁷ He differs from Sanders primarily in giving considerable credit to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' conflicts with Pharisees and in attaching such controversies to a different political agenda. At the very least—and this is no small thing—Wright convincingly demonstrates that the pieces of the Gospel tradition dismissed by the New Quest can be used as the basis of an equally plausible construal of Jesus sponsored by the Third Quest. As mention of his scholarly antecedents indicates, Wright's portrait of Jesus is significant not so much for its novelty as for its reclamation of a reading currently less in favor and for its attempt to secure that reading by showing how it makes better sense of all the data.

Despite the different result, however, Wright's project resembles those of other Jesus Questers in two critical respects. First, the choice of pattern very much determines the selection and interpretation of the pieces. This does not, on the surface, appear to be the case on either side: the New Quest makes a great commotion about its scientific process of isolating the authentic pieces of the Jesus tradition analytically and then moving to the resulting portrait, whereas Wright is clear about his use of the pattern of the prophet and does not appear to make any real systematic discrimination among traditions with regard to reliability. In both cases, however, appearances deceive. The Lukan parable of the prodigal is a good example. It is the master parable for Robert W. Funk, the pure representation of the vision of Jesus, even though it does not meet any of the fabled criteria for authenticity.⁸ But it is equally important for Wright, not because it has passed any tests but because it can be read (at least to his satisfaction) as an allegory of the same master-script that Jesus both follows and

⁶ A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*; Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (1901; London: A & C Black, 1925).

⁷ Especially E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, and Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*.

⁸ See R.W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*.

enunciates—the script of Israel’s exile coming to an end in the triumph of God (*JVG* 125–131).

A second way in which the New Quest, as represented by Funk and his associates, and the Third Quest, as represented by Wright, agree is on a set of uncritical assumptions concerning history.⁹ Both have remarkable confidence in the historian’s ability to move from literary judgments to historical conclusions when working with ancient sources. The New Questers think they can dissect sayings material into discrete slices. Wright thinks he can align the sayings of Jesus with specific prophetic passages in such fashion as to reveal Jesus’ own intentions. Both tend to elide the critical distinction between historical reconstructions—always a fragile and creative task entirely dependent on the accidents of source survival—and “what really happened.” In Wright’s case, this manifests itself most in language that declares what Jesus hoped to accomplish, as though tentative guesses in the direction of the probable goals of reported actions could lead, largely by way of repetition, to confident assertions concerning Jesus’ specific and coherent aims (e.g. *JVG* 132, 163, 167, 309 n. 246, 604–11).

Finally, both Wright and the New Questers are confident that history has implications for theology—that is, history has a normative function. It is not Funk but Wright who declares, “If Jesus was as Reimarus, or Schweitzer, or Sanders, have portrayed him, then the church needs at the very least to revise its faith quite substantially” (*NTPG* 22). Wright is even more insistent than any of the New Questers that history and theology must cohere: “I wish in the present work to share the concern of [Questers like Reimarus] for rigorous historical construction, and also to work towards a new integration of history and theology which will do justice, rather than violence, to both” (*JVG* 122).

In his preface, he declares, “At every stage I found myself coming face to face with historical problems, and (since I could not abandon my basic Christian beliefs without becoming a totally different person) with the question of how, if at all, history and belief might cohere”; and he concludes that in the process of his investigations, “my view of Jesus within his historical context has substantially developed and changed. So, *inevitably*, has my understanding of what Christianity itself actually is, and the nature of my belief in it” (*JVG* xv, emphasis added). Note the word *inevitably*: in the “integration” of history and theology, it appears that historical construction is the dominant factor to which theology must conform.

⁹ For my discussion of these points, see L.T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 1–58.

In the conclusion to the present book, Wright states, “A truly first-century Jewish theological perspective would teach us to recognize that history, especially the history of first-century Judaism, is the sphere where we find, at work to judge and to save, the God who made the world” (*JVG* 662). The statement is remarkable on a number of counts, not least in its understanding of God’s revelation, as well as for its easy equation between “history as scholars’ historical reconstruction or the past” and “history as what happened in the past” But I cite it here simply to note how unabashedly Wright asserts the fundamentally theological character of historiography on Jesus, which, for him, has high stakes: “if [New Testament theology] does not contain the decisive proclamation of Jesus, it cannot itself be the be-all and end-all of the divine revelation, the ultimate locus of authority the ‘thing’ that all the study of the New Testament is bent towards finding” (*NTPG* 23, emphasis original).

As I have pointed out in another place, these assumptions about history and historiography stand in need of serious challenge.¹⁰ At the heart of the historical Jesus debate are the epistemological issues that are suppressed or bracketed by Third and New Questers alike:

1. the limits of historiography as a way of knowing
2. the need to define what is meant in any specific instance by the “historical”
3. the non-normative character of historical reconstruction apart from the decisions of contemporary communities

Unless and until Questers of any stripe seriously engage the epistemological challenge, conceptual confusion and methodological imprecision will continue to haunt the entire enterprise.

Historiographical Comments

It is tempting—but impossible—to take on Wright’s historiographical practices in detail, particularly since the sheer length of his argument may well tempt other readers to leave unattended its major weaknesses. In a review of *The New Testament and the People of God*, I pointed out several traits that were already problematic in that volume, above all the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81–104.

tendency to create an artificially unified worldview out of the complex world of first-century Judaism.¹¹ That tendency is even more prominent in *Jesus and the Victory of God*, as it necessarily must be, if Wright is to follow the logic of his model. Readers need to be aware, however, of the fallacy of moving from the observation that certain prophetic and Second Temple texts contain a theme concerning exile and God's victory to the empirical claim that "in Jesus' day many, if not most, Jews, regarded the exile as still continuing" (*JVG* 126; see also xvii. 445). One cannot simply move from the presence of a literary theme (even a frequent one) found in literature that happened to have been preserved to a shared psychology among a populace; above all, one cannot make an empirical claim that such an outlook was present among "many, if not most, Jews" in Jesus' day.

A handy checklist for the errors in historiographical argumentation found in Wright's work is David Hackett Fischer's *Historians' Fallacies*,¹² which I was reading concurrently with my study of Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Fischer does not provide a complete compendium, but he seeks to encourage better thinking among historians by noting the sorts of errors in logic made by famous practitioners of the craft. Fischer would have termed Wright's illicit elision from the literary to the empirical as one of two forms of fallacy—either the "aesthetic fallacy" (if it works logically, it must have happened factually) or the fallacy of generalization he calls "statistical sampling" (if some people thought this way, everyone must have thought this way).¹³

Another form of erroneous historical logic identified by Fischer is the "black and white fallacy," which he defines as the "misconstruction of vague terms" either by obscuring differences or artificially sharpening them. The form this fallacy takes in Wright is in his habit of forming of false alternatives. "If Jesus is not the last prophet," says Wright, "he is a false prophet" (*JIV* 364). Really? Are those truly the only alternatives available? More precisely, Wright has here committed the fallacy of the excluded middle or "false dichotomy."¹⁴

¹¹ Johnson, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 536–538.

¹² David Hackett Fischer, *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

¹³ See *ibid.*, 87, for more on the aesthetic fallacy; see *ibid.*, 104, for more on the fallacy of statistical sampling. It is amusing, apropos the Jesus Seminar, to note that in 1970 Fischer parodies the "fallacy of prevalent proof" by imagining a group of scholars settling a historical problem by "resorting to a vote" (*ibid.*, 52)!

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 276–277, for more on black-and-white fallacy; see *ibid.*, 9–12, for more on the fallacy of the false dichotomy.

Similarly, after stating that “most first century Jews would have seen themselves as still, in all sorts of senses, ‘in exile,’” Wright continues, “I would ask critics to face the question: would any serious-thinking first-century Jew claim that the promises of Isaiah 40–66, or of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Zechariah, had been fulfilled?” (*JVG* xvii). Even if we refrain from asking which of the many promises and predictions Wright has in mind, we must still note that he excludes the possibility that the very *issue* of fulfilling these promises may not have been posed by most Jews in the first place, not least because they did not inhabit the eschatological story line that he has made normative.

Perhaps the most egregious example of black-and white fallacy is the way Wright tends to caricature any understanding of religion that is not, by his definition, political. On the same page, he contrasts the “contours of Second-Temple Judaism” to the “bland and anachronistic landscape of moralism,” and he opposes a “claim about eschatology” to “a piece of ‘teaching’ about ‘religion’ or ‘morality,’ . . . the dissemination of a timeless truth” (*JVG* 433). His favorite negative epithet is, in fact, “timeless” (see *JVG* 650), indicating once more how “history” in this work is not only one mode of knowing but an entire value system already heavy laden with theological significance (cf. *JVG* 122).

Earlier, Wright dismisses the view that Jesus might have taught “a different sort of religion, namely, an interior spiritual sort” in this fashion: “This is clearly no good. If it were true, Jesus would have been simply incomprehensible, a teacher of abstract and interior truths to a people hungry for God to act within history. The people were asking for bread and freedom, not thin air” (*JVG* 92); and, a few pages later, “in such a world, to be non-political is to be irrelevant” (*JVG* 98). Now these statements are patently disconfirmed by much ancient evidence, most obviously in the many forms of Gnostic spirituality within Hellenism, Judaism and Christianity. They also show circularity in argumentation.¹⁵ Not only does he caricature the religion of the interior as “thin air” but he unfairly suggests that such a religious posture is less “political” than one preoccupied with social arrangements, when in fact, the Epicurean withdrawal from public in the name of a quietist piety could be regarded as having significant political implications (see Plutarch, *Against Colotes*). More striking still, these citations show that the issue for Wright appears to be less whether Jesus did or did not do something than whether it has matched Wright’s

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 49–51, for the “fallacy of circular proof.”

understanding of what he *should* have done in order to be a politically relevant—and therefore, in his judgment, religiously significant—figure of the first century.

The notion that the majority of Jews still thought of themselves as “somehow in exile” and that all “authentic Jews” were searching for a restoration of Israel on the historical (that is, political) plane is central to Wright’s entire reconstruction. He states in his preface that he is “not attempting to reduce everything to a single theme” but that he is using the term “exile as shorthand” for the “expectation that Israel’s god would once again act *within her history*” (*JVG* xviii, emphasis original). I pause here first to observe how the phrase “God acting in history” works well rhetorically but—as shown by Rudolf Bultmann’s famous response to Oscar Cullmann’s *Christ and Time*—is conceptually very fuzzy.¹⁶ More to the point, Wright’s subsequent use of exile exemplifies what Fischer terms the “fallacy of ambiguity,” defined as “the use of a word or an expression which has two or more possible meanings, without sufficient specification to which meaning is intended.”¹⁷ Precisely because the term functions as a kind of symbolic shorthand, Wright is able to draw all kinds of equations and inferences that a more precise usage might disallow. Thus, his discussion of the forgiveness of sins (*JVC* 268–74) might just barely be brought within the theme of “return from exile,” but it is neither a necessary part of that theme nor explicable only in terms of that theme.

I conclude these comments on Wright’s historiographical practices with his treatment of the Pharisees (*NTPG* 181–203; *JVC* 369–442). In the Gospel accounts the Pharisees obviously play a key role as opponents of Jesus over matters of the law. They neither express nor are given any specific eschatological views. If they consider themselves, as did “most Jews in Jesus’ day,” as still in exile, the Gospels do not say how. Neither does the Jewish historian Josephus—our other major source of knowledge of the Pharisees—emphasize their eschatology, except to distinguish them from Sadducees with respect to their belief in the resurrection. Josephus mostly stresses the Pharisees’ concern for the strict observance of the laws, thereby agreeing with the Gospels as well as with Paul, who is our only first-hand Pharisaic voice of the period before the war of 66–70 C.E.

¹⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, “History of Salvation and History,” in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1960), 226–240.

¹⁷ See Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies*, 265.

If all this evidence is taken at face value, then the Gospel accounts make good sense. The Pharisees appear in the stories concerning them fairly much as they are described by Josephus, the disputes over the observance of Torah fit within a context of intra-Jewish dispute over the meaning of allegiance to God, and the opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees could well have escalated to a point where he was vulnerable to serious criticism and worse. In none of this would there be a need for diverging eschatological visions or competing political agendas.

Wright, however, is particularly given to that fallacy Fischer calls “the fallacy of one-dimensional man.”¹⁸ In this case the one dimension is political. Authentic Judaism must also be a political Judaism. The Gospels must therefore be read against the backdrop of a revisionist view of the Pharisees and of Wright’s own conviction that everything Jesus said and did must fit within a specific eschatological script. Following Jacob Neusner’s argument that the Pharisees began in politics and ended in piety,¹⁹ Wright gathers all the evidence from Josephus of Pharisaic involvement in anti-Roman activity before 135 C.E. Fair enough. It’s not a great deal, but it’s some. It should be pointed out, however, that there is no connection drawn in the sources between such activity and any Pharisaic ideology. In other words, the involvement of Pharisee X in a struggle against Pilate may or may not have been because he was a Pharisee. It may equally be the case that Rioter Z was a choleric and revolutionary fellow who also happened to be a Pharisee. But for Wright, all human activity must flow consistently from some group ideology or story. Any resistance to Rome by a Pharisee must therefore represent a Pharisaic political posture.

Wright then takes the tensions between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel within the Pharisaic movement²⁰ also in political terms, with the stricter Shammaites now representing an even stronger line of resistance to Rome than the Hillelites. Once more note the elision: being stricter in *halachah* must equal a more resistant political posture as well. Then, Wright takes the usual assumption, that the house of Shammai was more numerous and powerful before 70 C.E. than the House of Hillel, to argue the Pharisees as a whole during the time of Jesus were so hard-line against Rome that they were virtually equivalent to Zealots. Finally, since all praxis must flow consistently from a story, the Pharisees can be seen

¹⁸ Ibid., 201–203.

¹⁹ Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

²⁰ Our sources here are Mishnaic and Talmudic, and the disputes they describe are Halachic rather than political or eschatological.

as sponsoring a restoration from exile that was actively resistant to Rome, not only ritually but, if necessary, also by force.

Having (literally) created this portrait of the Pharisees, Wright can then portray the conflicts between them and Jesus in terms of rival political programs for the restoration from exile. Jesus' inclusionary ministry is one of passive resistance and non-violence, involving the reinterpretation of the social symbols of Judaism. The Pharisees advance a program of restoration that is exclusionary and confrontational, willing to exercise violence in order to protect the traditional understanding and restore the kingdom of Israel. Since the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees involved politics from the start, it is much easier to understand the conflicts between such political programs as leading to a political resolution through a choreographed state execution.

As I stated from the start, Wright has managed to construct a plausible scenario. But historiography—as Wright himself recognizes—must move from the plausible (it is possible and makes sense) to the probable (there is a stronger reason for thinking it happened this way and not some other way), and the only way to the probable is through the assessment of specific historical evidence. In his presentation of the Pharisees, I would argue that Wright has stretched the evidence very far indeed, making a secondary element in one source (Josephus) into the dominant and defining element of the Pharisees. In the process, Wright is forced to conclude that *all* our sources—Josephus, the Gospels, the Talmud, and presumably also Paul—have, for reasons of their own, suppressed this political dimension (*NTPG* 202).

In short, at some critical junctures, Wright has taken those pieces of evidence that fit his overall schema and rejected or reinterpreted the pieces that don't. Thus he says concerning Josephus' emphasis on the Pharisees' belief in the resurrection, "This belief, however, is not merely to do with speculation about a future life after death. As we can see from some of the early texts which articulate it, is bound up with the desire for a reconstituted and restored Israel" (*NTPG* 200). Note how slippery this is: if the resurrection is "not merely to do" with the future life, it nevertheless certainly does at least have much to do with it! Josephus, furthermore, does not connect this belief with a hope for political restoration.

And the texts that Wright claims to be "bound up with" a restored Israel (Ezek and 2 Macc) are not specifically Pharisaic. In 2 Maccabees, furthermore, the specific passages dealing with the resurrection of the Maccabean martyrs (2 Macc 6–7) are not in the least connected to a this-worldly restoration of Israel's political fortunes.

Historians must—and often do—stretch the limits of evidence in order to find meaningful patterns or to test hypotheses. But they must expect to be challenged if they do it on this scale. Wright relies on supposition, tenuous links and possible combinations for his construction. But positive evidence is lacking where he most needs it. He has not made the historical case concerning the Pharisees. Instead, he has committed what Fischer calls “the historian’s fallacy,” which is the tendency to assume that what the historian knows the subjects of inquiry also must have known and acted upon as well.²¹

Suppose we grant that each and every Pharisee espoused the ideological views Wright ascribes to the Pharisees as a whole and that each and every Pharisee acted upon these views with utter consistency, as part of a coherent political program (and if we grant this, we are granting more than any serious historian should). We would by no means thereby grant that each and every Pharisee thereby also knew that this was what they were doing—not to mention that the Pharisees could recognize in Jesus’ symbolic actions a political program that was in some ways akin but in other ways inimical and threatening to theirs—so that all of the Pharisees responded to Jesus on this basis and this basis alone.

Likewise, suppose we granted that Jesus had the entire eschatological scenario ascribed to him by Wright in his head at every moment, that he acted consistently with that scenario in all his actions and that he even *knew* that this was what he was doing. We could by no means thereby allow that Jesus also knew *their* program in detail and that he shaped his own program consciously as a counter to that of the Pharisees, so that it shared their dream of restoration but eschewed their violent methods.

Wright has the characters in the Gospels acting out a script that was available to none of them because it has only been constructed by contemporary scholars. It would have been far better if he had heeded his own salutary warning:

“We have no means of knowing whether Caiaphas would have been aware of the speculations on this point which we have already studied. (We may remind ourselves that we do not know who in the first century read which non-biblical books; also, that there may have been dozens or even hundreds of texts familiar then and subsequently lost.) Nor do we have any idea whether Jesus had himself been influenced by the

²¹ Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies*, 209–213.

non-biblical texts we have studied, or whether his own use was original to himself, albeit parallel to others roughly contemporary" (*JVG* 643).

A good reminder, needing only the addition of "biblical writings" to make it adequate. Yet Wright proceeds to ignore his own warning in his ever more elaborate speculations about what might have been. The length of his argument, with its insistent repetition of points that have not been demonstrated but only asserted, places Wright in proximity to that form of "fallacy of substantive distraction" Fischer lists under arguments *ad Verecundiam* ("appeal to authority") namely, "a thesis which is sustained by the length of its exposition."²²

The Gospels and Christian Origins

I move now to a substantive review of two elements in Wright's project that are interconnected and critical to the evaluation of his historical Jesus. The first is his relatively uncritical use of the Gospels as sources; the second is his (so far) minimalist view of the resurrection.

1. *The Gospels as Sources*

In *The New Testament and the People of God* (371–443), Wright provides his most sustained account of the compositions in the New Testament, under the (not surprising) rubric of "stories in early Christianity," treating in turn the four Gospels, Paul and Hebrews, before considering form criticism. Although he considers some basic themes in these materials, his single organizing thesis is that they all represent subversions of Israel's shared story. In other words, his partial survey of New Testament literature serves mainly to make a point that no one would dispute, namely that these compositions represent reinterpretations of the symbolic world of Torah. What Wright does *not* do in this section is consider the difficult critical issues concerning literary relationships between the sources, nor does he assess the difficulties their respective forms of the "story" present for historical reconstruction. He spends considerable time demonstrating what needs no proof and no time dealing with what most requires attention.

At the beginning of *The New Testament and the People of God*, Wright asserts that "Jesus' own theological beliefs cannot be read off the surface of the text" (22), a statement that appears to respect the difficulties of

²² *Ibid.*, 287.

getting at Jesus' ideas and motivations through the evangelists' literary representations. Subsequent statements, however, move in another direction. He insists that the Synoptic writers considered themselves to be writing a "history of Jesus" (*NTPG* 397) in which the perspective of the resurrection was not determinative (*NTPG* 398). This history of Jesus, furthermore, was of a special sort; the early church "told Israel-stories about him" (*NTPG* 401), and the Gospels "are, in fact, Jewish-style biographies, designed to show the quintessence of Israel's story played out in a single life. . . . The Gospels are therefore the story of Jesus *told as the story of Israel in miniature*" (*NTPG* 402). Yet, "the evangelists' theological and pastoral programme has in no way diminished their intent to write about Jesus of Nazareth" (*NTPG* 403). In these statements, Wright seems intent on maintaining the character of the Gospels as accurate historical records basically unaffected by literary shaping, while at the same time he is insisting that they tell the story of Jesus as the story of Israel in miniature.

The only way these tensions can be reconciled is if Jesus himself was following a scriptural script such as Wright has proposed and if the Gospels are "performances" of that basic script. But to suppose this is to ignore the most obvious thing about the Gospels: they not only place the emphasis differently, they are truly different scripts. If Wright wants to avoid the deconstructive path of the New Questers and work with the New Testament compositions as stories, then he must deal with each of their stories in all their specificity, *before* seeing how some historical script might underlie them.

Just as his analysis of sources consisted simply in assertions supportive of his central thesis, Wright fails to supply a rationale for the way he actually uses the New Testament as evidence for his historical reconstruction. Why, for example, has he made no use of the historical evidence in Paul's letters concerning the human Jesus? Even more pertinently, why has he not dealt with John as a source for the historical Jesus? In his preface, Wright admits that his reconstruction "has been conducted almost entirely in terms of the synoptic tradition," but he provides no reason why he has not even considered John's possible use. I will return to this point, for Wright's plea that he omitted John in the interest of brevity and his hope that he might be able to work with John in the future simply do not suffice (*JVG* xvi).

In his use of the Synoptics themselves, moreover, Wright appears to be bound by no consistent principle of selection or use. He relieves himself of the necessity of taking differences between accounts seriously by appealing to the premise that stories circulated in oral tradition in slightly

different forms (*JVC* 133–36). He can construct major parts of his thesis by the use of one of the Gospels without seriously taking that composition's literary and religious interests into account. Note, for example, it is Luke-Acts that provides Wright with the framework for his presentation of Jesus as prophet—the theme is much less developed in the other Synoptics. It is Matthew's Sermon on the Mount that he takes as his text for Jesus' teaching, rather than Luke's Sermon on the Plain, even though large sections of that discourse are clearly peculiar to Matthew. It is Mark's apocalyptic discourse that he takes as Jesus' version, even though Luke's differs in significant ways. He provides no reason why he follows now one Gospel and now another; indeed he fails even to acknowledge that this is his procedure.

More disturbing is his sometimes casual assessment of material. See again the basic prophetic mindset he attributes to Jesus. After listing the passages referring to Jesus as a prophet (*JVG* 164–65), Wright notes that these include statements from the triple tradition—Luke, Matthew and John. He does not state why in this case John's evidence is significant. Then he claims that “apart from Acts 3:22 there is nothing in the New Testament, outside the gospels, about Jesus as a prophet.” Actually, Acts 7:37 could be added, as could Revelation 19:10. Wright then asserts that although the Gospels have a “Moses-typology,” they have only tangential allusion to the specific idea of a “prophet like Moses” (*JVG* 166). In fact, however, John's Gospel has a specific and important “prophet like Moses” theme (Wayne A. Meeks' important monograph is missing from Wright's bibliography),²³ and the most substantial scholarship on Luke-Acts in the past thirty years has demonstrated just how central the theme of the prophet like Moses is to Luke's work.²⁴ The point here is that Wright's assessment of the data—and above all his failure to reckon with the specific compositional tendencies of the sources—undercuts his confident assertion that “we are here in touch with firmly authentic tradition, preserved against all the tendencies that may be presumed to have been at work” (*JVG* 165–66).

At times Wright will take the specific wording in a specific Gospel passage as a critical clue to Jesus' intentions. On Mark 13, for example, he writes, “The scriptural background is in fact threefold, and very instruc-

²³ W.A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, Supplement to *Novum Testamentum* 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

²⁴ For discussion and bibliography, see L.T. Johnson, “Luke-Acts,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:403–420.

tive for *what we must hypothesize as the mindset of Jesus, reusing Israel's prophetic heritage, and retelling its story, consistently with his entire set of aims*" (JVG 349, emphasis added; see the entire argument in detail, JVG 149–60). At other times, he can ignore the clear statement of the source in favor of his own reading. Thus, although the Synoptics clearly identify John with Elijah, Wright insists that "Jesus adopts the style of, and consciously seems to imitate, Elijah" (JVG 367), even though his evidence for this is drawn only from the stories in Luke that all scholars recognize as specifically Lukan redaction. Wright treats the Gospels as reliable reports of Jesus' actions and words and intentions when they agree with his thesis; when they do not, he ignores or corrects them in light of the master story that Jesus "must" have been following.

2. *Christian Origins*

Corresponding to Wright's inconsistency with regard to the sources is his minimalist understanding of the resurrection. I do not mean to suggest that the resurrection is less than critical for Wright; he agrees with Sanders that Jesus' followers would not have survived longer than those of John without the resurrection (JVG 110). The resurrection was "the only reason they came up with for supposing that Jesus was anything other than a dream that might have come true but didn't" (JVG 659). The relevance of Jesus, continues Wright, depends entirely on what view one takes of the resurrection. I call his view "minimalist" because Jesus' resurrection is described primarily as the resuscitation of Jesus as an individual, rather than an eschatological event affecting his followers as well, and as something that served to ratify who Jesus already was rather than cause a fundamental process of interpretation of his paradoxical life and death: "The resurrection thus vindicates *what Jesus was already believed to be*" (NTPG 400, emphasis original), Wright clearly emphasizes continuity, rather than discontinuity, between the earthly ministry of Jesus and the resurrection.

Wright's understanding of the Gospel accounts and of the resurrection comes together in the statement at the end of this book, which comes as close as anything to addressing the transition between Jesus and the faith of the church:

But if he was an eschatological prophet/Messiah, announcing the kingdom and dying in order to bring it about, the resurrection would declare that he had in principle succeeded in his task, and that his earlier redefinitions of the coming kingdom had pointed to a further task awaiting his followers, that of *implementing* what he had achieved. (JVG 660, emphasis original)

Once more, then, continuity. But is this, in fact, what we find in our earliest evidence concerning Christian convictions about Jesus?

It is impossible to review all the New Testament evidence here, but it can be stated with considerable confidence that the New Testament compositions apart from the Synoptics show few traces of continuity with Jesus' understanding of his mission (as Wright sketches it). In *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Wright presents a maximal case of such continuity, depending heavily on Romans and portions of Galatians and Philippians.²⁵ And even in these letters (which do not constitute all of Paul) the evidence is stretched uncomfortably to fit the thesis that Jesus and Paul were reading from the same scriptural script concerning God's triumph.

Most of Paul, and most of the New Testament literature in general, focuses on Jesus as the risen Lord, that is, as the powerful source of life and the victor over the cosmic forces that hold humans captive to sin and death. These writings do not slight Jesus' humanity in the least. Jesus' humanity is significant, however, not because of what he said or did as a prophet of Israel but because of how he revealed God's reconciling work for humans in the pattern of his life. It is not the prophetic vision of Jesus that is cited as normative; it is his character as the obedient son who gave his life in service to others. When Paul refers to "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16), he gives no indication that he means Jesus' understanding of Israel's story and how he was to bring it to completion; Paul means, instead, an attitude or disposition of heart that expressed itself in self-donative service. And if one were to ask Paul whether it were more important to know where they were in the storyline of God's triumph in history or to live lives worthily of God in imitation of Jesus, Paul's answer would emphatically be to focus not on what is next but on what should be done now. And if this is the case with Paul—who does after all, maintain a passionate connection to Israel as a people and a lively sense of God's eschatological victory—it is even more the case in the other New Testament epistolary literature. The risen Lord is worshiped as the source of eternal life for all who believe in him; his humanity is the pattern for obedient faith in God.

Wright could object to this by observing that this epistolary literature was addressed primarily to Gentile believers and, in any case, was preoccupied with the implementation of what Jesus had achieved rather than with the memory of his mission and vision. It is the Gospels, he might say, that provide the definitive evidence for a clean continuity between

²⁵ See L.T. Johnson, "Which Paul?" *First Things* 80 (1998): 58–60.

Jesus and the church's understanding of him. But precisely here is where Wright's lack of a critical analysis of the Gospels and above all his failure to account for John, weakens his argument. If one follows the two-source solution to the Synoptic Problem (the literary relationship between Matthew, Mark and Luke), then Mark's story line is the basic source for both Luke and Matthew (to which Q offers sayings material as a supplement but not an alternative story line). If one prefers Matthean priority, then Luke used Matthew, and Mark epitomized them. In either case, we have basically only *one* "Synoptic witness" to the portrayal of Jesus in Wright, not three. The question therefore becomes urgent: why should this version be preferred to John as providing historical access to the words, deeds and even self-consciousness of Jesus? The question becomes even more acute when it is noted that there are at least as many links between John and Paul as there are between Paul and the Synoptics. Just as with Wright's standardized "story of Israel" the complexity of first-century Judaism is reduced to a single eschatological strand, so with Wright's "historical Jesus" the complexity of witnesses to Jesus is reduced to a single Synoptic strand. And *that* strand, as I have indicated, has been reduced even further by Wright's distillation of the distinctive witnesses of Matthew, Mark and Luke into single voice.

There is still a further difficulty with Wright's position, for in fact none of the Synoptic Gospels as such contain precisely the Jesus he now puts before us. In order to come up with his Jesus, in fact, Wright needs to abstract some elements from each of the Synoptic Gospels and amplify these elements by aligning them with a presumptive master story. No less than the New Questers, despite his apparent greater fealty to the Gospel narratives, Wright ends up enucleating his simple Jesus from their more complex compositions. And if this is the case—if Wright's Jesus never existed until Wright constructed him—then serious questions must be put to his claim to have gained access to the very perceptions of Jesus²⁶ as well as to the premise that the resurrection simply validated who Jesus had been all along. If none of Wright's chosen sources, the Synoptic Gospels, got it right, then who did? Only Wright himself?

²⁶ Wright speaks of Jesus "regarding" his ministry as in some way unique (*JVG* 163) and as in continuity with the great prophets (*JVG* 167). Jesus "envisaged his own work," and he "really did believe" he was inaugurating (*JVG* 197). Jesus "expects" a great event within a generation or two (*JVG* 207). "Jesus' understanding of his own vocation belonged closely with an implicit understanding of his own self" (*JVG* 222). Jesus "regarded himself" as Messiah (*JVG* 489), and so forth.

Another Approach to the Jesus of the Gospels

I began this essay by stating that Wright's portrait of Jesus had considerable plausibility, as it does. In fact, his portrait of Jesus is not that far from the one constructed by the evangelist Luke, for whom also Jesus is above all a prophet. But Wright's work is flawed in the same way the work of the New Questers is flawed—by his trying to go past the limits established by the evidence. By trying to establish an absolutely clear and consistent historical Jesus, Wright paradoxically ends with another in a series of sociological stereotype Jesuses, one who must think and act in accordance with the role assigned him. By trying to prove too much, Wright commits any number of fallacies and ends up with a position that is logically and historiographically unsound.

Like those he opposes, Wright distorts an essentially complex process by trying to make it simple. He dislikes those views of the resurrection that emphasize its radical character because such a view seems to establish nothing but discontinuity between the early church and Jesus. And he is partly correct. In his reaction, however, he goes much too far in the other direction, ending with an emphasis on continuity that is simply not credible or consistent with the evidence of the sources taken as a whole. Above all, Wright cannot demonstrate that scriptural prophecies and the Synoptic accounts "fit like a glove" (*JVG* 602) simply because the Gospel writers themselves made that fit, especially since Paul, Hebrews, 1 Peter and, above all, the Gospel of John all offer interpretations of Jesus that resemble those in the Synoptics with respect to their use of the symbolic world of Torah but that differ in the texts they employ and the specific images they create.

I would suggest that a more useful path to the *rapprochement* Wright seeks between history, literature and theology is to recognize the distinctive and interdependent role played by each rather than reduce them to one. I would also suggest that the construction of the multiple images of Jesus in the New Testament results not from a simple, linear process but from a complex and dialectical one.

We can begin by recognizing there are a number of important points concerning the human Jesus that can be established historically—that is to say, with a high degree of historical probability. And, as I have suggested, these points are compatible with the basic lines of a prophetic ministry that proclaimed the rule of God, that called people to repentance as part of a faithful Israel, that included the outcast of society and that involved preaching, teaching, and healing. There is every reason to think that Jesus

was baptized by John in the Jordan, that he chose special followers, that he performed a prophetic gesture in the temple, that he shared a last meal with the disciples and that he was executed as a messianic figure. Properly historical evidence is sufficient to make these statements. There was, in a word, a Jesus to remember, and we can say some things about him.

But then we must also recognize the critical importance of the resurrection, which was far more than a simple resuscitation from the dead. The sources themselves witness that the resurrection involved as much discontinuity as continuity, demanding that Jesus be viewed in a new way because of his present life as powerful Lord. The memory of Jesus after his death was inevitably selected and shaped by the experience of the church, above all by the experience of the resurrection, which was understood not as something that happened only to Jesus in the past but especially as something that touched those who worshiped him in the present. The memory of Jesus past could not but be affected by the experience of Jesus present. If there was a Jesus to remember, then, this was also a Jesus remembered through the influence of that power the Christians called the Holy Spirit.

From the first, the process of remembering Jesus involved seeing him in the light of Scriptural prophecies. There is no reason to think that Jesus did not himself refer to the scriptures with reference to his mission. But we cannot demonstrate that he did, or which texts he himself might have used. What the evidence does make clear is that from the very beginning, as shown primarily by Paul's letters, the significance of Jesus—if you will, the theological appreciation of Jesus—was mediated by an interpretation of Jesus that read him into Torah and read Torah into his work and his death and his resurrection. It is even possible that church learned this practice from Jesus. But it is imperative to note that the only interpretations we are able to verify are those made by the compositions themselves. These rereadings of Scripture took a variety of forms, as we see by comparing Romans to Hebrews, 1 Peter to Revelation. We see it also by comparing the Gospel of John to the Gospel of Matthew or the Gospel of Luke. The texts chosen are different, the resulting themes are different, but the instinct to read Jesus through Scripture remains constant.

This process of interpreting Jesus through and in Torah reaches one form of crystallization in the narrative Gospels now found in the New Testament. And here is where the specifically literary character of these narratives must be taken seriously. It will not do (to use one of Wright's favorite phrases) to assert that each of the Synoptic Gospels "more or less" tells the same story. That is obvious from their literary interdependence.

But what is equally clear from a close reading of each of the Gospels is that each Gospel's own way of interpreting Jesus through Torah is distinctive. Each of them gives its own meaning to the work of Jesus and, above all, its own interpretation of Jesus vis-à-vis the people Israel. Nor will it do to ignore that diversity by choosing from all these Gospels (and only them) those elements that fit the master plot Wright has discerned in the Scripture, thereby creating a single story that is not found as such in any of them.

Indeed, if we were to look for a unifying element in the Gospels (including that of John), it would be found not in the historical details of Jesus' activity, nor in the Scriptures that are brought to bear on that activity, but in the deep agreement concerning the basic character of Jesus as obedient servant and the basic character of discipleship as following in the path that he followed. In a word, it is not the historical specificity of Jesus' words and deeds but rather the pattern of humanity he reveals within his historical specificity that forms the heart of the Gospel story.

A proper appreciation of the dialectical process by which the Gospels came into being would recognize the historicity of Jesus as a first-century Jewish man who acted as a prophet. It would recognize the radical change in the perception of Jesus brought about by his scandalous crucifixion and his surprising resurrection into God's own life, a change in perception that led to a reexamination of the Scripture in the light of these experiences. It would recognize, finally, that the Gospel narratives contain a variety of images of Jesus, each of which contains some elements of historical fact and event, each of which testifies to his powerful presence as Lord, each of which advances an understanding of discipleship in imitation of his suffering service and each of which clothes Jesus richly and diversely in the garments of Torah.

Despite its great energy, ambition, and intelligence, Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God* yields neither a rendering of Jesus nor an account of the Gospels that is convincingly historical. At best it is an inventive exercise in one of the aspects of the theology of the Synoptic tradition.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE JESUS OF THE GOSPELS AND PHILOSOPHY

This essay considers four ways in which the figure of Jesus as found in the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) gives rise to the sort of thinking that can properly be called philosophical. I do not want to argue that one way is better than another; each has its merit and each has its limits. I do want to argue that the ways are sufficiently discrete as to demand clarity concerning choices made with respect to the gospel narratives and how they are being read. I further argue that each approach also carries with it different understandings of what is meant by “philosophy.”

The Historical Jesus as Sage

The first approach is to consider Jesus, not as a character in the gospel narratives, but as a historical figure whose words can be abstracted from those narratives and provide the basis for consideration of Jesus as an ancient Jewish sage. The antecedents of the approach are impressive: the Manichaean teacher Faustus dismissed the gospel narratives as inventions of the apostles and considered only Jesus’ words to be authentic and trustworthy.¹ From Thomas Jefferson to Robert Funk, certain searchers after the “historical Jesus” have also focused on the sayings of Jesus as distinctively providing access to his human identity and mission.²

The difficulties of determining the *ipsissima verba*—or even the *ipsissima vox*—of Jesus are notorious, as are the diverse motivations of those seeking to discover the “real Jesus” through his speech alone.³ The uncertain attribution and shape of specific sayings, whether *logia*, *chreia*, or parable, makes the determination, “Jesus said X,” hazardous.⁴ And the effort to displace Christian belief in Jesus as the resurrected Son of God

¹ Augustine, *Reply to Faustus*, II, 1; V, 1.

² See T. Jefferson, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*; Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels*.

³ See L.T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus*.

⁴ The elaborately devised “criteria” for determining authentic sayings serve, even when appropriately employed, to identify only the earliest available and verifiable form of a

on the basis of “what he said” lacks both philosophical detachment and religious sensibility.⁵ Even if such difficulties could be surmounted, there remains the greatest obstacle: the very premise that a collection of sayings, removed from narrative context, provides sure access to anyone’s “identity and mission.”⁶

Preoccupation with fixing Jesus’ historical words or voice, moreover, is more fundamentally suited to a biographical rather than a philosophical inquiry; in the same fashion, one could seek the “genuine words of Socrates” in the writings of his contemporary Aristophanes or his students Xenophon and Plato, without ever having those words “give rise to thought” in the form of philosophy.⁷ Jesus in this sort of quest might appear as one of the sages whose words are reported by Diogenes Laertius—a figure of the past whose opinions are worth noting because they had influence on some followers, but not as one of the significant shapers of thought.⁸ Thus, if it is possible to determine that Jesus actually said, “The kingdom of God has arrived; repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15), the statement might have great significance for describing Jesus’ self-conception and sense of mission, might also make an important (if difficult to verify) claim to truth, but still fall outside the interests of philosophy.

Some of the words of Jesus in the gospels are of interest to philosophy understood in the ancient sense as the love of wisdom, namely those statements that construct an imaginary narrative world (as do the parables) or statements that affirm a truth about humans, or statements that exhort to a certain kind of moral behavior. Such statements give rise to thought in the philosophical sense when they are considered, not as avenues to the mind of Jesus, but as declarations are to be weighed in light of human

saying in the data pool; the fact that even the earliest versions derive, not directly from Jesus, but from some stage of tradition, is seldom taken seriously by the searchers.

⁵ The desire to use a reconstituted Jesus as normative for contemporaries is implicit in virtually all historical Jesus research, but it most obvious in R. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*.

⁶ See L.T. Johnson, “The Humanity of Jesus: What’s at Stake in the Quest for the Historical Jesus?” in *The Jesus Controversy* (Rockwell Lecture Series; Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1999) 48–74, and now, W.A. Meeks, *Christ is the Question* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

⁷ Distinct representations are given Socrates by his critic Aristophanes, *Nubes*, and by each of the students who memorialized him: see Xenophon, *Apologia*, *Memorabilia*; Plato, *Dialogues*. In the first, Socrates is a charlatan, in the second, a simple moral teacher, in the third, a dialectician and metaphysician.

⁸ See especially the treatment of the pre-Socratic Sages in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.

experience past and present: thus, we might ask of each of them, do they, in fact, contain wisdom or provide an avenue along which wisdom can be discovered?

The parables have been particularly favored by historical-Jesus-questers, because they are thought to give privileged access to Jesus' world-view.⁹ Certainly, the parables ascribed to Jesus in the synoptic gospels are distinctive. Although some Jews used *mashalim* to explicate Torah, and some Greeks used fables to teach morals,¹⁰ ancient literature has no parallel to the remarkably compressed and vivid stories ascribed to Jesus.¹¹ When read within the gospel narratives, the parables appear as elements within the rhetorical constructions of those compositions, serving among other things to interpret the larger narrative.¹² When detached from the gospels and read in isolation, however, the parables are polyvalent, inviting a variety of interpretations, and fitting into any number of hermeneutical frameworks.¹³ The parables of Jesus abstracted from the gospel narratives are appreciated for their elements of paradox, reversal, and surprise; they are regarded as stories that subvert rather than confirm conventional expectations.¹⁴ As discreet narratives, they can even be put into conversation with other provocative literary voices such as Kafka and Borges.¹⁵ The literary quality of the parables is patent; less clear is how they give rise to thought, unless it is through inducing that sense of surprise and wonder and uncertainty that ought to accompany serious reflection on the world.

⁹ See J.D. Crossan, in *Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*; Crossan builds on the premises and procedures of J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1963).

¹⁰ For examples of each, see D.R. Cartlidge and D.L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 137–141.

¹¹ Crossan memorably characterizes Jesus' parables in terms of brevity, narrativity, and metaphoricality; see J.D. Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

¹² See M. Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study* (Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 6; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977), and L.T. Johnson, "The Lukan Kingship Parable (Luke 19:11–27)," *Novum Testamentum* 24 (1982) 139–159.

¹³ See M.A. Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

¹⁴ See J.D. Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1975).

¹⁵ J.D. Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

Other discrete statements by Jesus take the form of aphorisms (*logia*). They may be organized by the evangelists into sermon-like collections, but probably circulated originally in the form of isolated declarations. They resemble the short snappy observations that also find parallel in Jewish proverbs and Greco-Roman *apophthegmata*. When found in the form of a *chreia* (whether simple or developed), such declarations tend toward biographical enmeshment, finding their significance in the narrative context provided. An example is the statement in Luke 12:15, “No one’s life is based on an abundance of riches.” It is found with a preliminary warning, “Watch out! Protect yourself from every form of greed,” and is part of a developed *chreia*,¹⁶ yet when taken in isolation can stand as an observation concerning human existence that gives rise to serious thought concerning the connection and lack of connection between being and having.¹⁷

More obviously akin to proverbial wisdom are such statements as “Can a blind person be a guide for another blind person? Won’t they both fall in a ditch?” (Luke 6:39), and “A sound tree does not produce rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree produce good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit” (Luke 6:43–44). They appear now in a collection conventionally called “Luke’s Sermon on the Plain” (6:17–49), but each can stand alone as an invitation to reflection on life. Both state succinctly and indirectly (through the image of unsighted people leading each other into a ditch and through the image of trees bearing fruits) something of larger significance concerning human existence: leadership requires greater capacities of people; human actions reveal human internal dispositions. Such statements may be trivial or profound. They may also be both deeply provocative and counter-intuitive, as when Luke’s Jesus declares, “Blessed are the poor” (6:20). The evangelists clearly considered them to have greater authority because they were spoken by Jesus. But as statements about life, they can be considered by thinkers in the same way that the wise sayings of Solomon or Solon or Confucius. Origen states the principle clearly:

¹⁶ For the translation, see L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 197; for analysis from the perspective of Greco-Roman rhetoric, see A.J. Malherbe, “The Christianization of *Topos* (Luke 12:13–34),” *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996) 123–135, and T.D. Stegman, “Reading Luke 12:13–34 as an Elaboration of a *Chreia*: How Hermogenes of Tarsus Sheds Light on Luke’s Gospel,” *Novum Testamentum* 49 (2006) 1–25.

¹⁷ Such as can be found in G. Marcel, *Being and Having* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), and *The Mystery of Being* (London: Harvill Press, 1951).

If the doctrine be sound and the effect of it good, whether it was made known to the Greeks by Plato or any of the wise men of Greece, or whether it was delivered to the Jews by Moses or any of the prophets, or whether it was given to the Christians in the recorded teachings of Jesus Christ, or in the instructions of his apostles, that does not affect the value of the truth communicated.¹⁸

Finally, there are those statements of Jesus that take the form of direct exhortation to his followers concerning their manner of life. Such instructions most resemble those found in Greco-Roman philosophical schools for the training of students within a specific tradition; perhaps the most obvious analogy would be the *Sovereign Maxims* ascribed to Epicurus.¹⁹ It must be remembered that, especially in the early empire, philosophy was considered above all to be a manner of life, less a matter of wisdom in the sense of theory as wisdom in the sense of virtue.²⁰ Protreptic discourses that exhorted would-be philosophers to match their profession with practice are widely attested.²¹ In this set of sayings, Jesus words do not provide an imaginative construal of the world (as in parable) nor a general truth about the world (as in an aphorism), but specific requirements of a follower. Once more, Luke's Sermon on the Plain provides a good example. Immediately after having Jesus pronounce the blessings and woes (6:17–26), Luke continues,

But I declare to you who are listening: love your enemies. Act well toward those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer your other cheek as well. Do not hold back even your shirt from the one who takes your coat. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not demand restitution from one who takes what is your own. Just as you want people to act toward you, act in the same way toward them.

¹⁸ Origen, *C. Cels.* 7:59.

¹⁹ For the role of philosophical maxims as guides to behavior, see A.J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), especially 68–120.

²⁰ See the classic discussion in S. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (New York: World Publishing Company 1956 [1904]) and the more recent treatment in M.C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²¹ For protreptic discourse, see Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation*, 122–123; for a reading of a NT composition as protreptic, see L.T. Johnson, *The Letter of James* (Anchor Bible 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995).

Such moral instructions are impressively rigorous, especially in combination, although specific commands find parallels in the statements of Greco-Roman and Jewish moralists. The “Golden Rule” is fairly well attested in antiquity,²² and the offering of the body in service appears as an ideal for the Cynic philosopher.²³ Such parallels confirm that these statements fit within an understanding of philosophy as a way of life, in which the point of language is less to describe reality than to change character.

This first approach concentrates on the historical Jesus’ speech as giving rise to thought. The fact that Jesus’ words are found in narrative gospels is immaterial; indeed, the forms of those sayings in apocryphal gospels—most intriguingly, the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*—are legitimately, even necessarily, included in the data base.²⁴ Jesus’ parables subvert conventional ways of viewing the world, his aphorisms invite consideration of human existence, and his exhortations lead to a certain way of living. However distinctive his sayings might be in content, this approach places Jesus firmly in the context of the sort of moral teaching found among ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish philosophers.

The Narrative Jesus as Moral Exemplar

A second philosophical approach to Jesus is equally consonant with the ancient conviction that philosophy was not only about thoughts but about practice. Some aspects of this moral philosophy were touched on in the previous section, in the consideration of Jesus’ exhortations to a manner of life. Concern for virtue and vice was not merely a matter of accurate analysis,²⁵ but had the practical aim of shaping consistent habits of disposition and behavior. Aristotle is the main source of the sort of “character ethic” that persisted among the Greco-Roman and Jewish moralists of the

²² The negative form is found in Tob 4:15 and is ascribed to Hillel in *bTShab* 31 a; the positive form is attested by Pseudo-Isocrates, *Demonicus* 14; *Nicocles* 61.

²³ Epictetus *Discourse* III. 22. 21–22, 69–70, 88–89; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 77/78. 40–45.

²⁴ See, e.g., S.J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1993) and M. Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); Use of the full spectrum of sayings material is found especially in J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*.

²⁵ For a sample of the exquisite dissection of virtues and vices, see Plutarch, *On Envy and Anger* (*Mor.* 536–538); *On Control of Anger* (*Mor.* 452–464); *On Brotherly Love* (*Mor.* 478–492).

early empire.²⁶ The emphasis on character makes intelligible the insistence among such philosophers that students not only learn wise maxims, but learn through the close observance and imitation (and memory) of models.²⁷ Models or exemplars are important because they demonstrate virtue in action.²⁸ The best models to imitate were living persons, whether a parent, or a leader, or a philosophical mentor.²⁹ But the literary representation of exemplars can also serve to instruct in the moral life. There is in antiquity a direct connection between the construction of moral exemplars and the writing of biographies, as seen most vividly in the *Moralia* and the *Vitae Paralleleae* of Plutarch; what is rendered analytically—with many small examples—in the essays is displayed narratively in his biographies of eminent figures.

Approaching Jesus in the gospels from such a philosophical perspective involves a very different evaluation of the gospels themselves. Now the point of reading is not the abstracting of some golden sayings of “Jesus the historical sage” from the dross of unworthy narratives, but rather of focusing on how the gospel narratives render the character of Jesus, not least in the ways in which what he proclaims is embodied in what he does, so that the *bios* of the human Jesus becomes an example to readers. The narratives as such are valorized as vehicles of character ethics. In contrast to the quest for Jesus as a historical sage, furthermore, analysis here must restrict itself primarily to the four-canonical gospels.³⁰

That reading the gospels as exemplary narratives came naturally to early Christian readers is easy to demonstrate, perhaps nowhere more magnificently than in the sermons of Leo the Great. After speaking about

²⁶ See Aristotle's *Ethica Eudemia* and *Ethica Nicomachea*, as well as the analyses of dispositions in his *Rhetorica*.

²⁷ For a discussion of this combination of elements and their application to a NT text, see L.T. Johnson, “The Mirror of Remembrance (James 1:22–25),” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988) 632–645.

²⁸ In the same way, vices are demonstrated in the behavior of those who betray the philosophical ideal; thus, protreptic discourses often contain slander against “false philosophers”; see L.T. Johnson, “2 Timothy and the Polemic against False Teachers,” *Journal of Religious Studies* 6/7 (1978–79) 1–26, and “The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989) 419–441.

²⁹ In Pseudo-Isocrates' *Demonicus*, the young man's father is presented as the ideal example for imitation; in Lucian of Samosata's *Demonax* and *Nigrinus*, the philosophical teacher is a model for students to emulate.

³⁰ See the comments on the narrative character of the canonical gospels in contrast to the “Gnostic Gospels” found at Nag-Hammadi in L.T. Johnson, “Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense?” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert Morgan*, edited by C. Rowland and C. Tuckett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 93–108.

Jesus' humility and ministry of service, Leo concludes his sermon with these words:

These words of our Lord, dearly beloved, are useful to us, not only for the communication of grace, but as an example for our imitation also—if only these remedies would be turned into instruction, and what has been bestowed by the mysteries would benefit the way people live. Let us remember that we must live in the “humility and meekness” of our Redeemer, since, as the Apostle says, “If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” In vain we are called Christians if we do not imitate Christ. For this reason did he refer to himself as the Way, that the teacher's manner of life might be the exemplar for his disciples, and that the servant might choose the humility which had been practiced by the master, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.³¹

Contemporary historical critics who have recovered an appreciation for ancient literary conventions have also recognized this dimension of the narrative gospels, seeing them (correctly) as a species of philosophical *Bios*.³² To date, however, attention has tended to focus on the question of genre, rather than on the specific ways in which the diverse gospels shape the character of the human Jesus. For the purposes of the present, largely descriptive essay, I can touch on only three broad aspects of the canonical gospels rendering of Jesus' character.

1. The gospel narratives diverge in their rendering of Jesus' character. Beyond the multiple differences among the gospels that befuddle historical questers—differences in sequence, location, wording, and the like—are the distinct portrayals of Jesus that are found in the narratives precisely as narratives, effects accomplished through a variety of literary techniques, including direct characterization (of Jesus, of the Jewish populace, of his followers, and of his opponents), employment of symbols and metaphors, authorial commentary, scriptural citation and allusion. The cumulative result of these many small touches are internally consistent and distinct portraits, such that the reader truly comes to know a different literary

³¹ Leo the Great, *Sermon* 25:5–6 (25 December, 444); citation from St. Leo the Great, *Sermons* (The Fathers of the Church 93; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 103–104; see also *Sermon* 37:3–4; 46:2–3; 59:4–5; see also Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 20:5; 29:5–7; 34; 38:1–3.

³² The pioneering work by C.W. Votaw, *The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970; original essays in 1915) was taken up by C.H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) and developed still further by others.

“Jesus” in each of the gospel narratives. The point can be made quickly by looking at the portrayal of Jesus in Matthew and Luke.

In Greco-Roman moral philosophy, the authenticity of teaching was demonstrated by behavior consistent with the teaching. Seneca states the principle succinctly: *verba rebus proba* (“prove the words by deeds”).³³ Both Matthew and Luke show Jesus enacting that principle. Written in the context of competition between formative Judaism and the messianic movement associated with Jesus, Matthew’s Gospel portrays Jesus as a teacher of the church who is clothed with the symbols of Torah so central to the form of Judaism that his community engages: in his gospel, Jesus is the interpreter of Torah, the fulfiller of Torah, and even the personification of Torah.³⁴ Written in the context of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles, Luke’s Gospel portrays Jesus as a public philosopher and prophet who carries God’s good news to the outcast among Jews, and whose disciples carry it to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).³⁵

Matthew’s Gospel illustrates Seneca’s principle by showing through narrative how Jesus acts in a manner consistent with his own teachings. In Matthew’s version of the beatitudes, Jesus declares, “Blessed are the poor in spirit (πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι) for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3), “Blessed are the meek (πραεῖς) for they shall inherit the land” (Matt 5:5), and “Blessed are the merciful (ἐλεήμονες) for they shall receive mercy” (Matt 5:7). The first two characteristics are ascribed to Jesus directly in the declaration of Matt 11:29, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek (πραῦς) and humble of heart (ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ).”

The characteristic of meekness is further confirmed by the citation of Zechariah 9:9 at Jesus entry into Jerusalem, “Behold your king comes to you, meek (πραῦς) and riding on an ass” (Matt 21:5), while the characteristic of lowliness is affirmed by the application to Jesus of the suffering servant song from Isaiah 42:1–4 (Matt 12:18–21), and the quality of mercy is affirmed by the application of Hos 6:6 to Jesus’ call of sinners, “I desire mercy (ἔλεος) and not sacrifice” (Matt 9:13). That such narrative characterization is not accidental is shown by the negative portrayal of Peter. In his opening sermon, Jesus expressly forbids taking oaths, declaring that anything more than a simple yes or no is “from the evil one” (Matt 5:33–37).

³³ Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 20.1.

³⁴ For a fuller characterization, see L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, revised, enlarged edition with T. Penner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 187–212.

³⁵ Johnson, *Writings*, 213–258.

The declaration is given narrative expression when Peter's resistance to Jesus' passion takes the form of an oath, ("God forbid, Lord!"), leading to Jesus calling Peter, "Satan" (Matt 16:22–23), and when Peter twice is said to swear an oath when he denies Jesus (Matt 26:72–74).³⁶

Luke's two volume narrative of the good news (Luke-Acts) gives a distinctive characterization to Jesus and his disciples, but equally connects their actions to Jesus' words. In Luke's case, Jesus (and his mother Mary [Luke 1:46–55]) give expression to a prophetic vision that expresses God's will for humans: God's visitation accomplishes a reversal of human expectations and measurements that is most succinctly stated by Jesus' statement, "Blessed are you poor" and "Woe to you who are rich" (Luke 6:20, 24). The spirit-anointed messiah proclaims as fulfilled in himself Isaiah's prophetic vision of a mission to the outcast and the oppressed as "a year acceptable to the Lord" (Isa 61:1–2; 58:6; Luke 4:16–21).

The Lukan narrative shows Jesus enacting this vision: he heals those who are oppressed by Satan (Luke 6:31–37), he calls into God's people those who for one reason or another were marginal to full participation: the lame, the blind, the poor (7:22), women (8:1–3) and children (9:46–48). His status-reversing message is in turn rejected by the rich and the powerful and the religiously established (16:14; 18:18–23). In Acts, Luke shows Jesus' prophetic successors continuing to enact the prophet's vision of God's rule, by healings (Acts 3:1–10; 8:32–35) and exorcisms (16:16–18), by embracing the outcast of Israel (Samaritans [8:4–8], Eunuchs [8:26–40]), and by extending Jesus' ministry of open table-fellowship even to the despised Gentiles (10–15). Even more impressive, from the perspective of ancient character ethics, is the way in which Jesus and his followers embody the radical life style consonant with the prophetic vision of the reversal of values: Jesus and his followers are poor (Luke 9:58; Acts 3:6), are itinerant (Luke 9–19; Acts 13–28), are dependent on God in prayer (Luke 9:28–29; Acts 4:23–31), exercise leadership in the mode of servants (Luke 22:25–30; Acts 4:32–37), and speak truth boldly to religious and political authorities (Luke 11:39–52; Acts 5:27–32).³⁷

³⁶ Johnson, *Writings*, 205–206.

³⁷ See L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), and *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992).

2. If they diverge in tone and nuance, the gospel narratives also converge concerning the essential character of Jesus. The distinctive portraits of Jesus by Matthew and Luke are matched by those found in the narratives constructed by Mark and John. The literary character “Jesus” is distinct in each narrative: Mark’s Suffering son of Man, Matthew’s Teacher of the Church, Luke’s Prophet of God’s Visitation, and John’s Man from Heaven are impossible to harmonize fully. Similarly, the portrayal of the disciples in each gospel is distinct: in Mark, Jesus’ chosen followers are both stupid and faithless; in Matthew, morally inadequate but intelligent; in Luke, prophetic successors trained to continue Jesus’ mission; in John, the friends who will experience from the world the same hatred shown Jesus. The narrative gospels bear witness to Jesus by the way in which they interpret him so diversely. Precisely the diversity of this witness, however, makes all the more startling the fact that these narratives converge concerning the heart of Jesus’ character, and, for that matter, on the character of discipleship.

I speak here of the fundamental and defining dispositions of Jesus, in contrast to the diverse roles—wonder-worker, teacher, prophet, revealer—emphasized by the respective narratives. These fundamental dispositions are utterly simple. In all the Gospels, Jesus is a human being totally defined by his relationship with God, a relationship expressed by faithful obedience to God’s will. Jesus is not defined by human expectations or perceptions, his own or others, but by a radical stance of hearing and responsiveness to his Father. This “vertical” relationship of faithful obedience is expressed by an equally fundamental “horizontal” disposition toward other humans, a disposition of loving service. The narratives of the canonical gospels—in this respect fully in agreement with the other canonical witnesses—see Jesus as “the man for others” precisely because he is also a completely “God-defined man.”

Similarly, for all their disparate ways of describing Jesus’ actual disciples, the four canonical gospels agree completely on the fundamental character of discipleship. It has nothing to do with self-seeking or self-aggrandizement, with success or prosperity. Rather, authentic discipleship means having the same “character” as Jesus, following in the path that he walked ahead of them. True “students” (μαθηταί) of this teacher will show the same faithful obedience toward God that he did, and will imitate the life of service toward others that he exemplified. Readers of these narratives, in turn, learn from the diversity of the gospels’ portrait of Jesus how complex and diverse the expressions of this basic character can

be, and yet how simple and profound in its essence. Likewise, they learn from the actual performance of Jesus' followers how not to be disciples, but from Jesus' words concerning discipleship they learn how it means an imitation of his example.³⁸

In short, despite their literary diversity and the distinctiveness of their portraits of Jesus, the canonical gospel narratives render "the identity of Jesus Christ" in a clear and unequivocal form.³⁹ The character of Jesus in the gospels is so distinct that it cannot be mistaken for any other religious or political leader. The "Christ Image" of the gospels represents a certain way of being human—the way of God's servant and servant of other humans—that is so unmistakable that literary critics can speak confidently of other narrative renderings of innocent sufferers in terms of this image.⁴⁰ The character of Jesus as depicted in the narrative gospels was meant to be imitated, and in fact the history of Christianity has shown that movements of radical discipleship in the church—think of Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa—have most often been stimulated by those challenged to imitate his character in their own historical circumstances.

3. The character of Jesus (and of discipleship) in the narrative gospels of the New Testament challenge (or should challenge) the philosophical understandings of the self in the contemporary world. Not only does the Christ image in the gospels stand in opposition to classical construals of the noble person—obedience, service, meekness and humility are all associated with the slave class, not the aristocracy—but it also stands in opposition to the sovereign self cultivated since the enlightenment. Friedrich Nietzsche made the challenge explicit, when he appealed to the older Greek sense of nobility and scorned the "slave mentality" of Christians.⁴¹ Even within some forms of Christian theology, the character of Jesus and of discipleship as portrayed by the Gospels—and the other NT writings—is criticized as dangerous to the self-esteem and self-worth

³⁸ This argument is made more fully in L.T. Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

³⁹ See Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Basis of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

⁴⁰ For example, Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, or Melville's *Billy Budd*.

⁴¹ See, in particular, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by C. Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

of some people: humility, obedience, and service are considered contrary to the flourishing of humans within just social structures.⁴²

Insofar as philosophy has to do with thinking about the proper way of being human, the character of Jesus in the narrative gospels ought to give rise to the most serious sort of thinking. Is the gospels' depiction of Jesus' character and the character of discipleship good for humans or not? Can a serious politics be based on such a construal of the person? Is this way of being human essentially pathological, leaving those shaped by it wounded, weak, and incapable of robust action in the world? Or is it, in fact, a way of living that reveals the deepest truth within humans and paradoxically elevates them to their highest excellence?

The Narrative Jesus as Revealing God

The two previous approaches to the Jesus of the gospels focus entirely on his humanity: in the first instance, attention is given to his words apart from the narrative, and in the second, to the depiction of his human character through the respective gospel narratives. Both approaches are available to the philosophically inclined whether they share Christian faith or not. A third approach leads us into the realm of what is properly called "Christian philosophy." It reads the gospel narratives from the perspective of early Christian experiences and convictions concerning Jesus that transcend ordinary humanity, expressed by the creed respectively as "descended from heaven" and "ascended into heaven." The conviction that Jesus after his death was exalted to the right hand of God and shares fully in God's life and power (at one end of his human story) corresponds (at the other end) to the conviction that he was the incarnate word of God. This approach, in short, takes seriously the larger "mythic" story that is mostly only implied within the gospel narratives themselves—with the notable exceptions of John and Acts—but that is made explicit by Christian confession.

In this approach, the Jesus of the gospels is not simply a sage of first century Palestine or a moral exemplar, but is the revelation of God in a human person. What gives rise to thought concerning Jesus, therefore, is not what he says or what he did, but above all who he is; what gives rise

⁴² Delores Williams, for example, argues that the cross is no longer a viable Christian symbol for women of color who have experienced oppression, in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

to thought concerning discipleship is not living by his words or following his example, but rather being transformed through participation in his being.

Such a perspective, it should be emphasized, is not imposed violently on the gospels. They were, after all, composed by followers who had strong experiences and convictions concerning Jesus' exalted status as Lord, and were written after—and undoubtedly in light of—the very “high” Christology found in Paul and Hebrews (see only 1 Cor 8:6–8; Gal 4:3–7; Heb 1:1–13). The understanding of Jesus as the one who by his very being reveals God is, to be sure, most explicit in the narrative of John's Gospel. In the Prologue, Jesus is identified with the pre-existent word that became flesh and revealed God's glory (John 1:1–18). John similarly introduces Jesus' last meal with his followers with the solemn declaration that “Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father” (13:1), and that Jesus was “fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God” (13:3). In John's Gospel, Jesus reveals the God no one has ever seen (1:18), though a man, he “makes himself God” (10:33), and is declared by Thomas to be “Lord and God” (20:28). But the second part of Luke's gospel narrative—the Acts of the Apostles—is equally emphatic in its assertion of the “mythic” dimensions of the Jesus story: he is “taken up into heaven” (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:10) and “will return again in the same way” (Acts 9:11); elevated to the Father's right hand, he pours out the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17–34); as risen Lord, he will “judge the world with justice” (Acts 17:31).

Readers with such convictions concerning Jesus can find them confirmed as well by the less explicit statements found in the synoptic gospels. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus' birth is ascribed to the Holy Spirit, making him “God with us” (Matt 1:20–23) and “Son of the Most High,” indeed, “Son of God” (Luke 1:31–35). Jesus makes declarations, even in these more realistic narratives, such as “for this purpose I have come” (Mark 1:38), and “I have come not to call the righteous to repentance but sinners” (Luke 5:32). Jesus works powerful deeds that make unclean spirits recognize him as “Son of the Most High God” (Mark 5:20) and make his disciples ask, “Who is this whom even wind and sea obey?” (Mark 4:41). He shows himself transfigured in the radiance of God's glory, and his closest followers hear him declared from heaven as God's “beloved son” (Mark 8:2–8; Matt 17:1–8; Luke 9:28–35). And after his resurrection he will show himself among his disciples, commissioning them with “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matt 20:18–10; Luke 24:46–49; Mark 16:15).

The mythic dimension of the gospel narratives provided no shock to the common religious sensibilities of the Greco-Roman world, where the membrane between gods and humans was a permeable one, with noble heroes being elevated to divine status and gods visiting the world in human form.⁴³ But it did shock the religious sensibilities of pious Jews, who regarded claims made for the divinity of Jesus as a form of idolatry.⁴⁴ And it challenged the more sophisticated Christians who shared with other Greco-Roman philosophers abhorrence for crude anthropomorphism in language about the divine, and regarded thinking wrongly about the divine (superstition) as more evil than denying the divine altogether.⁴⁵

The Middle Platonism of Philo of Alexandria (together with Aristobolos and others) showed the mental struggle involved in thinking philosophically with the dualistic categories of Plato in response to the cosmology and psychology expressed by the intensely material and realistic biblical narratives. In some cases, thinking well about God demanded recourse to a spiritualization of the biblical text through allegory, precisely to avoid the sort of superstition that mythic language could encourage.⁴⁶ The historical human character of Jesus is never evaporated in the developing Christian myth, outside some forms of Gnosticism. But the conviction that in Jesus of Nazareth the God of creation and covenant entered into the frame of human existence made the apparent dissonance between the myth and good thinking about God even greater. Nowhere is the potential for philosophical revolution more apparent than in the anonymous composition *To the Hebrews*, which simultaneously affirms in the strongest possible terms the divine origin and nature of Jesus, and his complete immersion in the lot of suffering humanity, and which, by reading both Platonic and biblical cosmologies through the incarnation, obedient suffering, sacrificial death and royal exaltation of Jesus, bends both to the point of shattering.

⁴³ See, above all, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; for other texts, see Carlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 129–136; 187–202.

⁴⁴ See A.F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, Leiden: Brill, 1977).

⁴⁵ The point is made repeatedly and emphatically by Plutarch, *On Superstition* (*Mor.* 164–171), *Isis and Osiris* 11 (*Mor.* 355D).

⁴⁶ For the way Philo's two worlds came together, see A. Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union Press, 1982) and *Philo's Jewish Identity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); see also C.R. Holladay, "Jewish Responses to Hellenistic Culture," in *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt*, edited by P. Bilde, et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992) 139–163.

The mythic dimension of the gospels—and other early Christian compositions—gives rise to thought by challenging the basic categories of existence. If God has entered into humanity (not only Jesus, but also those who are “in Christ”) then the nature both of humanity and of divinity need to be rethought, time and eternity require new assessment, the infinite and the finite demand an accounting. If God has entered into a human body and that body has subsequently entered the life of God, then the very nature of “body” must be rethought, and if “God’s Holy Spirit” can enter the bodies of other humans as “the body of Christ,” then both body and spirit need to be assessed in terms of what Paul calls the “spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν, 1 Cor 15:44).

If the impassible, all powerful God can enter so fully into the tangle of human existence as to suffer and die, then both the meaning of the divine and the meaning of suffering require new examination. And if by resurrection, Jesus has become “Lord,” then most serious consideration must be given by those considering themselves monotheists to resolving the problem of “two powers in heaven.” In short, this dimension of the gospels gives rise to ontology, to thinking about the meaning of being and existence in light of the shared conviction, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

Christian theology of the Patristic period can be understood as a philosophical effort to take with equal seriousness the mythic dimension of the biblical idiom (“the truth of the Gospel”), and the requirement to think well and righteously about God, avoiding that superstition that is worse than atheism (the truth of philosophy). The Trinitarian and Christological debates that spanned the 4th–6th centuries were spurred by a spirit of philosophical inquiry among teachers who (like Arius and Eunomius) sought to fit the paradoxical claims of the gospels into the neat categories of classical metaphysics, and were answered by thinkers (like Athanasius and the Cappadocians), who had equal facility in those categories but also had a deeper commitment to the mythic language of scripture as the source of the knowledge of salvation.⁴⁷ Seen in this light, the appearance of the ὁμοούσιος in the Nicene Creed or of δύο φύσεις μία πρόσωπον in the Formula of Chalcedon appears less as an inappropriate distortion of

⁴⁷ For a sense of the interaction of biblical and philosophical impulses in Patristic thought, see L. Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and R.L. Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

the gospel narratives than a bold insistence that they be read faithfully in their mythic dimension.

Such a difficult, and in many ways fruitful, struggle could only be sustained so long as the two partners in the conversation remained alive. Sadly, one of the notable exiles from the contemporary house of philosophy is ontology.⁴⁸ Perhaps not coincidentally, the same spirit of Enlightenment that banished metaphysics as a form of nonsense (because non-verifiable) also impelled the quest for the historical Jesus as a new norm for right-thinking Christians—that is, Christians who kept their religion within the bounds of reason (defined in terms of empiricism). That quest memorably began to be “scientific,” it will be recalled, when David Friedrich Strauss relegated the mythic dimension of the gospels to the non-historical, and, by the canons of reason then employed, not to be taken seriously in its truth claims. Kierkegaard stands as a notable and heroic example of a genuine philosophical mind continuing to struggle with the challenge posed by the gospels’ mythic language about Jesus.⁴⁹

The present state of affairs generally is perhaps best communicated by the collection of essays that appeared in 1976 under the title, *The Myth of the Incarnate God*; each essay, in its fashion, considered the “myth” as something disposable for thoughtful Christians, not in the least worth considering as a claim that should give rise to serious thought.⁵⁰ The present situation is further illuminated by the realization that Christian thinkers calling themselves systematic theologians have concluded that Christology should begin with a reconstruction of the “historical Jesus.”⁵¹

The loss of the conversation between philosophy and the mythic dimension of the gospels is sad on several counts. First, the alternative Jesus offered by a multitude of historical questers is, even when plausible, lacking in any significant depth. He may be an interesting or even important figure of the past, but that is all he is, and it is unclear why (as a sage)

⁴⁸ Such banishments are never immediate and seldom absolute. Particularly in continental philosophy, from Hegel to Heidegger there were (and are) those who continued (and continue) to engage metaphysics. But the conversation is not set by them: the retreat from ontology to epistemology and from epistemology to language has been steady and most influential.

⁴⁹ See S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy by Johannes Climacus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁵⁰ J. Hicks, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977).

⁵¹ E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1979); R. Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

he should command our attention more than, say, Epictetus does. Second, the desire for a historically verifiable Jesus means—and Strauss was right on the methodological point—excluding all those mythic dimensions that give the gospels, and the figure of Jesus, such compelling depth. Third, as a result, contemporary readers find themselves cut off from centuries of serious engagement with the Jesus of the gospels found in a sea of literature that addressed this mythic dimension with philosophical acuity.

Fourth, as a further consequence, the language of the Christian faith becomes increasingly unintelligible, even to believers, precisely because so much of this language is grounded in the mythic dimension of the gospels and other NT literature. Without a phenomenology of body or of spirit (or with only a definition of body and mind that depend on Cartesian dualism), it is impossible to speak meaningfully of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of a *σῶμα πνευματικόν*. As a result, even Christians tend to speak of the resurrection either in terms of a resuscitation of Jesus (in order to save historicity) or in terms of a psychological adjustment among his followers (in order to save enlightenment reasonability), and in either case, miss the truth of the Gospel.

Finally, the loss of the mythic language of the gospels and the mode of philosophy that thinks about being and existence means that—as in some forms of “liberation theology”—a more than legitimate passion for social justice among the poor and oppressed is expressed by the rejection of any transcendental understanding of sin and salvation. Sin is defined in terms of evil social structures and the dispositions that support them, and salvation is defined in terms of the dispositions and actions of humans through whom God brings justice to the earth. Once more, this passion is usually linked to an understanding of the prophetic ministry of the historical Jesus. The loss here is extraordinary, no less than the truth of the incarnation expressed in mythic terms: God entered into human existence, not so that human social arrangements might be altered, but so that the very frame of human existence might be transformed; the goal that we call salvation is not a Utopian society, but a participation in God’s glory.

Jesus and Narrative Ontology

A final way in which the Jesus of the Gospels gives rise to thought is through reflection on the nature of narrative itself and its way of bringing into existence what previously did not exist, and the peculiar sort of presence it thereby establishes in the world. The third approach, sketched

above, took the mythic language of the gospels as referring to the actual figure of Jesus in both human and divine dimension; ontology, therefore, meant inquiry into the implications of the incarnate Word. Now the object of inquiry is the gospel narrative as narrative, and the ontological implications of reading. In contrast to the other approaches described in this essay, the roots of this approach lie not in an earlier mode of interpretation but in the nature of narrative and in the practices of the early church with respect to the gospels. My remarks here are only suggestive, because I am only at an early stage of thinking about this perspective. As I seek to find a way toward a kind of ontology that does not require a misapplication or even a repristination of classical categories, I can only touch on some of the elements such thinking would require.

The first step is to consider the distinctive way in which stories—above all personal narratives—create a space in the world. When you tell me the story of your experience, a complex sort of presence comes into being. The story you tell is not identical with your empirical self—the story selects elements from the experience of the past and shapes them—but is nevertheless connected to your empirical self as source: it is not only about you, it somehow communicates you. Once the story is spoken, and heard, furthermore, it stands between us as something both you and I can refer to. Your “storied self” takes its place in our thoughts and reflections. In our further conversations, both of us can refer to “your story” as something real, even if it does not correspond, for example, to your present experience or situation. It is so real that we can both poke and pull at it interpretively without destroying it. The story is neither yours nor mine, even though it comes from you and is accepted by me. It stands between us as a common point of reference. Even when the empirical you departs, the storied you can continue its presence, and its influence, in my life. The philosophical question concerns the nature of this presence.

The shared personal story is perhaps only the smallest and most accessible example of a wide range of phenomena—things about whose “appearance” we can all agree—concerning which the question of “being” (that is, of ontology) properly can be asked. Very often, the phenomena are connected to human imagination, the most creative dimension of human cognition. Psychologists recognize, for example, that fantasy is somehow something real—it has presence and exercises power—even if (or especially) when it fails to be “realized” physically. Fantasy, moreover, can be both private (“my wife loves me”) and communal (“we are the chosen people”). Lives of individuals and of populations are more often and more

powerfully directed by fantasy than by fact.⁵² But how can we think about the sort of “being” found in fantasy?

Similarly, it is commonly recognized that the performance of music or drama “brings into being” the notes on a page or the words in a script with a presence and power that is epiphanic. The ringing tones of an aria somehow “fill” the hall and the hearts of the audience, forcing recognition of insistent existence not measurable by the printed notes and lyrics. The sound is evanescent. Yet, Mirella Freni’s Mimi remains “real” to all who heard her in her performance of *La Boheme*. Falstaff (whoever plays him) likewise notoriously transcends the plots and plays into which Shakespeare wrote his character, and forces recognition of him as a shared cultural presence the moment his name is mentioned.⁵³ These performances of texts create a presence that exercises power over others than the performers; the presence is often transitory, the effects of the power often linger. But what sort of thought concerning “being” does this realm demand and enable?

The second step is to consider what sort of presence and power, that I have earlier called “space in the world” is created by the performance, through public reading, of a narrative with a central character far more compelling than Falstaff. The gospel narratives of the New Testament can rightly be considered as “personal stories” in two ways. First, they arise from the many smaller stories told about Jesus among his followers during an extended period of oral tradition following the resurrection experience. Such testimonies are ineluctably personal in their selectivity and their subjective shaping. Second, the gospel narratives are expressly shaped to communicate the person of Jesus (see Luke 1:4; John 20:31) and are themselves both selective and subjective in their literary shaping. They are narratives, moreover, which were meant to be read aloud in the assembly, that is, “performed” by a reader. That this was the case follows from ancient practice: reading generally was an oral/aural rather than a merely visual experience; the gospels existed (at first) only in singular manuscripts and (until printing) only in limited numbers of manuscripts; and, they were read aloud in the context of the liturgical assembly.

⁵² See E.S. Person, *By Force of Fantasy: How We Make our Lives* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1995).

⁵³ So, extravagantly, H. Bloom, *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), and more critically, R. Rosenbaum, *Shakespeare Wars: Clashing Scholars, Public Fiascoes, Palace Coups* (New York: Random House, 2006).

When the gospel narratives were first read to their intended audiences, the character of Jesus (as well as of the disciples and crowds and opponents) progressively “came into existence” in the real space and time of the hearers. Jesus took on his character among them through the process of reading. It was not there all at once, but emerged. And as it emerged, came into existence through the reading-construction of the hearers, it reshaped or gave more definite shape to the various partial stories about Jesus, and partial apprehensions of his character already present among the listeners. The literary character of Jesus thus came into an extra-textual existence among the hearers of the gospel as the narrative was performed in public. All those who heard this performance could then refer to a “Jesus” that had come to be among them that had not existed before.

The process becomes more complicated, however, as the narrative undoubtedly was read repeatedly in the assembly; now, the scattered partial stories as well as the prior hearings of the extended narrative gain greater coherence and greater depth through rehearing. As we know, the practice of liturgical reading eventually involved far more than the recitation of a single gospel. All four canonical gospels were recited in the assembly, not in complete sequence, but in segments determined by lectionaries, in combination with other fragmentary sections of text from the Old and New Testament. Such oral performances—which early on included interpretations and applications through homilies—were located within cultic performances of an ever more complex liturgy of the Eucharist, which put into ritual action segments of the Jesus story (above all the last supper). If the philosophical question concerning being is asked concerning the narratives that make the literary character of Jesus present among hearers, that question itself must respond to the complications involved in these diverse forms of “presentation” and the “Jesus” being presented: the character of Jesus found in one gospel, the character of Jesus constructed and presented by multiple gospels, and the character of Jesus constructed by the diverse forms of liturgical practice.

The “story of Jesus” existing among believers across the centuries of Christian faith has a real existence through such multiple liturgical performances, as well as other, less verbal representations, such as multiple sacramental and paraliturgical rituals and the example of the saints. I am not suggesting that this presence is of the order as that claimed for the presence of the resurrected Jesus in the body of Christ that is the church, or for the sacramental presence of the Lord Jesus in the Eucharistic meal, but I do suggest that it is a distinctive sort of presence that has its own

character and its own reality. It transcends the specific narratives of the gospels, yet remains always anchored in and dependent on those narratives, so that with renewed reading of the narratives, specific dimensions of his presence come once more into more powerful existence among readers.

Conclusion

My essay has not advanced a constructive position concerning Jesus and philosophy, but has instead performed the modest task of describing four ways in which the Jesus of the gospels has or might give rise to the serious and disciplined thought worthy of the name philosophy. I have suggested that each approach demands certain decisions concerning how the gospels are to be read: as sources for the sayings of the historical Jesus, as narratives that display a certain moral character, as myths that reveal the presence of God in a human being, and as narratives that through the process of public reading bring a character into existence among readers. Each approach also yields a different kind of philosophy: the historical Jesus is an ancient sage whose words form part of the history of philosophy; the Jesus who is moral exemplar fits within character ethics; the mythic Jesus gives rise to classical ontology, and the narratively-recited Jesus enables thought about the reality of existence in the shared universe of literary, artistic and literary performance. I consider each approach to have value, but am certain that the collapse of the second and third modes is a sad loss, and the rise of the fourth as possibility only a meager replacement.

CHAPTER FIVE

JESUS AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS

There are at least four ways in which the Jesus of the Gospels might be engaged by philosophy, that is, be the occasion for serious and sustained thought about existence.¹ The first is to treat Jesus as an ancient sage, whose sayings can be evaluated side-by-side with other ancient sages for their insight into human life.² The second is to engage the narrative depiction of Jesus in the Gospels as a contribution to character ethics.³ The third is to take the lead of the Gospels' more mythic language as a pointer to ontology.⁴ The fourth is to reflect on the ontological implications of the public reading of the Gospels—how does Jesus “come into being” through such performance?⁵ In this essay, I choose the first mode of engagement. I take sayings attributed to Jesus by the Gospel of Matthew as Jesus' own—much in the way we might take Xenophon's report of Socrates table-talk (in the *Memorabilia*) as Socrates' own—in order to consider, not what the words tell us about Jesus, but what they say about a most important subject on which Jesus was by no means the first to declare.

Indeed, when Matthew's Gospel has Jesus begin the teaching of his students with eight statements concerning human happiness, it places him within a lively conversation on that topic among Greek philosophers.⁶ Here

¹ See L.T. Johnson, “The Jesus of the Gospels and Philosophy,” *Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays*, ed. P.K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 163–83.

² The practice extends from the ancient Manichee Faustus (see Augustine, *Reply to Faustus* II, 1) through Thomas Jefferson (*The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*) to Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1993).

³ See H. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Basis of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), and L.T. Johnson, *Living Jesus Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1999).

⁴ For a sense of the interaction of biblical and philosophical impulses in Patristic thought, see L. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and R.L. Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁵ As in P. Ricoeur, *Temps et Recit* (3 vols.; Paris: Seuil, 1983–1985).

⁶ For a massively learned but not always helpful orientation to the beatitudes in context, see H.D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon of the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

is my translation of Jesus' words: "Those who are poor in spirit are happy, because heaven's rule is theirs. Those who grieve are happy, because they will themselves be comforted. Those who are meek are happy, because they will inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for justice are happy, because they will be satisfied. Those who show mercy are happy, because they will themselves be shown mercy. Those who are pure in heart are happy, because they will see God. Those who are makers of peace are happy, because they will be called God's children. Those who have been persecuted for the sake of justice are happy, because heaven's rule is theirs" (Matt 5:3–10).

My translation can be challenged in a number of ways: the term "blessed," for example, is a far more familiar translation of μακάριος than "happy;"⁷ putting the term "happy" at the end of each first phrase, moreover, spoils the balance of the statements; the term "righteousness" renders δικαιοσύνη better than "justice" does; "those who show pity" might be more precise than "those who show mercy;" the "Kingdom of heaven" is more familiar than "heaven's rule," just as "sons of God" is more traditional than "God's children." I made my translation as unfamiliar as possible precisely to enable a fresh hearing of the words that are among the most familiar in English literature, and among the least likely to stimulate crisp thought rather than vague comfort.

Before putting Jesus into conversation with Greek philosophers, I need to consider several preliminary questions. The first is simply the legitimacy of regarding Matthew's Jesus as a Greco-Roman moral teacher, or philosopher. In fact, Matthew virtually invites us so to consider him. In no other Gospel is Jesus' identity as teacher more emphasized; he is a teacher, moreover, who gathers around himself a group of students ("disciples" [μαθηταί]), and spends considerable time instructing them on how they should live.⁸ Such practical wisdom was the very stuff of

⁷ In contemporary usage, alas, "blessed" carries an inevitable religious connotation of receiving divine blessings, without any necessary nuance of pleasure or delight; thus, the more common translation obscures the fact that Jesus' words connect directly to other thinkers who speak of being "happy" (μακάριος).

⁸ For support of these assertions, see the short treatment of Matthew's Gospel in L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (3d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 165–86, and *Living Jesus*, 145–58, as well as the commentaries by D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Sacra Pagina 1; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), and U. Luz, *Matthew* (3 vols.; trans. W.C. Linss; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989–2005).

philosophy in the early empire, when theory seemed less important than therapy.⁹

The form of Matthew's words also invites a philosophical reading. His statements are in Koine Greek, and although they clearly echo the Jewish Scripture,¹⁰ the Scripture they echo was also written in Greek,¹¹ and had entered into philosophical discourse through Hellenistic Jewish interpreters such as Aristobolos and Philo of Alexandria.¹² Matthew wants readers to see Jesus as a new Moses, to be sure;¹³ but Jewish interpreters of the Greek Bible had already construed Moses as the best of philosophers and the study of the law of Moses as the most perfect path to happiness.¹⁴ Finally, Jesus' statements in Matthew are easily recognized as the sort of aphorism or maxim that was the staple of the teaching of practical wisdom among Greco-Roman philosophers.¹⁵ The first and second part of each statement are intimately and internally connected: thus, it is because people are pure of heart that they can see God, and it is because people can see God that they are happy; again, it is because people are meek that they are able to inherit the earth, and it is because they inherit the earth that they are happy. Ancient philosophers would recognize in Jesus' statements a form of gnomic wisdom.

A second preliminary issue involves identifying the available conversation partners. Happiness is a common theme among Greco-Roman philosophers, and my earlier comment on Philo of Alexandria indicates that it was taken up by Hellenistic Jewish thinkers as well. My interest, however, is in placing Jesus within the rich variety of views among philosophers commonly designated as pagan. Three figures convincingly

⁹ See M.C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Thus, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the way of the wicked" (Psalm 1:1); "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12); "Blessed is the man who trusts in you" (Psalm 84:12).

¹¹ The Septuagint (LXX) had been the bible for Hellenistic Jews for more than 250 years when Matthew wrote. Thus, Psalm 1:1 reads, Μακάριος ἀνὴρ, ὃς οὐκ ἐπορεύθη ἐν βουλήν ἄσεβων.

¹² See Aristobolos, *Fragment 1.2–4*, in C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors, Volume 3: Aristobolos* (Texts and Translations 39; Pseudepigrapha 13; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 137. A still useful introduction to Philo of Alexandria is E.R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* second revised edition (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963).

¹³ The argument is most forcefully made by B.W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930).

¹⁴ *On the Contemplative Life* 11 and 90.

¹⁵ See Seneca, *Letter* 33.

propose themselves. First, Plato's student Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), whose vast learning and meticulous moral analysis remained a powerful influence well into the period of the early empire,¹⁶ begins and concludes his important treatise, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with the topic of human happiness.¹⁷ He is an obvious and necessary part of the conversation. Quite a different perspective is offered by Epicurus, another fourth century B.C.E. philosopher (341–270), whose views as expressed in his *Sovereign Maxims* were excoriated by many,¹⁸ but whose impact remained real among those dedicated to the school he founded, and whose vision was given new and powerful expression by Lucretius' first-century B.C.E. poem, "On the Nature of Things" (*de Rerum Natura*).¹⁹ Finally, there is "that marvelous old man," Epictetus (55–135 C.E.), a contemporary of the evangelist Matthew.²⁰ Epictetus was a crippled slave of the cynic-stoic tradition who taught future diplomats the Stoic vision of the good life. His remarkably vivid oral *Discourses* were transcribed and published by Arrian, one of his students.²¹ So, then: the conversation is among Aristotle, Epicurus, Epictetus, and Jesus.

Finally, I must acknowledge from the start the fictive and constructed character of this conversation. There is no evidence that Matthew knew any of the Greek Philosophers, or even that the philosophers necessarily knew much first-hand about each other—although Epictetus has nothing but contempt for what he thinks he knows about the Epicureans.²² The conversation I construct, furthermore, requires pulling opinions out of their original contexts—a practice that makes the exegete in me uncomfortable—and the willingness to bracket the incommensurability

¹⁶ The subtle analyses of specific vices (e.g. anger, envy, garrulousness) and virtues (e.g. on brotherly love) in Plutarch's *Moralia* and *Parallel Lives*, for example, show the influence of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* more than that of any other predecessor.

¹⁷ Aristotle devotes all of Book One and much of Book Ten to the topic; I use the translation of H. Rackham, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (rev. ed.; LCL; Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1934).

¹⁸ I use the translation of C. Bailey, *Epicurus, the Extant Remains* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926).

¹⁹ I use the translation of H.A.J. Munro, *On the Nature of Things* (New York: Doubleday, 1963).

²⁰ The phrase is used by Lucian of Samosata, *The Ignorant Book Collector* 13.

²¹ I have chosen Epictetus rather than Seneca's *On the Happy Life* for two reasons: his language is always most vivid, and he is more consistent than the Roman Stoic, who was frequently attracted to the Epicurean tradition. The vividness of the language, to be sure, owes something to the brilliance of the translation by W.A. Oldfather, *Epictetus*, (2 vols.; LCL; Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1925).

²² See Epictetus, *Discourse* I, 5, 9; I, 23, 1–10; II, 23, 21–22; III, 7, 7–29; III, 24, 38.

of the sources: Aristotle's treatise is massive compared to Epicurus' maxims; Epictetus' four books of discourses are far more extensive than Jesus' eight gnomic statements. Most of all, it means isolating Matthew's beatitudes without reference either to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, the rest of Matthew's narrative, or—most importantly—the Gospel of Luke's strikingly different set of statements involving happiness and woe (Luke 6:20–26).²³ In short, the conversation is one I construct out of the bits and pieces of ancient literature, and is considerably neater than the sort of living exchange in which people talk past and over each other without a conductor instructing them on when and how to talk on topic.

Points of Agreement

For there to be a conversation on any topic, the participants must share certain fundamental understandings; there must be a ground of agreement among them on which smaller points of agreement and disagreement can be displayed; otherwise, they could not get started at all. Thus, all our ancient authors regard happiness as something desirable, rather than as something to be avoided. “For what is it that every man is seeking?” asks Epictetus, and answers, “to live securely, to be happy, to do everything as he wishes to do, not to be hindered, not to be subject to compulsion” (*Discourses* IV, 1, 46). As we might expect among those professionally dedicated to moral instruction, moreover, none of our participants locate happiness in something merely external, momentary, or accidental. Happiness is not for them a warm puppy, a family reunion, or winning the lottery. Rather, they all agree that happiness is an enduring condition that is intrinsic—and, they thought, distinctive—to the construction of the human self. And being moralists, they all regard happiness as a corollary or consequence of human choice and disposition. Not simply human choice between this thing and that—as between flavors of ice cream—but the habitual human disposition for good (virtue) rather than bad (vice).

Among all these ancient figures, therefore, happiness is connected to what we would call character ethics, as well as, perhaps, psychology;

²³ For a crisp consideration of the distinctive versions, see C.R. Holladay, “The Beatitudes: Jesus' Recipe for Happiness?” in *Between Experience and Interpretation: Engaging the Writings of the New Testament* (ed. M.F. Foskett and O.W. Allen, Jr.; Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 83–102.

ancient philosophy was as much about human emotions and their proper control as it was about ideas and their proper alignment.²⁴ Matthew shares the moralist's perspective: he has the robust optimism of antiquity, which recognized no deeply ingrained resistance to freedom of choice.²⁵ When Matthew has Jesus speak of meekness and mercy, of purity of heart and peace-making, he is, no less than Aristotle, using the language of character ethics.

Within this broad area of agreement, that happiness is a quality of human character properly disposed, there are also, to be sure, specific and sometimes strong points of disagreement among the discussants. The topic is too important to lack controversy altogether. As the Christian philosopher Origen reminded the Epicurean philosopher Celsus in the third century C.E., the fact that a subject invites strong and opposing views is an indication of its significance (*Contra Celsum*, 3.12–13 and 6.26). Such is the case for the subject of happiness. On three aspects of happiness, the Greco-Roman philosophers have recognizably distinct views: the connection between happiness and social engagement, the connection between happiness and pleasure, and the connection between happiness and circumstances, or to put it another way, the security of happiness in times of trouble.

Disputed Questions

On these three aspects of happiness, Matthew's Jesus has little to offer. The readers of this Gospel, after all, are members of a small Jewish sect whose preoccupations involve rivalry with the synagogue of Formative Judaism down the street rather than citizenship within the wider political world;²⁶ the statements about peace-making and being persecuted are

²⁴ For the philosopher as the "physician of the soul" and other medical metaphors, see Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* and A.J. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Roemischen Welt* II, 26.1 (1992): 267–333.

²⁵ In this respect, Matthew is closer both to Paul and to James, than any of them is to the "introspective conscience" that Augustine read into Paul and thereby fundamentally shaped western theology; see the classic essay by K. Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 78–96.

²⁶ See A.J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and J.A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

directed internally and to the immediate sibling rival;²⁷ those who are being persecuted for justice, moreover, tend not to give much thought to options concerning pleasure; as for the security of happiness in circumstances of affliction, Matthew has Jesus connect them in a manner that Aristotle, for one, could only consider “paradoxical.” He states, “No one would pronounce a man living a life of misery to be happy, unless for the sake of maintaining a paradox” (*NE* 1096A).

The three Greek philosophers, in contrast, have sharp and distinct opinions on each point. Thus, if we ask whether happiness is correlated to political involvement, Aristotle’s view is entirely positive. He considers happiness a supreme good, and since “the good of man (sic) is the active exercise of his soul’s faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue” (*NE* 1098A), it follows that happiness involves active participation in the life of the *polis*, even though the highest expression of happiness is found not in the active but in the contemplative life (*NE* 1096A, 1178B). Indeed, he declares that the self-sufficiency characteristic of happiness applies not “to oneself alone, living a life of isolation” but also to family, friends and fellow-citizens, “since man is by nature a social being [or “political thing”]” (*NE* 1097B). Indeed, Aristotle’s discussion of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics* serves as propaedeutic for *The Politics*.²⁸

Despite living within an increasingly autocratic empire rather than the democratic *polis* of the classical period, Epictetus agrees completely with Aristotle on the matter of social engagement. The Stoic ideal of following nature implicates humans in the natural order of society; political engagement, then, falls within the duties (τὰ καθήκοντα) required of the virtuous person: “I want to know,” he says, “what is my duty towards the gods, towards parents, towards brothers, towards my country, towards strangers” (*Discourses* II, 17, 31). Even the Cynic who eschews marriage and children for the sake of challenging other humans to the path of proper perception and virtuous living, does so in service to society: “In the name of God, sir, who do mankind the greater service? Those who bring into the world two or three ugly-snouted children to take their place, or those who exercise oversight, to the best of their ability, over all mankind, observing what they are doing, how they are spending their lives, what they are careful about, and what they undutifully neglect?” (*Discourses* III, 22, 7).

²⁷ See, e.g., Matt 5:10, 44; 10:16–42; 12:9; 13:21; 14:1–12; 16:21; 17:22; 20:17; 23:29–39; 24:9–14.

²⁸ See *NE* 1181B.

In contrast, Epicurus rejected such political involvement—with all its inevitable conflict—as inimical to the happiness that consisted in ἀταραξία (“freedom from disturbance”) available only to those few who live apart with friends in the secluded garden (κῆπος). He declared among his fundamental principles that “Protection from other men, secured to some extent by the power to expel and by material prosperity, in its purest form comes from a quiet life withdrawn from the multitude” (*Sovereign Maxims* 14). Diogenes Laertius states that although Epicurus showed benevolence to all mankind (ἡ πρὸς πάντας αὐτοῦ φιλανθρωπία), he “did not touch politics” (οὐδὲ πολιτείας ἤψατο) (*Lives* X, 10). Much of the hostility shown toward Epicureans by the philosophers of other, more politically engaged, traditions was based on this deliberate withdrawal from political involvement. Plutarch castigates “those who withdraw themselves and their disciples from participation in the state” (*Against Colotes* 31 [*Mor.* 1125C]).

A second area of disagreement concerned the role of pleasure (ἡδονή) in happiness. As might be expected from so subtle an analyst of human emotions and dispositions, Aristotle rejects from the start the sort of fixation on pleasure that he identifies with the herd (*NE* 1095B)—they “show themselves to be utterly slavish, by preferring what is only a life for cattle”—and he states, “we must pronounce the admittedly disgraceful pleasures not to be pleasures at all, except to the depraved” (*NE* 1196B)—yet he recognizes a positive if limited role for pleasure in the virtuous life (*NE* 1099A). Not every pleasure, after all, is of a base, sensory sort; the practice of virtue itself yields a distinctive pleasure, as does contemplation, for “pleasures correspond to the activities to which they belong” (*NE* 1176B). For Aristotle, the measure must always be the good: “If the standard if everything is goodness, or the good man, *qua* good, then the things that seem to him to be pleasures are pleasures, and the things he enjoys are pleasant” (*NE* 1176A).

Epicurus more straightforwardly embraces pleasure as an important, perhaps even essential component in happiness. “A Pleasant Life” free from turmoil is precisely the point of withdrawing with friends from political entanglement. He states that, “It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly” (*Sovereign Maxims* 5). Epicurus is no crass hedonist. His personal life, according to Diogenes Laertius, was simple, even austere (*Lives* X, 11). He recognizes the limits of pleasure (*Sovereign Maxims* 18), and doubts that profligate pleasures are worth the effort (*Sovereign Maxims* 10). Indeed, he recog-

nizes that the cessation of pain gives greater pleasure than any positive sensation: “the end of all our actions,” Diogenes Laertius has him declare, “is to be free of pain and fear” (*Lives* X, 123). Diogenes also quotes him to this effect, “When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood by some to do through ignorance, prejudice or willful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul” (*Lives* X, 131). Mental pleasure, furthermore, is better than physical pleasure (*Sovereign Maxims* 20). But in the end, it is pleasure itself that measures the appropriateness of pleasure: “No pleasure is a bad thing in itself,” he states, “but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves” (*Sovereign Maxims* 7).

For the Stoic Epictetus, in contrast, pleasure is a threat to true happiness. He refuses to “lay down pleasure as the good and end of life” (*Fragment* 14), and Epicurus’ enthusiastic embrace of pleasure as a dimension of happiness is among the reasons Epictetus scorns his philosophy: “your doctrines are bad, subversive of the state, destructive to the family, not even fit for women” (*Discourse* III, 7, 20). Happiness for Epictetus is living according to nature—but that does not come naturally! It involves a struggle to become virtuous, and this process of learning is like athletic training that demands pain rather than pleasure (*Discourse* III, 23, 30). Pleasure is a distraction, a downward pull that resists the demands of duty (*Discourse* III, 24, 37–39). The search for true happiness therefore requires that the philosopher work against the seductive power of pleasure (*Discourse* III, 12, 4–10). In the epitome of his teaching called the *Enchiridion*, Epictetus offers his students advice concerning pleasure: “Be careful not to allow its enticement, and sweetness, and attractiveness to overcome you; but set over against all this the thought, how much better is the consciousness of having won a victory over it” (*Enchiridion* 34).

The third issue at debate among our three Greco-Roman philosophers is the degree to which happiness depends on external circumstances and is therefore secure or insecure. Once more, Aristotle has a carefully nuanced appreciation both of the ideal—that happiness should be the consequence of virtuous endeavor—and the reality, that terrible circumstances can bring on misery. In the first part of his discussion, he acknowledges that “happiness also requires external goods” and enumerates some of them: friends, wealth, political power, a good birth, satisfactory children, personal beauty. He is a keen observer: “A man of very ugly appearance

or low birth, or childless and alone in the world, is not our idea of a happy man, and still less so, perhaps is one who has children or friends that are worthless, or who has had good ones but lost them by death.” He adds, “Happiness does seem to require the addition of external prosperity” (*NE* 1099B).

The more Aristotle locates happiness in virtue (*NE* 1098B)—as when he says that the good of man is the active exercise of his soul’s faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue (*NE* 1098A)—the more secure it would seem to be from the effects of Fortune or Chance, especially when he makes the highest excellence the practice of contemplation, which places one at a remove from life’s exigencies (*NE* 1177A). But he is forced to acknowledge at the end of his treatise that even such a virtuous character and such excellence in contemplation are sufficiently fragile as to depend in turn upon a process of education and a just system of politics—they are, in short, conditional (*NE* 1130A–1131A).

Epicurus bases his teaching and his way of life on the elimination of fear and disturbance, and the creation of a pleasant life among like-minded friends in the garden. Yet his *Sovereign Maxims* reveal a very real anxiety concerning the threat posed by the larger society and its ways of thinking and acting. A happiness based on ἀταραξία is paradoxically always under threat, for reality is full of disturbances, not all of them mental. Take as a sample only these maxims: “If we had never been molested by alarms at celestial and atmospheric phenomena, nor by the misgiving that death somehow affects us, we should have had no need to study natural science” (*Sovereign Maxims* 11). Again, “There would be no advantage in providing security against our fellowmen so long as were alarmed by occurrences over our heads or beneath the earth or in general by whatever happens in the boundless universe” (*Sovereign Maxims* 13). Again: “The same conviction which inspires confidence that nothing we have to fear is eternal or even of long duration, also enables us to see that even in our limited conditions of life nothing enhances our security so much as friendship” (*Sovereign Maxims* 28). And once more: “When tolerable security against our fellowmen is attained, then on a basis of power sufficient to afford support and of material prosperity arises in most genuine form the security of a quiet private life withdrawn from the multitude” (*Sovereign Maxims* 14).

Here, happiness depends not only on pleasure but on the fragile alignment among friends concerning the fears that afflict humans. No wonder it is reported that Epicurus required of his comrades the memorization and constant repetition of his maxims (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* X, 12); such repetition preserved happiness by serving as a prophylactic against

fear: "Exercise thyself in these and kindred precepts day and night, both with thyself and with him who is like unto thee; then neither in waking or in dreams wilt thou be disturbed, but will live as a god among men" (*Lives X*, 135).

Epictetus is the most robustly confident in the security of happiness because he ties it absolutely to virtue, and for the ancient Stoic, no circumstance can fundamentally alter one's moral purpose. He says, "If it is virtue that holds out the promise thus to create happiness and calm and serenity, then assuredly progress toward virtue is progress toward each of these states of mind" (*Discourse I*, 4, 3; III, 24, 51–52). To the student bemoaning the loss of an opportunity to travel to Athens and cries, "Athens is beautiful," Epictetus declares, "But happiness is much more beautiful, tranquility, freedom from turmoil, having your own affairs under no man's control" (*Discourse IV*, 4, 30). Adverse circumstances do not take away from the philosopher's happiness, but only provide the opportunity to demonstrate it through the exercise of moral virtue; whereas the person who locates happiness in external circumstances "must needs be hindered and restrained, be a slave to those who have control over these things," the one who sees his own good and advantage as residing only in the things under his own control—that is his perceptions and his moral purpose—is "free, serene, happy, unharmed, high-minded, reverent, giving thanks for all things to god, under no circumstances finding fault with anything that has happened nor blaming anyone" (*Discourse IV*, 7, 9–10).

Happiness and the Divine

My sketch of the disputed questions concerning happiness among the ancient philosophers has had the purpose of showing how the topic could generate distinct opinions on important points even among those who basically agreed on its character. The review has also left the voice of Matthew's Jesus silent, for his statements do not directly address the role of pleasure, political engagement, and external circumstance that divide the philosophers. On the final aspect of happiness that I consider in this essay, however, Jesus' voice is not only direct and emphatic, it is also distinctive; this is the question of how happiness relates to the divine.

On this point as well, each of our three Greco-Roman philosophers has a view, for if happiness is a supreme good and supremely to be desired, it would be difficult to discuss happiness without in some fashion adverting to those supreme beings who could be referred to simply as "the happy ones"

(οἱ μάκαρες).²⁹ The phrase “some fashion” applies especially to Epicurus, antiquity’s most famous atheist and detester of religion. Essential for establishing the “freedom from disturbance” (ἀταραξία) that ensured the pleasant life, and therefore human happiness, was the dismissal of traditional notions about the gods—above all that they were active in the world to reward and punish. The first fear that Epicurus banished was fear of the gods.

The entire system of religious observance, Epicurus held, needed to be replaced by the knowledge of natural causes. His disciple Lucretius speaks of humans “laying foully prostrate upon earth crushed under the weight of religion” until the man from Greece stood up to religion face-to face, and as a consequence of his liberating instruction, “religion is put under foot and trampled on in turn; us his victory brings level with heaven.” Lucretius provides a poetic version of the natural science Epicurus deployed to demonstrate that natural things—above all the earthquakes, thunders and lightning that ordinary folk took as divine portents—had completely natural causes (*De Rerum Natura* 5.181–199), and that providence was an empty notion (*De Rerum Natura* 6.379–422). He builds on the statement of Epicurus, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, that heavenly occurrences take place without any command of the gods, “who at the same time enjoy perfect bliss (“happiness”) along with immortality” (*Lives* X, 77).

The corollary of the Epicurean withdrawal from politics to live “the quiet life” with friends, then, was withdrawal from the religious practices that supported the life of the Greek *polis*, and it was this dimension of Epicurean atheism that was most feared and detested by others. Plutarch says, “I think a city might rather be formed without the ground it stands on than a government, once you remove all religion, get itself established, or, once established, survive. Now it is this belief, the underpinning and base that holds all society and legislation together, that the Epicureans, not by encirclement or covertly in riddles, but by launching against it the first of their most Cardinal Tenets, proceed directly to demolish (*Against Colotes* 31 [*Mor.* 1125E]).

Sovereign Maxims 1 reads, “A Blessed (μακάριος) and eternal Being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble on any other being; hence he is exempt from movements of anger and partiality, for every such movement implies weakness.” The gods are blessed, that is happy, precisely because of their withdrawal from turbulence and social interference. Happiness within the epicurean community, then, means in a real way sharing the

²⁹ See Homer, *Iliad* 1. 399; *Odyssey* 10.299; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 136.

bliss (happiness) of the gods, precisely because of a withdrawal from society and the practices of friendship that secure ἀταραξία (“freedom from disturbance”). This is why Epicurus can claim that if one maintains the precepts and lives without disturbance, then one “will live as a god among men. For man loses all semblance of mortality by living in the midst of immortal blessings” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* X, 135). The sage was himself revered as divine by his immediate followers (Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 17, *Mor.* 1117B)—because he realized in himself the happiness belonging to the immortals, and revealed that way of life to others.

Perhaps surprisingly in view of his exact opposite position concerning social engagement, Aristotle takes a position concerning happiness and the divine not far distant from Epicurus. It is not that Aristotle sets out to de-mystify the traditional gods; he simply ignores them. Rather, he regards the contemplative life as a participation in, or at least an imitation of, the highest expression of the divine: he declares,

If happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be the virtue of the best part of us. Whether then this be the intellect, or whatever else it be that is thought to rule and lead us by nature, and to have cognizance of what is noble and divine, either as being itself also actually divine, or as being relatively the divinest part of us, it is the activity of this part of us in accordance with the virtue proper to it that will constitute perfect happiness; and it has been stated already that this activity is the activity of contemplation. (*NE* 1177A)

He later states even more clearly, “Perfect happiness is some form of contemplative activity. The gods, as we conceive them, enjoy supreme felicity and happiness (μακαρίους καὶ εὐδαίμονας),” and notes that this happiness resides not in their actions but in their contemplation: “it follows that the activity of god, which is transcendent is blessedness, is the activity of contemplation; and therefore among human activities that which is most akin to the divine activity of contemplation will be the greatest source of happiness” (*NE* 1078B).

Epictetus had the most complex view of divinity. The Stoic side of him viewed the natural order as an expression of the divine spirit, so that in a very real way, “following nature” was at the same time “following God.”³⁰ Similarly the human reason that enabled the world to be rightly

³⁰ For Epictetus’ distinctive religious sensibility, see L.T. Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (Anchor Bible Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 64–78.

perceived and engaged was an expression of the divine spirit, so that following nature was also a form of human participation in divine activity (*Discourse II*, 8, 11–13). But his personal piety was such that he also conceived of the divine in highly personal terms and as the supremely “other” (*Discourse I*, 1, 32), whose will humans are to obey (*Discourse IV*, 1, 89–90). The more the human will is aligned with the divine will—the order of nature itself—the happier humans are.

Thus, Epictetus speaks of Heracles: “It was no mere story which he had heard, that Zeus was the father of men, for he always thought of him as his own father, and called him so, and in all that he did, he looked to him. Wherefore, he had the power to live happily in every place” (*Discourse II*, 24, 16). So he tells his students wanting, like Epicureans, to “live in peace,” that they should “remember who is the Giver is, and to whom he gives, and for what end. If you are brought up in reasonings such as these, can you any longer raise questions where you are going to be happy, and where you are to please God? Are not men everywhere equally distant from God? Do they not everywhere have the same view of what is to pass?” (*Discourse IV*, 4, 47–48). The Cynic, who shares “the scepter and diadem of Zeus”—that is, shares in the divine rule—shows other humans how such happiness is possible:

That you may see for yourselves, O Men, to be looking for happiness and serenity, not where it is, but where it is not, behold, God has sent me to you as an example; I have neither property, nor house, nor wife, nor children, no, not even so much as a bed, or a shirt, or a piece of furniture, and yet you see how healthy I am. Make trial of me, and if you see that I am free from turmoil, hear my remedies and the treatment which cured me. (*Discourse IV*, 8, 30–31)

Now, if we put ourselves in the position of the three Greco-Roman philosophers as we listen to Jesus pronounce on human happiness in Matthew’s Gospel, what would strike us, beyond the obvious points of similarity stated earlier in this essay? Quite apart from the religious sensibility displayed by Jesus, we would—as Greco-Roman moralists—find at least three aspects of the beatitudes puzzling.

First, as I suggested earlier, Aristotle would not be alone in finding paradoxical Jesus’ linking of human misery and happiness. When Jesus declares as happy those who are poor in spirit, grieving, meek, hungering and thirsty for justice and persecuted for justice’s sake, he is making claims that would be simply incomprehensible to Epicurus, for it is impossible to associate “a pleasant life” with any of those conditions. Even Epictetus, who relished hardships as the opportunity to test virtue would

not identify happiness with the conditions of hardship themselves, only with the triumph of human will over those circumstances. But Jesus does not say happy are those who conquer grief; he declares as happy those who grieve.

Second, I think that the Greco-Roman philosophers would find the beatitudes hopelessly vulgar rather than noble. Aristotle and Epicurus share the assumed values of the ancient aristocracy with regard to good birth, education, wealth, and above all position and honor. And although he recasts some of these values—what counts as honorable is not the opinion of other people but the court of opinion of one's self-respect and the divine pleasure³¹—Epictetus equally embraces the values of nobility. He and they alike would find poverty of spirit and meekness to be slavish rather than noble, would think meekness and mercy (pity) to be dispositions more fitting to women than men, and would regard grieving as a display of emotion inappropriate to the well-bred and honorable person.³²

Third, and possibly connected to the previous point, the philosophers would have been struck by the other-related character of some of Matthew's blessings—receiving mercy, being comforted (by whom?), making peace (by or for whom?); each of these elevates the circumstantial and vulnerable aspect of happiness. Similarly, they would have been put off by tone of neediness found in statements such as “poor in spirit” and “hungering and thirsting for justice.” The philosophers' disquiet would be linked to their conviction that happiness was a matter of *αὐτάρχεια*—or control over one's self, contentment—and ideally, at least, freedom from need.³³ Happiness is for them more a matter of resting than questing. Only Epictetus, I surmise, would recognize something of his own agonistic appreciation of happiness in Matthew's statements.

The philosophers would have puzzled most, though, over the religious language saturating Jesus' words. They were all, remember, thinkers who stood at some distance from the popular religiosity of the Greco-Roman

³¹ See on this the superb analysis by D.A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, revised edition (SBL Studies in Biblical Literature 21; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), especially 86–155.

³² Well-known is the contempt expressed for such slave-morality by F. Nietzsche, as in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, edited by K. Ansell Pearson, translated by C. Diethe (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10–34.

³³ The *topos* on contentment or self-sufficiency is standard in Greco-Roman moral discourse; for a selection of passages, see A.J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Handbook* (Library of Early Christianity; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 112–14, 120, 145.

world that celebrated the divine presence in various ways and conceived of the gods as intimately involved with human existence.³⁴ Aristotle stood aloof from such piety, Epicurus scorned it, and even Epictetus used it to clothe his fundamentally Stoic understanding of divine immanence.

If they stretched, the philosophers perhaps could read Matthew's statements about human happiness and "heaven's rule" in their own terms: the wise and happy man shares, as Epictetus put it, "Zeus' scepter and diadem," because the person of complete self control ruled all that mattered.³⁵ They might have read in this light as well Matthew's language about the happy being "children (literally, sons) of God," through such participation in the divine delight; that is the way Epictetus perceived Heracles,³⁶ and Epicurus views the one living a life of serenity as a "God among men" (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* X, 135). But they would have balked, as I have suggested, at the connections Matthew has Jesus make: "heaven's rule" certainly should not be linked to poverty of spirit and persecution; being a child of God is not a consequence of seeking unity among other humans so much as finding peace within the soul.

They would have been even further repulsed at the realization that for Matthew, "heaven's rule" did not mean the divine bliss shared by humans, but rather the sometimes violent and apocalyptic intrusion of God's mighty will into human affairs,³⁷ demonstrated through prophecy, exorcisms, and healings performed by the same teacher now speaking about human happiness.³⁸ Such an understanding of a personal, active, god would plunge humans back into the very superstition from which Epicurus sought to free them, a world of divine portents and terrors, of punishments and rewards.³⁹ This reaction would grow more pronounced if our philosophers appreciated the force of Matthew's Septuagintal Greek, which carried forward the "divine passive" found in the Hebrew Bible. The phrases, "will be comforted, will be satisfied, will receive mercy, will be

³⁴ For the characteristics of what I term "Religiousness A"—the dominant expression of religious sensibility in the Greco-Roman world, and for that matter, in most religions—see Johnson, *Among the Gentiles* 32–63.

³⁵ For the philosopher as the ideal king, see Musonius Rufus, *Fragment* 8, and the discussion by Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (LEC 4; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 31. See also Plato, *Republic* V, 473Cff. and VI, 502Aff.

³⁶ See *Discourse* II, 16, 44–45; III, 24, 13–17; III, 26, 31.

³⁷ E.g., Matt 4:17; 11:7–28; 12:22–36; 16:13–20; 16:27; 24:1–25:46.

³⁸ E.g., Matt 4:23–25; 8:1–17, 28–32; 9:32–35; 12:9–14, 22–24.

³⁹ Epicurus was not alone; in addition to the portrayal of the superstitious man in Theophrastus' *Characters*, see Plutarch's judgment that superstition is worse than atheism; for analysis, see Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 101–110.

called” all refer, in this usage, not to responses from fellow humans but to divine responses to humans. Jesus states that God calls them children, shows them mercy, comforts them, and satisfies their quest for justice.

Two statements by Jesus would have utterly escaped the grasp of our three Greco-Roman philosophers, because they not only suppose the same intimate and personal relationship between a living God who is “other,” but are soaked in the specific imagery of the Jewish Scripture and its language about the God of Israel. The statement that the meek are happy because they will inherit the earth unmistakably alludes to the story of the Exodus and Conquest, where Moses is characterized as the meekest of all men (Num 12:2), and where God’s promise to Abraham⁴⁰ that his descendents would inherit the land (γῆ can mean both land and earth) is narratively realized. Here, the philosophers would stumble over the particularity of that promise, and the outrageous assumption that a barbarian people might be closer to the divine than the Greeks.⁴¹

No less challenging is the assertion that the pure of heart are happy because they will see God: “purity of heart” is a complex conception intelligible only within the symbolic world of Scripture,⁴² and Philo of Alexandria made the capacity to “see God” the virtual definition of Israel: “Now this race is called in the Hebrew tongue Israel, but, expressed in our tongue, the word is ‘He who sees God,’ and to see Him seems to me of all possessions, public or private, the most precious” (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 4). It is an experience available specifically to Israel through its worship of the true God (Philo, *Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 120). The revelations given to the people by God through the prophets, “are absolutely and entirely signs of the divine excellences, graciousness and beneficence, by which he incites all men to noble conduct, and particularly the nation of his worshipers, for whom he opens up the road that leads to happiness (εὐδαιμονία)” (Philo, *Life of Moses* 2: 189).

As in many conversations among people with genuinely different perspectives, then, Matthew’s Jesus and the Greek philosophers may well have talked past as much as to each other on the issue of human

⁴⁰ Gen 12:2–3; 15:5, 18–20; 17:5–8.

⁴¹ At the heart of Plutarch’s critique of superstition is that, in contrast to the genuine *eusebeia* that binds together “the city of gods and men” that is Greek civilization, superstition is associated with barbarism; see *On Superstition* 12 [Mor. 171B]. Thus he regards Jewish belief and practice as forms of superstition (*On Superstition* 8 [Mor. 169D]).

⁴² See especially Psalm 50:1–12, and James 4:8, with the discussion in L.T. Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 268–89.

happiness. They certainly agreed that it was a matter of character more than chance; they were in accord that happiness touched on the divine in human existence. But while even among the philosophers themselves, the specific construction of character and the specific understanding of the divine were already in dispute, the addition of Jesus' statements only made the conversation more complex, and difficult. Yet imagining such a conversation enables us to imagine as well the beginnings of a long process that ultimately transformed philosophy itself for a long and lingering moment in the intellectual life of the West, when the living God of Israel came to be the measure of being and becoming, and when having a purity of heart that enabled the vision of the living God came to be the measure of human happiness.⁴³

⁴³ The merging of Greco-Roman moral philosophy and the beatitudes are evident, I think, both in Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, and in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II, 1, 1–114.

CHAPTER SIX

DOES A THEOLOGY OF THE CANONICAL GOSPELS MAKE SENSE?

I begin this essay in honor of Robert Morgan in a mood of mild resistance and of modest experimentation. I don't resist joining in the celebration of Robert Morgan, who has done so much to chart the progress and possibilities of biblical theology. Like others who have benefited from his great good will, generosity and spirit of collegiality, I gladly celebrate his life and work. But I resist the topic which has been assigned to me, as these things are, by the editors of this volume. And here is where the mood of modest experimentation comes to my assistance. I have cast my topic in the form of a question, and have asked whether the topic even makes sense. I hope to show that it might, but my expectations are low, as yours should be as well: the title of the chapter indicates my tentative approach to the assigned topic, 'the theology of the canonical Gospels.' My mood of resistance is mild, for I have grown fond of taking on odd titles and topics as a way of stretching the mind a bit. I am encouraged in this by remembering how much of Greek philosophy grew, like a mighty forest from small seeds, from a handful of pithy statements. So although I have real difficulties generally with 'biblical theology' to which I will turn immediately, I am fascinated by the possibility of thinking well about the problems and possibilities of connecting 'canonical Gospels' with 'theology' and, in particular, asking whether the preposition 'of' is the best way to link them.

The Problems with Biblical Theology

Although I have sometimes been described as a 'biblical theologian'—especially by those who do not think me much of a historian or linguist—my discomfort with the enterprise called biblical theology has persisted over many years. I don't think that I have encouraged the designation "theologian" by attaching that word to the title of any of my books. The reason is partly autobiographical. Entering professional biblical scholarship from the side of Benedictine monasticism, I had from the start a difficult time putting together the sort of thinking with and on and about the texts of Scripture that happened in the Divine Office and in *Lectio Divina*—which surely was a sort of theological thinking—and the sort of

thing I read in books called “New Testament Theology” [and, for the rest of this essay, I will confine myself to the NT rather than to the Bible as a whole].

For a long time, I thought that the problem lay mainly in the historical character of the discipline and in the necessary selectivity involved in trying to construct a unitary “theology of the New Testament.” I found that abstraction was impossible to avoid, and that the voices of NT witnesses were invariably suppressed or distorted in service of some unitary principle or other. In my own work, I resisted the pressure toward unification and abstraction by focusing on the diverse “theological voices” of the canon, seeking ways of hearing those voices in all their singularity. But I have come to acknowledge that such efforts, even when carried out with considerable literary sensitivity and theological imagination, do not entirely avoid the same problem of abstraction. There is still a large gap between “reading Luke’s Gospel theologically” and “the theology of Luke.” The process of isolating and describing even salient features of a narrative is a stage removed from engaging narrative. Similarly, when trying to hear the “theological voice” of a Pauline letter, identifying and discussing the elements of Paul’s argument requires a step of abstraction from actually following that argument. Even the most adequate analysis necessarily selects what fits the analysis, and thereby also necessarily excludes what does not fit it. The issue is not whether hearing Luke-Acts as a radical prophecy is superior to hearing it as ecclesiastical propaganda, or whether reading Romans as a fund-raising letter is superior to reading it as an attack on works-righteousness. The issue is, rather, that making one or the other case means stressing some evidence and diminishing other evidence, simply because it is required to make any ‘reading’ at all.

Slowly, I have come to realize a more fundamental reason why books called “theology of the New Testament” seem to have so little to do with theology or the New Testament, and why they do not give rise to theological thinking with and about the writings of the New Testament, why, in fact, they do not give rise to vigorous theological conversation so much as they seem to close a conversation, and that is because they are books. They are books, moreover, written by scholars for other scholars (whatever their protests to the contrary) and therefore bristling with learning. This points us to the larger problem of thinking theologically about Scripture, which has to do with the mode and social location of such thinking.

The writing of books requires fixed choices that, once made, remain fixed. When New Testament theology is done in the form of books, it is necessary to be more highly selective in subject and source, more definite

in conclusion, than if one were speaking with others *viva voce* about the meaning and implications of the New Testament writings. The writing of books demands and reinforces the problems inherent in the doing of New Testament theology: it remains a description of the past, it exists at the level of abstraction, and it stays fixed—at least until a future edition! That New Testament theology appears in the form of books, in turn, reminds us that this odd sub-discipline of New Testament studies has existed for its entire history, and ever increasingly, within the social context of the academy rather than the church. Scholars may say that they are writing for the church, but the level of their prose, the character of their imagined readers, and the weight of their footnotes, argue that they are writing primarily for academic colleagues. I do not mean to suggest that this shift in social location and mode of discourse is entirely unfortunate or has not led to some interesting and occasionally even important insight. I simply mean to propose that the activity of writing books within the academy—even if their subject is called theology—should not be considered either inevitable or ideal.

It is in fact possible to think about theology in quite another way. We can think of theology in terms of a living conversation within the church, a conversation that arises out of and is directed to the practices of faith: liturgy, prayer, social action, discernment, and decision making. Within such conversation, the New Testament plays a role that is far more flexible and vital, far more dialogical—not only between the texts and the faithful but also between the faithful themselves on the basis of the texts—and far more open and corrigible, than is possible within the static universe of publications. Those who are expert in Scripture and also committed to the shared practices of faith can probably best serve theology within the church, not by writing books called the theology of the New Testament, but by enabling and participating in the practices and joining the conversation, *viva voce* and vulnerable, together with other, less learned but perhaps holier, fellow believers.

Set against this second way of imagining the use of the New Testament in the church's theological conversation, the assigned topic for the present chapter, "the theology of the canonical Gospels," would seem to represent everything that is wrong about the standard approach to biblical theology. What could be more static, abstract and artificial, than defining *the* theology of four such disparate literary narratives? Even if it were possible to find their common characteristics, could we then suppose what was common to them was what was most important in each? What would we necessarily leave out in the effort to find what could be said about them

together? And even if we were successful in achieving a 'good' summary, what purpose would it serve? What value for the church's conversation about its life would such an exercise have?

The Heuristic Value of Canonical Clusters

I suspect that there is some real value in playing with clusters of canonical compositions if such clusters are temporary, tentative, and heuristic. By temporary, I mean that we gather the compositions together only for a time before letting them return to their respective individual status as discrete witnesses. Otherwise, the clustering has the effect of diminishing the voice of each composition in favour of an overall apprehension that does not correspond to any of the compositions while simultaneously blocking a clear view of each composition's character. The classic example is the cluster commonly called 'the Pastoral letters'. So fixed and permanent has this cluster become that it is almost impossible to find a clean reading of any one of Paul's letters to his delegates Titus and Timothy. Closely linked to temporary is tentative: the clustering should retain an open and experimental character; the characterization must not become so fixed and final as to preclude other combinations being put into play. Such tentativeness is connected, in turn, to the purpose of the clustering, which is heuristic: what can such temporary clusters of canonical texts; enable us to see that we might not otherwise notice, if we read them separately? The effort will have been worthwhile only if it gives us deeper insight into elements that are truly present in each composition, but whose presence may have gone unnoticed or under-appreciated, if they had not been brought together in this fashion.

Such clustering of compositions can, in short, enable us to set up something of a conversation among the New Testament witnesses through a process of comparison and contrast, and this conversation can enable us better to appreciate both what they have in common and how they differ. By seeing them together, it is sometimes possible to see each of them more clearly. The benefit is obvious in the case of Paul's letters, which fall into natural groups (1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans, Colossians and Ephesians). A close comparison of Romans 4 and Galatians 3 can lead to a deeper appreciation of the distinctiveness of the argument concerning Abraham in the respective chapters. We learn from this that there is more to be learned when the compositions are close enough to enable meaningful comparison, yet distinct enough to

also enable contrast. More venturesome temporary and tentative clusters among the Pauline letters could yield considerable benefit. Much could be learned, for example, if 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus were not always read together, but put individually in conversation with other Pauline letters. A comparison between 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians reveals a striking similarity of situation and issue in the two compositions, even as it also shows disparate modes of response. Similarly, 2 Timothy appears in a new light when we observe how not only its setting but also its mode of argumentation closely resembles that in Philipians. The challenge in such exercises remains that of characterizing without caricature, of discerning elements of genuine commonality that are also essential to the respective compositions, without suppressing the evidence that does not fit.

The Canonical Gospels: Two Exercises in Comparison

In the case of the canonical Gospels, we are able to get a sense of what 'theology' might be associated with them as a group by means of a double-comparison, the first between the Synoptics and John, and the second, between all four canonical Gospels and selected apocryphal Gospels. The first comparison is helped by the fact that, despite their many significant differences that enable them to be truly distinct witnesses, the literary interdependence among the Synoptics gives them a sufficiently stable shared profile to allow a genuine comparison to John. I agree with the majority of scholars who conclude that John has no direct literary contact with the Matthew, Mark or Luke, although the Fourth Gospel clearly shares some common traditions with the Synoptics.

The Synoptics and John in Comparison

The differences between John and the Synoptics are obvious and for this exercise, require only a quick reminder. The length of Jesus' ministry is one year in the Synoptics and three years in John. The place of Jesus' ministry is distinct: in the Synoptics, it centres in Galilee, in John, Jesus works mainly in Judaea, with short trips to Galilee. The placement of events differs: in John, the cleansing of the temple occurs at the start of Jesus' ministry rather than at the end; in John, Jesus' eucharistic words occur after the feeding of the multitude, not at the last supper. Even the date of Jesus' death is different: in the Synoptics, it takes place on Passover, in John on the day of preparation for the Passover. The roles played by disciples differ:

in the Synoptics, Peter is the chief spokesperson; in John, Peter retains that role, but important speaking parts are given as well to Nathaniel, Thomas, Philip, and especially 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'.

Far more intriguing are the ways in which the characteristic deeds and words of Jesus are dissimilar. In the Synoptics, Jesus' words often take the form of short aphorisms, or the punch-lines of *chreiai*, in which the objections of interlocutors are quickly demolished by an authoritative pronouncement. His longer discourses, like the Sermon on the Mount (or Plain) seem clearly cobbled together by the evangelists out of such shorter (and originally free-floating) *logia*. Most of all, Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels speaks in parables; his remarkable narrative analogies subvert reader expectations and awaken insight. In John's Gospel, by contrast, Jesus tells no parables; his few *paroimiai* do not at all resemble the parables of the synoptic tradition.

Jesus' characteristic speech in the Fourth Gospel, moreover, is quite unlike the patterns we find in Matthew, Mark or Luke. Here, Jesus confronts opponents, it is true, but he does not crush them with a single saying. The controversies instead go on and on, stretching in one case across several chapters (see John 7–10). And instead of speaking discourses that are obviously constructed by the evangelist out of smaller units, Jesus in John's Gospel moves from controversies into long, self-revealing monologues, justifying the report of the temple police who had been sent to spy on him, "no one has ever spoken like this!" (John 7:46). Unlike the pattern of speech in the Synoptics, in which Jesus addresses by turns the crowds, his opponents and his disciples—providing the last group positive instructions on power and prayer and possessions—John's Jesus gives no teaching to his disciples until the last supper, and then it is by way of answering their questions, before elaborating his final and most solemn monologue.

Finally, we note how different Jesus' characteristic actions are in John and in the Synoptics. For Mark, and to a lesser sense also Matthew and Luke, Jesus' exorcisms serve as the prime demonstration that the rule of God has come upon humans. Remarkably, John has no exorcisms at all. John reports a small selection of healings and a resuscitation, which, although transmuted, clearly resemble versions in the Synoptic account. John also shares the sequence of the "nature wonders" found in the Synoptics: the multiplication of the loaves and the walking on the water. And John adds still another miracle of the same sort, the changing of water into wine. What distinguishes all these wonders in John, to be sure, is that they are designated as 'signs' that reveal Jesus as the bearer of God's glory.

So great are these dissimilarities that we cannot link the four canonical Gospels at the obvious level of plot line, sayings or deeds. It is for this reason, even more than its supposedly more “dogmatic” character, that the quest for the historical Jesus began by dismissing John from consideration, and continues to disregard John’s witness to the humanity of Jesus. But there are ways in which we can speak of theological perceptions that join the four Gospels that exist at a deeper and more implicit level.

First, all four Gospels are realistic narratives. By this, I do not mean that they are lacking the miraculous, but that their stories take place in real time and space, with characters who interact with each other in specific places and in a genuine temporal sequence. Characters are born, live and die, including Jesus, who is born in a specific place of specific parents, has brothers, and dies violently by a specific means in a specific city. The theological significance of this is fairly obvious: that divine revelation takes place through bodies rather than apart from bodies not only affirms the worth of bodies, but also of time, since time is simply the measure of bodies in motion. As realistic narratives set in a specific time and place, moreover, all four Gospels implicitly affirm the compatibility of God’s self-disclosure and real human existence within history.

Second, all four Gospels have specific historical roots in first-century Palestine. Despite differences in locating specific events, the canonical Gospels share the placement of their stories in the verifiable circumstances of Roman rule, Hellenistic culture, and above all, the complex Judaism of Galilee and Judaea in the time of Pontius Pilate. One of the most remarkable aspects of the extensive archaeological discoveries of the past century, in fact, is that no important aspect of the canonical Gospels’ report concerning those historical circumstances has been disconfirmed, and every important aspect concerning Judaism in that place has been confirmed. So profound and pervasive is this grounding in first-century Palestinian Judaism—and so surprising, given the circumstances of the development of the Gospel tradition—that the Jesus of the canonical Gospels is literally unimaginable outside that world.

Third, all four Gospels explicitly connect the story of Jesus to that of Israel, using the texts and symbols of Torah to express the identity and role of Jesus. They do this differently; the distance between Matthew’s formula-citation of Scripture, and John’s subtle appropriation of the imagery associated with Jewish feasts is real. Yet for both—as also for Mark and Luke—Jesus is to be understood within the framework of Torah, and, in turn, Torah is to be understood as pointing to Jesus. Indeed, John and Matthew are perhaps closest in this, that one imagines Jesus as the Word

made flesh, and the other images Jesus as Torah made human. The intertextual links between the Jewish Scripture and the canonical Gospels are so intricate and extensive that the story of Jesus appears overwhelmingly as the continuation of the story of Israel told in Torah.

Fourth, all the canonical Gospels emphasize the way humans respond to Jesus. Despite the insignificant differences in terminology, the canonical Gospels all show a human drama of challenge and decision. Other characters beside Jesus matter, and they do more than pose questions to him. They enter into genuine relationships with Jesus, whether of opposition, or friendship, or discipleship. The Gospels thereby support the perception of humans as capable of making such choices. They are free to decide for or against the revelation of God in Christ. Not least among the many surprising elements in the Gospels is the amount of space given to the rejection of the message and the messenger.

Fifth, all the canonical Gospels emphasize the passion of Jesus. The dominant position of the passion is most obvious in Mark, to be sure. But the attention to the suffering and death of Jesus is not less in the other three canonical Gospels; it is simply that in them the attention to Jesus' ministry is greater. Like Mark, Matthew and Luke each anticipate the actual account of Jesus' passion by formal prophecies made by Jesus, which has the effect of the end of the narrative overshadowing everything that precedes it. John also, with his distinctive language about the hour and glorification of Jesus, creates a sense, early in his narrative, that everything before Jesus' passion and death is a prelude to the main event. The portrayal of Jesus as a suffering Messiah, executed under Roman authority by crucifixion, is not only found in all four Gospels, it is the part of the story on which they most agree. If we add this emphasis on suffering to the previously noted traits of body, time, space, historical location, immersion in Torah, and the human interaction of secondary characters, we are stating in more detail that the four canonical Gospels are realistic narratives. But we are also observing that everything asserted about God's revelation in these Gospels involves the physical world.

Sixth, the canonical Gospels share an understanding of the resurrection of Jesus that is continuous with his human existence and sustaining of the relationships formed in his human ministry. In one fashion or another, the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples serves to empower them to continue his mission through witnessing to him. The resurrection does not, in these Gospels, become the occasion for the revelation of new and secret truths about Jesus or the cosmos. The modest predictions in John 21 concerning Peter and the Beloved Disciple are the partial and illuminating

exception: they concern the mortal destiny of the disciples. In Luke, the resurrection revelation of Jesus concerns the way properly to understand his human existence in light of Scripture.

Seventh, the canonical Gospels, despite their many differences concerning the forms of Jesus' words or his precise actions, agree in their portrayal of Jesus as a human sent from God for the sake of other humans, and who speaks and acts as God's representative, even as he is also radically obedient to God. The nuances of this portrayal are, to be sure, what most distinguish each individual Gospel, so this level of agreement is broad and non-specific. Certainly, John's Gospel elevates the perception of Jesus as the very revelation of God. But at the same time, John places no less stress on Jesus doing and speaking only what he receives from the father. Likewise, Luke's Gospel portrays Jesus in perhaps the most 'life-like' terms, crafting his story in terms most like Hellenistic biographies. Yet Luke also regards Jesus as God's 'son' in a manner distinct from other characters. Another common feature of the canonical Gospels as realistic narratives is that their Jesus has a real human character (*ethos*), which is recognizable in each of the four portrayals despite the distinct rendering of Jesus by the respective evangelists. In all four Gospels, Jesus is first someone totally defined by radical obedience to God. He is motivated not by human ambition or human respect. He seeks to please only God. But equally, Jesus in all four Gospels is the one who shows that obedience to God by giving of himself in service to others. His lack of self-seeking is expressed in his seeking the good of those around him. His obedience to God is articulated by his self-donative pattern of life. His death, in all four Gospels, is at once the supreme expression of his obedient faith in God and his love for others.

Eighth, in all the canonical Gospels, God is at once the father of Jesus and the God of Israel. Stated negatively, the canonical Gospels drive no wedge between the God of Jesus and the God of creation. One of the corollaries of these Gospels' deep enmeshment in the world of Torah is that readers perceive Jesus' 'father' to be continuous with the creating, revealing, judging and saving God of whom the law and prophets spoke. This, perception, to be sure, is entirely consistent with the character of the Gospels as realistic narratives in which bodies, time and history, not to mention human freedom, are valorized.

Ninth, in the canonical Gospels, God's final triumph is still in the future. This note is struck most emphatically in the Synoptic tradition, to be sure, with its explicit future eschatology stated by Jesus himself, and its vision of the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven. And John's Gospel

certainly shifts the emphasis to a “realized eschatology” in the ministry of Jesus: already in his coming there is judgment in the world. But even in John, there is the clear statement of a future resurrection and judgment, and the disciples are told that the future paraclete has a distinctive work to accomplish, and that they also will need to endure tribulations.

Tenth, despite remarkably different shadings in their portraits of the disciples as characters in the narrative, the canonical Gospels agree that discipleship means following in the path of radical obedience to God and service to others demonstrated by Jesus. The distinctive portraits of the disciples must be acknowledged: in Mark, they are stupid and faithless; in Matthew, they are faithless but intelligent; in Luke, they are the prophets-in-training who will carry on Jesus’ prophetic programme; in John, they are the friends who will experience the hatred of the world as Jesus has. Precisely these differences in characterization—fitted to the purposes of the respective evangelists—makes more impressive the fundamental agreement on the character (*ethos*) of the disciple. In John as in the Synoptics, we find no trace of a triumphalistic understanding of discipleship, which would position Jesus’ followers above others, or ensure their worldly success and safety. Just the opposite: their radical obedience to God is to lead in them, as it did in Jesus, to the service of others. And this service of others involves a certain way of using power and possessions, both supremely worldly realities. Discipleship in the canonical Gospels is not, in short, a matter of intelligence or understanding, but a matter of moral disposition.

These ten points of commonality are all the more impressive because of the manifest diversity of the four Gospels in terms of specific literary structuring, portrayal of Jesus, use of Torah, depiction of the disciples and opponents, understanding of the end-time. They are also the more impressive because John is not in a literary relationship with the Synoptics, but in all these points, represents a genuinely independent theological voice.

The next question that must arise concerns the *distinctiveness* of this cluster of compositions and cluster of theological perceptions that they share despite their surface differences. It might be fruitful at this point to enter into a comparison with non-Gospel canonical writings (Paul’s letters, for example), but the process of comparison would be complicated by the simple fact that the other New Testament writings have such an obviously different literary character. The more interesting and illuminating approach might be to compare these canonical witnesses to other compositions from early Christianity that are designated in one manner or another as ‘Gospels’. Such comparison might enable us to discern whether

what is shared by the canonical Gospels is also essential to the canonical Gospels, or whether much of what they share is simply consequent on writing a Gospel rather than a letter.

Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels in Comparison

There are many apocryphal Gospels from early Christianity that we cannot adequately compare to the canonical Gospels because they are fragmentary or because they witness to only one element of the story found in the canonical Gospels. It would be wonderful, for example, if we had complete versions of the so-called 'Jewish-Christian' Gospels, such as the *Gospel of the Hebrews* or the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, but we do not; we have only a handful of fragments. Similarly, if the *Gospel of Peter* were extant in more than its present truncated form, it could provide a more useful comparison to the canonical versions. For different reasons, the infancy Gospels of James, Thomas and Pseudo-Matthew offer slender basis for comparison. Their theological tendencies are not obscure, they are right on the surface. But their restriction to the birth and infancy gives them a distinctive character that is difficult to bring into conversation with any portion of the canonical tradition apart from the infancy accounts in Matthew and Luke. The same difficulties apply to the Gospels that we term Gnostic as well, since, with some exceptions, they tend to focus on post-resurrection revelations rather than on the pre-resurrection ministry. In the comparison that follows, therefore, I will use the shared characteristics that I have discerned in the canonical Gospels, and ask whether and in what manner, the same characteristics occur in the apocryphal Gospels.

1. *The Gospels as realistic narratives.* None of the Gnostic Gospels take the form of narrative. Rather, they focus entirely on Jesus as revealer, and take the form of discrete sayings or *chreiai* with no narrative framework (*Gospel of Thomas*'), or revelatory discourses in response to questions (*Gospel of Mary*, *Dialogue of the Saviour*). Two of the most important Gnostic "Gospels" (*Gospel of Truth*, *Gospel of Philip*) take the form of teaching *about* Jesus rather than any sort of story. Many of these Gospels, therefore, are not narratives at all. Of those that take narrative form, we can say that the *Gospel of Peter* clearly comes closest to the canonical Gospels in its "realistic" character, while the infancy Gospels tend toward the legendary and fantastic. As a consequence, neither the body nor time are given a positive valence in the Gnostic or infancy Gospels.

2. *The Gospels as rooted in Palestinian Jewish realities.* On this, the canonical Gospels are distinctive. The *Protevangelium of James* and *the Gospel of Peter* try, but clearly have no real knowledge of Judaism or its relations with the larger political order.
3. *The Gospels as connected to the story of Israel.* The infancy Gospel called *Pseudo-Matthew* imitates the canonical Matthew in using specific formula citations to connect incidents in Jesus' Infancy with Scripture. Apart from this exception, the apocryphal Gospels are noteworthy for the absence of this element.
4. *The Gospels as showing human responses to Jesus.* The point of this category is that characters other than Jesus matter and are shown making decisive choices. Certainly the infancy Gospels of James and Thomas show some significance to the decisions made by Joseph (*Thomas*) and Mary (*James*). And *The Gospel of Peter* highlights the response of Herod and "the Jews". In the Gnostic Gospels, however, the role assigned to other characters is that of asking questions of Jesus. Without a narrative, to be sure, it is difficult to play a narrative role.
5. *The Gospels as emphasizing the passion of Jesus.* The canonical Gospels are impressively, even overwhelmingly consistent in their attention to the suffering of Jesus. The extant apocryphal Gospels are almost equally consistent in their avoidance of that human suffering. The *Gospel of Peter*, notably, corresponds in part to the canonical passion narratives, but does not share their focus on Jesus' actual suffering. The Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* has some beautiful ways of expressing the suffering and death of Christ, but does not touch on the specifics of that suffering. The other apocryphal Gospels simply avoid the subject.
6. *The resurrection as continuous with the human ministry of Jesus.* On this point, the Gnostic Gospels provide the most pertinent comparison. Those that make the resurrection the *mise-en-scene* (as do *Pistis Sophia*, *Questions of Barnabas*, *Gospel of Mary*, *Dialogue of the Saviour*) also make it the occasion for substantially new revelations of Jesus that are intended either to supplement or replace those delivered to the Twelve during Jesus' human ministry.
7. *The understanding of Jesus.* The canonical Gospels, we have seen, have an extremely complex presentation of Jesus, at once fully human and enmeshed in the physical world, and representing God in a manner superior to any other figure; defined by complete obedience and submission to God, as well as by self-sacrificing service to others. Insofar as the apocryphal Gospels can be said to have an "understanding of Jesus," it is invariably less complex than that in the canonical Gospels.

The infancy Gospels are entirely focused on the miraculous, with Jesus either the occasion or the cause of a transcending of natural processes. The *Gospel of Peter* shows Jesus as simply passive. The Gnostic Gospels (including the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*) emphasize Jesus as divine revealer. In none of them is obedience towards God or loving service to humans part of the character of Jesus, much less its essential note.

8. *Jesus and the God of Israel.* Just as the apocryphal Gospels in general do not portray Jesus in terms of Torah, to an equal degree they avoid the issue of the God whom Jesus represents. The relation of Gnosticism in all its diversity toward the Scriptures of Israel is notoriously complex, but it is a safe generalization that the Gnostic Gospels are at the very least ambivalent towards those texts as well as the God of whom they speak. Insofar as the God of Israel is the God who creates the material world, the Gnostic texts resist that God. A Gnostic sensibility that finds the world to be a corpse, and blessedness in detachment and solitariness (see the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*), is far both from the sensibility of Torah and of the canonical Gospels.
9. *God's final triumph is in the future.* Insofar as the apocryphal Gospels tend to diminish the significance of bodies and time, they also diminish the significance of the future as public event. So far as I can determine, there is nothing like the canonical Gospels' future expectation in the apocrypha.
10. *The nature of discipleship.* As with the *ethos* of Jesus, here also we find the sharpest difference between the canonical and apocryphal Gospels. The infancy Gospels do not offer any image of discipleship. Nor does the *Gospel of Peter*. As for the Gnostic Gospels, the emphasis is certainly on knowledge, both of Jesus and of the truths that he reveals. In the case of the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, it is properly called self-knowledge. The apprehension of discipleship in the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Gospel of Philip* is certainly more complex, with some sense of outreach to the neighbour through sharing enlightenment. The sacramental language of the *Gospel of Philip* even implies that, to some degree, material things have value as spiritual signs. But the emphasis on the uses of power and possessions as modes of service to others is absent. Nor do we find an understanding of discipleship as following in the path of suffering obedience and service exemplified by Jesus.

The reader, will, I hope, excuse the clumsiness of this set of comparisons, which are offered for their heuristic and experimental value. Although individual apocryphal Gospels resemble the canonical Gospels on one

point or another, it can be said that, as a whole—and as we now have them—they represent theological emphases quite other than the canonical ones. On one side (the Infancy Gospels) there is an emphasis on wonderworking and physical purity. On the other side (the Gnostic Gospels) we find an emphasis on saving knowledge, asceticism and rejection of the created order. We simply do not find in them realistic narratives, enmeshment in the world of Torah, affirmation of body, time and history, relationships among humans, an expectation for the future, or a Jesus as obedient to God and servant of humans. The effect of the comparison of canonical and apocryphal Gospels has been to reinforce the perception of what the canonical Gospels distinctively share.

What Theology do the Canonical Gospels Enable?

These comparisons have involved a considerable degree of abstraction. In order to affirm these points of similarity and dissimilarity, I have had to eliminate considerations of all the wonderfully detailed ways in which each composition—apocryphal as well as canonical—escapes such reduction as was necessary to this task. If this list of qualities were to replace reading of the specific compositions, and replace the process of transformation that all serious literary engagement invites, in favour of a neat set of descriptors, then the effort has moved in the wrong direction. The only justification for the exercise is that—while remaining tentative and temporary—it also proves to have heuristic value. I think that in the present case, the exercise has enabled us to see things that are shared by the canonical Gospels and are simply not found in anything like the same degree in any other single apocryphal writing, or in them all collectively. It has also enabled us to detect, beneath the clear diversity to be found on the surface of the four canonical Gospels, genuinely common elements that we might miss if we had only a single Gospel before us, or if we were to read only the Synoptics and not John, or if we were in ignorance of the apocryphal compositions.

Now we are able to ask the question of the best way to relate the terms ‘theology’ and “canonical Gospels”. I resist the term “theology of the canonical Gospels”, because it suggests that the qualities I have isolated either represent what the Gospels are about, or adequately summarize any one of them individually, or all of them together. This would be, I think, an inappropriate and inaccurate reduction.

A better question is, “what theology does the canonical tradition support, and with what theology is it incompatible?” Asking the question

this way does not force us to “find” a theology in the actual compositions, but enables us to think about the theological premises and perceptions out of which the compositions arise and to which they give support, or, conversely, what theological premises and perceptions they would, taken individually or collectively, fail to support.

It is clear, I think, what sort of theology the canonical Gospels would utterly fail to support. A dualistic rejection of the creator God and of his Torah, of the body and of history and of community, in favour of a disembodied revelation concerning esoteric realities beyond those available to this present physical world, would find no support in the canonical Gospels. Neither would an understanding of Jesus purely as thaumaturge or sage, without reference to his obedient suffering in service to others, or an understanding of him as a divine revealer, removed from the passions and problems of embodied humanity. Nor could any support be found in the canonical Gospels for an understanding of discipleship as consisting in a detached and ironic posture—given by revelations available only to the few—superior to the ignorant sufferings of the many. One would need to read the apocryphal Gospels to find support for such a theology.

It should be equally clear what sort of theology the canonical Gospels enable and support. By implication, a realistic narrative of God’s revelation through a human person affirms the value of the body, of time, and of history; it supports and enables an incarnational theology. The specific setting of this revelation in the symbolic world of Torah and the social realities of first-century Palestinian, in turn, supports an understanding of revelation that is in continuous with the story of Israel, and therefore affirms the validity of that earlier story even as it claims to continue it in a distinctive fashion. The rendering of secondary characters as important for the relationships they form and the choices they make supports a positive understanding of human freedom and the value of relationship and community.

The portrayal of Jesus as suffering as other humans do supports an understanding of incarnation that is complete, and an understanding of God as participating fully in the human condition even to the experience of suffering and death. The emphasis on resurrection as continuous with Jesus’ human ministry further affirms the value and the future of the human person with whom God has associated in the humanity of Jesus. As Jesus’ body had a future that was not utterly discontinuous with his human identity, so, we might think, other humans can look forward to an embodied existence that, however changed, is also not utterly discontinuous with their present bodily being. The expectation of God’s triumph as

future works against any sort of realized eschatology that rests in the perfection of the individual, and therefore works for the effort to realize God's kingdom through the transformation of communities and social realities. The understanding of discipleship as consisting in radical obedience to God, demonstrated by loving service to others supports an understanding of discipleship as not measured by human expectations but God's will, and not measured by individual accomplishment but by the building up of the human community.

It will come as no shock to readers of this volume that the theology enabled and supported by the canonical Gospels bears the strongest possible resemblance to the theology found in Christianity's rule of faith, eventually elaborated as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. These creeds take the form of a narrative with past, present and future. They profess faith in one God who is also the father of Jesus Christ, who was born of a specific woman and crucified under a specific historical ruler, who suffered, died and was buried, was raised on the third day, and is expected to come again as judge of the living and the dead. The classic creeds of Christianity, in short, represent a version of theology that finds its best support in the canonical Gospels.

An answer, finally, to the question that has directed this chapter. I think that sense can be made of a "theology of the canonical Gospels", but only when it is understood as a theology that is enabled and supported by the canonical Gospels.

PART TWO

LUKE-ACTS

CHAPTER SEVEN

ON FINDING THE LUKAN COMMUNITY: A CAUTIOUS CAUTIONARY ESSAY

We have all heard the old fable of the blindfolded sages and the elephant, and have learned its moral: the limited perception of a part can only with hazard be trusted to explain the whole. The sage who, upon feeling the elephant's trunk, concluded he was handling a snake was not wrong in his perception, only in his conclusion. There are more possibilities to wriggly things than snakes. But having learned that moral from the tale, we may find ourselves tempted in the opposite direction, so that whenever we touch something slick and vaguely prehensile, we conclude there is an elephant attached. Wrong again, and for the same reason.

I am reminded of this tale when I consider the signs of a stirring interest among Lukan scholars in finding the Lukan community.¹ Why should there be this interest? How has it arisen? Is it the text of Luke-Acts itself which impels the search, or is it a set of presuppositions regarding the reading of New Testament documents generally, presuppositions which may not apply in this case? Since it is no longer the fashion to regard Luke as the companion of Paul, or as writing to specifically Pauline communities,² the basis for a description of the Lukan community would seem to be limited to the text of Luke-Acts. Any optimism accompanying the search is provided by certain presuppositions concerning the relationship between the author, his work, and his readers: (a) the author was writing

¹ S. Brown, "The Role of the Prologues in Determining the Purpose of Luke-Acts," *Perspectives on Luke Acts*, ed. CH. Talbert (Danville: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) 108; (hereafter this volume cited as *Perspectives*). R.J. Karris, "Rich and Poor: The Lukan-Sitz-im-Leben," *Perspectives* 112-125, and "Missionary Communities: A New Paradigm for the study of Luke-Acts," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 80-97; C.H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke Acts* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974) 134-136; R. McDonnell, "Luke's Sitz-im-Leben: An Early Christian School," (Unpublished Paper for CBA Luke-Acts Task Force, 1978).

² Cf. W.G. Kuemmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 147-148. The recent attempt by J. Quinn to connect the Pastorals to Luke-Acts is imaginative and deserves attention. Cf. "The Last Volume of Luke: The Relation of Luke-Acts to the Pastoral Epistles," *Perspectives* 62-75.

for a specific group of people with definable and distinct characteristics;³ (b) the author's text reveals, at least by inference, hard information about this group; so that (c) on the basis of that information the Lukan audience can be described with some accuracy. A further presupposition would seem to be that this description of the community's life situation will provide sharper insight into those very themes which have provided the basis of the description. In short, we can move from the text to its life-setting, and from the life-setting to the meaning of the text.

As you recognize, these presuppositions are those of the exegetical approach which has come to be called the "mirror method".⁴ I suggest that the hope of discovering a Lukan community derives less from the shape of the Lukan documents than from the presumed validity of this method for the study of any New Testament document. Since it has been successful elsewhere, it should work here, as well.

In this short essay, I will try to draw some lessons from what I perceive to be the limits of the mirror method in general, and apply them by way of caution to the reading of Luke-Acts. Skepticism, after all, has its functions. If a legitimate doubt can be raised about the validity or fruitfulness of this way of reading Luke-Acts, perhaps the way to a more appropriate approach can be cleared.

The Limits of the Mirror Method: Lessons from Paul

In the case of the Corinthian letters, which are occasional in nature, which are addressed to a concrete and identifiable group, and which describe specific problems within that group, the mirror method has had some success. It has not been an unqualified success, since there are as many opinions about the precise dimensions of the Corinthian social setting, attitudes and problems as there are investigators.⁵ But at least the

³ The problem of terminology corresponds to the problem of definition. What sort of grouping is denoted by "community"? Among the possibilities: (a) members of a household or household-based Church; (b) members of an intentional grouping such as a school; (c) Christians of a particular city; (d) Christians of a district or province; (e) the readers, generally. The wider the net is thrown, the more combinations of sociological factors are possible.

⁴ Whether there is a literary origin to this term I do not know. It has been part of the shorthand of the discipline since I began scripture studies.

⁵ By way of sample, A. Schlatter, *Paulus der Bote Jesu*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Calwert Verlag, 1969) 11-46; W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) 117ff.; J. Munck, "The Church without Factions," *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Atlanta: John

method makes sense here, indeed is almost necessary.⁶ And there are some controls. We know the author, and what he has written elsewhere. He explicitly refers to the attitudes of the members of the community, and even alludes to aspects of their social standing.⁷ He appears to cite the slogans of his interlocutors, and takes up their positions in his argument.⁸ There is, furthermore, some exegetical reward. By piecing together the diverse bits of information (and fitting them to what we know of Corinth from elsewhere, including Acts), we can construct a more or less coherent picture of a community and its problems. This portrait, in turn, helps us recognize the significance of parts of Paul's argument we might otherwise have overlooked.

The method's success in the Corinthian correspondence has not been matched in the other Pauline letters. In Galatians and Colossians (granting the authenticity of the latter), we are able to make some guesses about the identity or practices of the respective "opponents",⁹ but are not able to say much about the "Galatian Community" or the "Colossian Community" apart from the fairly obvious facts that both were young Gentile churches. The letters simply do not yield that sort of information, in spite of the clear "occasionality" of both writings.¹⁰ In these cases we do not have

Knox, 1959) 135–167; H. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 14–16; N.A. Dahl, "Paul and the Church at Corinth According to 1 Corinthians 1:10–4:21," *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 40–61; R.A. Horsley, "How Can Some of You Say That There is No Resurrection of the Dead," "Spiritual Elitism in Corinth," *Novum Testamentum* 20 (1978) 203–240. On the excesses of the mirror reading of II Corinthians, cf. C.J.A. Hickling, "Is the Second Epistle to the Corinthians a Source for Early Church History?" *ZNW* 66 (1975) 284–287.

⁶ "Die Rekonstruktion derselben ist eine wesentliche Aufgabe der Auslegung der beiden Korintherbriefe," H. Conzelmann, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) 28.

⁷ Cf. G. Theissen, "Soziale Schichtung in der Korinthischen Gemeinde: ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des hellenistischen Urchristentums," *ZNW* 65 (1974) 232–272; A. Ehrhardt, "Social Problems of the Early Church," *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) 275–312; A.J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1977) 71–91.

⁸ J.C. Hurd, *The Origin of I Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965) 114–209.

⁹ For Galatians, cf. J. Tyson, "Paul's Opponents in Galatia," *Novum Testamentum* 10 (1968) 241–254; R. Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," *NTS* 17 (1970) 198–212; A.E. Harvey, "The Opposition of Paul," *Studia Evangelica* IV ed. F.L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968) 319–332; R.McL. Wilson, "Gnostics—in Galatia?" *ibid.*, 358–367. For Colossians, cf. F.O. Francis and W.A. Meeks, *Conflict in Colossae* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).

¹⁰ H.D. Betz has illuminating remarks on the coherent literary structure of Galatians in the light of Hellenistic rhetoric, despite its "occasional" nature, in "The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *NTS* 21 (1975) 353–379.

the support of evidence from Acts or other ancient sources (at least not directly). Even though both letters were written in response to a crisis, we can only with great difficulty reconstruct the “heresy,” much less describe the make-up of the community as a social organism.¹¹

The Letter to the Romans should stand as an example of the mirror method’s limits. Romans 14 (and 16) appear to give us information for the reconstruction of the Roman church’s situation, and some scholars have tried to read Romans through the lens of that reconstruction.¹² The legitimacy of this has been questioned before.¹³ To what extent does Paul in Rom 14, by a kind of literary inertia, carry over into Romans the concerns of I Cor 8–10?¹⁴ The thematic and theological connection between Rom 1–11 and 14 should not be doubted. But that the “life-setting” of Rom 14 explains or adequately accounts for the theological exposition of 1–11 is not likely. Romans reminds us that life-setting, occasion, purpose and meaning should not hastily be identified. Why? Precisely because of the literary shape of the writing. Rom 1–11 gives no indication of having been stimulated by local difficulties, but gives every sign of being a carefully constructed scholastic diatribe of more universal significance.¹⁵

Recognition of the literary structure of Romans leads to the analysis of passages within that structure. Few would want to argue, I think, that the vice-list of Rom 1:30–31 reveals the characteristic failings of the Roman community. We know that Paul is using a literary convention, and recognize as well that this *τύπος* has a place within a broader literary set-piece (the polemic against idolatry), which, in turn, prepares for the argument of chapter four. Neither would many of us want to conclude

¹¹ Cf. The epilogue of *Conflict at Colossae*, 209–218.

¹² H.W. Bartsch, “Die historische Situation des Roemerbriefes,” *Studia Evangelica* IV, 281–291; E. Trocmé, “L’Épître aux Romains et le Méthode Missionnaire de l’Apôtre Paul,” *NTS* 7 (1960) 148–153; P. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith* (Naperville: A. Allenson, 1971) 1–35; K.P. Donfried, “False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans,” *CBQ* 36 (1974) 332–355.

¹³ R.J. Karris, “Rom 14:1–15:13 and the Occasion of Romans,” *CBQ* 35 (1973) 155–178, and “The Occasion of Romans: A Response to Professor Donfried,” *CBQ* 36 (1974) 356–358; from the point of view of rhetorical analysis, W. Wuellner, “Paul’s Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans,” *CBQ* 38 (1976) 330–351.

¹⁴ Karris, “Rom 14:1–15:13,” 162ff.; G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 93–94; W.A. Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972) 67–68.

¹⁵ S.K. Stowers, *A Critical Reassessment of Paul and the Diatribe: The Dialogical Element in Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Unpublished Yale Dissertation, 1979) 233–249, 263–268, 270–275. On the basis of a thorough examination of the form and function of diatribal elements, Stowers argues convincingly that Romans should be read as “the self-introduction of Paul as a teacher and preacher of the Gospel,” and that the specific problems of the Roman community are not to be read out of the document.

from Paul's positive remarks about the state in Rom 13:1–7 that the Roman church was caught up in revolutionary fervor.

Again, we see that Paul is employing stereotyped ethical teaching whose variation is due less to the situation of his readers than his own perceptions.

There is a lesson to be learned from Romans. Where references to local situations are few and ambiguous, and where there is clear evidence of literary technique, it is hazardous to move from the presence of a theme or *τόπος* to the situation of readers. The more a Pauline letter moves toward being an "epistle", the more generalized the applicability of his teaching becomes. And the more clearly a theme or *τόπος* serves a literary function within a broader argument, the less likely its presence is to be accounted for by the particular circumstances of the readers.

Within the Pauline corpus itself, therefore, the mirror method has only limited applicability. The reconstruction of a Pauline community must take into account the literary structure of the individual letters, together with a degree of occasionality and specificity these suggest. The study of Paul's letters reminds us that even in documents of a genuinely occasional nature, not every element in the writing is determined by the place, the people, or the occasion. Some things are there because of the demands of genre, the impetus of tradition, the logic of argumentation, the inertia of scriptural citations, and the idiosyncratic perceptions of the author. Responsible exegesis takes these factors into account before using passages as a mirror to community problems.¹⁶ Where they are not taken into account, the reading of documents can become fantastical.

The Mirror Reading of the Gospels: Lessons Yet to be Learned

The categories and perceptions of form-criticism are still alive in redaction-criticism of the Gospels.¹⁷ If form-criticism tended to draw the tightest sort of connection between individual units of tradition and the

¹⁶ Cf. the cautious remarks concerning the Thessalonian community in Malherbe's *Social Aspects*, 25–27.

¹⁷ Cf. J. Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 1–46; S. Simonsen, "Zur Frage der grundlegenden Problematik in form—und redaktions—geschichtliche Evangelienforschung," *StudTheol* 27 (1972) 1–23; R.H. Stein, "The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Markan Redaction History," *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971) 181–198; P. Stuhlmacher, "Thesen zur Methodologie gegenwaertiger Exegese" *ZNW* 63 (1972) 18–26.

life-setting of communities, redaction-criticism generally assumes a similar symbiotic connection between the evangelists and individual communities. The recent efflorescence of heresy-hunting going by the neutral rubric of “traditions in conflict” has simply given a distinctive coloration to this perception.¹⁸

Redaction of traditional material, we are to understand, points to the pastoral and theological concerns of the evangelist. Fair enough. But another, less legitimate assumption is too frequently made: that these concerns are invariably determined by some crisis among the evangelist’s readers, his community. Still further down the logical road is the assumption that these crises involved eschatological or Christological heresies. Once these assumptions are in place—and they are assumptions, whose roots cannot be traced here¹⁹—then it appears possible to move from the themes of the text to the social setting and theological stances of the text’s readers. Where there is a plus in the text we are to infer a minus in the community, or in part of the community, and so forth.

The purpose of the evangelist’s redaction, then, is to shape the story about Jesus in such fashion as to correct or counter such misunderstandings or opposing theologies.²⁰ It has been pointed out before that the resulting polemic is extraordinarily subtle,²¹ and that we should have no notion of the opposition at all were it not for the positive presentation of their supposed positions within the Gospels themselves.²² But these

¹⁸ C.J.A. Hickling, “A Problem of Method in Gospel Research,” *RelStud* 10 (1974) 339–346 (in review of Weeden).

¹⁹ However remote (but real) the influence of F.C. Baur, the debt these assumptions owe to W. Bauer’s *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. R. Kraft and G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) is clear, and is explicitly acknowledged in H. Koester’s “GNO-MAI DIAPHOROI, The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity,” *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 114, n. 1, and in E. Käsemann’s *The Testament of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 75, n. 1.

²⁰ “To some extent all of our canonical gospels are shaped so as to dispel a false image of the Savior and to provide a true one to follow,” C.H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 98; cf. also his *Literary Patterns*, 114–119, and *Luke and the Gnostics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) 15. The approach is rampant in the study of Mark. Cf. T. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 56; W. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 144–147; E. Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 107ff.

²¹ Cf. W.A. Meeks, “Hypomnēmata from an Untamed Skeptic: A Response to George Kennedy,” *The Relationships Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. W.O. Walker (Trinity U. Press, 1978) 162–163; Hickling, “A Problem of Method,” 343.

²² Despite the genuine contribution made by Talbert’s *What is a Gospel?*, the case for the polemic function of “Type B” biographies has not convincingly been made. Talbert notes (94–95), “Other lives aim to dispel a false image of the teacher and to provide a true

criticisms have not had much impact, and the assumptions I have stated appear to be gaining ever more dominance in redactional studies, even though their validity has not been tested by anything more rigorous than popularity. The danger posed by this methodological hegemony is real. By limiting the possible relations between author and text, text and audience, the mirror method not only gives off implausible historical refractions, but can lead to the distortion of those texts which form the only starting place and inevitable homing of our shared investigation.

The method has had some success in the study of John's Gospel. But there, we have the evidence given by the three letters, which points to a divided community. And in the letters, the terminology of the Gospel is placed in the context of an ecclesiological and theological dispute.²³ The Gospel also has observable redactional seams which open to reveal, within the narrative, the community concerns. The corpus as a whole, therefore, and the literary structure of the document, give some justification for reading elements of the Gospel as reflections of internecine quarrels within Johannine Christianity. Whether or not an obsessive preoccupation with these factors has led to an enrichment of our understanding of John's Gospel as a whole, I leave to you.

But it is essential to stress that in the Synoptics, we have no such supporting evidence for intra-communitarian disputes, and no controls to the fantasies of heresy-hunting. Consider, if you will, the logical steps necessary to justify the leap from the "Scribes" of Mark's narrative to the Jacobean party of the Jerusalem church.²⁴ Or those required to identify the

model to follow . . . in these lives material that had been used to discredit a teacher was often times taken up and neutralized by its inclusion in a new whole." But the slanders against Apollonius and Epicurus (to which Talbert alludes) are explicitly stated as such; they are not "neutralized" without being identified (cf. Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* I, 2; I, 13; IV, 18; IV, 26; IV, 43-44; V, 33, 37, 39; VII, 4, 17; and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* X, 4-8. Furthermore, it is one thing to rebut slanders from without; it is another to polemicize against heterodox tendencies *within* a school by means of such materials. The latter is what Talbert is suggesting, but I do not find evidence for this function in the Hellenistic biographies.

²³ Among others, cf. W.A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972) 44-72; J.L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979); R.E. Brown, "'Other Sheep not of this Fold': The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the Late First Century," *JBL* 97 (1978) 5-22, and *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). For another, non-theological reading of the situation in III John, cf. A.J. Malherbe, "The Inhospitality of Diotrephes," *God's Christ and His People*, ed. J. Jervell and W.A. Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 222-232.

²⁴ E. Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark*, 120-137.

“Pharisees” of Luke’s narrative as “antinomians” within the Lukan church.²⁵ Reading everything in the Gospel narratives as immediately addressed to a contemporary crisis reduces them to the level of cryptograms, and the evangelists to the level of tractarians.

An objection may be raised here. Isn’t it axiomatic for New Testament scholarship that a document’s meaning is determined by its purpose, and for that purpose to be real it must be seen within a concrete life-setting?²⁶ Doesn’t every writing (ancient or modern) emerge from and address itself to a specific situation? Without being grounded in a “life-setting,” don’t the documents of the New Testament become floating fragments, motivationless and purposeless productions of whose meaning we cannot be certain?

The objection touches on the heart of the matter. It raises the difficult issue of how texts are to be read. I have no intention of getting into those murky waters. But even when we grant the legitimacy of the classical historical-critical method as such, which method uses the documents of the New Testament as sources for the depiction of primitive Christianity, logic must be observed. Certainly if, from other sources, a concrete life-setting for a document is available, we would do wrong to neglect it. But even in such a case, we could not facily equate life-setting, occasion, motivation, purpose and meaning. These aspects of authorship are interrelated, to be sure; but they are not identical, nor do they flow automatically from one to the other. The possibilities are multiple.²⁷ With regard to the Gospels, then, to agree that they emerge from a life-setting does not allow us to conclude that the life-setting is determinative of the document’s meaning, either as a whole or in its parts. If this is so, neither can we move directly from the concerns of the text to its life-setting, or the attitudes of its readers. Without the clear and unequivocal indication by the author in his text, we cannot establish the connection between the presence of a

²⁵ R.J. Karris, “The Lukan Sitz-im-Leben: Methodology and Prospects,” *1976 SBL Seminar Papers* ed. G. MacRae (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976) 226.

²⁶ R.J. Karris, “Missionary Communities,” 96.

²⁷ Clearly, there are diverse possibilities at each level, even when there is a specific life-setting and occasion. Take, for example, the inaugural speech of A. Bartlett Giamatti to the Yale community in 1978. Knowing the setting and the situation does not tell us what his motivations were for giving the speech, or the purposes he wished to achieve. Even though his talk dealt at length with the “state of the university,” moreover, the meaning of the speech derived less from some objective base of data on this, than from his own vision of the nature and task of a university in any time and place.

particular motif and the stance of the readers. At the most, we can learn something about the author's perception of his readers' situation.

The Search for the Lukan Community

If the quest for the Pauline community is difficult, and that for the communities behind the Synoptics suspect, how realistic are our expectations of finding the profile of a community in a document like Luke-Acts, whose author we do not know, which is addressed to an individual, not a church, and in which, of all the documents of the New Testament, there are the clearest marks of literary intention and artifice? If we take the Gospel prologue seriously as an indication of publication,²⁸ we have a writing which proclaims its presentation to a larger world than that defined by a particular community's concerns. If we choose not to take this aspect of the prologue seriously, how far are we able to go beyond the certainty that the audience read Greek, very probably was already Christian, and possibly knew something about the scriptures? What sort of connection are we assuming between the author of Luke-Acts and a specific, sociologically definable grouping? With what justification do we see his text as mirroring that group's situation? It comes down again to attaching the presence of a theme to the needs of a hypothetical community.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose there was such a community, and the author had as one of his purposes the instruction of this community in the demands of discipleship. It need not be shown again that prayer was an important aspect of discipleship for Luke.²⁹ But from what Luke says about prayer, what can we learn about his readers' appreciation of it? Are we to suppose that Luke stresses praying because his community does not pray (or that some in the community are not praying)? Or, are we to conclude that people are praying wrongly, and he wishes to correct an incipient doxological heresy by providing proper models of prayer? How specific should we get? By using a special title in two of his prayers,³⁰ is Luke intending to counter a theological tendency manifested

²⁸ H.J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927) 194–204, and "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," *The Beginnings of Christianity* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1922) II, 490; H. Von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972) 123–124; N.A. Dahl, "The Purpose of Luke-Acts," *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 87.

²⁹ Cf. A. Trites, "The Prayer Motif in Luke-Acts," *Perspectives* 168–186.

³⁰ Δεσπότης in Luke 2:29 and Acts 4:24.

by the use of other divine titles in prayer?³¹ But there are still other possibilities. There may be no problem with prayer at all. Perhaps Luke emphasizes prayer as a way of congratulating his community on its practice, or as a way of showing that its practice was rooted in the example of Jesus and the first disciples.³²

I may be accused of engaging in parody. But the importance of teasing out the logical possibilities in a neutral case is to stress the essential point. Even if, by redactional analysis, we are able to arrive at one or the other of these possibilities, we are still only in contact with Luke's perception of the community's needs, not the situation of the community as such.³³ Certainly, if it were not for the popularity of the assumptions governing so much redaction-criticism, a fair reading of the text would lead us to conclude that the motif of prayer is important in Luke-Acts because of (a) the strength of the tradition concerning Jesus' own prayer, (b) the tradition of prayer among Christians, and (c) Luke's appreciation of its importance. In any case, the interpreter's first task is to take into account everything Luke has to say about prayer, not only by way of command, but also by way of modeling in the narrative, before suggesting that some tendency is being countered.³⁴

The same logical possibilities are present for other themes in Luke-Acts, such as missionary images, almsgiving, and hospitality. Even if we grant that Luke's purpose was specifically to instruct a particular community concerning these ideals, we cannot automatically conclude that the practices or ideals being inculcated were either lacking or misunderstood within that community.³⁵

But what is there about the text of Luke-Acts which leads us to think that such a particular, problem-centered instruction was the purpose for

³¹ The vagaries of Christological critique by title can be illustrated for Luke 24:21 by J. Wanke, *Die Emmauserzaehlung* (Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1973) 61 and 64, and for Luke 7:13 by H. Shuermann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969) 403.

³² Trites, 179.

³³ This is true as well, of course, for the Pauline letters; cf. Hickling, "II Corinthians" 285.

³⁴ As Trites does, 179–184.

³⁵ The same caution should obtain with regard to materials as pervasive as those dealing with persecution. Karris, "Missionary Communities," 84, says that Luke's readers were undergoing "persecution, harassment and distress," and seeks to find what might have come from Jews and what from Gentiles. He concludes that Luke "has given diverse answers to his persecuted Christian reader," (87). The problem here is that the motif of tribulations is at once so widespread in the New Testament writings, so stereotyped, and so attached to apocalyptic expressions, that it is very difficult to derive specific information about the kind of sufferings a particular community might be undergoing.

writing in the first place?³⁶ To say that the evangelists were teachers of the Church is one thing. To say that everything included in the Gospels was aimed at the problems of any particular community is something else altogether, and goes beyond the evidence. Quite apart from the influence of the tradition, and Luke's interest in writing a historical account,³⁷ there is every reason to believe that the composition of Luke's work was motivated above all by the demands of his overall literary and theological aims.³⁸

The lesson learned from Romans should be applied to Luke-Acts. The more generalized and pervasive a motif, the less likely it is to be attached to a specific community stimulus, and this is particularly the case when it can be shown that a passage or motif serves a literary function. This is the biggest hurdle placed between the text of Luke-Acts and the discovery of a community. In Luke-Acts we should recognize that: (a) the literary structure as a whole has meaning; that is, there is some correspondence between the author's intentions and the literary vehicle employed; (b) individual elements within this structure have as their *primary* meaning a literary function (so that to treat them in isolation from this setting can distort the meaning of the text as surely as lifting Rom 1:30–31 out of context); and (c) composition can be motivated as much by aesthetic or theological aims as by instructional or polemical ones.³⁹

Given a fairly intricate and intelligible literary structure which, taken as a whole, conveys a coherent message, our *first* assumption with regard to individual parts within that structure should not be that they point to a specific community problem, but that they are in service to the larger

³⁶ Cf. the typically sane remarks of Dahl in "The Purpose of Luke-Acts," 93.

³⁷ Cf. W.C. van Unnik, "Once More St. Luke's Prologue," *Essays on the Gospel of Luke and Acts* (Neotestamentica 7; The New Testament Society of South Africa, 1973), 19.

³⁸ The assessment of P. Schubert, "The Structure and Significance of Luke 24," *Neutestamentliche Studien fuer Rudolf Bultmann* (Berlin: A. Toepelmann, 1954), 185, stands firm: "Luke is a littérateur of considerable skill and technique. His literary methods serve his theology as his theology serves them."

³⁹ The literary function of Lukan materials has been well recognized by Talbert, *Literary Function* 120, 136, and *What is a Gospel?*, 11. I have two criticisms of his application. In my judgment, he tends to identify the unique in Luke's redaction with the important (cf. *Literary Patterns* 112–118); and he moves too quickly from the purported architectonic (literary) function to the theological (polemic) function, via the suggested function of certain biographies, *ibid.*, 135.

literary goal of the author.⁴⁰ To put it simply, exegesis cannot forget the importance of literary context for the determination of meaning.⁴¹

By stressing the primacy of literary function, however, I am by no means sounding the call for a new methodology, or for the importation of alien literary critical methods to save the day. I simply want to remind myself and you of the elementary rules of our discipline, one of which demands the careful analysis both of structure and of content. Some studies which call themselves literary tend to move exclusively at the level of structure; some redactional studies exclusively at the level of content.⁴² Both extremes point to a deficient appreciation of *narrative* as the vehicle of theological expression.⁴³

Now, what is the literary context of Luke-Acts? Obviously, the two volumes taken together. Everyone agrees with this in principle, but the exegetical implications are not always appreciated. There are at least two important consequences of taking Luke-Acts as a literary unit. First, the redaction of Luke's Gospel vis-à-vis Mark or Matthew is not the sole or even the most important indicator of Luke's intentions. In Acts, Luke provides the first and authoritative interpretation of *his* Gospel story.⁴⁴ Whatever the legitimacy of moving from the narratives of Mark or Matthew to their respective communities, the same cannot be done in the case of Luke without considering all of his story. Not only does the further development of some motifs in Acts illuminate aspects of the third Gospel which are not obvious from synoptic comparison,⁴⁵ but the cessation or change of themes in Acts should caution against taking a synoptic

⁴⁰ It is striking, for example, that Luke's parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11–27) is usually interpreted as a response to eschatological or messianic expectations, and rarely if ever seen as interpreting the narrative of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Cf. L.T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977) 168–170.

⁴¹ Cf. Talbert, *What is a Gospel?*, 11.

⁴² For the first, cf., e.g., R. Morgenthaler, *Die lukanische Geschichtsschreibung als Zeugnis* 2 vols. (Zuerich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1949) and M.D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts* (London: SPCK, 1964); for the second, cf., e.g., E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), and I.H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970).

⁴³ Cf. H. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1974).

⁴⁴ Here, I strongly disagree with the methodological preference of Talbert, *Literary Patterns* 121, n. 10, concerning the determination of Lukan Christology, and agree with G.W.H. Lampe, "The Lucan Portrait of Christ," *NTS* 2 (1956) 160–175. Cf. *Literary Function of Possessions*, 70–78.

⁴⁵ E.g., the allusion to Deut 18:5f. in Luke 9:35 is made certain by the strength of the Mosaic imagery in Acts 3 and 7. Cf. F. Gils, *Jésus Prophète d'après les Evangiles Synoptiques* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1957) 36.

comparison as definitive.⁴⁶ Second, the temptation to read the Gospels as cryptograms directed to the contemporaries of the evangelist is countered in Luke by the plain fact that the story of the first disciples continues in Acts, not only with elements of continuity, but also of discontinuity. In Luke's writing, the past is really past. The story of Jesus and his first followers is significant for Luke's readers, but not as a direct mirror of their situation.⁴⁷

What are some of the features of Luke-Acts as a literary work which should be attended to? First, that Luke-Acts taken as a whole, is a story.⁴⁸ It has a beginning and an end, and whatever the elements of circularity, the story is linear; things change and develop. The exegetical importance of this simple observation cannot be overemphasized. If this is a story, the reader must attend to the *place* in the story a passage occurs. Does a pericope or thematic statement serve a function which is appropriate here and only here in the story? Second, the story of Luke-Acts is carried by the main characters, who are uniformly presented by literary stereotyping, which is itself of first importance for grasping their significance. Third, the storyline has a consistent pattern of acceptance and rejection; ignoring the placement of passages within this pattern can lead to misreading. Fourth, not only is Luke a theologian of the promise-fulfillment school; he makes fulfillment of prophecy a literary mechanism. The context of a pericope in Luke-Acts is established not only by what happens immediately before and after, but as well by the way a whole series of passages flow from and illuminate thematic (prophetic) statements within the narrative.

In another place, I tried to deal with the language about possessions within Luke-Acts, by placing it within the literary structure as I construe

⁴⁶ E.g., the perplexing Lukan view of the Pharisees. The recent article by J.H. Ziesler, "Luke and the Pharisees," *NTS* 25 (1979) 146–157, is helpful, but tends to soften the negative picture of the Pharisees in the Gospel, in favor of Acts' more positive shading.

⁴⁷ Although certainly not agreeing with Conzelmann's artificial epochal breakdown, nor with his view that the writing was stimulated by the issue of the delay of the parousia, I do agree with him that Luke "recognizes the uniqueness of the events of that time, and his picture of the early church is not meant to harmonize with the present, but stands in contrast. The characteristic summary statements about the life of the early community do not reflect present conditions, neither do they represent an ideal for the present," *Theology of St. Luke* (London: Farber and Farber, 1960) 14–15. On the other hand, Talbert's suggestion that Acts 20:29–30 points to a conviction of the author that his generation "participates in post-apostolic decadence," goes too far, especially when used as a lens for detecting a Christological heresy combatted by the evangelist. Cf. *Literary Patterns*, 102, 119.

⁴⁸ For this and the following points, cf. *Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, 9–126.

it. Whether or not my thesis regarding the symbolic function of possessions language within the story of the Prophet and the People is correct in every detail (and it would be surprising if it were), I maintain this *kind* of analysis is necessary before speaking of the economic state of Luke's community, or its use of possessions. It is necessary to notice, for example, *where* Luke talks about possessions, and in what connection.⁴⁹ Not all talk about possessions is really *about* possessions.⁵⁰ Still less is everything said about possessions intended to stand as a mandate to the Church.⁵¹ Finally, there is no indication that the ideals concerning the use of possessions form some sort of subtle polemic against members of Luke's community.

The task of discovering the literary function of the diverse elements in Luke-Acts does not by itself preclude the possibility of ultimately finding out something about Luke's readers. But it obviously makes the enterprise more arduous. On the other hand, any search for the life-setting of this

⁴⁹ Typically, Karris, "The Lukan sitz-im-Leben," 116, ignores the differences between Acts 2:41–47 and 4:32–37. There are significant differences in the two accounts, which raise exegetical questions concerning the function of each passage in its context. Cf. *Literary Function of Possessions*, 9–12.

⁵⁰ The thematic statements concerning the rich and poor in Luke 4:18; 6:20, 24; 7:22, 14:7–24 and their parabolic expression in 16:19–31 do not really have to do with the *use* of possessions, but serve a twofold literary and theological function: (a) signaling the mission of the prophetic Messiah, and (b) expressing the acceptance of the outcast and the rejection of the powerful. Cf. J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes III, Les Évangélistes* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1973) 47–64, and *Literary Function*, 132–144. It should also be noted that passages which do not at first sight appear to be about the use of possessions nevertheless are important for Luke's understanding of the power of possessions, e.g. Luke 15:11–32, 11:21–22; 9:10–17; 12:41–48; 19:11–27; 17:22–33.

⁵¹ The inconsistency of Luke's teaching about possessions, when taken at the level of mandate, has led to such attempts at reconciliation as H. Flender's *St. Luke, Theologian of Redemptive History* (London: SPCK, 1970) 75–78, and S. Brown's *Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 100–105, and H.J. Degenhardt's *Lukas Evangelist der Armen* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1965) 41, 185. Failure to take seriously the inconsistency mars Karris's "Lukan Sitz-im-Leben." Let us *ex hypothesi*, grant that Luke wanted to present the ideal way for community leaders to handle possessions. We not only have the instructions of 9:3–4 and 10:4–7 revoked by 22:35–36; we also see members of the 12 standing at the head of the community of goods in Acts 4:32ff, and handing over this duty to Hellenistic missionaries in 6:1ff; then we see that Paul worked for a living (18:3, 20:34), travelled with money (21:24, 24:36, 28:30), and recommended to the Ephesian Elders that they too work for the support of others as he had done (20:35). Does Luke want the preachers of Good News (the element which unites all these figures) to be destitute itinerants, self-sufficient laborers, supporters of others, or administrators of the community's wealth? The lack of clear mandate makes us question whether Luke is interested in the mandate, and forces us to consider his language about possessions at another level.

document which does not adequately take into account the context and function of passages and themes is likely to be arbitrary and superficial.⁵²

The understanding of Luke's purpose which seems to do most justice to the literary form of his work as well as his expressed intention, is that he intended to write the continuation of the biblical story.⁵³ Certainly, the story he tells revolves, around the acceptance and rejection of God's prophetic Christ by Israel, and the inclusion of the Gentiles among the "People for His name."⁵⁴ Although the characterization of Luke-Acts as a Hellenistic biography is a step in the right direction, it should be noted that this is a story in which the fate of the people is as significant as the fate of the heroes.⁵⁵ Luke's readers probably were Gentile (or at least predominantly so). But it is not likely that some heretical tendency among these Gentile believers stimulated the writing of this work. The story is so vast and inclusive, the elements it contains so diverse, it seems more likely that it emerged from the author's contemplation of the theological mystery of God's faithfulness to His people. The problem, if you will, is one of theodicy. Within this understanding, Luke-Acts can be seen to function as a kind of aetiological myth for the Gentile Christian Church, in which Luke conveys to his readers how the People of God has come to be what it now is.

⁵² Precisely the sort of genre studies of Talbert, and the insights offered by works like E. Pluemacher's *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972) are valuable in helping define the intellectual milieu of Luke's writing. It is possible, furthermore, to make at least plausible suggestions concerning the social milieu from these analyses of literary level. Cf. Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 29–59. But this is not the same as doing a mirror reading. Nor does it locate a "community" as such.

⁵³ N.A. Dahl, "The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. Keck and J. Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) 152–153, and "The Purpose of Luke-Acts," 88.

⁵⁴ N.A. Dahl, " 'A People for His Name' (Acts 15:14)," *NTS* 4 (1957) 324–326; cf. also *Literary Function of Possessions*, 123, n. 2.

⁵⁵ This aspect of Luke's story has not adequately been considered by Talbert. If Luke's writing can be considered as a Hellenistic biography, it can also be considered as the work of a "minor Hellenistic historian" (Dahl, "Purpose," 88), who tells not only of the founder and his successors, but also of the formation of God's People.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF LUKE-ACTS

Jack Dean Kingsbury's name is rightly associated with the effort to connect Christology to literary analysis of the Gospels.¹ This modest chapter seeks to sort through some of the important questions that need to be asked if one seeks the Christology of Luke-Acts. In other places I have advanced some of my ideas on the subject, arguing in particular for the important in Luke's presentation of Jesus as prophet.² But I have not before this had the opportunity to consider other dimensions of Christology in Luke-Acts. The way to that broader consideration can be prepared by answering some basic questions.

What is the Topic?

The obvious first question is by no means the easiest: What is it we seek when we inquire into a composition's "Christology"? Do we mean to discover the manner in which the writing demonstrates that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah? This has its own complications, including the diverse messianic expectations within Judaism of the first century against which our writing needs to be measured. But the task itself is relatively straightforward. We can treat the composition as a species of apologetics over against Judaism: Here are the messianic job qualifications; here is how Jesus meets them. Deciding the topic in this fashion also determines the choice of materials and methods. The use of messianic titles, for example, would appear of obvious importance, as would statements describing

¹ Counting only his books, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); *Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981); *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); *Matthew*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989); *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

² See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 39 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977); *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina 3 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991); *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992).

Jesus' functions. These are compared to diverse messianic images in Judaism.³ In the case of Luke-Acts, we would give our attention to titles such as "Son of man" and "Christ" and "prophet" and "son of David." Since all are used in considerable profusion, we might find ourselves trying to determine which was most important—to our author as well as to Jews of the first century—and might even conclude that our author was correcting messianic misperceptions by the use of such titles. Thus, in Luke 24:19–26, we might think Luke had such a strategy in mind when the disciples call Jesus a prophet and Jesus responds by referring to himself as Messiah.⁴

We might also come at the question of Christology from quite a different angle, asking now not how Luke's Jesus fits the categories of Jewish expectation but how Luke's presentation of Jesus fits within the belief structure of earliest Christianity. Thus, "Christian Christology"—to employ an awkward phrase—is the topic within which Luke is studied. From this perspective, it might be asked whether Luke's presentation of Jesus is more "human" or more "divine," using the categories of a developed Christian theology. On one side, perhaps his presentation of the resurrection in the speeches of Acts suggests an "adoptionistic" Christology;⁵ on another side, perhaps his infancy account moves in the direction of a high, "incarnational" Christology.⁶

Each of the foregoing approaches works within a framework outside the text of Luke-Acts and suffers from three fairly obvious limitations. First, asking questions from one perspective excludes those from another; they are two distinct frames of reference. Second, we do not know enough about either of the two frames to make the pursuit finally satisfying. Third, reading Luke-Acts only with reference to the world outside the composition leads to the neglect of the world constructed by the composition.

A more adequate way of defining the topic, therefore, is in terms of the presentation of Jesus in the literary composition we call Luke-Acts. This approach cannot entirely avoid questions pertinent to the other two definitions of the topic, for the simple reason that Luke's words are contextualized by the symbolic world of Torah (and all the literature generated

³ As classically demonstrated by O. Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. S.C. Guthrie and C.A.M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

⁴ See J. Wanke, *Die Emmauserzaehlung*, Erfurter Theologische Studien 31 (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1973), 61, 64.

⁵ As with J.A.T. Robinson, "The Most Primitive Christology of All?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1956): 177–89.

⁶ As in R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1979), 29–32, 311–15.

by Torah in first-century Judaism) as well as by the literature of nascent Christianity. But the focus here stays on what Luke's composition itself gives us. We seek to discover what this composition has constructed as Χριστός (messiah) or as προφήτης (prophet), rather than make appeal to what those terms necessarily must have meant to Jews or Christians in that world. By asking about the presentation of Jesus within the composition, furthermore, our investigation can include a range of evidence that neither of the other approaches allows, such as that provided by the characterization of Jesus and those with whom he interacts within the narrative.

What is the Literary Composition?

If our analysis of Luke's Christology is bounded by his literary composition rather than by the symbols and convictions of Judaism and the early church respectively, then we must be clear on exactly what our sense of that composition is. Decisions at this stage can be decisive. If, for example, we follow Hans Conzelmann in reading Luke apart from Acts and apart from the Lukan infancy accounts, we come up with a very different portrait than if those elements are included.⁷ Likewise if we focus, as C.F.D. Moule did, only on the Christology of Acts, with no real reference to the Gospel except for points of contrast, our results are again affected by this preliminary literary decision.⁸

The decision to read Luke-Acts as a literary and thematic unity is one that has, until recently, won wide general approbation but less systematic application.⁹ Remarkably few narrative studies of both volumes read as a single literary project have been undertaken by one scholar.¹⁰ Yet this is the sort of reading that promises the greatest yield. The recent question

⁷ H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 24, 48–49, 75, 172, 188; for the decisive argument against Conzelmann on this point, see P. Minear, "Luke's Use of the Birth Stories," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. Keck and J.L. Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 111–30.

⁸ C.F.D. Moule, "The Christology of Acts," in Keck and Martyn, eds. *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 159–85.

⁹ The case was made first and most convincingly by H.J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927).

¹⁰ My commentaries in the *Sacra Pagina* series (see note 2, above) are as far as I know, still the only major commentary on both volumes written by the same scholar in the same series. Not in the form of a commentary but of major importance is R.C. Tannehill. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986 and 1990).

put to the unity of Luke-Acts on the basis of generic difference is, in my view, mistaken.¹¹ The evidence that Luke has constructed a single composition in two volumes is overwhelming at every level, and if this position is seriously to be refuted, then the hypothesis of literary unity needs to be challenged in detail at each of these levels.

The decision to read Luke-Acts as a literary unity is not based on a theoretical conviction concerning “canonical criticism,” for the logic of a canonical criticism actually moves in the other direction: The early separation of the Gospel and Acts in the process of canonization would argue for their separate treatment.¹² Luke-Acts is simply a case in which the premise of narrative criticism that a narrative in its finished form ought to be treated as a coherent and intelligible whole unless the evidence forces an opposite conclusion is magnificently rewarded by the results.

Another way of asking the question “What is the composition?” is by inquiring specifically into literary genre. Although one part of Luke’s story or another might be read as a novel¹³ or as a biography,¹⁴ it seems correct to conclude as a whole that he sets out to write some sort of historical composition, and that the sort of history he does is best compared to Greco-Roman and Jewish histories of the apologetic sort.¹⁵ Like most such histories, Luke’s concern was less to persuade outsiders than to reassure insiders. Although elements in his narrative can support the suggestion that he is writing a defense of the Christian movement over against Rome—or even for Rome over against apocalyptically minded Christians—and though other elements can support his writing in defense of Paul with an eye either toward Roman authorities or toward a theologically influential Jewish segment within the Christian movement, the narrative makes the most sense when read as an apologia for God’s ways in history.¹⁶

¹¹ See M.C. Parsons and R.I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

¹² See Parsons and Pervo, *Rethinking*, 8–13; and B.S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 218–40.

¹³ See R.I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

¹⁴ D.L. Brown and J.L. Wentling, “The Conventions of Classical Biography and the Genre of Luke-Acts: A Preliminary Study,” in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature*, ed. C.H. Talbert (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

¹⁵ See especially G.E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography*, *Novum Testamentum Supplements* 64 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992); and J.T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*, *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series* 76 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ For fuller discussion, see Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 9–10.

Is Christology the Main Topic?

It may seem odd to ask whether the presentation of Jesus is really the most important thing going on in a Gospel, but the answer is not as obvious as we might at first think. Each Gospel's way of presenting Jesus ought to be evaluated within the context of that composition's discernible aims and concerns.

That Jesus is a central character in Luke-Acts is clear enough, although the way he continues to function as a character in the book of Acts requires some study. But is Jesus the point of Luke-Acts in the way he is the point of the fourth Gospel, let us say, or the Gospel of Mark? In the fourth Gospel, everything focuses on Jesus as the revealer of the Father. Mark likewise directs the reader's attention above all to the drama of Jesus and his disciples. Luke-Acts—in this respect resembling Matthew—opens the narrative to wider concerns. The way in which the good news reaches the Gentile world and the consequences of this extension for historical Israel form the central narrative theme of Luke-Acts.¹⁷ And within that theme, the issue of God's fidelity to Israel and to the promises God made to Israel is critical. Luke is writing an apologia for God.¹⁸

What Luke has to say about Jesus, in other words, must be placed within his overarching literary and religious purposes. We can legitimately expect that Luke's presentation of Jesus will serve those larger purposes, and we can test to see if in fact it does.

How Does the Narrative Mean?

Literary theory has exposed how complex reading is. I will not enter that hall of mirrors but will only make a couple of observations of rudimentary and fairly obvious significance in reading a narrative with the question "What is the presentation of Jesus in this narrative?" The first and most obvious assumption behind this question is that the ancient author had control of the materials deployed in the story. Even if, as in the case of Luke-Acts, some earlier sources are used, the working premise must

¹⁷ See S.G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); J. Dupont, "The Salvation of the Gentiles and the Theological Significance of Acts," in *The Salvation of the Gentiles* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 11–33.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 9–10.

be that the author approved those materials included without change and made alterations to other materials deliberately. This is a powerful assumption, and a necessary one for the task to be undertaken at all. If we do not understand the shaping, we conclude that the author made sense but we cannot find it. Once we assume that an author did not have control over the materials and was simply handing over traditions in a haphazard or “clumsy construction,”¹⁹ then it is senseless to ask about the consistency of a composition on any point at all. In the case of Luke-Acts, it is reasonable to suppose, furthermore, that Luke had proportionately greater freedom in the composition of the story in Acts than in that in his Gospel. We may suspect that he used sources for Acts, but we have not been able to determine them;²⁰ it is most probable that he was, in any case, the first to tell the story as we find it in Acts. Even if he was using earlier traditions, in other words, the shaping was his. For the Gospel, in contrast, we know that he used Mark as well as the source material designated as Q. In the Gospel portion of the story, we are able to observe the range of Luke’s creativity both in his use of Mark and by comparison with Matthew’s redaction of their shared materials. The implication of Luke’s being the first to continue the story into another complete volume and of having a correspondingly greater compositional freedom is that we should consider Acts as Luke’s own interpretation of the first part of his story. What he has to say about Jesus in the Gospel looks forward to Acts, and what he has to say about Jesus in Acts looks back to the Gospel.²¹

The next assumption is that narrative expresses meaning through the form of the story itself; a narrative is not simply a package containing propositions or a setting for the presentation of examples but, as Aristotle already recognized (*Poetics* 6.19–22), through the interplay of ἥθος (character) and μῦθος (plot) expresses διανοία (theme, or meaning).²² If this is so, then every element of a narrative is significant for understanding every other element: Just as the theme is expressed through characters and plot, so does characterization have plot implications and so does plotting serve the shaping of characters.

¹⁹ See J. Meagher, *Clumsy Construction in Mark’s Gospel: A Critique of Form and Redaktionsgeschichte* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979).

²⁰ Still unsurpassed on this point is J. Dupont, *The Sources of the Acts* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964).

²¹ Johnson, *Literary Function*, 13–28.

²² See L.T. Johnson, “Luke-Acts,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4:405.

In narratives written for purposes other than sheer entertainment, furthermore—as its prologue shows Luke-Acts manifestly was—narrative can legitimately be read as a form of rhetoric: The way the story is told expresses an argument.²³ In the case of Luke, the argument concerns God's fidelity to God's promises and is intended to secure ἀσφάλεια (assurance) in the readers (Luke 1:1–4). The prologue further indicates that the narrative argument involves the order in which the story is told. It is because the events are recounted καθεξῆς (in order) that Theophilus can be expected to have ἀσφάλεια (see Acts 11:4). The reader can therefore expect more than a normal importance to the sequence in Luke-Acts. Where something occurs in the story is as important as what occurs. The literary shaping of the story, in short, serves the religious purposes of the composition.²⁴

How is Character Determined?

Speaking about the presentation of Jesus in Luke-Acts implies that the focus of reading is the determination of the character within the story who is named Jesus, a character constructed in the act of reading by means of the textual clues provided by the narrative and the ways in which these are processed by the reader.²⁵ Among textual clues are those modes of “telling” that directly characterize: what a character says about himself, what other characters say about him, and what the narrator says about him. The various titles and functions claimed by Jesus or ascribed to Jesus by others are obviously of considerable importance. Equally important are the modes of “showing” that are forms of indirect identification, such as the use of language echoing biblical stories in the construction of scenes involving Jesus, as well as how language is used to suggest lines of resemblance or continuity between other characters and Jesus.

The more rounded and complex a character within a narrative, the more difficult it is to reduce its presentation to a simple formula. The

²³ See R.J. Dillon, “Previewing Luke's Program from his Prologue,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 205–27.

²⁴ See W.S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

²⁵ For the construction of character in Luke-Acts, see J.A. Darr, *On Character-Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); and W.H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 147 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

best advice is to “learn the character by reading through the narrative.” Analysis can, however, identify salient features that help distinguish or determine the shape of a specific character. The more an analysis depends on the convergence of multiple lines of evidence, the more adequate it will be. A statement about Jesus in Luke-Acts that relied solely on the use of titles or that ignored what was said about Jesus in the speeches of Acts, for example, must on that very basis be considered deficient. The more different kinds of evidence from different kinds of discourse and from different angles of vision converge, the more likely it is that a characterization is worth considering.

The Presentation of Jesus as a Prophet

Analysis of the presentation of Jesus as a prophet²⁶ in Luke’s character-construction best begins with the narrative of Acts as the freer and fuller development of themes anticipated in the Gospel. It begins with attention to how Luke portrays Jesus’ followers as prophets. The Holy Spirit actively intervenes throughout Acts (8:29, 39; 10:19; 11:15; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 20:23), and Luke shows five separate outpourings of the Spirit (2:1–4; 4:28–31; 8:15–17; 10:44; 19:6) on believers. But Luke’s most important characters—those who fundamentally advance the plot (Peter, John, Philip, Stephen, Barnabas, and Paul)—are “people of the Spirit” in a special way. They are not designated as *prophets*, for that term is reserved for relatively minor players within the way (11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10). Instead, Luke describes these protagonists with language that clearly identifies them as prophets. Each is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:8; 5:32; 6:3; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9). Each is “bold” in proclamation (4:13; 13:46; 28:31) of “the good news” (5:42; 8:4, 12, 25, 40; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7; 15:35) or the “word of God” (4:29; 8:14; 13:5). Each is a “witness” (2:32; 10:41; 13:31; 22:20) who works “signs and wonders” (4:30; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12) among the “people” (λαός), that is, the Jewish population

²⁶ In addition to Johnson, *Literary Function*, 38–126, see, for the profile of the prophet, P. Schubert, “The Structure and Significance of Luke 24,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 21 (Berlin: A. Topelmann, 1954), 165–86; J. Dupont, *Les Beatitudes*, vol. 3: *Les Evangelistes* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1973); P. Minear, *To Heal and to Reveal: The Prophetic Vocation according to Luke* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976); D. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); R. Dillon, *From Eyewitnesses to Ministers of the Word*, *Analecta biblica* 82 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1978); D. Moessner, “Luke 9:1–50: Luke’s Preview of the Journey of the Prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 575–605.

considered as the people of God (3:12; 4:1; 6:8; 13:15). In the symbolic world of Torah, this composite of characteristics belongs unmistakably to the prophet.

Luke's characterization of the apostles in Acts connects them explicitly to Moses and to Jesus. By having Peter amend the Joel citation with which he begins his Pentecost sermon, Luke shows his readers that the outpouring of the Spirit is eschatological ("in the last days"), is explicitly prophetic (he adds "they shall prophesy" in 2:18), and works "signs" and "portents" (wonders) (2:19). This last touch establishes a clear allusion to the prophet Moses, with whom the tag "signs and wonders" is associated in the LXX (Ps. 77:11–12, 32, 43) and above all in Deuteronomy 34:10–12: "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses . . . for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to do." When Peter then identifies Jesus as "a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you" (2:22–24), the reader naturally makes the connection between Jesus, Moses, and the apostles, especially since Luke consistently emphasizes that the power active in the words and works of his followers is precisely the Spirit of Jesus (2:33; 3:13; 4:10; 13:30–33). The link is forged most explicitly when Luke has Stephen—himself portrayed as a prophet—speak of Moses' working "wonders and signs" in the wilderness after his empowerment by God (7:36). The apostles are therefore portrayed as prophets like Jesus, and Jesus is portrayed as a prophet like Moses. But this is not a simple linear succession. Moses was "raised up" by God as a prophet only in the sense that God chose him. Jesus, by contrast, is the prophet whom God "raised up" in resurrection as the source of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, and the apostles are dependent on that Spirit of Jesus for their prophetic activity. The superiority of Jesus to Moses is intimated in 3:22 and above all in Stephen's speech, which declares:

It was this Moses, whom they rejected when they said, "Who made you a ruler and a judge?" and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, "God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up." (7:35–37)

In that part of the Stephen Speech devoted to Moses, moreover, Luke provides a narrative key to his two-volume work. The story of Moses, as Luke has Stephen tell it, has two main stages with an interlude. He is sent a first time to the people Israel but is rejected because they do not

understand that he was “visiting” them for their salvation (7:17–22). Moses must go into exile, but he encounters God and is empowered to return to his people a second time (7:30–34). Moses leads the people out of Egypt with “wonders and signs” (7:35–37), but the people reject him a second time by worshiping the golden calf. This time, the rejection of the prophet leads to their-own rejection by God, expressed by their being sent into exile (7:39–43). Thus Luke frames two visitations of the people, the first time in weakness, the second in power, and two offers of salvation to the people, the first, rejected in ignorance, leading to a second chance to hear the prophet.

The pattern of the Moses story provides the basic framework for Luke’s two-volume composition. The Gospel tells the story of God’s first sending of the prophet Jesus to “visit” the people for their “salvation” (see Luke 1:68; 7:16; 19:44), of their rejection of this salvation out of their ignorance (see Acts 3:17), and of Jesus being “raised up” out of death. Acts recounts Jesus’ establishment in power, manifested by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33–36), the sending out of the witnesses empowered by that Spirit (Luke 24:48–49; Acts 1:7–8), and the second offer of salvation to Israel in his name (4:12; 5:41). This time, however, the cost of rejecting the “prophet whom God has raised up” is being cut off from the people God is forming around the prophet himself (Acts 3:22–23).

By taking seriously the interpretive key offered by the speeches of Acts, we can appreciate more fully Luke’s portrayal of Jesus as prophet in the Gospel narrative. We see, for example, that although Luke does not use the title “prophet” with overwhelming frequency, he does employ it more vigorously than the other Gospels and in narratively strategic places.²⁷ It is a title, furthermore, that Jesus applies to himself (Luke 4:24; 13:33) and that is used with reference to him by his enemies (7:39; see also 22:64) and as a designation by both the receptive λαός (7:16; 9:8, 19) and his disciples (24:19; Acts 3:22). Even more important are the ways in which readers recognize Jesus as a prophet from how Luke shapes episodes within the narrative. Thus, the prophetic connotations are readily grasped in the prediction by Simeon that Jesus would be a “sign that will be opposed” and destined to cause “the falling and the rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34), and by the repeated insistence that, in Nazareth, Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” (see 4:1, 14) as he opened the scroll of Isaiah to read “The

²⁷ See Mark 6:4, 15; 8:28; Matt. 13:57; 16:14; 21:11, 46; John 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40, 52; 9:17. Compare Luke 4:24; 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19; 13:33–34; 24:19; Acts 3:22; 7:37.

Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me" (4:18) and then declare that this reading was fulfilled in him (4:21). But only in light of the development in Acts can the reader fully appreciate that in Luke's version of Jesus' transfiguration, Moses and Elijah not only appear with Jesus but also discuss the exodus that he will accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31), and recognize in God's command "Listen to him" (9:35) the anticipation of the citation from Deuteronomy 18:15 found in Acts 3:22 and 7:37.

The mention of Elijah at the transfiguration reminds us how complex Luke's prophetic imagery is, not least because of how the biblical figures of Elijah and Elisha in Kings were themselves modeled on the prophetic succession of Moses and Joshua. The way in which Joshua received Moses' prophetic spirit (Deut. 34:9) and Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:9–15) obviously provided Luke with a precedent in Torah for how the Spirit at work in Jesus during his ministry was even more powerfully active in his apostles after his resurrection and ascension. Not only Moses, therefore, but also Elijah and Elisha help shape Luke's portrayal of Jesus. Indeed, the first prophet in Luke's narrative is Jesus' cousin John the Baptist, whom the angel Gabriel declares will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, will turn many of the children of Israel back to their God, and "with the spirit and power of Elijah . . . will go before him [Jesus]" to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (1:15–17). John's preaching and prophetic action of baptizing for repentance follow "the word of God" coming upon "John son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (3:2), and Jesus himself acknowledges John as a "prophet . . . and more than a prophet" (7:26).²⁸

It is clear that for Luke, John is not Elijah *redivivus* any more than Jesus is Moses *redivivus*. Luke simply uses all the prophetic imagery available for the depiction of his main characters. Note how the wonders of Elijah and Elisha in Luke 4:25–27 (the raising of the widow of Zarephath's son and the healing of the Gentile soldier Naaman) are echoed by Jesus' own miracles of healing the servant of a Gentile soldier and raising the widow of Nain's son (7:1–16), a connection recognized by the crowd that cries, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" (7:16).²⁹ Elijah reappears at the transfiguration in the company of Moses (9:30). The tiny incidents in the journey narrative involving

²⁸ For Luke's distinctive rendering of John, see L.T. Johnson, "John the Baptist: Prophet of the Great Reversal," *Bible Today* 34 (1996): 295–99.

²⁹ See Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 116–26.

the threat of fire from heaven (9:54) and Jesus' saying about putting one's hand to the plow (9:62) appear to echo stories from the Elijah-Elisha cycle (see 2 Kings 1:10–12 and 1 Kings 19:20). And the most likely explanation for the presence of the “two men in dazzling clothes” at the empty tomb (Luke 24:4) and the “two men in white robes” at the ascension (Acts 1:10) is that they represent once more, at the time of Jesus' *exodos*, the prophetic figures of Moses and Elijah.³⁰ Certainly the literary signals planted by Luke himself support such a conjecture, particularly when the very construction of the ascension scene recalls the ascension of Elijah and the subsequent bestowal of the Spirit on Elisha.³¹

The characteristic actions of Jesus in the Gospel narrative also lead to perceiving him as a prophetic figure. His gestures of healing are twice connected to his prophetic mission. His inclusive table fellowship challenges the accepted piety of his opponents, climactically so in the case of Zacchaeus. His provocative acts at table serve to raise the question of his prophetic character. His entry into the city and his cleansing of the temple are intentionally symbolic acts.

No less does Jesus' speech characterize him as prophet. His parabolic discourse is designated as “the word of God.” He issues warnings of judgment and calls for conversion. And most decisively, he makes predictions. Luke carefully redacts the eschatological discourse he inherited from Mark 13. He has Jesus deliver it from within the temple precincts, and he organizes Jesus' prophecies so that they concern three discrete temporal stages. The first events concern the tribulations to be experienced by his followers. These Luke shows to have been literally fulfilled by the events he himself relates in Acts 1–8. The second events concern the destruction of the city by the Romans and the beginning of the time of the Gentiles. For Luke's first readers, these predictions—still fresh in memory—would also have been proven true. The verification of the first two sets of predictions makes Jesus' prophecies concerning the last days and the return of the Son of man all the more reliable.

These brief observations show how several different lines of evidence converge within Luke's narrative to create the image of Jesus as prophet: the explicit use of the title; stereotypical language associated with Moses; direct literary links drawn to Moses, Elijah, and Elisha; the construction of scenes based on stories involving these figures; the characteristic actions

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 161–71, 386–91.

³¹ Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 21–32.

and speeches of Jesus as recounted in the Gospel; and the two-stage structure of the entire composition, modeled by the story of Moses as found in the Stephen Speech of Acts.

These elements enable the reading of Luke's narrative as the story of the "Prophet and the People": Jesus is sent a first time to the people Israel for their salvation, but the people do not recognize the time of their visitation and reject him. He is killed but rises from the dead and is exalted at the right hand of God. He sends his Spirit on his disciples, who continue his prophetic mission among the people, offering them a second chance at salvation—that is, at being included in the restored people God is creating around the prophet Jesus. Although the leaders of the people continue to reject the message, many thousands in Jerusalem accept this second visitation. They embody within historic Israel the restored people of God, defined in terms of possession of the prophetic Spirit, so that when the message is extended to the Gentiles, as God had desired from the first, it represents not the replacement of the Jews but rather a growth of the *λαός* to include all the nations of the earth. Telling the story this way serves Luke's rhetorical purposes, showing how God proved faithful to the promises made to Abraham, and that therefore the faith of the Gentiles such as Theophilus is secure. God is not a God who fails to keep a promise or who abandons a people. Thus, the image of Jesus and the argument made by the composition reinforce each other.

Testing the Prophetic Image

I suggested above that the operative premise for investigating the Christology of Luke-Acts is that the author had considerable, though not absolute, control over his materials. Some elements in Luke's portrayal of Jesus came to him from his sources. One way of testing the adequacy of the prophetic hypothesis, then, is to ask whether and to what extent Luke's other images and themes attaching to Jesus confirm or detract from his presentation as a prophet. There is not space to do a complete account here, but I comment on three aspects of Luke's text that are not obviously part of the presentation of Jesus as prophet.

Son of Man

Luke takes over this designation from Mark and does not substantially alter its applications to Jesus as the one who has present power, who will suffer, and who will come in glory. We do notice, however, that Luke's

description of Jesus setting “his face to go to Jerusalem” in 9:51 echoes the “Son of man” logion of Ezekiel and thus accentuates the prophetic and divisive character of his path toward his suffering. Luke is also the only evangelist to use the title “Son of man” in the empty-tomb account (24:7), thereby confirming that Jesus’ prophecy concerning his resurrection had come true. Finally, Luke reports Stephen’s vision in the moment before his execution: “But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’” (Acts 7:55). The prophet Stephen thus confirms Jesus’ statement to the Sanhedrin: “But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69). In short, Luke’s use of the title “Son of man” is complementary to his presentation of Jesus as the prophet whom God has raised up.

Savior

Salvation is a fundamental theme in Luke-Acts in a manner not found in Mark and only very partially in John (see John 3:17; 4:22; 5:34; 10:9; 11:12; 12:47) and Matthew (see Matt. 1:21; 8:25). Like Matthew and Mark, Luke uses *σώζειν* for the healings of Jesus, but he amplifies the Markan theme that faith saves (see Mark 5:34; Matt. 9:22/Luke 8:48) by adding it to the accounts in 7:50; 8:12; 8:50; 17:19; and 18:42. More pertinent, Luke expands the notion of being “saved” from that of physical healing to inclusion in the people (see 9:24; 13:23; 19:10). Thus, in response to the threefold taunt at the cross challenging his capacity to save himself although he had saved others, Jesus promises the *ληστής* (thief) that he would be with Jesus that day in paradise (23:43). Jesus saves not only by healing but by including within God’s restored people.

Salvation in Luke-Acts, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, has a social meaning and is directly connected to the theme of the prophet and the people. Remember that in Stephen’s speech Moses “visited” his people a first time (Acts 7:23), but they did not understand “that God through him was rescuing them” (7:25). In the same fashion, Zechariah praises God at the birth of John because God’s visiting his people involved raising up “a mighty savior [Greek, ‘a horn for salvation’] for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:68–69) in order that his people “would be saved from our enemies” (1:71) and in order to “give knowledge of salvation to his people” (1:77). In Mary’s proclamation of praise, she designates God as “Savior” (1:47) because God has “helped his servant Israel” (1:54). The agent

through whom God would work his saving of the people is called Savior at his birth (2:11), and when Simeon receives the child Jesus in his arms, he praises God because “my eyes have seen your salvation” (2:30).

In this framing, Luke’s portrayal in chapters 9–19 of Jesus as the prophet making his way toward his death in Jerusalem and forming a people around himself while on that path, a people that is “saved by faith”—that becomes part of God’s people by committing themselves to the message and person of this prophet—reaches its culmination in the “visitation” of the house of the chief tax collector Zacchaeus: “Today salvation has come to this house, because he [Zacchaeus] too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (19:9–10).

The social dimension of salvation is obvious in the first part of Acts, when to be “saved” means specifically to join the people that is forming around the proclamation of the prophet whom God raised up as Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36)—and Savior (5:31)! All those who call on that name would be saved from the crooked generation that had rejected the prophet and would be joined to God’s restored Israel (see Acts 2:21, 40, 47; 4:9, 12; 13:26). The inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s people is likewise characterized in terms of salvation. Luke extended the Isaiah citation in his Gospel (3:6) to include the promise that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” The conversion of Cornelius is seen as “salvation for you and your whole household” (Acts 11:14). Paul’s mission to the Gentiles is covered by the citation from Isaiah 49:6, “you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47). His message concerns the “way of salvation” (16:17), and those who hear it and respond in faith are saved by joining this people (14:9; 16:31). The final prophecy in the narrative is uttered by Paul, who declares, “Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen” (28:28). Luke’s understanding of Jesus as savior and of his work as salvation, in short, fits perfectly within his presentation of him as the prophet around whom God was forming the restored Israel.

Son of David/King

It is not too great a stretch for the image of prophet and king to coalesce, since they combine in the profile of Moses in Hellenistic Judaism. Are they linked as well in Luke-Acts? The answer must take Luke’s treatment of David into account as well, especially in view of Gabriel’s opening announcement that God would give Mary’s child “the throne of his ancestor [father] David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his

kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32–33) and of Zechariah's characterization of God's visitation of the people as raising up "a mighty savior [Greek, 'a horn of salvation'] for us in the house of his servant David" (1:69). Although Luke stresses Jesus' descent from David, however (1:27, 69; 2:11; 3:31), and carries forward the identification of Jesus as "son of David" (6:3; 18:38–39), the rule the Lukan Jesus proclaims is not one over a Jewish state but the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (kingdom of God). Jesus stresses his obligation (δεῖ) to proclaim the good news of God's rule (4:43) immediately after his self-designation as a prophetic Messiah in 4:16–18. And the prophet who was to announce good news to the poor (4:18) does so by announcing, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (6:20). The prophet who is filled with the Holy Spirit (4:14) and speaks the "word of God" (8:11, 21) does so by preaching the good news of the rule of God (8:1) and revealing its mysteries in parabolic discourse (8:10). Those he sends as his emissaries likewise proclaim God's rule, even as they continue to work the same signs of healings that Jesus performs (9:2; 10:9, 11). Jesus' opposition consists not of the local political bosses or even of the empire but of the powers of Satan, who controls all the kingdoms of the known world (4:5). Jesus' triumph over these demonic forces signifies the arrival of God's rule (11:20).

As the prophet Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, his proclamation of God's kingdom intensifies (11:18; 12:31–32; 13:18, 20, 28, 29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20; 18:16–17, 24–25, 29). It is because many among the people heed his prophetic challenge and join him on his way to Jerusalem that Jesus can tell the Pharisees that "the kingdom of God is among you" (17:21). Luke's "kingship parable" in 19:11–27 serves to focus and interpret this progression. Jesus is the one who will be proclaimed as a king by the populace (19:38) and identified as a king by the Roman prefect who executes him (23:38). Before his arrest, he will bestow βασιλεία (kingdom) on the Twelve (22:29–30). Mocked on the cross as a king who cannot save himself (22:37), he extends a welcome to the criminal who asks of him a place when he enters into his kingdom (23:42).

The paradoxical character of Jesus' kingly rule is indicated by the way in which he is both identified with and distinguished from his ancestor David. Luke takes over from Mark 12:35–37 the pericope that claims, through the use of LXX Psalm 109:1, that the Messiah is not David's son but David's Lord (Luke 20:41–44). But Luke makes the point even more emphatically by invoking the same verse in Acts 2:33 for the resurrection of Jesus as an enthronement at God's right hand. It is as the prophet whom God raised up (Acts 3:22) that Jesus receives "the throne of his

ancestor David" (Luke 1:32), and therefore "of his kingdom (*βασίλεια*) there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). In Acts, David appears mostly as a prophet who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, foretold the truth about the Messiah Jesus (Acts 1:16; 2:25; 4:25). And the truth is that although David was also a prophet (Acts 2:30), he died and his tomb was still among them (2:29). David did not ascend into heaven (2:34), and his words about the Lord saying to my Lord therefore referred to the resurrected Jesus, whom God had made both Lord and Christ (2:36).

The subtlety of Luke's language can be seen in Paul's account of Israel's history in Acts 13:16–41. He declares that God raised up David to be a king (13:22), but it was of his seed that God brought—some manuscripts read "raised"—Jesus as savior for Israel (13:23). David once more serves as the source of prophecy (13:33–35) and the point of comparison for Jesus: "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, died [Greek, 'fell asleep'], was laid beside his ancestors, and experienced corruption; but he whom God raised up experienced no corruption" (13:36–37). The continued proclamation of the kingdom of God throughout Acts (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31), therefore, is explicitly distinguished from a political restoration of *βασίλεια* (kingdom) to Israel (1:6). Although the *βασίλεια* exercised by the risen Jesus through his prophetic representatives is a real one and is over the "house of Jacob" that is the restored Israel gathered into the Jerusalem church, it extends to all humans as that "salvation" which is equivalent to inclusion in God's prophetic people. Thus Luke has James say of the inclusion of Gentiles: "This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written: 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called'" (Acts 15:15–17).

Conclusion

The position that Luke's Jesus is fundamentally a prophetic figure is supported not only by multiple and converging lines of literary evidence but also by the way in which other important Lukan themes connected to Jesus are at least consonant and in most cases positively complementary to that prophetic presentation.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LUKAN KINGSHIP PARABLE

In a season when the parables of Jesus generally are subject to tireless investigation, the Lukan Parable of the Pounds (19:11–27) stands strangely neglected.¹ Perhaps the apparently conflated and secondary condition of the parable makes it less interesting to those seeking the literary persona of Jesus.² Or perhaps the conventional wisdom on the parable in its present context is so consistent and so strong that, in spite of all the talk about paradox and polyvalence elsewhere, here there seems to be no mystery. Scholars debate the process of the parable's formation.³ Does it combine two smaller parables (the "throne-pretender" and "the pounds")? Has Luke simply allegorized (with an eye to recent history) a story shared at some point in the tradition, with Matt 25:14–30?⁴ These questions disappear when it comes to Luke's redactional introduction to the parable in 19:11: all

¹ In the spate of studies devoted to the parables as literary artifacts, no one has looked hard at this one. There is nothing at all in E. Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1966) or M.A. Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables* (Phil.: Fortress, 1979), or in the volume from the Entrevernes Group, *Signs and Parables* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), or in that edited by D. Patte, *Semiology and Parables* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976). Only passing reference is made in J.D. Crossan, *In Parables*, M. Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable, A Literary Study* (CBQMS 6; Washington: CBA, 1977), D.O. Via, *The Parables* (Phil.: Fortress, 1967), and K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). J.D. Crossan has given a bit more attention to it in "The Servant Parables of Jesus." *Semeia* 1 (1974) 22–25.

² This quest is made most explicit by Crossan, as in his *Raid on the Articulate* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1976) 165–182.

³ Some older studies simply assert that Jesus spoke two similar but different parables at different points in his ministry, as M.J. Ollivier, "Etude sur la physionomie intellectuelle de N.S.J.C.: la parabole des mines (Luc xix 1–27)," *RB* 1 (1892) 589–601; H. Thiessen, "The Parable of the Nobleman and the Earthly Kingdom, Luke 19:11–27," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 91 (1937) 180–190; P. Joüin, "La parabole des mines (Luc 19:13–27) et la parabole des talents (Matthieu 25, 14–30)," *RSR* 29 (1939) 489–94.

⁴ For a full discussion of the options, cf. esp. M. Zerwick, "Die Parabel vom Thronanwaerter," *Bib* 40 (1959) 654–674, in which the Archelaus connection is extensively displayed, 660ff.; and, J. Dupont, "La parabole des Talents (Matt 25, 14–30) ou des Mines (Luc 19:12–27)," *RTP* ser. 3 19 (1969) 376–391; for shorter discussions, cf. J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* Rev. Ed. Trans. S. Hook (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963) 59; Crossan, "Servant Parables," 22–25, and F.D. Weinert, "The Parable of the Throne Claimant (Luke 19:12, 1415a, 27) Reconsidered," *CBQ* 39 (1977) 505ff.

agree that this makes *his* understanding of the parable absolutely clear.⁵ 19:11 reads, ἀκούοντων δὲ αὐτῶν ταῦτα προσθεὶς εἶπεν παραβολὴν διὰ τὸ ἐγγὺς εἶναι Ἰερουσαλὴμ αὐτὸν καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι. In the light of this introduction, the parable (which speaks of a nobleman going off to get a kingdom) must refer allegorically to the ascension of Jesus and his return at the parousia for judgment.⁶ Luke has Jesus tell the story here to counter any misunderstanding about the entry of Jesus as a messianic enthronement,⁷ and, for his Christian readers, to show that Jesus himself predicted the delay of the parousia.⁸ The business of the pounds and servants points to a secondary teaching, the need to deal with material possessions creatively and responsibly in the interim between ascension and parousia.⁹

Some have raised objections to one or the other aspect of this interpretation. In his recent article, for example, Weinert notes that two key

⁵ The decisive role of 19:11 is especially emphasized by Jeremias, *Parables*, 59; H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* tr. G. Buswell (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1961) 113; A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke* (ICC; N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903) 439; and, G. Schneider, *Parusiegleichnisse im Lukas-Evangelium* (Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1975) 38–42.

⁶ The consistent view of the commentaries is expressed by B.S. Easton, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 200. "To Luke this whole narrative was a transparent allegory of the church during the absence of Christ." With some variations, the same is advanced by A. Loisy, *L'Évangile selon Luc* (Paris, 1924) 458; I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978) 700–701; E.E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (London: Nelson, 1966) 223; J.M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930) 232; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THNT III; Berlin: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 1963) 363; E. Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT II, 1; Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1919) 549–550. Cf. also M.D. Goulder, "Characteristics of the Parables in the Several Gospels," *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968) 55; E. Kamlah, "Kritik und Interpretation der Parabel der Anvertrauten Geldern, Mt 25:14ff., Lk 19:12ff.," *Kerygma und Dogma* 14(1968) 30; J.D. Kaestli, *L'Eschatologie dans l'Oeuvre de Luc* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1969) 39; H. Flender, *Heil und Geschichte in der Theologie des Lukas* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1965) 73.

⁷ This is stressed by M.J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Luc* (EB; Paris: J Gabalda, 1948) 492, who sees it as addressed, not to Luke's contemporaries, but to the disciples. Cf. also Marshall, 700, and E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord* (Phil.: Westminster, 1975) 26.

⁸ "The parable is made explicitly to teach a lesson concerning the delay of the second advent," C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd, 1935) 147 (cf. also p. 153). Not everyone is so confident as that, but this function of the parable is the standard view, as in Goulder, "Characteristics," 62; Kaestli, *L'Eschatologie*, 38; Schneider, *Parusiegleichnisse*, 38–40; Kamlah, "Kritik," 29; Jeremias, *Parables* 59; Conzelmann, *Theology*, 113; Dupont, "parabole," 382; F. Bovon, *Luc te Théologien* (Paris: Delachaux et Niestle, 1978) 58; Marshall, 702; R. Hiers, "The Problem of the Delay of the Parousia in Luke-Acts," *NTS* 20 (1974) 148.

⁹ Cf. Flender, *Heil und Geschichte*, 73–74; S. Brown, *Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke* (AB 36; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 104; Kaestli, *L'Eschatologie*, 40; Marshall, 701; Grundmann, 363; Plummer, 438.

elements of the story (the hostile mission of the opposition, and the account of the revenge by the king) do not fit comfortably within Luke's supposed interpretative framework.¹⁰ But he does not question the conventional understanding of Luke's intention.¹¹ David Tiede, on the other hand, has broken with the accepted interpretation of this parable. He says that it does *not* refer to the delay of the parousia, but is best understood as an interpretation of the larger Lukan story at that point: "Whether the dominion of the king actually comes with his acclamation or his return in power, Luke warns that those who refuse to acknowledge such a king are playing a deadly game and, in effect, are already judged."¹² Tiede suggests that this judgment is pronounced by Jesus's words over the city in Luke 19:42–44.¹³ Although Tiede is certainly correct in his view, he could not, within the framework of his book, adequately support this position,¹⁴ as I could not when I first made a similar proposal.¹⁵ Since this way of reading the parable involves as well a shift in perception regarding the way Luke works, it may be appropriate to place the discussion of the passage firmly within that perception by means of a longer treatment.

Some Preliminary Remarks

The interpretation of the parable here being advanced depends on three principles concerning Luke's literary method which meet with wide approbation in theory but less application in practice. The first is that Luke-Acts is a single, though two-volumed, literary work. The story of Acts not only continues, but interprets Luke's version of the Gospel. The exegetical implication is that one must reckon with all of Luke's story to adequately assess his purposes. An interpretation of any passage which fails to take into account Luke's later development of the narrative is insufficient.¹⁶

¹⁰ Weinert, "Throne-Claimant," 507.

¹¹ Weinert, "Throne-Claimant," 506.

¹² D.L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Phil.: Fortress, 1980) 79.

¹³ Tiede, *Prophecy and History*, 80.

¹⁴ His discussion of the parable falls within a presentation of conflict and judgment in Luke-Acts. Tiede does a good job of showing the thematic connection of this passage to the opening of Luke's journey narrative, Luke 9:51ff. (cf. p. 57).

¹⁵ Cf. L.T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 39: Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977) 168–170.

¹⁶ For example, a study of "the poor" which does not take into account the complete cessation of this theme in Acts would be skewed, as in R.J. Karris, "Rich and Poor: The Lukan Sitz-im-leben," *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* ed. C.H. Talbert (Danville: Assoc. of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) 112–125.

The second principle is that Luke intends to give his audience ἀσφάλεια by writing his story καθ' ἑξῆς (Luke 1:3). I take this to mean that it is precisely the sequence (ordering) of the narrative which is significant.¹⁷ The use of this term in Acts 11:4 shows Luke's aim clearly: by reciting the events of Cornelius's conversion *in order* (and with interpretation), Peter convinces his listeners.¹⁸ So Luke intends his story to give ἀσφάλεια to Theophilus. The exegetical implication is that, in Luke, we need attend not only to *what* Luke says but also to *where* in the story he says it. Losing the thread of the story in Luke-Acts means losing the thread of meaning.

The third principle is that within his larger story, Luke uses sayings material to interpret the narrative for his reader. The interpretative function of the speeches in Acts has received considerable attention,¹⁹ and an increasing amount of work is also being done on the Gospel sayings material from this perspective.²⁰ I have called some of these interpretative sayings "programmatically prophetic," which is a rough and ready characterization.²¹ Sometimes Luke's sayings material points forward, and sometimes backward.²² At other times, he uses sayings to illustrate what is happening in his larger narrative.

Taken together, these three principles demand that the exegete take seriously the function of individual pericopae within the larger Lukan plot. Luke has a literary-theological goal which is connected to the way the story is told as a whole, and the way it unfolds in sequence. Before looking to what Luke may have wanted to teach a (putative) community by a single pericope, therefore, the exegete needs to look first to the role

¹⁷ For recent discussion of this, cf. G. Schneider, "Zur Bedeutung von *kathexēs* im lukanischen Doppelwerk, ZNW 68 (1977) 128–131, and, R.J. Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project from his Prologue (Luke 1:1–4)," *CBQ* 43 (1981) 205–227, esp. 217–223.

¹⁸ Cf. also Dillon, "Previewing," 220, n. 43.

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., U. Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag, 1961) 7–31; F. Prast, *Presbyter und Evangelium in nachapostolischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1979) 17–28; D. Hamm, *This Sign of Healing: Acts 3:1–10, A Study in Lukan Theology* (PhD Dissertation: St. Louis University, 1975); Johnson, *Literary Function*, 16–19.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., P. Schubert, "The Structure and Significance of Luke 24," *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann* (Berlin: A. Toepelmann, 1959) 165–186; P. Minear, "Luke's Use of the Birth Stories," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. Keck and L. Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) 111–130; Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts*, passim.

²¹ Johnson, *Literary Function* 18.

²² Cf. esp. R.J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word* (AB 82: Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978) 50, 116ff.

that passage plays in the literary composition as a whole.²³ The two perspectives need not conflict. Luke can use material both to advance his story and to edify his readers. The exegete's first task, however, is to check on its function within the whole, for it is in that whole where the purpose of Luke is most certainly to be found. Before applying these principles to the Parable of the Pounds, it will be helpful to clear the way by raising some specific questions concerning the usual understanding of the passage in its Lukan context.

Problems of the Traditional Interpretation

I. There is little in the parable itself which demands considering it an allegorical tale about the ascension-parousia. In particular, there is nothing in Luke's version to indicate a temporal delay. Matthew's Parable of the Talents appears to have affected the reading of Luke's story. By the way he has clustered 25:14–30 with the "Ten Maidens" (25:1–23) and "The Judgment of the Nations" (25:14–30) within his eschatological discourse (24:1–51), Matthew has made his parable one of eschatological judgment, Matthew alone has any indication that the man was gone *πολὸν χρόνον* (Matt 25:19).²⁴ In Matthew, the reward is for the future (25:21, 23) and is connected to *τὴν χαρὰν τοῦ κυρίου σου*. These notes point to an eschatological dominion for the faithful ones. This picture accords with Matt 19:28, in which the rule of the Twelve over Israel is seen in strictly eschatological terms (in contrast, as we shall see, to Luke). Luke's version of the parable has no significant delay in the nobleman's return as king. Everything gets carried out with dispatch. The "getting of the kingdom" is not an unrealized event of the future, but one already accomplished in the story (Luke 19:15).²⁵ The reward to those who have handled their charge well does not consist in some future overseeing of possessions, but is present (*ἴσθι, γίνου*), and consists in power (*ἐξουσία*) over cities within the King's realm (Luke 19:17, 19). They play a present leadership role within the kingdom gained by the nobleman. This political reward for the faithful use of possessions integrates the two parts of the story, and indicates as well that

²³ Cf. L.T. Johnson, "On Finding the Lukan Community: A Cautious Cautionary Essay," 1979 *SBL Seminar Papers* ed. P. Achtemeier (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979) 87–100.

²⁴ Against Creed, 232; Klostermann, 549; Dupont, "parabole," 382; Kaestli, *L'Eschatologie*, 39–40, one cannot take Luke's "far country" as indicating a significant temporal delay. Travel was not so bad, then.

²⁵ Cf. Tiede, *Prophecy and History*, 79.

the “political” aspect of the parable is not secondary but, in its present version, primary.

Other parts of the story do not fit the usual interpretation of the parable as a parousia-allegory. If the “going away” refers to the ascension of Jesus, what are we to make of his fellow “citizens” (19:14)—who are they? When and how do they voice their protest?²⁶ The slaughter of the opponents is even more difficult. Is there any indication elsewhere in Luke-Acts that there will be a final judgment looking like this?²⁷ The usual view of the parable also leaves hanging the fate of the third servant. In Matthew the profitless one is thrown into the outer darkness (Matt 25:30). Again, this is a recognizably eschatological element in Matthew (cf. Matt 8:12; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51). But although Luke knows this stereotype for eschatological judgment (cf. Luke 13:28), he does not use it here. Indeed, this man is simply deprived of his pound (and his potential leadership). He is not utterly rejected; only “the enemies” are eliminated. If the story is about judgment for stewardship in the period of the Church, therefore, it limps at this point.

Since there is nothing in the story itself which compels its being read as a parousia parable, and since some parts of the story militate against this reading, even more weight falls on the introduction in 19:11. The conventional reading is saved in this fashion: no matter how poorly the parable itself fits the setting, Luke sees it that way. But does he? Is 19:11 really so clear? If the introduction and parable go together so feebly, must we regard Luke as a sloppy workman? No, because we can ask whether this introduction means what it is usually taken to mean. Perhaps Luke’s parable accords very well with another understanding of the introduction.

II. The Introduction, 19:11. This single verse seems to be straightforward, but is not. Each part of the verse presents multiple possibilities for interpretation.

A. To whom is the parable spoken? 19:11 links the parable to the story of Zaccheus and its concluding sayings (19:1–10) by a genitive absolute,

²⁶ To identify the opponents simply as “the Jews,” without any qualification (as in Plummer 438, Marshall 701), is to miss the careful presentation of Luke concerning “the divided people of God.” cf. J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971) 41–74.

²⁷ Weinert, “Throne-Claimant,” 507.

ἀκουόντων δὲ αὐτῶν ταῦτα. Who are the αὐτοί? The strict grammatical antecedent would be the πάντες of verse 7, who grumbled because Jesus entered the house of Zaccheus.²⁸ They fit Luke's usual way of presenting the hostile leaders of the people, and the content of their complaint (cf. e.g. 15:1–3).²⁹ If the parable is told specifically to opponents, the harsh ending would surely be the point. It is possible, however, that the αὐτοί refers generally to either the ὄχλοι or μαθηταί who make up the other parts of Jesus' entourage as he goes towards Jerusalem. We last saw the ὄχλος in 18:36 (designated as the λαός in 18:43) at the healing of the blind man who proclaimed Jesus as Son of David (18:37–39). The μαθηταί last appeared as represented by the Twelve in 19:31, the audience for the third passion prediction (18:31–34).

There are, then, three possible audiences for the parable: the crowd, the disciples, or the opponents. In the journey narrative, Luke is generally careful to specify Jesus's audiences, and purposefully.³⁰ To the disciples, he has Jesus address teachings on discipleship; to the crowd, calls for repentance, and warnings; to the opponents, sayings of rejection and judgment.³¹ His failure to make *this* audience clearer to his reader leads one to think that the group to whom the parable was spoken was meant to consist of all those with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, with the parable addressing each segment in diverse ways, and Luke's readers most of all.

B. Is the story told to confute the audience's expectations, or confirm them? This is the critical issue posed by 19:11, and one not easily resolved. The usual understanding is, of course, that the parable is told to refute the expectation.³² But is there anything in the introduction itself which leads to this conclusion? Luke says that the parable was told because of two circumstances: he was near Jerusalem, and "they" considered ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφανέσθαι. That he was near to Jerusalem is not in doubt (18:31). If Luke wanted the parable to serve as a rebuttal, then it must have been addressed to their expectation.

Before looking at the content of that expectation, we should note that neither Luke's language here, nor his accustomed usage, demands that

²⁸ Cf. Joüon, 489, who then sees this as a parable told to opponents, 493.

²⁹ Johnson, *Literary Function*, 109–113.

³⁰ Cf. A. Mosely, "Jesus' Audiences in the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke," *NTS* 10 (1963) 139–149.

³¹ Johnson, *Literary Function*, 107–108.

³² Cf. esp. Conzelmann, *Theology* 113; Jeremias, *Parables* 59; Dodd, *Parables* 153.

we see the introduction as setting up a reversal of their expectations. The language: The verb *δοκέω* is used by Luke in its full range. Sometimes it appears in sentences containing false suppositions which are either implicitly or explicitly refuted.³³ Just as often, though, Luke uses it in a neutral sense.³⁴ It depends on the content whether it is a mere “supposition,” or a “consideration.” Nor does Luke’s customary way of introducing parables help us determine whether this one is meant to support or deny the audience’s expectations. He takes care to indicate the setting of the parables in Jesus’s ministry, and we are able sometimes to determine the audience because of his consistency in stereotyping his characters.³⁵ He can even explicitly state the purpose of a parable, as in the Woman and the Judge. This was told to the disciples *πρὸς τὸ δεῖν πάντοτε προσεύχασθαι αὐτοὺς καὶ μὴ ἐγκακεῖν* (Luke 18:1). The structure of this introduction is similar to that of 19:11, but it is much more explicit in its intention. Only once in Luke do we find Jesus telling a parable explicitly to refute an understanding of his audience. This is the parable of the Pharisee and Tax-Collector, told *πρὸς τινὰς τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι καὶ ἐξουθενοῦντας τοὺς λοιποὺς* (18:9). In that case, however, it is not a specific expectation, but an entire viewpoint which is countered. The parable of Lazarus and Dives (16:19–31) is likewise told to those we recognize as opponents of Jesus (16:14–15), and is an implicit rebuff to their attitude of *φιλαργυρία* (16:15), but the point is made subtly.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30–35) is told in response to a question, and while it may subvert the implicit understanding of the questioner,³⁶ is not strictly a refutation of it (cf. 10:28, 36–37). The parable of the Rich Fool (12:16–21) is told to the crowd (12:13, 16) in response to an inappropriate request (12:13), but does not function as a rebuttal of the request. The fascinating question of Peter in 12:41 makes the intended audience for Jesus’s parable of the Household Manager in 12:42–48 the Twelve,³⁷ but once more, the parable does not overturn any expectation of Peter’s. The parable of the Fig-Tree (13:6–9) is told to *confirm* Jesus’s demand for repentance in 13:1–5.

³³ Luke 8:18; 12:40, 51; 13:2, 4; 24:37; Acts 12:9; 17:18.

³⁴ Luke 1:3; 10:36; 22:24; Acts 15:22ff.; 25:27; 26:9; 27:13.

³⁵ As in Luke 16:14–15 and 18:9.

³⁶ Cf. J.D. Crossan, *The Dark Interval* (Niles, Ill.: Argus, 1975) 104–108.

³⁷ Mosely, “Audiences,” 146; Jeremias, *Parables* 50, 46, 99.

The introductions to parabolic discourse in chapters 14 and 15 are particularly interesting. Luke calls the lesson on hospitality given to Jesus's fellow guests a *παραβολή* (14:7), though it is neither veiled nor metaphorical. It serves to reprove the behavior Jesus had observed but does not directly attack any expectation of the guests. When Jesus does, in this setting, get down to parabolic discourse, (the parable of the Great Banquet, 14:16–24), he does so in response to a statement made by a guest regarding the kingdom: *μακάριος ὅστις φάγεται ἄρτον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ* (14:15). The parable shows something about the call to the kingdom, but it in no way functions to rebut the guest's exclamation, or his opinion. As in 19:11, the opinion is stimulated by an apparently eschatological statement by Jesus (14:4). The parable does not deny the blessedness of life in the kingdom, but it shifts the discussion to what is, in fact, happening in the ministry of Jesus: the rejection by those first called, and the invitation of the outcast. That this is the case is indicated by the thematic connection between the parable and Jesus's immediate call to the crowd in 14:25–33. In short, the parable of the Great Banquet responds to a statement about the Kingdom with an illustration of its emergence within the ministry of Jesus.

The most extended introduction to a parable is found in 15:1–3. The parables of the lost sheep (15:4–7), lost coin (15:8–10) and lost son (15:11–32) are told in response to the reactions of the Scribes and Pharisees to Jesus's ministry. They grumble because Jesus receives and eats with sinners. Each parable is clearly intended by Luke, not to refute this perception, but to confirm it. Each one shows that, in fact, Jesus's ministry precisely involves such a welcoming of those who are lost and sinful. These parables defend Jesus's ministry.

Luke's way of introducing parables is various. Only once does he explicitly refute the outlook of his listeners. Sometimes he uses the parable to confirm the viewpoint of the audience. Other times still he uses the introduction and parable as a way of illustrating something about the progress of his larger story. This is clearest in the parable of the Great Banquet and the parables of The Lost. It may well be the function of the Parable of the Pounds, as well. In any case, there is nothing in Luke's language or other usage to demand our seeing the parable as a refutation of the expectation expressed in 19:11.

C. The content of 19:11: what is being confirmed or confuted? There are at least three possibilities, here.

1. Usually the emphasis is placed on *παραχρήμα*,³⁸ and its place in the sentence would justify this stress. What does it mean? Apart from Matt 21:19, 20, it is a distinctively Lukan word, being used by him sixteen times and by the other NT writers not at all. Luke especially likes to use it for healings, to note the suddenness of physical change.³⁹ It always refers to a palpable, physical event. This is the only place where its reference might be to an event of larger or more indeterminate proportions. The *ταῦτα*, referring back to 19:9–10, seems to place their expectation within an eschatological framework.⁴⁰ If the parable confirms the introduction, Jesus's entrance as *βασιλεύς* and the events of the passion are proximate enough to be called *παραχρήμα*. But if this word is the target of disconfirmation, it is by no means necessary to conclude that the author is justifying a parousia delayed for generations. The confutation of *παραχρήμα* could be taken care of within the temporal range of Luke's narrative (any time past the *σήμερον* of 19:9), with not an eye to a distant return of the Lord.

2. The verb *ἀναφαίω* is in a position of greater emphasis even than *παραχρήμα*. It is usually taken to mean, simply, "appear." If so, the question "in what sense," is still appropriate. Does it point to a full-scale, visible realization of the kingdom, or specifically to the return of the Son of Man for judgment? Or can an "appearance" be accomplished by some sort of symbolic manifestation of the Kingdom, such as the proclamation of a king by his followers? Again, the issue of confirmation or disconfirmation is important.

It is necessary, in any case, to emphatically deny the assumption that *ἀναφαίνω* is part of the technical language connected to the parousia. This illegitimate transfer of meaning sometimes takes place,⁴¹ supported,

³⁸ Cf., e.g., Plummer, 439.

³⁹ Cf. Luke 4:39; 5:25; 8:44, 47, 55; 13:13, 18:43; Acts 3:7. He also uses it for the sudden deaths of Sapphira (Acts 5:10) and Herod (Acts 12:23).

⁴⁰ The combination of "Son of Abraham," "Salvation," "Today," and "Son of Man," is evocative. There is a cluster of eschatological Son of Man sayings in the journey section (9:26; 12:8–10, 40; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8). Abraham appears in eschatological contexts in 13:28 and 16:22. Of greater interest, however, is the Lukan redaction of 3:6–8, in which *σωτηρία* and *τέκνα Ἀβραάμ* closely joined. The statements of 19:9–10 are not, within the Lukan story, unusual. The coming of salvation is announced already in 1:69, 71 and 2:30. Jesus declares the Scripture fulfilled "today" in 4:21, and the bent woman is called a daughter of Abraham in 13:16. As in those places, the realization of salvation or healing is not future, but present, "for the Son of Man has come to save ..." (19:10).

⁴¹ This seems to be implicit in the commentaries, and is made explicit in Ellis, 223.

of course, by the use of φαίνω and especially ἐπιφαίνω in the New Testament. In 2 Thess 2:8, ἐπιφάνεια and παρουσία are used together. And in the Pastorals, ἐπιφάνεια has close to a technical meaning in reference to the παρουσία (cf. 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1; Tit 2:13). But Luke lacks this noun altogether, as he does παρουσία. Luke uses the adjective ἐπιφανής once in the citation of Joel 3:4 in Acts 2:20, with reference to the “Great and Manifest Day of the Lord.” As for the verb ἐπιφαίνω, it is used by Tit 2:11 and 3:4 in a sacral sense, but in both Luke 1:79 and Acts 27:20, the use is non-technical. There is simply no basis for transferring any technical sense from ἐπιφαίνω to ἀναφαίνω in Luke 19:11.

Neither can we assume that ἀναφαίνω always means the same as φαίνω,⁴² although it sometimes does. Luke is the only NT author to use it. In Acts 21:3, the aorist participle ἀναφάναντες means, “catching sight of,”⁴³ and the only other use in the NT is here in 19:11. To conclude that it means simply “appear,” however, would be precipitous, for the uses of ἀναφαίνω in other writings of the time are more various. The verb in the passive voice frequently does mean, “to appear, to be manifested,” as consistently in Josephus.⁴⁴ But this is not invariable. Philo uses it often in the sense of “to reveal,” especially in contexts wherein something latent becomes visible.⁴⁵ By extension, he can speak of God “revealing” his own existence,⁴⁶ or the truth of a situation.⁴⁷ This meaning, in turn, shades easily into “manifest” in the sense of “demonstrate,” or even “display.”⁴⁸ The step is not far, then, to another use of ἀναφαίνω which is of special interest to the analysis of this passage. Philo speaks of God “revealing his judgment.” As a verbal action, this sort of manifestation is tantamount to “announcing his judgment.”⁴⁹ Finally, Philo speaks of actions which “reveal” or “declare” a

⁴² Luke uses φαίνω physical appearance in Luke 9:8 and for a mental impression in Luke 24:11. He uses ἐμφανής in Acts 10:40 for Jesus’s resurrection appearance. Ἐμφανίζω used in Acts 23:15, 22; 24:1; 25:2, 15 for “report.”

⁴³ As in Philo, *Ad Flaccum* 27.

⁴⁴ Cf. Josephus, *JB* IV 377; VII 371 and *Ant* XVII 120.

⁴⁵ Cf. *De Migr. Abr.* 183; *De Fuga* 28; *De Cong.* 124, 153; *De Spec. Leg.* II, 141, 152; IV, 51–52; *Ad Gaium* 120.

⁴⁶ *De Praem.* 44. Cf. also the two uses of ἀναφαίνω given in J.H. Moulton, G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930) 39.

⁴⁷ *De Jos.* 255.

⁴⁸ *Quod Omn. Prob.* 149; *De Praem.* 4. Plato uses ἀναφαίνω this sense in *Critias* 108C.

⁴⁹ *De Vita Mosis* II, 228. The two uses of ἀναφαίνω LXX Job 11:18 and 13:18 seem to me to bear the same meaning. In Job’s forensic context “to appear righteous” implies, “to be declared righteous by the judge.”

royal figure to be divine.⁵⁰ This last usage is considerably older than Philo, and can be found in Pindar,⁵¹ Euripides,⁵² and, possibly, in Herodotus.⁵³

In the light of this, it is not at all impossible that Luke intended μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι to mean that “the Kingdom of God was going to be declared.” This would find immediate confirmation in the proclamation of Jesus as King in 19:38. But this brings us to the final difficulty of 19:11, the meaning of βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.

3. What point does Luke want to make about the Kingdom of God? If the function of the parable is to confirm the expectation of 19:11, then Luke illustrates something about this kingdom, and those who reject it. And by having Jesus proclaimed as king in 19:38, he says something about the relation of Jesus to this Kingdom. This is straightforward. But if the point of the parable is to refute 19:11, several other possibilities present themselves. Already from Luke 1:33, Luke told us that Jesus would rule over Israel forever. The question of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is raised explicitly in Acts 1:6, and only obliquely answered. Three aspects of “Kingdom” must therefore be considered: the kingship of Jesus, rule over Israel, and the Kingdom of God. Do they mutually impinge? If the point of the parable is to clarify a misconception contained in 19:11, how does it do this? Does it assert that messianic rule over Israel is not the same thing as the Kingdom of God, although Jesus is proclaimed as king in the entry?⁵⁴ Does it assert that the rule of Jesus over God’s people is not yet the full realization of God’s rule and Kingdom?⁵⁵ Much weight rests on a less than clear construction. This article cannot rehearse all the complexity of Luke’s view of the Kingdom. But a simplistic view of 19:11 which, without qualification, identifies βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ with the return of Jesus at the parousia misses that complexity altogether and begs the question of the passage’s meaning.

⁵⁰ In a recitation of Caligula’s wrongdoing, Philo asks rhetorically, διὰ ταῦτα ὁ νέος Διόνυσος ἡμῖν ἀνεφάνης?

⁵¹ Pindar’s 4th Pythian Ode 1:62 has the son of Polymnestus declared the (future) king of Cyrene: βασιλέ’ ἄμφανεν Κυράνα (Liddell and Scott).

⁵² In the *Bacchae* 528, there is a divine acclamation: ἀναφαίνω σε τόδ’, ᾧ Βάκχιε, Θήβαις ὀνομάζειν (Liddell and Scott).

⁵³ Herodotus III, 82.

⁵⁴ Dupont, “parabole,” 381.

⁵⁵ Conzelmann, *Theology* 198; Hiers, “Delay,” 148.

III. This is the final deficiency in the traditional understanding of the parable with its introduction: it makes Luke work against himself as an author. We are asked to believe that Luke, using traditional materials with considerable freedom and able to put this passage wherever he wished,⁵⁶ deliberately placed it here at the climax of Jesus's carefully plotted ascent to Jerusalem (with meticulous markings of the way and the exact point of entry). He put it at this point of crescendo, in order to show that, in fact, this entry of Jesus was not the "appearing at once" of the Kingdom of God. Why should Luke's readers need to be told that? Were they so confused?⁵⁷ If Luke wanted to clarify matters, he has done an extraordinarily poor job, for the placement of the parable here only heightens the kingly impression made by Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem. This is strengthened further by Luke's insertion of ὁ βασιλεύς in 19:38, which makes the acclamation ἀναφαινεσθαι explicit, and by his having the Pharisees respond immediately with a demand that this acclamation of Jesus as king be silenced. As to the connection between this royal entry and the kingdom of God, Luke has further muddied his own waters by making the phrasing of 19:38 (ἐν οὐρανῷ εἰρήνην καὶ δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις) recall so emphatically the angelic praise of God in 2:14 (δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνην ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας).

The entry is only part of the problem. The Lukan version of the Last Supper again speaks clearly of the kingly rule of *Jesus*, one to be given as well to the Twelve: καγὼ διατίθεμαι ὑμῖν καθὼς διέθετο μοι ὁ πατήρ μου βασιλείαν (22:29). The striking difference from the parallel Matthean logion has been elaborated before.⁵⁸ In Luke, the authority is a present one, and will be carried out by the Twelve in Luke's narrative of the Jerusalem community.⁵⁹ Again, if Luke wished to loosen the connection between the reign of God and the manifestations of it in Jesus's ministry, he only confused the issue by shaping this passage the way he did. He adds to the confusion further in 23:2 by the way he has phrased the charge against

⁵⁶ A simple observation, but worth pondering. If Luke had control of his materials, and wanted to achieve the purpose suggested for this passage, why didn't he place the passage in a less ambiguous setting, for example after the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, so that the reader could not miss the next "enthronement" as the ascension?

⁵⁷ Marshall, 702, sees the difficulty here, but passes over it.

⁵⁸ J. Dupont, "Le logion des douze Trônes (Mat 19:28, Lc 22:28-30)," *Bib* 45 (1964) 355-392. One should especially note the solemn and legal resonances of διατίθημι, cf. *L-S*, s.v. and J. Behm, "διατίθημι," *TDNT* II, 104-106, who sees the ἵνα clause as the object of the verb.

⁵⁹ Dupont, "Logion," 381; Brown, *Apostasy* 64ff.; Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* 94.

Jesus. Before Pilate, Jesus is accused of stirring up the nation and calling himself a Christ, a king (λέγοντα ἑαυτὸν χριστὸν βασιλέα εἶναι). Only Luke draws this close a connection between χριστὸς and βασιλεύς, and has reported it as Jesus's own identification. Finally, in a uniquely Lukan turn, the man crucified with Jesus asks to be remembered ὅταν ἔλθῃς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου (23:42), and Jesus tells him that he will be with him that day in paradise (23:43).

Since all of these notes emphasizing the kingly identity of Jesus are uniquely Lukan, and all of them occur immediately after the parable with its introduction, we must take seriously the possibility that Luke intended his parable to *confirm* 19:11, for the progress of Luke's story after the parable shows us in fact a "manifestation" of God's Kingdom "immediately." The points I have made should at least cause the traditional interpretation of this passage as a teaching on the delay of the parousia to be put aside, and prepare the way for a reading of the parable which takes seriously its function within Luke's larger narrative. The shape of the parable itself, the ambiguity of 19:11, and Luke's consistency as a writer call for such a reading.

The Lukan Context for the Parable

If it is so that Luke achieves his purpose not only by what he tells his readers but also by the order of his telling, it is important to see precisely where in his story Luke has placed this passage, and what that placement might signify. The parable comes at a critical turning point in three concurrent developments within Luke's story: the proclamation of God's Rule by the Prophet-Messiah, the division within the people Israel caused by this proclamation, and the formation of a new leadership for the restored portion of this people.

A. Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Luke does not *identify* the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of Israel, or the kingship of Jesus. The Kingdom of God remains a transcendent reality, the effective rule of God, which is proclaimed throughout Luke-Acts,⁶⁰ but is never said to be realized fully.⁶¹ As Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God (4:43) and sends out emissar-

⁶⁰ Cf. Prast, *Presbyter und Evangelium* 263–300.

⁶¹ But Conzelmann goes too far when he asserts, "He knows nothing of an immanent development on the basis of the preaching of the kingdom," *Theology* 122.

ies so to preach (9:2; 10:9), the missionaries of Acts continue to preach ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ: Philip (Acts 8:12), Barnabas with Paul (14:21–22), and Paul himself (19:8; 20:25) until the very end (28:23, 31). Jesus can speak of the “approach” (ἔγγυς) of the Kingdom as a future phenomenon (Luke 21:31).

But there is another side to Luke’s presentation of the Kingdom. Jesus promises not to eat or drink after the meal with his disciples before his death “until the Kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:16, 18). Yet, Luke makes a point of Jesus eating and drinking with his witnesses after his resurrection (24:30, 43; Acts 1:4; 10:41), and these occasions are used by Jesus to teach them τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ (Acts 1:4). Here is the deep ambiguity in Luke’s teaching on the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is not the church, certainly, nor is it simply a spiritual reality. At the same time, it is not entirely future, or world-ending. People enter into it (Luke 18:24) even if through suffering (Acts 14:22). Luke’s eschatology is decidedly more individualistic than some other NT writers (cf. Luke 12:20; 16:22),⁶² and his eschatology is not simply a temporal category.⁶³ At the heart of the ambiguity is the role played by Jesus as King over Israel. Luke may not have intended to resolve the ambiguity, but it is part of the puzzle into which this parable must be fitted.

From the beginning of the Gospel, Luke’s reader knows that Jesus will reign (βασιλεῦσει) over the House of Jacob, that his kingdom (βασιλεία) will have no end (1:33), because God will give him the throne of his father David (1:32). In Luke, prophecies have a way of getting fulfilled within his story, and so it is with this one. In the first eight chapters of the Gospel, the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ occurs five times, in each case with Jesus as its proclaimer (4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10). From the sending of the Twelve in 9:1, however, up to our parable in 19:11, the phrase occurs twenty-one times. Luke does more than intensify the number of references to the kingdom in this section. He associates the Kingdom explicitly with the words and work of Jesus, and he pictures the Kingdom as imminent, indeed immanent.⁶⁴ These two aspects are brought together in Jesus’s response during the Beelzebul controversy, “If I cast out demons by the finger of God, ἄρα ἔφθασεν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ” (11:20).

The prayer Jesus teaches his disciples during the journey, ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου (11:2) is found in a context where that kingdom is appearing

⁶² Cf. J. Dupont, *Lés Beatitudes III Les Évangélistes* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1973) 136.

⁶³ This is developed in a small pamphlet of mine, *Luke-Acts: A Story of Prophet and People* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981) 54–64.

⁶⁴ Cf. Luke 10:9, 11; 16:16; 17:20–21; 18:16–17; 18:24, 29.

powerfully in the work and words of Jesus. It is because of this that he can tell the μαθηταί (12:22) to seek the Kingdom because, in fact, it has already pleased the Father to give it to them: μὴ φόβου . . . ὅτι εὐδόκησεν ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν δοῦναι ὑμῖν τὴν βασιλείαν (12:32).⁶⁵ It is for this reason that the kingdom parables of the mustard seed and leaven, which stress immanent presence, are appropriate in this journey context (13:18–21),⁶⁶ and it is for this reason that Jesus's response to the Pharisees' interrogation about the coming of the Kingdom ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν, 17:20–21) must be seen as an interpretation precisely of this process: in the progress of Jesus toward Jerusalem, the authentic people of God and therefore the Kingdom of God, is coming into existence.

The kingdom has been connected to Jesus's work, and has been increasingly pictured as present. But Jesus himself has never yet been called a king. Only, just before the Zaccheus incident, he is twice called "Son of David" by the blind man of Jericho, which is a preparation. Right *after* the parable, however, we find Jesus himself proclaimed as βασιλεὺς (19:38), accused of claiming to be Messiah-King (23:2ff.), castigated as such on the cross (23:37, 38), begged there for a place in his kingdom (23:42), and, at the last supper, giving rule (βασιλεία) to his closest followers (22:29). Concerning this past point, we should note that Jesus gives to others what had already been granted to him (καθὼς διέθετό μοι ὁ πατήρ μου βασιλείαν). This should be kept in mind as we read the parable, for the nobleman gave rule to his servants after he had gotten the kingdom (λαβόντα τὴν βασιλείαν, 19:15). After the parable, in short, the Kingdom of God and the Kingship of Jesus are brought by Luke very close together.

This connection continues in Acts, though less obtrusively, for the point has been made for any careful reader. The question concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel "at this time" is not so much rebuffed as answered in terms of his followers' witnessing to *him* (Acts 1:6–8). Philip preaches about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ—the two are spoken in one breath (Acts 8:12). We find Paul accused of preaching another king, Jesus (Acts 17:7). And Paul's final testimony concerning the Kingdom of God is specified by his trying to persuade the Jews of Rome περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (28:23). At the very end, Paul preaches the Kingdom

⁶⁵ The use of the aorist should be noted here, as well as the complete absence of this element of realization in the parallel, Matt 6:33.

⁶⁶ Unless these small parables have this interpretative function within the Lukan journey narrative, their uprooting from the Markan setting (cf. Mk 4:30–32) which is taken over by Matt 13:31–33, is hard to understand.

and teaches περὶ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Acts 28:31). Finally, we note that in Paul's sermon at Antioch of Pisidia, he strikes the Davidic (and therefore kingly) connection hard, by moving directly from David to Jesus τῷ Ἰσραὴλ σωτῆρα (13:23, cf. Luke 2:11), a connection already established by Luke 1:32, 69; 18:37–39; 20:41–44; Acts 2:34; 7:45, and picked up a last time by James in Acts 15:16.

As Luke sees God's people as consisting in more than the historical Israel, yet always rooted in the restored people (realized in the Jerusalem community),⁶⁷ so he sees the Kingdom of God as *transcending* the rule of Jesus over the people Israel, yet always without denying the reality or legitimacy of that messianic rule. It is not contrary to God's Kingdom; in some sense, it is both sign and partial realization of that kingdom. And the place in the story where this connection is established is the Parable of the Pounds.

B. The rejection of Jesus by the leaders of Israel.⁶⁸ It is again in the journey narrative that Luke intensifies this part of his story. Zechariah had predicted a division in the people Israel caused by Jesus (Luke 2:34). It was programmatically foreshadowed at Nazareth (4:16–30). And in 7:29–30, Luke identifies the nature of the split: the tax-collectors and sinners—the outcast—received God's prophets; but the leaders of the people—the Pharisees and Lawyers—rejected both John and Jesus. These are the “citizens” (19:14) who did not accept the prophetic messianic mission of Jesus. Because they rejected him, they rejected God's plan for themselves (7:30), and found themselves progressively excluded from the restored people forming about the Messiah.

In the journey narrative, Luke so organizes his materials that the reader gains the impression of a great crowd of disciples being formed about Jesus from among the crowd, as he makes his way to Jerusalem (the small band of 8:1–3 becomes, at the entrance to the city, a πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν, 19:37). At the same time, the leaders of the people, who constantly test and oppose the prophet, are being excluded.

Once more, the Parable of the Pounds proves to be a critical stage in this progress of the story. It is immediately preceded by the acceptance by Zaccheus of Jesus (Zaccheus, of course, being a chief tax-collector),

⁶⁷ Cf. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* 56–64, and N.A. Dahl, “A People for His Name (Acts 15:14)” *NTS* 4 (1957–8) 319–327.

⁶⁸ For these two sections of the argument, I rely on evidence developed more fully in *Literary Function* 46–121, and will therefore make my points without great elaboration.

and Jesus in turn proclaiming him a son of Abraham (19:9).⁶⁹ Typically, the opponents respond to the gesture of fellowship by grumbling (19:7, cf. 15:1–3). After the Parable of the Pounds, when Jesus is acclaimed as βασιλεύς, the Pharisees want the acclamation silenced (19:39). In response, Jesus speaks words of judgment over their city (19:41–44), thus completing the pattern: the leaders who reject Jesus are themselves rejected.

That there will be a change in leadership over the people is indicated parabolically by the Parable of the Vineyard (20:9–18) which is recognized by the leaders as addressed to them (20:19). The representatives of the leadership shift at this point: the Pharisees and Lawyers are replaced by the members of the Sanhedrin as the opponents of Jesus. But it is still the leaders who oppose him, rather than the populace at large.⁷⁰

In Acts, the Jerusalem narrative shows how the leaders of the people who rejected the voice of the Prophet whom God raised up (to continue his powerful presence in the words and deeds of his prophetic followers) were “cut off from the people” (Acts 3:23). Before the Spirit-filled words and deeds of the Apostles, the leaders were reduced to fear and impotence: authority over the people passed from their hands (5:26, 41–42).

They resisted the rule of the one who was the true heir of the throne of David his father (Acts 2:30, cf. Luke 1:32), who was at God’s right hand (2:35), and was seen as Son of Man standing at God’s right hand (7:56). They resisted him by refusing the proclamation of him by those who proclaimed God’s Kingdom in his name. They were never “slaughtered.” But they were certainly, in Luke’s story, “cut off” from the people of God.

C. The New Leadership over Israel. As the old leaders fall away from their place of authority, Luke shows us the preparation, installation, and ministry of a new group of leaders over Israel: the Twelve. From the sending out of the Twelve in 9:1ff., Luke joins two aspects of this leadership: (1) it is intimately connected with the work of Jesus—as he proclaims the kingdom and announces its presence by works of healing, so do they (9:2, 11): 2) it is symbolized by the disposition of possessions, especially by the distribution of food. The Twelve share with Jesus in the feeding of the

⁶⁹ Notice how the talk of Abraham in 3:8; 13:15–16; 13:28 and 16:22 occurs within this theme of acceptance and rejection within the people. Luke makes the point repeatedly that the acceptance or rejection of Jesus determines inclusion within the people. Thus, in 19:9–10, salvation comes to Zaccheus, a son of Abraham because of his acceptance of Jesus.

⁷⁰ Cf. J. Kodell, “Luke’s Use of Laos, ‘People’ especially in the Jerusalem Narrative,” *CBQ* 31 (1969) 327–343; Johnson, *Literary Function* 117–119.

five thousand (9:12–17). The Twelve (cf. 12:41) are like managers whom the master will place over the household servants (12:42).

After the Parable of the Pounds, as we have seen, the Twelve are, at the Last Supper, given βασιλεία over Israel (22:29–30), and this authority is symbolized in terms of service at tables (22:24–27).⁷¹ In Acts, this authority is exercised by the leadership role the Twelve play within the restored Israel. They are established in power when faced with persecution (4:23–31). They exercise prophetic power within the people (5:1–11), and are the acknowledged leaders both within (4:32–37) and without (5:12–42). The authority they wield is again symbolized by their being in charge of the collection and distribution of goods. When the Twelve hand on the spiritual authority to the Seven, it is once more symbolized by table-service (Acts 6:1ff.). In this progression as well, the Parable of the Pounds provides a point of pivot.

Reading the Parable in Context

The lines of interpretation should by now be abundantly clear. Who is the nobleman who would be king, and who in fact gets βασιλεία, so that he cannot only exercise it, but share it with his faithful followers? Jesus, who will immediately be hailed as king, dispose of βασιλεία, grant entrance to the thief, and, as risen Lord, continue to exercise authority through his emissaries' words and deeds. Who are the fellow citizens who do not wish to have this man as their ruler, who protest it, and then, defeated, are slaughtered before the king? The leaders of the people who decried the proclamation of Jesus as King, who mocked him as such on the cross, who rejected his mission as prophet, who persecuted his Apostles and who, at last, found themselves "cut off from the people." Who are the servants whose use of possessions is rewarded by ἐξουσία within the dominion of this king? The Twelve, who have been schooled in service (22:28), and whose βασιλεία over the restored Israel is exercised and expressed in the ministry of word and table-service.⁷² When will all this occur? In the course of the story Luke is telling, beginning *immediately* with the messianic proclamation of Jesus in 19:38.

⁷¹ Cf. Prast, *Presbyter und Evangelium* 233–262.

⁷² Brown, *Apostasy* 64, connects the ἐξουσία of the parable to the βασιλεία of 22:29, but refers the first to the parousia.

Not everything fits exactly. One cannot push the “slaughtering,” for example, or suggest that the profitless servant who was rejected from leadership is Judas. Luke is not working with needlepoint obsessiveness. But the parable works admirably to illustrate and interpret the next section of Luke’s story. Indeed, it does nothing else so well. Reading the Parable of the Pounds in this fashion within the context of the Lukan story, we conclude that it does not deny but confirm the expectation of 19:11: Jesus *is* proclaimed as a King and does exercise rule through his apostles in the restored Israel. This is a “manifestation” of God’s Kingdom. And those who refuse it, are cut off. The parable and its introduction together serve the literary function of alerting the reader as to just what will follow. It is, preeminently, the Lukan kingship parable.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF SŌTĒRIA IN LUKE-ACTS AND PAUL

What do New Testament writers mean when they speak of salvation? My inability to answer so basic a question has bothered me more in recent years as I worked through two NT compositions (Luke-Acts and James) where salvation language figures prominently. It is easier to state the importance of the language than to define its significance.

The Question

Part of my discomfort—perhaps shared by my readers—derives from my increased awareness of the complexity of such a question and the difficulty of carrying out proper inquiry into it. Soteriologies are complex systems of meaning, which often show only a part of themselves publicly. Statements about salvation bear with them an implicit cosmology, anthropology, and eschatology, but it is not always easy to tease these implicit dimensions into visibility. And the accurate delineation of any soteriology is hampered by an assumption that the system as a whole is already understood even as we examine its parts.

The assumption is often wrong. My inherited Catholic Christianity, for example, leads me to assume that the NT's language about salvation concerns the future blessedness of the individual human soul in heaven. Using such a code, I can deal easily with passages such as James 1:21, which encourages its readers to accept with meekness the implanted word "which is able to save your souls." Likewise, I imagine that I understand what Luke means by those who seek to "save their souls" only to end up losing them (Luke 9:21). My assumptive soteriological code makes good (even if erroneous) sense of statements about individual persons in relation to God.

But I have a harder time supplying sense to Paul's statement, "Thus all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). Can Israel be saved the way souls are saved? What might that mean? Does this passage demand consideration, as many New Testament Theologies suppose, under the rubric of final

and universal salvation?¹ The adequacy of my assumed code is challenged. I must scramble for meaning the way Irenaeus was required to when Gnostics read Paul's language of "flesh and spirit" cosmologically rather than morally.²

Any attempt to deal seriously with NT soteriology first must pay close attention to the system implied by explicit statements, and second, must question the assumption that the code for understanding the system is already in possession. The third thing any such analysis must do is resist the impulse to harmonize the divergent witnesses precipitously.

Fresh impetus has recently been given to a reexamination of NT soteriology(ies) by the publication of N.T. Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God*.³ Wright surveys Jewish apocalyptic literature of the first century and concludes that "the hope of Israel" had nothing to do with a world-ending cataclysm but rather with a this-worldly restoration of God's people.⁴ On that basis, he further questions widespread assumptions about the NT's "Apocalyptic worldview." He suggests that there is little evidence either for a fervent expectation of the end of the world associated with the parousia, or for a great crisis created by the "delay of the parousia."⁵ Wright suggests that the NT writers also may well have viewed salvation as a restoration of God's people here on earth.⁶ It is not necessary to deny future or individual or spiritual dimensions of Christian hope, in order to reconsider, as Wright invites us, a this-worldly, socially defined understanding of salvation in early Christianity. It is a good hypothesis.⁷ How can it be tested?

¹ See, e.g., D.E.H. Whitely, *The Theology of St Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 273; E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955) 223; G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1974) 521; W.G. Kummel, *The Theology of the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) 238.

² Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I, 3; I, 8, 2–5; I, 20, 2.

³ As he explains in his preface (xiii–xix), this is the first of a projected five-volume study on "Christian Origins and the Question of God," Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress Press, 1992).

⁴ Wright, 300 and especially 334–338. On this point as on many others in his reconstruction of Judaism (whose main fault is its almost exclusive focus on the Palestinian variety), Wright credits his conversation with E.P. Sanders; see *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E.* (London: SCM Press, 1992) 278, 298.

⁵ Wright, 459–64.

⁶ Wright, 400 and 458.

⁷ And this is how Wright identifies his own effort, p. 464.

Comparative Method

One way to begin to test the hypothesis is through the careful comparison of two NT writers for whom salvation is a major theme. Comparison between bodies of literature is difficult to execute properly. But it is of considerable benefit. Comparison sharpens our perception of each writing, and enables the generation of more encompassing theories.⁸ If the examination of salvation language within two sets of NT writings for whom it is most centrally a concern should reveal—despite all the expected dissimilarities—a deep level of fundamental agreement, then a general theory concerning the early Christian conception of salvation is at least one step closer to being demonstrated. Such a comparison, of course, must move beyond the mere lining up of “parallels” to deal with dissimilarities as well as similarities, and the functions of each within the respective compositions.

Luke-Acts and Paul’s letters offer themselves as good candidates for comparison on the question of salvation. First, we are dealing with the most substantial bodies of literature in the NT attributable to individual authors. Second, the theme of salvation plays a distinctively important role in each author’s writings. In support of this last assertion, a few statistics: (a) the Gospel of Luke uses *σώζειν* 17 times (compare Matt 14, Mark 13, John 6), and Acts uses *σώζειν* 13 times; these 30 instances match the 28 uses of the verb by Paul (21 if the Pastorals are excluded). Apart from the Gospel passages already mentioned, *σώζειν* is used otherwise in the NT 11 times; in sum, Luke and Paul use the verb 58 of its 102 occurrences. (b) The noun *σωτηρία* is found 10 times in Luke-Acts and 17 times in Paul (15 outside the Pastorals), (c) The term *σωτήριον* is used in the NT only the three instances found in Luke-Acts (Luke 2:30; 3:6; Acts 28:28), and the one case of Eph 6:17. (d) The title *σωτήρ* appears four times in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23), and twelve times in Paul (but only twice—Phil 3:20 and Eph 5:23—if we exclude the ten instances in the Pastorals), (e) Finally, the adjective *σωτήριος* is found in the NT only in Titus 2:11. Third, these statistics show that compared to other NT writings, these authors are not only fond of salvation language, but that the various terms are proportionately distributed in each case. We are not in

⁸ See J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 46.

a position of trying to compare a minor theme in one author to a major theme in the other.

Such an even-handed approach has not always been the rule when comparisons have been made between Luke-Acts and Paul. More often, what has been called comparison has turned out to be a measuring of Luke-Acts against a Pauline standard to Luke-Acts' disadvantage. The approach is classically illustrated by Vielhauer's essay on "The Paulinism of Acts,"⁹ and is perpetuated by any number of studies that propose to compare the "image of Paul" in the undisputed letters and in Luke-Acts¹⁰ or that consider some theme thought to be "central" to Paul but regrettably deficient in Luke-Acts.¹¹

Because of the assumed connections between "Paul" and "Luke," and because "Paul" appears as a character in both sets of writings, it has proven extraordinarily difficult to disentangle a genuine comparison between the compositions from notions of dependence, derivation, development, and distortion.¹² But precisely such a dispassionate and even-handed comparison is what is desired if we are to make headway concerning the role of salvation language in each set of compositions. To make the point emphatically, I turn first to the writings of Luke before considering those of Paul.

Criteria for Comparison

For such a comparison to be adequate, several criteria need meeting. First, all of the relevant data should be included. Ideally, this would include all references to redemption and liberation (among others) as well as terms for "salvation." That ideal will certainly not be met in the present essay

⁹ In *Studies in Luke-Acts* ed. L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 33–50.

¹⁰ See, e.g., P.-G. Mueller, "Der 'Paulinismus' in der Apostelgeschichte: Ein Forschungsgeschichtlicher Überblick," *Paulus in den neutestamentlichen Spaetschriften* ed. K. Kertelge (Quaestiones Disputatae 89; Freiberg: Herder, 1981) 157–201, and K. Loening, "Paulinismus in der Apostelgeschichte," *ibid.*, 202–232.

¹¹ See, e.g., the discussion of "salvation" in S.G. Wilson's *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1979), which reads the evidence consistently to show that Luke and the Pastorals not only agree on major aspects of this theme but do so in consistent disagreement with Paul. Unfortunately, the argument is based on faulty method: see my review in *JBL* 101 (1982) 459–460.

¹² For a very recent example, see J.C. Beker, *Heirs of Paul: Paul's Legacy in the New Testament and in the Church Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). Despite the use of a "comparative method" (ch.3) and despite protestations of sympathy for the difficulties facing Paul's "adapters," Beker must conclude, "Therefore we can only consider Luke's adaptation of Paul an acute deformation and distortion of the historical Paul" (92).

which aims at suggestion rather than demonstration. On the other hand, it is important as well to isolate specific “language games” to see how they work on their own terms (if they do) before invoking language from another “game” to explicate them.¹³ Second, the literary character of the respective writings must be taken into account. Although Paul’s letters do not lack some narrative character,¹⁴ the implicit story undergirding his argument requires reconstruction. The analysis of salvation in Luke-Acts must take narrative structure much more directly into account.¹⁵ Third, the ways in which each writer appropriates earlier traditions has some significance for the analysis: Paul obviously makes use of creedal formulae and scriptural texts (Rom 9:10; 10:13),¹⁶ but in addition to citing scripture (Acts 2:21), Luke also takes over and modifies the salvation language already embedded in his Markan gospel source.

Finally, proper comparison demands a consistent set of questions that can appropriately put to both authors’ works. The full range of questions concerning salvation would include: who does the saving; what is salvation from; what aids or impedes salvation; how is salvation accomplished; when does salvation take place; what is the *telos* of salvation; where is salvation accomplished; and finally, *who* is saved? Neither Luke nor Paul fills out the survey completely. The questions they most fully and directly respond to are the ones most useful for comparison. Fortunately for the sake of this exercise, the compositions enable us to work toward some answer to our opening question: do these writers conceive of salvation primarily in terms of when, or where? Are they thinking mainly about the individual, or a social group?

The Social Character of Salvation in Luke-Acts

The most appropriate procedure would be to work through Luke-Acts in its narrative order, since that is clearly the way Luke himself wishes to

¹³ See the helpful discussion in E. Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul,” *SBL* 105 (1986) 274–275; also, J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 256–60, in conversation with G. Theissen, “Soterioiogische Symbolik in den paulinischen Schriften,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 20 (1974) 282–304.

¹⁴ See the seminal work by R.B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (SBLDS 56; Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1983).

¹⁵ See now W.S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

¹⁶ For intertextual connections in Romans 9–11, see R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 73–83.

make his argument.¹⁷ Although constraints of space demand here a more efficient approach, the literary unity of the two volumes and their narrative progression must be kept in mind.¹⁸

To assess the social dimension of salvation in Luke-Acts, I will deal with the verb *σώζειν*, which is primarily embedded in specific stories and pronouncements, and then the use of the substantives *σωτηρία* and *σωτήριον*, which more frequently occur in programmatic announcements.¹⁹ Narrative sequence is observed only by considering each volume's combined data in turn.

The Gospel

By far the hardest material to evaluate is that involving *σώζειν*. One difficulty is presented by the fact that Luke takes over some instances from Mark (6:9=Mark 3:4; 8:48–50=Mark 5:23–24; 9:24=Mark 8:35; 18:26=Mark 10:26; 18:42=Mark 10:52; 23:35–37=Mark 15:30–31), while also eliminating Mark's use of *σώζειν* in other passages (the healing summary of Mark 6:56 and the eschatological declarations in 13:13, 30), and lavishly increasing the use of the verb in still other places (Luke 7:50; 8:12; 8:36; 9:56; 13:23; 17:19; 19:10; 23:39). Luke's practice can usefully be contrasted to that of Matthew, who adds *σώζειν* to his Markan source twice (Matt 8:25; 14:30), and otherwise amplifies the language about salvation only by adding the programmatic statement in the infancy account, "for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). Another difficulty is that *σώζειν* is found frequently in healing stories, where the verb obviously bears the straightforward

¹⁷ See L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991) 1–24.

¹⁸ In *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1970), I.H. Marshall declared that "the central theme in the writings of Luke is that Jesus offers salvation to men," (116), and he devoted half his book (pp. 77–215) to developing that theme. Marshall did not yet have the advantage of the work done on the theme of "the people of God" in Luke-Acts by N. Dahl, "The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts," *Studies in Luke-Acts* ed. L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 139–158, or J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), and he failed to integrate the theme of salvation into that of the shaping of God's people. In this respect, R.F. O'Toole, *The Unity of Luke's Theology* (Good News Studies 9; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984), which also takes salvation as a central Lukan theme, is an advance. But far more attention is given to the playing out of the theme in narrative terms by R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); see esp. 1:15–44 and 1:103–139.

¹⁹ For the similar treatment of Lukan strands, see L.T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 39; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977) 127–159.

meaning of “being rescued/healed” from some specific physical or spiritual ailment, and *individuals* rather than groups are affected (see Luke 7:50; 8:36; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Conclusions about a thematic significance of σῶζειν or about any “social dimensions” of salvation must be derived from such passages by inference.

In fact, however, the passages do support some such inferences. We note first that Luke, taking the lead from his Markan source, makes the term of healing not only “salvation” from a physical sickness but a “restoration” to human society (see Luke 4:39; 5:14; 5:25; 6:9; 7:10; 8:39; 8:48–56; 14:4; 17:19). Indeed, Luke emphasizes this aspect of σῶζειν by having Jesus return the resuscitated son of Nain to his mother (7:15) and the pacified epileptic to his father (13:10–17). And although the language of “salvation” is not explicitly used, such also is the obvious point of Jesus’ three parables of the “lost and found” in 15:3–32, the last of which (15:11–32) restores lost son to father in illustration of Jesus’ mission to the outcast of Israel represented by “tax-collectors and sinners” (15:1–2). The coalescence of these ideas is suggested as well by the synonymous character of two declarations by Jesus. In 9:24, he states that “the Son of Man came not to destroy lives but to save (σῶζειν) them,” and in 19:10, he says that “the Son of Man came to search out (ζητῆσαι) and save (σῶζειν) that which was lost.”

That Luke signified something more than physical recovery by his healing stories is also indicated by his expansion of the theme of *faith* beyond trust shown toward Jesus the healer (see 7:50; 8:48–50; 17:19; 18:42), to the message of Good News proclaimed by this prophetic Messiah to the poor and outcast of the people (4:16–32; 6:20). Luke combines deeds of healing with “the good news proclaimed to the poor” (7:22–23), and matches the faith shown toward Jesus the healer with the “faith in order to be saved” that is directed to “the word of God” (8:12). As I stated in my recent commentary on Luke, “By combining physical healings with the proclamation of the good news, furthermore, Luke continues to make the point noted earlier, that the ministry of healing involves most of all the ‘healing’ or the ‘restoration’ of the people of God.”²⁰

The two previous observations are joined by the theoretical question, unique to Luke’s Gospel, posed to Jesus as he progresses on his journey to Jerusalem. Luke structures his journey in order to show how, as the prophet Jesus heads toward his death, he is already gathering a people

²⁰ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* 125.

around himself.²¹ The question is motivated, therefore, by the events taking place within the narrative itself: “Lord, are those who are being saved few in number?” (κύριε εἰ ὀλίγοι οἱ σωζόμενοι, 13:23). Notice the present progressive sense of the participle. Both the question and Jesus’ answer make most sense when “salvation” is understood precisely in terms of inclusion within God’s people. Included in the kingdom of God are Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and “all the prophets,” as well as those (we note) who will come from the east and west and north and south to recline in the kingdom of God. Excluded are those who do not enter by the narrow gate (Luke 13:24–30). It is surely not by accident that Luke has placed this question so close to the healing of the bent woman who is designated as a “daughter of Abraham” (13:10–17),²² As the ministry of healing is continuous with the prophetic proclamation of the good news to the poor, so is “saving” of the sick continuous with that “rescuing of the lost” that leads to the restoration of God’s people.

The story of Zacchaeus makes the point conclusively. It comes at the climax of Jesus’ progression toward Jerusalem. Zacchaeus is the paradigmatic “sinner and tax-collector” who when visited by the prophet responds to him in faith (as is shown by the disposition of his possessions).²³ Jesus’ declaration that “the Son of Man has come to search out and save (σῶζειν) that which was lost” (19:10) is here used to support Jesus’ pronouncement that “today salvation (σωτηρία) has come to this house, because he too is a child of Abraham” (19:9).

As the declaration concerning Zacchaeus shows, Luke’s language of σωτηρία/σωτήριον corresponds to that of σῶζειν. The statement that σωτηρία had “come” (or “happened”: ἐγένετο) to the house of Zacchaeus (19:9) is the first use of this substantive since the *Benedictus*, where it occurs three times: Zechariah says that God has “raised up a horn of salvation (σωτηρία) for us (ἡμῖν)” in 1:69; that this is understood as a salvation (σωτηρία) from “our enemies” is stated in 1:71; and that the prophet John would give “knowledge of salvation” (σωτηρία) to his people (τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ) in 1:77. These statements join that in 19:9 concerning Zacchaeus to frame Luke’s use of σῶζειν, and move in the same direction. Who saves? God. Through

²¹ See Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* 163–165; and, with a different emphasis, D.P. Moesner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

²² See M. Dennis Hamm, *This Sign of Healing, Acts 3:1–10: A Study in Lucan Theology* (Ph.D. Dissertation, St. Louis University, 1975) 64–73.

²³ For discussion, see D. Hamm, “Luke 19:8 Once More: Does Zaccheus Defend or Resolve?” *JBL* 107 (1988) 431–437; and Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* 283–288.

what agency? The visitation of God's prophets. Who is saved? The people Israel. What is the sign of salvation? Negatively, freedom from enemies and freedom from sin (1:75, 77); positively, the freedom to worship God in holiness and righteousness (1:74–75). Salvation “means,” then, leading a life before God as a member of God's people.

Mary's designation of God as “my savior” (σωτήρ) obviously conforms to this understanding, for the entire structure of the *Magnificat* demonstrates how the “raising up” of this lowly servant is emblematic of the “raising up” of the people Israel (1:46–55),²⁴ in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. The angelic announcement of Jesus as a “savior born for you who is Lord Messiah” (2:11) fits in the same framework, as does Simeon's declaration upon receiving the child Jesus that “my eyes have seen your salvation” (σωτήριον, 2:30), which he then elaborates as a “glory of your people Israel” as well as a “light of revelation to the Gentiles” (2:32), a prophetic note of universality sounded also by Luke's inclusion of Isa 40:5 in the citation of 3:6, “and all flesh will see the salvation (σωτήριον) of God.”

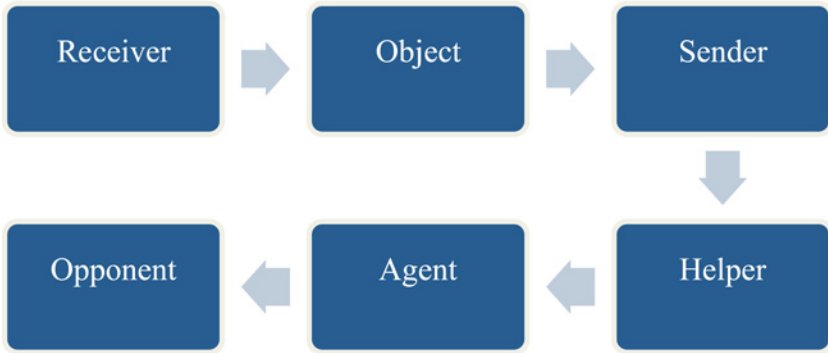
In the gospel section of his narrative, then, Luke uses salvation language with reference to the restoration of God's people in response to prophetic visitation. This conclusion is supported negatively by the fact that Luke does *not* use salvation language in other contexts where it might have been expected. Luke avoids using salvation for the resting of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, for example (16:32), or for the reception of the good thief into paradise (23:42–43)—an omission the more striking for failing to match the set-up provided by 23:39, “Save yourself, and us.” Finally, Luke does not use salvation language with reference to the disciples' future experience of the parousia. I have noted already his omission of σφζειν as found in Mark's eschatological discourse (Mark 13:13, 20). In speaking of the parousia in 17:33, Luke uses the language of “losing and gaining” one's life, rather than the language of “losing and saving” (in contrast to 9:24). And in 21:28, those who persevere to the end will find their ἀπολύτρωσις to be near at hand, rather than their σωτηρία.

In his efforts to describe the normative story that shapes the worldview of Judaism and early Christianity, Wright makes judicious use of the “actantial model” of narrative analysis associated with A.J. Greimas.²⁵ Since I have entered into conversation with Wright, it may be helpful to display my findings concerning Luke's salvation-language in the gospel in

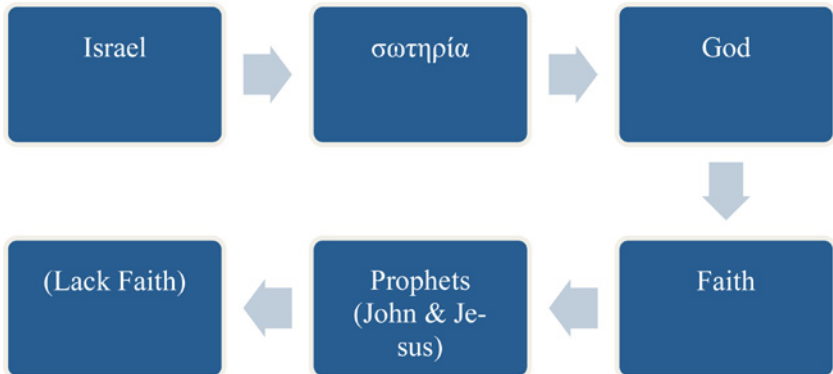
²⁴ Johnson, *Gospel of Luke* 45–44.

²⁵ Wright, 69–77; it has also been used effectively by Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ* 92–125.

the form of the model he himself has adopted from Greimas. The basic model looks like this:



Like Wright, I find the model useful most of all for the way it enables complex data to be organized. My findings with respect to salvation language in the Gospel of Luke fit perfectly into this model:



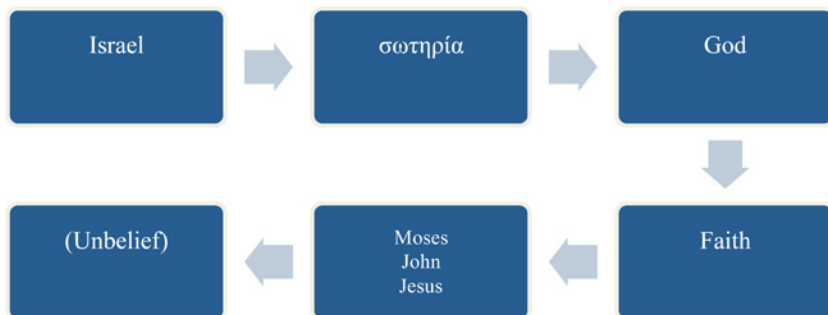
To spell this out: God sent salvation to his people Israel through the agency of his prophets John and Jesus. It could be received by faith and (by implication) impeded by lack of faith. What the model does *not* make clear is that “salvation” has meant precisely to *be* part of this people by faith.

Acts

This discussion of salvation language in Acts will bracket from the start the two cases of σώζειν in 27:20 and 27:31 as well as the declaration, “this will turn out for your salvation (σωτηρία)” in 27:34. In the context of Paul’s sea voyage and shipwreck, these terms bear the obvious meaning of “rescue and survival.” It is possible that they might be read for deeper narrative significance, but they need not be.²⁶

Otherwise, the salvation language in Acts develops the theme established by Luke’s gospel. Indeed, two of Luke’s programmatic statements flesh out the actantial model sketched above. In his recital of Israelite history, Luke has Stephen declare that in Moses’ first visitation of the people, God wanted “to give salvation (σωτηρία) to them through his hand” (Acts 7:25). And in Paul’s proclamation in the Synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, he states that of David’s seed “according to the promise, he sent Jesus as a savior (σωτήρ) to Israel” (13:23), and concludes to his Jewish audience, “to us the message of this salvation (λόγος τῆς σωτηρίας ταύτης) has been sent (ἐξαπεστάλη)” (13:26). This is the point also of Peter’s declaration in 5:31 to the council that “God has raised to his right hand this one as pioneer and savior (σωτήρ) in order to give repentance (μετάνοιαν) and forgiveness of sins to Israel (τῷ Ἰσραήλ).”

On the basis of these texts, the model now looks like this:



²⁶ See L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992) 456–459.

The receiver of salvation, in other words, remains Israel. This social understanding is entirely consistent with Luke's use of *σώζειν* in the first part of Acts. In Peter's Pentecost speech, after announcing on the basis of Joel 3:5 that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (2:21), Peter says in response to those who ask him, "what shall we do?" to "be saved [or: save yourselves, *σώθητε*] from this twisted generation" (2:40). Salvation appears here *precisely* as the formation of a remnant people out of the larger faithless population, which, by being baptized and repenting, receives the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38), which Luke has Peter interpret as the "promise to you and to your children" (2:39).²⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, to see those who join this people being referred to as "those being saved" (*οἱ σωζόμενοι*). In context, the term means virtually the same thing as "being in community" (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*, 2:47) and "those who were believing" (*οἱ πιστεύσαντες* 2:44).

As the healing of the bent woman in Luke 13:10–17 and as the reception of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10 symbolized the restoration of Israel, so does the healing of the lame man at the gate in Acts 3:1–10, as has been shown so well by Dennis Hamm.²⁸ Peter makes this clear in his speech to the council following the healing, when he declares the man to have been "saved" (4:9), and connects his healing/salvation to the restoration of Israel through the prophet Jesus: "this is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become a cornerstone, and there is not in any other the salvation (*σωτηρία*), for neither is another name given among humans under heaven in which we must be saved (*δεῖ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς*, 4:12). It is, furthermore, undoubtedly this symbolic function of the healing that helps account for the awkward inclusion of "faith" as the other active agent of healing in 3:16.²⁹

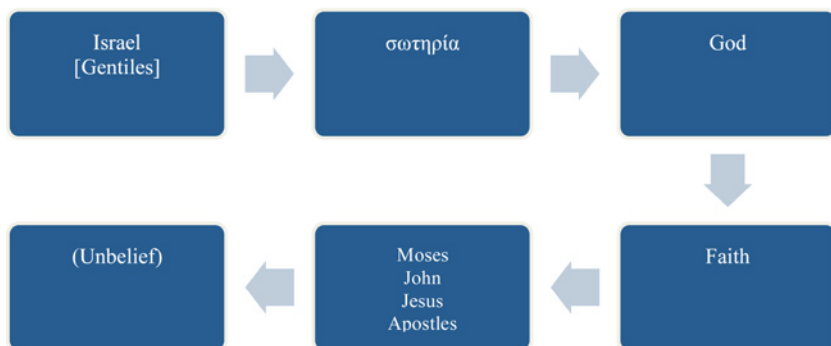
As the proclamation of the word moves into the Gentile world, Luke continues to use salvation language in precisely the same social sense. Cornelius is told by the angel to send for Peter, who will "speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (11:15). In still a third symbolic healing, the lame man of Lystra is perceived by Paul to possess "such faith as to be saved" (14:9). This healing by faith symbolizes

²⁷ For the language of "remnant" for believing Jews in Luke-Acts, see also D.P. Moesner, "Paul in Acts: Preacher of Eschatological Repentance to Israel," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988) 102.

²⁸ D. Hamm, "Acts 3:1–10: The Healing of the Temple Beggar as Lukan Theology," *Biblica* 67 (1988) 305–319.

²⁹ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* 68.

the spread of the movement among Gentiles through the ministry of Paul, in fulfillment of the programmatic prophecy announced by him at the end of his synagogue speech at Antioch of Pisidia: “I have made you a light to the nations, so that you will be for salvation (σωτηρία) to the end of the earth” (Acts 13:47; see Isa 49:6). The narrative model for Luke’s story of salvation can therefore be expanded still further, both with reference to the “receivers” of salvation and with reference to the “agent”:



Although the receiver is expanded and the agents multiplied, it remains the same story: God sends salvation to his people through his prophets, and salvation means precisely to be part of that people.

That Luke continues to work with such a fundamentally social understanding of salvation is shown above all by the conflict at Antioch and the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Those telling the Gentile believers “you cannot be saved unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses” (15:1) are not stating something about a future life with God but something about status within the restored people of God. For them, to be a part of this people demands the practice of the customary circumcision. The same logic attends the statement of the Pharisaic party that the Law of Moses must be kept (15:5). But Peter responds by recounting his experience of God’s work among the Gentiles, concluding that “through the gift that is the Lord Jesus, we are believing in order to be saved, in the same way that they are” (15:11).³⁰ He asserts that membership in the people is exactly the same for both Jews and Gentiles. Thus also James speaks of the Gentile mission in terms of the “raising up of the fallen tent

³⁰ For this translation, see Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles* 263.

of David" (15:16) by which God "has made visitation to take from the Gentiles a people for his name" (15:14).³¹

This decision once made, the message moves even more rapidly into the gentile world through the work of Paul. The Pythian spirit in Philippi announces to the crowd that "these people are announcing to you (ὑμῖν) a way of salvation (σωτηρία, 16:17). When the frightened jailor in that city asks "what must I do in order to be saved" (16:30), Paul's response is in terms of faith and of the group: "believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household" (16:31). The upshot is that his entire household is baptized (16:34). The extension of the people of God among Gentiles is solemnly enunciated at the end of Acts. Corresponding to Paul's statement in 13:26 that "to us was sent (ἐξαπεστάλη) the message of this salvation" is his final prophecy in 28:28, "to the Gentiles this salvation (σωτήριον) has been sent (ἀπεστάλη). And they will listen."

Luke's use of salvation language is utterly consistent. It has to do with God's restoration on earth of a people drawn from the Jews and Gentiles alike, a people that responds in faith to the prophetic proclamation of good news. Salvation for Luke involves healing and rescue, but its term is present and social rather than future and individual. Salvation means belonging to a certain community, with faith signifying in behavioral terms the commitment that makes such inclusion actual.

The Social Dimension of Salvation in Paul's Letters

The problems of method here are different if no less complex. First, the distribution of salvation language is uneven across the letters. It is missing entirely in Colossians, Philemon and (surprisingly) Galatians. At the other extreme, Romans uses σώζειν 8 times and σωτηρία 5 times. 1 Cor uses σώζειν 8 times but σωτηρία not at all. 2 Cor uses σώζειν once and σωτηρία 3 times. 1 Thess uses σώζειν once and σωτηρία twice; 2 Thess uses σώζειν once and σωτηρία once. Philippians does not use σώζειν but has σωτηρία three times and σωτήρ once. Ephesians has σώζειν twice, σωτηρία once, σωτήριον once and σωτήρ once. The obvious conclusion is that the language is not equally central to every letter, and is configured somewhat differently wherever it occurs. A second problem is what to do with the Pastorals. On one hand, their use of salvation language is extravagant, including σώζειν (1 Tim

³¹ See N.A. Dahl, " 'A People for His Name' (Acts 15:14)," *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-58) 319-327.

1:15; 2:4; 2:15; 4:16; 2 Tim 1:9; 4:18; Tit 3:5), σωτηρία (2 Tim 2:10; 3:15), σωτήρ (1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Tim 1:11; Tit 1:3; 1:4; 2:10; 2:13; 3:4; 3:6), and σωτήριος (Tit 2:11). On the other hand, the data from the Pastorals is so complex and the questioning of their authorship so widespread that including them in this discussion could prove both distending and distracting.³²

It is sensible method, therefore, to begin with Romans, where the language is most attested and plays the most central thematic role; then compare the other undisputed letters with Romans for consistency; then bracket the data from the Pastorals for another occasion.³³

Romans

Read on its own terms, Paul's salvation language in Romans also appears to tell a story of how God was revealing through the good news about Jesus a "power for salvation (εις σωτηριαν) to all who believe, Jews first and Gentiles" (1:16). As we all now recognize, that is the "thesis" of Paul's diatribal argument.³⁴ But it is also the "story-line" in whose plot Paul conceives his mission to be playing a critical role. God's plan for salvation, according to Paul's argument, is not directed first of all at scattered individuals but at

³² I adopt this procedure with some regret and only for efficiency; the more the Pastorals are systematically excluded from such analyses, the more stereotypical views of them can prevail. For my own position concerning authenticity, see L.T. Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986) 255–257, 381–389.

³³ Although it must exist somewhere, my limited research has yet to uncover a study that proceeds this way. More often, the subject of "salvation" is treated without specific attention to the language of σωτηρία; J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, for example, pays close attention to the communal concerns of Paul (309), and in particular to the connection of Church to Israel (316), but without reference to σωτηρία; E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1977) similarly has several of the pieces but treats them separately; likewise, L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul* (NY: Herder and Herder, 1959). But at least these are aware of the social dimension. More often, salvation in Paul is treated almost entirely in terms of its temporal dimension and in terms of the individual's destiny: The comment by W. Foerster is classic: "In Paul σῶζω and σωτηρία are obviously limited quite intentionally to the relation between man and God," in *Sōzō*, ktl. *TDNT* 7:992. See also J. Bonsirven, *Theology of the New Testament* (Westminster: Newman, 1963) 271–272; E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955) 223; W.G. Kummel, *The Theology of the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) 145–50, 186, 238. R. Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) simply equates salvation with righteousness (1:271), and pays no attention to σωτηρία as social; not surprisingly, Bultmann has no discussion at all of Rom 9–11! The best treatment of σωτηρία in social terms that I have yet found is F. Amiot, *The Key Concepts of St. Paul* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962), esp. 148, 173.

³⁴ J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Word Biblical Commentary 38; Dallas: Word Books, 1988) 37–49.

social groups, at peoples. This becomes clear in the midrashic argument of chapters 9–11, where the bulk of Romans’ salvation language is located.

The first suggestion that σωτηρία is communal is found in Paul’s citation of Isa 10:22, which states that “the remnant will be saved” (τὸ ὑπόλειμμα σωθήσεται, 9:27). Paul then declares that his prayer is for “them” (αὐτῶν)—meaning his fellow Jews—“for salvation” (εἰς σωτηρίαν, 10:1). In context, this clearly means that his fellow Jews are not presently part of the remnant people constituted by faith, since their acknowledged zeal for God is not accompanied by “recognition” (10:2).

The tight cluster of statements in 10:9–13 serves to clarify what “recognition” Paul sees as necessary for “salvation,” that is, inclusion in the remnant people of God. The confessional language of 10:9–10 deserves especially close attention. How does a person become part of the remnant people? First, there is the verbal profession that “Jesus is Lord” (10:9a). This, says Paul, is εἰς σωτηρίαν (10:10b). He means it has the effect of “recognizing” the claim of the messianic community concerning Jesus (see 1 Cor 12:1–3). This recognition signifies membership in the messianic community. But the verbal profession must be accompanied by “believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead” (10:9b). Such faith establishes one as “sharing the faith of Abraham” (4:16–25) εἰς δικαιοσύνην (unto righteousness, 10:10a) and therefore as part of that “remnant chosen by grace in the present time” (11:5). Consequently it issues in, “you will be saved” (10:9b). The faith from the heart defines the right relationship with God, but the confession with the mouth defines entrance into the “salvation people” (10:10).³⁵ That Paul is thinking of salvation in terms of membership in the remnant people is shown further by his iteration of the principle of God’s impartiality (10:12) and citation from Joel 3:5, “For everyone who should call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (10:13; compare Acts 2:21). This reading makes good sense of the next three statements involving salvation. In 11:11, Paul asserts that Israel did not stumble so as utterly to fall. God has not rejected his λαός (11:1). Rather, their “false step” (παράπτωμα) has meant σωτηρία τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. This can only make sense in the historical context of the early Christian mission, including that of Paul, which

³⁵ It is striking to find a consistent tradition of interpretation that simply equates δικαιοσύνη and σωτηρία in 10:10, clearly because the social implication of verbal profession have not been thought through: see e.g. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* I: 271; H. Conzelmann, *Grundriss der Theologie des Neuen Testament* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967) 224; L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 2:136.

progressed to the Gentiles largely because of Jewish rejection. Acceptance by the Gentiles of the Good News in “the present season” means “salvation for them,” that is, their inclusion in God’s ὑπόλειμμα. Paul also adverts to the deeper game God is playing. The Gentiles are included to παραζηλώσαι αὐτούς, that is, stimulate his fellow-Jews to emulation (11:11). Such, indeed, was the motivation for Paul’s own work among the Gentiles: he “magnifies his ministry” so that παραζηλώσω μου τὴν σάρκα (“cause my kinspeople to emulate”) which he spells out “and I might save some from among them” (καὶ σώσω τινὰς ἐξ αὐτῶν, 11:14).

In these passages, salvation cannot mean anything other than inclusion of the Jews in the restored Israel according to the promise by faith. That Paul expected his mission to have just that effect is expressed in 11:25–26: “Blindness has come upon a part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles come in, and thus all Israel will be saved” (καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται).

Paul’s thesis statement in 1:16 and his elaboration of it in chs 9–11 support the suggestion that σωτηρία means inclusion in God’s restored λαός (see Rom 9:25, 26; 10:21; 11:1, 2; 15:10–11). It should be emphasized that Paul has *not* used salvation with reference to the individual person’s spiritual dilemma or as opposed by life according to the flesh or sold under sin. Nor has it been used for an individual’s future life before or with God.

This reading enables us to understand 13:11 in the same context of Paul’s ministry. The community is encouraged to pay special attention to the commandment of love, “since you also know the season, that the hour [is here] for you already to rise from sleep, for now (νῦν) our salvation (σωτηρία) is closer than when we came to believe.” In the context of the argument from 9–11, the σωτηρία Paul has in mind is the inclusion of Jews as well as Gentiles in the people rescued from the ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ. The Gentiles need particularly in “this season” to show that love which is the “fulfillment of the other law” by being its summary (13:8), and by thus demonstrating the “righteous demand of the law” (8:4), cause the Jews to emulate them and turn to Jesus as the τέλος γὰρ νόμου (10:4).

The three remaining texts in Romans might be thought to challenge this “horizontal” reading of salvation. In 5:9–10, Paul celebrates the restored relationship between God and humans (5:1) enabled by “this gift in which we stand” (5:2) by declaring: “How much more therefore, now having been put in right relationship by his blood, shall we be saved through him from the wrath. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, how much more, once reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” We notice at once that the contrast in these sentences

establishes a rhetorical rather than a real temporal sequence. The contrast posits “salvation” as a condition distinguishable from “righteousness,” as in 10:9–10. But no more than there should salvation be read here as an entirely future reality: first, the ὀργή is not only future in Romans (2:5, 8); it is also past and present as well (1:18; 3:5; 4:15; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4–5). Second, there is no question that, for Paul, the gift of Jesus’ “life” (ζωή) is already shared by those who “live by faith” (1:17; see 5:17–18; 6:4; 8:2, 10). In these statements, therefore, σωτηρίας is not only clearly communal (referring to all those who “now have peace with God”, 5:1), but is at the very least also incipient in those who, justified and reconciled, now live by the Spirit of Jesus. The same temporal tension is expressed by 8:23–24: “ourselves having the first-fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we await the ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν; for we have been saved (ἐσώθημεν) in hope.” Here, salvation is grammatically past and the redemption of the body (by resurrection?) is future. But as the plurals suggest, the experience of being in the restored people (“salvation”) is proleptic of the future and full realization of redemption/reconciliation by God.

In Romans, therefore, salvation has to do with inclusion within God’s remnant people. Negatively, it denotes rescue from the ὀργή that is God’s judgment on sinful humanity. Positively, it signifies right relationship and reconciliation with God through recognition of the gift given by the faith of Jesus expressed in his sacrificial death (3:21–26).³⁶ Apart from 10:9–10, 13, which define the terms of inclusion in this people, salvation language in Romans is entirely social in character. It would not distort the “story-line” of Romans, I think, to display it this way:



³⁶ On this, see L.T. Johnson, “Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982) 77–90.

The major difference from the “story-line” of Luke-Acts involves the major role played by the ὁργή τοῦ θεοῦ in Romans, and the dialectical character of Jewish/Gentile roles in God’s plan, only a portion of which appears in Acts.

Corinthian Correspondence

Paul’s use of salvation language in 1 Corinthians is almost entirely consistent with that in Romans. The Corinthians are “being saved” (notice the plural present progressive, σῳζέσθε) through the Gospel preached by Paul (15:2); the message of the cross is said to be δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ for those who “are being saved” (τοῖς δὲ σῳζομένοις, 1:18), and through its foolishness, God has been pleased to “save those who are believing” (σῳσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας, 1:21). That these statements fit within Paul’s Roman understanding of “joining the remnant community” is shown further by the marked resemblance to Rom 11:14 in Paul’s declaration that he becomes all things to all people ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σῳσω (9:22), as well as his assertion in 10:33 that he seeks the good of the many ἵνα σωθῶσιν.

Such a “social” understanding of salvation gives an edge to Paul’s cautionary comment to husbands and wives of unbelievers. He asks each in turn, “how do you know that you will save your husband/wife” (7:16)? In context, this surely does not mean, “How do you know you will influence them for eternal life,” but rather, “How do you know whether you can draw them into the community/remnant people?”

Two of the statements in 1 Corinthians seem not to fit this framework. In his discussion of the work of himself and Apollos, Paul says that “the day” will make clear how builders of the house have done their work, “for it is revealed in fire.” The one whose house is burnt up will “suffer loss but himself be saved (σωθήσεται), but thus, as though through fire” (3:12). Here the future judgment of the individual seems to be the clear focus for salvation language. And with reference to the sexually deviant member of the church in 1 Cor 5:1–5, Paul expresses the desire that the ἄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός (destruction of “his” flesh, or destruction of his “fleshly lusts?”) will have an effect: “ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα (his spirit? the spirit operative in the community?) σωθῆ on the day of the Lord.” Once more, future judgment is in view for the individual person. But even in these two texts, we notice, the fate of the individual is very much related to that social reality that is the community (the “house”/the “gathering”).

Turning to 2 Corinthians, the use of τοῖς σωζομένοις in 2:15 has exactly the same valence as in 1 Cor 1:18. In 2 Cor 6:2, the citation of Isaiah 49:2, “In an acceptable season I heard you, on a day of salvation I have helped you,” is applied by Paul to the community’s present circumstances: “Behold, now is the acceptable season; behold, now is the day of salvation,” and used as part of the presentation of his ministry as one that “avoids giving offense” (6:3); the combination reminds us of Rom 13:11–14. The precise meaning of 2 Cor 1:6 is harder to pin down: “If we are afflicted it is for your encouragement and σωτηρία,” as is that of 7:10: “sorrow according to God works repentance without regret εἰς σωτηρίαν, but the sorrow of the world works death.” There is no doubt, however, that the context in both cases is social rather than individual, present rather than future.

Thessalonian Correspondence

If 1 Thess 2:16 is not an interpolation—as I believe it is not—then the statement concerning the Jews who “are preventing us from speaking to the Gentiles ἵνα σωθῶσιν” corresponds exactly with the missionary language employed by Paul in Rom 11:11–14. Likewise, the two statements in 5:8–9 make sense precisely when understood in application to life in the present time within the messianic remnant community: “But let us who are of the day be alert, having put on the breastplate of faith and love and the hope of salvation as a helmet. Because (ὅτι) God has not destined us for wrath (ὀργήν) but for the possession of salvation (σωτηρία) through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When 2 Thess 2:10 characterizes those who “are being destroyed” (τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις, compare 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15) as those who by deception “do not accept the truth εἰς τὸ σωθῆναι αὐτοῦς,” the salvation language functions straightforwardly to designate those who belong to the community and those who do not.³⁷ This can be seen even more clearly when placed next to the sequel in 2:13; they are to thank God, “because God chose you to be the first fruits unto salvation (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς εἰς σωτηρίαν) in holiness of Spirit and fidelity to truth.” Note in passing that “first fruits unto salvation” echoes the language of Rom 11:16 concerning the remnant people.

³⁷ For salvation language used in defining insiders and outsiders, see Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul,” 276–277.

Captivity Correspondence

The usage in Philippians is more mixed. In 1:27–28, the language of salvation suggests just the sort of insider/outsider distinction found in the Corinthian and Thessalonian correspondence. The Philippians' living according to the good news and not being intimidated by "those who are opposing" is "proof of your salvation" (σωτηρία) as it is also for those opposing "proof of their destruction" (ἐνδειξις ἀπωλείας; compare 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; 2 Thess 2:10). Likewise, Paul's instruction in 2:12 to "work out your own salvation (τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν) in fear and trembling," when addressed to all "my beloved," suggests that they live out their community identity according to the "mind of Christ" in mutual service (Phil 2:1–12a). In contrast, the expectation from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ as σωτήρ, while communal, is certainly oriented to the future. And in 1:19, Paul's assertion that Christ's being preached in whatever circumstances "will turn out to me εἰς σωτηρίαν" has his individual future as its obvious point of reference, especially since this is what is developed by the verses following in 1:20–26.

The salvation language in Ephesians is virtually identical to Romans, no surprise in light of the overall resemblance between these letters.³⁸ In 2:5 and 2:8, the statements χάριτι ἐστε σεσωσμένοι and τῇ γὰρ χάριτι ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως refer precisely to the inclusion of the Gentiles with the Jews in the one people being shaped by God. Likewise in the opening blessing, the εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας (1:13) is mentioned with reference to the Gentiles (καὶ ὑμεῖς) who by faith have become heirs of the promise. In contrast to Philippians, Ephesians' designation of Jesus as σωτήρ fits within this present and social context: he is "head of the church, himself σωτήρ of the body" (5:23). Finally, the exhortation to "accept the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" is addressed to the community and has the same sense of 1 Thess 5:8, namely, to live out their identity as God's remnant people even in the face of spiritual opposition.

Such is the evidence in Paul's letters, absent the complicating data from the Pastorals. We have found that Paul's most deliberate use of salvation language is in Romans, and that with some few exceptions, his usage elsewhere fits comfortably within its framework. Salvation language is used more consistently of present circumstances rather than future. It almost

³⁸ See A. Van Roon, *The Authenticity of Ephesians* (NovTSupp 39; Leiden: Brill, 1974).

entirely has a social rather than an individual application. It seems to mean primarily belonging to a remnant people chosen in the present time by God (by grace and through faith), a people which itself escapes the wrath that is God's judgment turned even now toward the world of sinful humanity, and yet also lives in hope of a future in which the remnant will be filled out (Rom 11:12) by Paul's fellow Jews, whose joining of the remnant people, Paul thinks, will mean "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26) and as well, "the resurrection of the dead" (Rom 11:15).

Conclusions

This essay began as an effort to test Wright's hypothesis concerning the conception of salvation in early Christianity by carrying out a careful comparison of salvation language in two NT writers. The sketchy comparison of Luke-Acts and Paul's Letters suggest the following conclusions:

1. The use of σωτηρία/σώζειν language in both writers serves to identify present social realities more than the future destiny of individuals.
2. Both writers share the same basic story and world-view: salvation means belonging to the remnant people God is creating out of Jews and Gentiles in the present season. For Luke and Paul, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* would not only be true but tautologous.
3. Comparison on the basis of this deliberately limited set of data tends to support the view that at least these two important NT writers shared the overall story and world-view that Wright has described as that of Jewish apocalyptic. Yet by defining the remnant people in terms of grace and faith and spiritual transformation, that story was given a decisive turn and that world-view a definitive new shaping.³⁹
4. If doing comparisons adequately is so arduous, it is no wonder that it is also done so rarely.

³⁹ In this respect, Wright's consideration of the ways in which the messianists reshaped Jewish symbols in light of the experience of Jesus (pp. 365–70), and redefined hope in light of the continuing presence of Jesus (pp. 459–464), is a more adequate account than Bultmann's flat, "what for the Jews is a *matter of hope* is for Paul a *present reality*—or better is also a present reality," *Theology of the New Testament* 1:279 (underscoring original).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LITERARY CRITICISM OF LUKE-ACTS

I agree with C. Kavin Rowe that the history of reception is important.¹ Indeed, I am willing to argue that biblical scholars in the future will probably find the examination of the world that the New Testament creates more fruitful than the study of the world that created the New Testament. But in his attempt to use the evidence of the late second century (mainly Irenaeus and the Muratorian Canon) to warn against drawing historical conclusions from the reading of Luke-Acts as a literary unity, Rowe may fall into the same error against which he warns.

The fact that there is no evidence that Luke-Acts was received or read as a literary unity in late second-century compositions does not answer the question of how the first readers might have read and understood Luke's writing.

In the first place, one could find little evidence that any New Testament writings were read in the late second century—or for much of the patristic period—as “literary compositions”. It is well known that patristic writers seldom advert to the distinctive literary characteristics of a Gospel or Epistle. That Luke-Acts was not read in the late second century as a literary unity is no more surprising than that no other New Testament writing was read that way.

In the second place, the second-century writers to whom Rowe refers were already approaching the New Testament compositions precisely as parts of a New Testament, that is, as a collection of writings that were to be read in the church, in distinction from other writings that were not to be read in church. They were, furthermore, making arguments or statements precisely about matters of inclusion and exclusion for a church considered as universal rather than simply local. In contrast, no original hearers of Paul's letters or of the Gospels could possibly have heard them as part of a collection. And even if we assert a wider audience for the Gospels than a single community, we must admit that the first hearers of Luke-Acts (or, if one insists, of Luke and Acts) would have heard the

¹ C.K. Rowe, “History, Hermeneutics and the Unity of Luke-Acts,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (2005): 131–157.

composition, not as part of a scriptural collection written in the past, but as a single, discrete, literary composition addressed to them—and possibly others—in the present.

In short, there is a gap between the authors cited by Rowe and the first readers of Luke-Acts, a gap not only of time, but also of circumstance and therefore of perspective. It is this gap that traditional historical-critical exegesis has tried to fill. Since we cannot supply the first readers of New Testament compositions, we try as best we can to imagine how they might have read. Literary criticism is very much like historical exegesis in this respect. Literary critics though, at least of the sort I try to be, think that historical critics pay too little attention to the rhetoric of the compositions and too much attention to the putative reconstruction of their historical situation—often at the expense of compositional integrity.

Literary critics seek to redress that imbalance by focusing on the composition's own rhetorical intentionality, but they do not thereby abandon historical imagination. To put it simply, the way the composition itself is put together suggests readers with certain characteristics and capabilities. Analysis of the composition's rhetorical or narrative logic also reveals not only the writing's argument but also something about the direction in which that argument wishes to turn its intended readers. A delicate sensibility is required in such reading. As I argued over 25 years ago, it is certainly wrong-headed to construct a 'Lukan Community' from the narrative of Luke-Acts.² But this does not mean that some historical judgments cannot be made about the readers. Scholars can, for example, argue over, the ethnic identity of author and readers, for the composition allows distinct conclusions to be reached. The composition does not allow the conclusion, however, that the readers were not intended to be intensely and existentially interested in the destiny of Jews and Gentiles in the unfolding of God's plan. To reach such a conclusion would mean to go against the composition's internal logic and to indict the author as rhetorically incompetent.

The same desire for balance accounts for the way literary critics speak of "intended readers", or "ideal readers", or "imagined readers". They do not want to make historical claims about actual readers. But they want to respect the nature of writing as communication, and point to the kinds of characteristics and competencies required to make full sense of the

² Johnson, "On Finding the Lukan Community: A Cautious Cautionary Essay," in P. Achtemeier (ed.), 1979 *SBL Seminar Papers* (Missoula: Scholars Press): 87–100.

author's work. Such language points to the nature of the composition more than it does to the situation of the readers. And it is in this chastened and modest sense that I employed the phrase "Luke's readers recognize", in my commentary on Acts (476) cited by Rowe.

Rowe also tries to get some historical leverage from the prologue to Acts: the second volume may have been composed at a time substantially later than Luke and therefore could not have been read as 'one work' even by its earliest readers. But the leverage is simply not there. Nothing in the second prologue suggests the passage of time between the composition of the two volumes. Indeed, the very briefness of the prologue to Acts suggests the opposite, namely that the author could assume substantial knowledge of what the first volume contains.

On this point Rowe has some good-natured fun with my own two-volume commentary on Luke-Acts, noting that it was published separately and shelved in two different sections of the Duke Divinity library, even though I explicitly communicated to my readers that I wanted the volumes to be read together. Let me grant the point and push it further. I have no doubt that my books are used in a variety of ways. Some readers look in them for cross-references, others for a bit of historical data or lexical information, others for my opinion of a single verse or passage. Some readers of one volume may in fact be unaware that I have written the other volume.

But if we are to ask about the "intended" readers or "ideal" readers of my commentary, the ones who are most competent to follow my argument concerning Luke-Acts as a whole, and therefore best understand what I wanted to communicate in my commentary, we would have to think of those readers who have, despite the vagaries of book cataloguing, read them as one. No one would suggest, furthermore, that those who read one without reference to the other are reading "Johnson's commentary" in a superior fashion, even if we were to show statistically that nearly all of my readers did read that way. I can state, finally, that although the commentary volumes were published in 1991 and 1992, both volumes could have been read together in sequence by my first "ideal reader", who was Daniel Harrington, SJ, the editor of the *Sacra Pagina* commentary series.

I make two final points quickly. (1) As I think Rowe recognizes, I regard the literary-critical reading of Luke-Acts as a unity to be a genuine reading choice. By no means do I think it has exclusive value. It is perfectly legitimate to read Acts together with Paul's letters, and Luke together with the other Gospels. It is appropriate to read the Gospel as a source for historical knowledge about Jesus, and Acts as a source for historical

knowledge about early Christianity. It is also appropriate to employ the various reading perspectives offered by source history, tradition history, form criticism and redaction criticism. But I do claim that the sort of literary-critical reading I have done of Luke's entire narrative is best for one purpose, namely understanding his literary and theological voice. (2) As important as reception history is, it cannot be prescriptive for all interpretation. Would Rowe seriously propose that the reading of Romans by Origen, Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine should preclude the efforts to hear Romans fresh—within the frame of first-century social realities and rhetoric—by readers such as Stendahl, Sanders and Stowers? Surely not. I hope he would agree that all of these ways of reading ought to be part of a vigorous and wide-ranging conversation about the meaning of the texts.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NARRATIVE CRITICISM AND TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF THE NRSV

As anyone who has tried it can attest, translation is a difficult, even a perilous art. Because of its central role in the worship and teaching of faith communities, the translation of the Bible is even more daunting, and seldom lacking in controversy. Augustine objected strenuously to Jerome's translation of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew,¹ and the King James Version was initiated because of the pitched ecclesiastical battles in England swirling around the Geneva and Bishop's Bible.²

The KJV, in fact, set a precedent for translations carried out by large committees of scholars,³ reducing the risk incurred by any single translator—learning a lesson, no doubt, from the experience of the great Tyndale.⁴ Still, even a translation carried out by committee (as was the NRSV),⁵ comes into the world naked, exposed to the gaze of benevolent and hostile eyes alike without the protective clothing provided by a commentary that can explain the thinking that went into every translation decision. I undertake my critical examination of the New Revised Standard translation of Luke-Acts, then, in a spirit of deep appreciation for the courage and integrity of

¹ See Augustine, *Letters* 28 and 71, and my discussion, "Augustine and the Demands of Charity," in *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, with W.S. Kurz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 108–110.

² The *Geneva Bible* was published in 1560 with an introduction by John Calvin, and with extensive notes of a thoroughly reformed (and decidedly anti-Catholic) tendency: it consistently reduced priests to elders and church to congregation. It was also popular, going through 140 printings before 1640. Elizabeth I sponsored the *Bishops Bible* in 1568 precisely to counter such low-church tendencies. In 1604 King James I responded to a plea from bishops at the Hampton Court conference to authorize a new translation.

³ Fifty-four scholars from Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster met in six teams over a period of four years. Three scholars subsequently spent nine months going over the work of the six teams, and the complete translation was published by Robert Barker in 1611.

⁴ William Tyndale (1494–1536) left his imprint on all subsequent English translations (some 80 percent of the KJV comes from him). He was hounded by the agents of Henry VIII (then in his Catholic phase), arrested near Brussels in 1535, strangled, and burned at the stake. See D. Daniel, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁵ The NRSV copyright is dated 1989; according to B.M. Metzger, "the Story of the New RSV Bible," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 24 (1990) 171–176, the "time of publication" was May 1, 1990.

those responsible for this important version, especially since my own efforts at translating portions of the New Testament make me aware of the distance between exalted linguistic goals and lowly translation compromises.⁶

These reflections on narrative criticism and translation are offered in tribute to Professor Carl R. Holladay. We have been friends for thirty years and colleagues at Yale and Emory for almost twenty.⁷ It is a joy for me to share in the celebration of Professor Holladay's place and accomplishments in his chosen world of biblical scholarship. The topic seemed particularly appropriate for this occasion because Carl has himself expended great effort in text-critical and translation labors,⁸ because like me, he has struggled with the strengths and weaknesses of the NRSV since its first appearance,⁹ and because he is now, at the time of writing, working on a commentary on the Acts of the Apostles that will once more require the establishment of the text and an original translation.¹⁰ So important has Carl been to my own efforts along these lines that the most difficult aspect of writing the present essay is that I must do without his steady and wise consultation on the points I make.

The NRSV and Its Critics

As explained by Bruce Metzger for the committee of translators in a preface addressed to the reader, this new translation of the entire Bible

⁶ See L.T. Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Notes and Introduction* (Anchor Bible 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995); *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991); *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992); *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Notes and Introduction* (Anchor Bible 35 A; New York: Doubleday, 2001); *Hebrews: A Commentary* (The New Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2006).

⁷ Carl was appointed to Yale Divinity School in 1975, and I joined him in 1976. We co-taught New Testament Introduction there for four years. Out of that experience, I wrote *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 2nd revised and enlarged edition with Todd Penner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), a book that owed a great deal to our joint efforts and lively conversations. Carl went to Emory in 1980, and on the basis of his teaching of NT introduction over many years at Candler School of Theology, wrote *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005). We have been colleagues at the Candler School of Theology and in the Emory Graduate Division of Religion since 1992, an association that has meant a great deal to me, and in which I have gained more than I have given.

⁸ See in particular C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*. 4 Volumes: Vol. 1, *Historians*; Vol. 2, *Poets*; Vol. 3, *Aristobulus*; Vol. 4, *Orphica* (Chico, CA, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1983–1989).

⁹ He has, in fact, reviewed two study Bibles based on the new translation; see C.R. Holladay, "Sorting out the NRSV Study Bibles," *The Christian Century* 111 (April 6, 1994) 350–352.

¹⁰ In the Westminster/John Knox Press series entitled, *New Testament Library*.

was authorized in 1974 by the Policies Committee of the Revised Standard Version, which is a standing committee of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. It was not to be an entirely fresh start, but a revision that continued in the King James tradition, taking into account new knowledge concerning texts (especially in the Old Testament) and language (both ancient and modern). The committee took as its maxim, “as literal as possible, as free as necessary.” The feature of the NRSV that has drawn most attention from fans and critics alike, was its effort to use gender-inclusive language with respect to humans (but not of God), but equally innovative was the elimination of archaic forms (thee, thou, thine, art, hast, hadst) in passages addressed to God. Although the distinction between “shall” and “will” is maintained in the Old Testament, it is eliminated in the New Testament because of the “more colloquial nature of the Koine Greek.”¹¹ The goals of the NRSV, in short, appear to be eminently modest and reasonable.

The first chair of the committee was Herbert G. May, but after his death in 1977, Bruce Metzger became chair, assisted by Robert C. Dentan and Walter Harrelson as vice chairpersons. Members came and went over the years, but at the time of publication, the 33 member committee had 10 scholars specializing in the New Testament and 23 specializing in the Old Testament. There was one Jewish member and one from the Greek Orthodox Church. The remaining members were drawn from Roman Catholic (5), Episcopal (5) and a variety of Protestant traditions (17), as well as some identified only by academic positions (4). Although the committee remained overwhelmingly male, there were four female members by the time the committee finished its work.

The process followed by the committee was as follows: larger groups worked on sections of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocrypha, and their revisions were then handed over to two editorial committees for each testament. Bruce Metzger and two others made up each of these editorial committees “for the necessary smoothing and standardizing of work that had extended over a span of fifteen years.” Then, “it was the responsibility of the chair to introduce at the very end a number of adjustments within, and between, the Old and New Testaments.” The process, as we shall see, may account for some of the problems in the translation; at the very least, it removed the final product from the review of the committee

¹¹ Metzger, Preface, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) ix–xiv.

as a whole and gave enormous authority for “last minute changes” to the general editor.¹²

Because the NRSV was not a private venture but an official production of the National Council of Churches, and because it was immediately embraced by scholars and teachers as the improved version of the widely-accepted (if not universally accepted) Revised Standard Version, it quickly achieved establishment status, appearing in study versions with notes by respected scholars,¹³ in tools such as the Synopsis¹⁴ and Concordance,¹⁵ in the Common Lectionary,¹⁶ and as one of the translations (with the NIV) used in the multi-volume commentary, *New Interpreter's Bible*.¹⁷ The National Conference of Catholic Bishops quickly granted the translation an *imprimatur* and authorized its use in Catholic editions of the Bible.¹⁸ This initiative was subsequently reversed by the Vatican because of the NRSV's use of inclusive language,¹⁹ but the same fate was suffered by the *New American Bible*, produced by the scholars of the Catholic Biblical Association of America;²⁰

¹² Metzger, “The Story of the New RSV Bible” 171–172.

¹³ For example, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books*, edited by B.M. Metzger and R.E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); *NRSV Harper Study Bible, Expanded and Updated*, edited by V. Verbrugge with study helps by H. Lindell (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991); *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, edited W.A. Meeks (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); *Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, with notes and references by H.C. Kee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with The Apocrypha* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

¹⁴ B.H. Throckmorton, *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels*, 5 edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992).

¹⁵ See R.E. Whitaker and J.R. Kohlenberger, *Analytical Concordance to the New Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). So far as I can tell, no concordance on the entire Bible has appeared.

¹⁶ See *Revised Common Lectionary 1992 for the United Methodist Church* (Wichita: St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 1992); W. Brueggemann, C.B. Cousar, B.R. Gaventa, J.D. Newsome, *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV*. 3 Volumes (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

¹⁷ *The New Interpreter's Bible in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

¹⁸ See “Imprimatur Granted” in *The Christian Century* 108 (November 20–17, 1991) 1087.

¹⁹ See “Vatican Bans NRSV for Catholic Worship,” in *The Christian Century* 111 (December 7, 1994) 1154.

²⁰ The New American Bible (NAB) first appeared in 1970 and was amended to employ more inclusive language in 1991. The Vatican rejected it as the basis for the revised lectionary for the Roman Catholic Dioceses in the United States because of this inclusive language, then in 2000 the 1991 *New American Bible with Psalms and Revised New Testament* was modified by a committee made up of members of the Vatican and American Bishops for use in the liturgy.

both translations were victims of the retrogressive sexism characteristic of the Vatican under John Paul II.

The effect of this publishing *putsch* was most evident in the world of theological education associated with the same denominations that sponsored the translation. Its explicit embrace by American scholars, not to mention its use in the commonly used pedagogical resources, meant that for most seminary students, the RSV was speedily displaced, and the NRSV was the version used in their study (and subsequent use) of the Bible. The translation won slower acceptance among Christian groups less strongly affiliated with the National Council of Churches,²¹ and anecdotal publishing information suggests that the NRSV has proved to be more popular among academics than among ordinary Bible readers.²²

In preparing for this essay, I made the usual “due diligence” search for earlier reviews of the New Revised Standard Version. Although I managed to find a not inconsiderable number of them, and will summarize them briefly, four general impressions emerged from my reading. The first is that the initial flurry of responses based on a superficial reading was succeeded only sporadically by later, substantive engagements. The second is that the reviews tended to appear mostly in ecclesiastical journals rather than in specifically scholarly venues. The third is that attention, both positive and negative, focused disproportionately on the issue of gender-inclusive language or the quality of the English diction, rather than on the question of how accurately the translation rendered the Hebrew or Greek originals. The fourth is that the few reviews by independent biblical scholars that considered the translation in some detail tended to be more negative than those that provided only a superficial impression. Overall, it seems, the closer one peers at the NRSV the worse it appears as a responsible rendering of the ancient compositions.

²¹ See “Bible Translation Awaits Acceptance,” *The Christian Century* 110 (February 17, 1993), 168–169.

²² A comparison of sales ranking on Amazon.com made on November 10, 2006 shows that the NRSV sells best in study versions, with the *New Oxford Annotated* (2001) ranked 2,477, the *New Interpreter's Study Bible* at 11,770, and the *HarperCollins* at 42,969. The best-selling non-study version (OUP, 1991) was ranked 101,654. The Revised Standard Version is still available in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (1977) and is ranked 78,901. The Nelson hardback of the RSV (1952) is ranked 4,933. The Nelson edition of the KJV, in turn, ranks 1,686, and the Hendrickson edition at 7,926. The NIV study edition (Zondervan) ranks 2,880, and the 2005 Hendrickson hardback ranks 79,649. The *Oxford Study Bible* of the Revised English Version ranks 74,422. To put this in context, the DVD of the KJV ranks at 3,489, and sells well in every available packaging.

Almost concurrent with the actual publication of the translation a number of essays appeared by representatives of the sponsoring organization,²³ by leading members of the translation committee: Bruce Metzger,²⁴ Walter Harrelson,²⁵ Robert C. Dentan²⁶ (all part of the group carrying out penultimate or final revisions), and by the committee's sole Jewish member, Harry Orlinsky.²⁷ Such essays are not properly reviews but can be fairly characterized as an effort to "sell" the new translation. This is not to say that they are not worth reading. Metzger most clearly gives expression to the overall process and goals; Dentan provides historical context and is candid about the committee's shifting perceptions as well as the role of "common-sense" in many translation decisions. Harrelson is particularly helpful in communicating the impact of new textual knowledge on the translation, and on the growing awareness of the inclusive-language problem, as well as acknowledging, "The NRSV has flaws." Harrelson also well states the committee's conviction concerning its work (please observe the ordering of the positive points):

No doubt there are mistakes, instances of lack of consistency, infelicities of expression, and perhaps some howlers. But on the basis of my examination of considerable portions of the text I would judge that it is by far our most inclusive Bible, the one best suited for public reading among all the newer translations, and (as will be indicated elsewhere in this issue) our most accurate available English Bible.²⁸

A number of positive reviews appeared shortly after publication of the new translation. Some of these are less critical reviews than they are essays that applaud the new version for its goals and process, and use it as an opportunity to talk about translation in general, or suggest topics

²³ See "The Long Road to the NRSV" by J. Martin Bailey, Acting Associate General Secretary for Communications of the NCCC USA, in *Religion and Public Education* 17 (Winter, 1990) 45–50, and "The NRSV—Why Now?" by A.O. Van Eck, Associate General Secretary for Education and Ministry, NCCC, in *Religious Education* 85 (Spring 1990) 163–172.

²⁴ B.M. Metzger, "The Story of the New RSV Bible," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 24 (Fall 1990) 171–176; "The Processes and Struggles Involved in Making a New Translation of the Bible," *Religious Education* 85 (Spring 1990) 174–184.

²⁵ W. Harrelson, "Recent Discoveries and Bible Translation," *Religious Education* 85 (Spring, 1990) 186–200; "Inclusive Language in the New Revised Standard Version," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* n.s. 11/3 (1990) 224–231.

²⁶ R.C. Dentan, "The Story of the New Revised Standard Version," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* n.s. 11/3 (1990) 211–223.

²⁷ H.M. Orlinsky, "A Jewish Scholar Looks at the Revised Standard Version and Its New Edition," *Religious Education* 85 (Spring, 1990) 211–221.

²⁸ Harrelson, "Inclusive Language in the NRSV," 231.

for discussion and instruction.²⁹ Others praise the translation for its aesthetic qualities³⁰ or for its suitability for public reading.³¹ Two positive reviews that focus on gender-inclusive language compare the NRSV to the *Revised English Bible*, published in the same year by British scholars. New Testament scholar B.H. Throckmorton applauds the NRSV's moves toward inclusivity,³² while Old Testament scholar Carole R. Fontaine is appreciative of the NRSV but more reserved in her approval: it does not go far enough.³³ Herbert G. Grether compares the NRSV to three other recent English translations (all of which profess inclusivity as a goal) and finds that it is more consistent than the others.³⁴ By far the most positive scholarly review was by Walter Wink, who declared himself "astonished by the almost unerring precision of not just some but virtually all its changes," states that the NRSV is a "quantum leap forward," and a "stunning achievement." Wink notes a number of passages that might have been rendered better, but also uses phrases such as "brilliant phrasing" and "excellencies" for the NRSV's renderings. As for the issue of inclusive language, Wink's main complaint is that the committee did not go far enough.³⁵

A positive but carefully nuanced review was offered by D.A. Carson, who found some items to criticize—inconsistency in the use of "Messiah" and "Christ," for example, and the failure to explain why the NRSV sometimes places in the text readings that appeared as alternatives in the RSV's notes—but finds that, "by any reckoning, the NRSV is fresh, powerful, interesting, and usually right."³⁶ In similar fashion, Roman Catholic New Testament scholar John Donahue concludes that "in terms of accuracy,

²⁹ K.R. Krim, "Translating the Bible: An Unending Task," *Religious Education* 85 (Spring, 1990) 201–210; M. Boys, "Educational Tasks Old and New for an Ancient yet Timely Text," *Religious Education* 85 (Spring, 1990) 227–239; H.S. Olson, "The Word in Quest of Words," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 18 (1991) 338–344; A.D. Bennett, "The NRSV: A Teaching Guide," *Religious Education* 85 (Spring, 1990) 255–278.

³⁰ J. Jenkins, "The NRSV: The Church's Bible?" *Lutheran Forum* 27 (November, 1993) 50–51; T.A. Reiner, "The NRSV: Beauty and the Beast," *Word and World* 16 (1996) 366, 368.

³¹ R.G. Bratcher, "Translating for the Reader," *Theology Today* 47 (1990) 290–298; J.V. Brownson, "Selecting a Translation of the Bible for Public Reading," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 24 (1990) 191–194.

³² B.H. Throckmorton, "The NRSV and the REB: A New Testament Critique," *Theology Today* 47 (1990) 281–289.

³³ C.R. Fontaine, "The NRSV and the REB: A Feminist Critique," *Theology Today* 47 (1990) 273–280.

³⁴ H.G. Grether, "Translators and the Gender Gap," *Theology Today* 47 (1990) 299–305.

³⁵ W. Wink, "The New RSV: The Best Translation, Halfway There," *The Christian Century* 107 (September, 1990) 829–833.

³⁶ D.A. Carson, "A Review of the New Revised Standard Version," *The Reformed Theological Review* 1 (January–April, 1991) 1–11.

recapturing not only the meaning but the tone of the biblical texts, and ease of reading, the NRSV may be the best English version available." Donahue does identify a key passage in which the goal of inclusive-language threatens the integrity of the scriptural metaphor (Galatians 4:4–7), and he reaches a conclusion that others have as well, "although judging that the NRSV may be the best English translation available, I think that the Old Testament is better translated than the New." He considers that, inclusive language aside, the revised version of the NAB (1986) "has a slight edge in the New Testament, both for accuracy and English expression."³⁷

A second set of early reviews more evenly balanced positive and negative aspects of the NRSV. A short review appearing at the relatively late date of 1996 complained that the translation tried to be "all things to all people," and was hampered by excessive dependence on the Tyndale tradition.³⁸ Another later essay discusses the reception of the NRSV in the Orthodox tradition, but does not consider the translation itself in any detail.³⁹ In contrast, the essay by Peter Mendham lists matching lists of details, which, in his judgment, the NRSV handled well or poorly, but advances no definitive judgment of the translation's value overall, concluding, "But you judge."⁴⁰ A similar list of details is drawn up by Sakae Kubo with little comment beyond, "In some cases, I would disagree with the choices of the NRSV committee," and his conclusion that no more revisions in the KJ tradition should be made, but a fresh translation undertaken.⁴¹

The Bible Division at Trinity Lutheran Seminary gave a thorough review to the distinct parts of the NRSV and reached similar mixed conclusions. In the Old Testament, the reviewers found counterbalancing positive and negative aspects. The scholars reviewing the New Testament, however, found more to challenge than to praise. A consistent worry was with accuracy. As Mark Powell comments, "Now we realize why the NRSV reads so well. The scholars who prepared this version apparently viewed themselves not only as translators but also as copy-editors. Their 'improvements,' however, will not be appreciated by those who prize accuracy over art-

³⁷ J. Donahue, S.J., "Adjusting the Standard: A First Look at the NRSV," *Ecumenical Trends* 19/10 (November, 1990) 145–150.

³⁸ M.A. Throntveit, "The NRSV: All Things to All People," *Word and World* 16 (1996) 367, 369.

³⁹ M. Prokurat, "NRSV: Preliminary Report," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 43/3–4 (1999) 359–374.

⁴⁰ P. Mendham, "The New Standard?" *St. Mark's Review* 142 (Winter, 1990) 34–37.

⁴¹ S. Kubo, "The New Revised Standard Version," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29 (Spring, 1991) 61–69.

istry, substance over form.” The essay concludes that the version is an improvement over the RSV, but also that “the overall product, however, is uneven and suffers from being too close to the RSV in many instances and too far from the Greek in even more cases.”⁴² The final essay in this mixed-review category is by J.J.M. Roberts, a member of the NRSV translation committee, who states candidly, “The NRSV is a very good translation in some places, but it is *also* a very poor translation in some ways in some places.” He worries about the “nimbus of piety and respect” surrounding the translation process, and seeks to show the human dimension of the committee’s work. Specifically, he attributes the deficiencies of the NRSV to “the danger of absolute editorial control,” noting that the final revisions undertaken by a small inner group, and then Metzger alone, removed the final product from the careful discernment process carried out within the subcommittees in touch with the actual translation decisions. This agrees substantially with Powell’s hunch that a desire for smoothness and readability in the end trumped a concern for accuracy with respect to the original languages.⁴³

I turn now to predominantly negative assessments of the NRSV. Two early reviews focused on the standard translation questions without overdue attention to the question of inclusive language. J.H. Dobson provides a close examination of Mark 1:1–20 and John 1:1–51, and a more cursory survey of other passages in John. He acknowledges the readability of the translation, but concludes that claims to have taken advantage of advances in biblical studies “do not stand up to careful scrutiny.” His analysis, however, is flawed because of his premise that “most of the New Testament was written by people who knew Hebrew and probably also Aramaic”—the handling of whose idioms serves as his main criterion of evaluation.⁴⁴ In an extensive analysis, John H. Stek (a member of the Committee that produced the NIV translation) pays some attention to inclusive language, but concentrates on a range of other translation issues. He appreciates the NRSV’s improved style—“the washing out of all those cumbersome Hebraisms and archaisms”—but “when I began to follow my nose and concentrate on certain details, I grew increasingly disappointed.” He predicts that the

⁴² C. Lynn Nakamura, R.W. Doermann, R.R. Hutton, M.A. Powell, M.H. Hoops, S.K. Avotri, W.F. Taylor, Jr., “The New Revised Standard Version: A Review,” *Trinity Seminary Review* 12 (Fall, 1990) 77–94.

⁴³ J.J.M. Roberts, “An Evaluation of the NRSV: Demystifying Bible Translation,” *Insights* 108 (1993) 25–36.

⁴⁴ J.H. Dobson, “New Revised Standard Version OUP 1995—Part 1. An Appraisal,” *Churchman* 118 (2004) 53–74.

NRSV will find greater success among liberal than among evangelical Christians.⁴⁵

Since the issue of gender-inclusive language is not the main interest of the present essay, I quickly summarize the negative reviews of the NRSV that focus especially on that aspect of the translation. As might be expected, some criticize the NRSV for going too far, either with respect to the original languages or contemporary English.⁴⁶ Specific objections are raised concerning the effect of inclusive language on Paul's metaphor of adoption.⁴⁷ Other reviewers criticize the translators for not going far enough and allowing the translation to retain unnecessary elements of patriarchy and androcentrism.⁴⁸

Closer to the point of my essay are those reviews that take up specific aspects of the NRSV primarily from the perspective of accuracy, rather than readability, and find it wanting. These reviews illustrate the observation made above that the closer one looks, the worse this translation appears. Some focus on the translation of a specific passage. Paul Ellingworth rejects on linguistic and sociological grounds the NRSV's translation of ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί in Acts 1:16 as "friends."⁴⁹ Although Edwin Hostetter thinks the NRSV a "superb translation"; he challenges its rendering of Canticle 1:5 as "I am black and beautiful"—replacing the RSV's "I am very dark but comely"—concluding that "at this juncture the translators have seemingly succumbed to tampering with the message of Scripture."⁵⁰ Thomas Salter finds the NRSV translation of υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου in Rev 1:13 and 14:14 as "*the* son of Man" rather than "a son of Man" is faulty. It "shows the heavy influence of gospel studies but does not take into account the use and function of

⁴⁵ J.H. Stek, "The New Revised Standard Version: A Preliminary Assessment," *Reformed Review* 43 (Spring, 1990) 171–188; a slightly revised form of the essay also appears in *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (April, 1991) 80–99.

⁴⁶ P.B. Bretscher, "Translating the Bible: An Evaluation of the New Revised Standard Version," *Logia* 3 (January 1994) 55–58; A.E. Steinmann, "Bible Translations among Luther's Heirs," *Logia* 10 (Epiphany, 2001) 13–22.

⁴⁷ J. Alsup, "Translation as Interpretation and Communication," *Insights* 108 (1993) 15–23; G. Vail, "Inclusive Language and the Equal Dignity of Women and Men in Christ," *The Thomist* 67 (2003) 579–606.

⁴⁸ K. Farmer, "The Misleading Translations in the New Revised Standard Version of Proverbs," *Daughters of Sarah* 21 (Winter, 1995) 36–41; C. Mercer, "Contemporary Language and New Translations of the Bible: the Impact of Feminism," *Religion and Public Education* 17 (Winter, 1990) 89–98.

⁴⁹ P. Ellingworth, "'Men and Brethren . . .' (Acts 1:16)," *Bible Translator* 55 (2004) 153–155.

⁵⁰ E.C. Hostetter, "Mistranslation in Cant 1:5," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34 (Spring, 1994) 35–36.

the phrase in apocalyptic literature.”⁵¹ Other responses take up consistent translation patterns. J. LaGrand objects to the frequent use of “Gentiles” in place of “nations” in the NRSV,⁵² and Troy Martin systematically compares the RSV and NRSV with respect to their translation of terms for time and money, finding both deficient but the RSV as relatively superior.⁵³

Finally, two reviews provide sustained attention to specific biblical compositions. Jack Lewis examines the NRSV translation of the Minor Prophets, and although he draws no sweeping conclusions, his close analysis of individual points makes clear the puzzling lack of consistency characterizing the translation, not least on choices touching text-criticism and inclusive language.⁵⁴ Paul Walasky’s examination of the NRSV translation of Luke-Acts comes closest to the topic of my essay. In his introductory comments, Walasky properly observes that “few biblical authors were more conscious of the problems and possibilities of language than Luke the Evangelist. From the elegant introduction to the Third Gospel to the final speech recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke was fully aware that he was writing in a linguistically complex culture.” He notes further that “there is a significant amount of resonance that operates between the two Lukan volumes.”

In his examination of the opening chapters of the Gospel and the final section of Acts, Walasky finds the smoothness of the translation as a whole impressive, yet finds it wanting precisely in its literary sensitivity. The translation obscures the dense intertextual allusions to the LXX in Luke’s infancy account, and it fails to understand the intratextual echoes in Luke’s use of terms such as ὑπηρέτης. He concludes, “the translators have certainly achieved an overall smoothness in their English text of Luke-Acts. However, it may be a texture that Luke never intended.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ T.B. Salter, “HOMOION HUION ANTHROPOU in Rev. 1:13 and 14:14,” *Bible Translator* 44 (July, 1993) 349–350.

⁵² J. LaGrand, “Proliferation of the “Gentile” in the New Revised Standard Version,” *Biblical Research* 41 (1996) 77–87.

⁵³ T. Martin, “Time and Money in Translation: A Comparison of the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version,” *Biblical Research* 38 (1993) 55–73.

⁵⁴ J.P. Lewis, “The Minor Prophets in the NRSV,” *Restoration Quarterly* 33 (1991) 129–139.

⁵⁵ P.W. Walasky, “‘In Our Own Language’: Working with the New Revised Standard Version of Luke-Acts,” *Religious Education* 85 (Spring, 1990) 222–228.

Narrative Criticism and Translation

Walasky has well made the basic point about the importance of paying attention to narrative interconnections in Luke-Acts, a composition of considerable literary self-consciousness and sophistication. A significant body of scholarship devoted to the narrative artistry of Luke-Acts has confirmed the importance of literary connections within and between the two parts of Luke's work.⁵⁶ In the rest of this essay, I want to show that the NRSV's failure to attend to such narrative signals has led to inadequate and at times erroneous translation. I am not interested in assigning blame, especially since an appreciation of literary criticism (much less rhetorical criticism) was not widespread at the time that work on the NRSV was begun.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the problems in the NRSV translation of Luke-Acts are real, and I write in the hope that due consideration for narrative criticism might inform future efforts. I will consider in turn two passages from the Gospel, then some themes that span the Gospel and Acts, and finally a passage in Acts.

The Prologue (Luke 1:1–4)

The importance of the prologue for the interpretation of the entire two-volume work is universally recognized.⁵⁸ It is the more shocking, then, that the NRSV's translation gets two of the critical elements in the prologue wrong. First, following the RSV, it translates the final phrase, ἵνα ἐπιγινώσκειτε περὶ ὧν κατήχηθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν, as, "so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

⁵⁶ The pioneering works were by H.J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke* (HTS VI; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920) and *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1927); fuller realizations of the literary approach are found in L.T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 39; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977) and especially R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 Volumes (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 1990).

⁵⁷ It is worth observing, however, that one of the New Testament committee members, Paul Minear, had a deserved reputation for literary sensitivity, not least with respect to Luke-Acts: see "Luke's Use of the Birth Stories," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, edited by L. Keck and J.L. Martyn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) 111–130; *To Heal and to Reveal: The Prophetic Vocation according to Luke* (New York: Crossroad, 1976).

⁵⁸ See R.J. Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project from his Prologue," *CBQ* 43 (1981) 205–221; S. Brown, "The Role of the Prologue in Determining the Purpose of Luke-Acts," *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, edited by C.H. Talbert (Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) 99–111.

But the translation of ἀσφάλεια as “truth” is both wrong and misleading, since it gives the impression that Luke writes in order to correct the factual accuracy of earlier narratives, but that is not the case. A simple glimpse at the concordance reveals that Luke’s use of ἀσφαλής and its cognates always stresses “security, certainty” (Acts 2:36; 16:23–24; 21:34; 22:30; 25:26, and above all, Acts 5:23), which the NRSV translation correctly communicates in those other passages. Luke’s concern is not truth versus falsehood, but certainty versus doubt. He writes to give Theophilus “assurance” concerning the things about which he has been instructed.⁵⁹

Even worse is the NRSV’s bungling of the prologue’s main point. Luke sets out to write, not simply a διήγησις (“narrative”) as others have done, but to write an “orderly account” (καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι). That the phrase καθεξῆς is of critical importance can be seen from its use to describe Peter’s exposition in Acts 11:4: it is clear that, for Luke, a narrative told in proper sequence has a rhetorically convincing effect.⁶⁰ In this case the RSV gets the contrast exactly right, but for some inexplicable reason, the NRSV uses “orderly account” for both the noun διήγησις in 1:1 and the phrase καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι in 1:3, and thus destroys the author’s deliberate and critical contrast. It is impossible to make sense to students of the prologue’s point using the NRSV translation.

The Empty Tomb (Luke 24:1–12)

The first problem here is the puzzling decisions made about the text. The NRSV claimed that it made use of the best information about the ancient text, but that claim seems not to have much support in this passage. There is a consistent tendency in some western witnesses (D and some Old Latin MSS) to abbreviate the passage. These witnesses omit “of the Lord Jesus” after “the body” in 24:3, the statement “he is not here but has arisen” in 24:6, the adjective “sinful” (ἀμαρτωλῶν) in 24:7, and the entirety of 24:12. In each case, the overwhelming external testimony supports the inclusion of the longer reading, and they are all found in the text of the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland (1993). The RSV read the shorter version in 24:3, 6, and 12, but retained the adjective ἀμαρτωλῶν in 24:7, translating “sinful men.” The NRSV, in contrast, has the longer reading in 24:6, 7 and 12, but omits “of

⁵⁹ For the argument, see Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 3–10, 28–30.

⁶⁰ G. Schneider, “Zur Bedeutung von *kathexes* im lukanischen Doppelwerk,” *ZNW* 68 (1977) 128–131.

the Lord Jesus” in 24:3. The choices made by each translation are mysterious, especially since there has been no shift in external evidence, and the minority witnesses show such a clear pattern of omission. The footnotes provide no explanation for these textual choices.

Attention to the literary fabric of Luke-Acts would have provided more evidence to support the inclusion of 24:3, “of the Lord Jesus” (τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ) in two ways. First, the statement in 24:34 “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon,” reveals the author’s comfort with using the resurrection title in the gospel narrative, anticipating its thematic employment with respect to Jesus in Acts (1:6, 21; 2:36; 4:26, 33; 7:59, etc.). Second, Luke is distinctive for using his narrative voice to call Jesus κύριος even in the pre-resurrection portions of the Gospel (Luke 10:1; 17:5–6; 18:6; 22:61).

The exclusion of κυρίου Ἰησοῦ by the NRSV in 24:3 is exacerbated by the mistranslation of 24:5. The two men ask the women, τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν? The question is unique to Luke. The NRSV follows the inept rendering in the RSV, “Why do you look [RSV, seek] for the living among the dead?” This translation makes it seem as though it were a matter of neighborhoods: Jesus is among the living people, not among the dead people, and the women are looking in the wrong place. But Luke has τὸν ζῶντα, in the singular, which can adequately be translated only as “the Living One,” or “The One Who Lives.” In other words, Luke has the messengers characterize Jesus alone in a manner corresponding to the title of Lord: Jesus shares the life and power of “the living God” (Acts 14:15). Thus, we see the declaration, “he lives” in 24:23, and in Acts, Jesus shows εἰσαυτὸν ζῶντα to the disciples (1:3) and Peter calls him ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς in Acts 3:15.

In 24:7, in turn, if the reading εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων ἀμαρτωλῶν is accepted—it is the only time the phrase occurs in Luke-Acts—then the translation of the RSV, “sinful men” is considerably better than the NRSV’s “sinners.” In fact, a better translation still would be “men who are sinners.” The reason is the way in which Luke’s Gospel so frequently speaks of ἀμαρτωλοί as those whom Jesus calls and who respond to his message (5:8, 30, 32; 7:34, 37, 39; 15:1, 2, 7, 10; 18:3; 19:7). Translating the phrase more fully would make clear that it was a group of men who were sinners—the leaders of the people in Jerusalem—who were responsible for the death of Jesus, and not all the “sinners” who heard and obeyed him during his ministry. This is one of the cases in which a concern for inclusive language obscures the literary point. That clarity sometimes is more important that

inclusivity is demonstrated by the NRSV itself, when it adds “the women” to the RSV in 24:5, to make clear who was doing what to whom.

A final example of how sensitivity to the larger narrative can assist a translation is found in 24:12. Although the NRSV places it in the text rather than relegate it to a footnote as does the RSV, it follows the RSV’s flat translation: Peter, after seeing the linen cloths, “went home, amazed at what had happened,” thus translating *καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν θαυμάζων τὸ γεγονός*. The two translations take *πρὸς ἑαυτὸν* (literally, “toward himself”) as the direct object of *ἀπῆλθεν* (“he went away”), and provide the fairly desperate rendering “went home.” Three observations can be made. The first is that Luke never uses this sort of construction for “going home.” The second is that Luke does use constructions with *ἑαυτὸς* for a variety of interior acts of introspection (see 12:17; 16:3; 18:4), the most notable being the case of the Lost Son who “coming to himself said” *εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἔλθων ἔφη* (15:17) and the Pharisee who “prayed toward himself (*ταῦτα πρὸς ἑαυτὸν προσηύχετο*, 18:11). The third is that Peter is preeminently the character who, later in the narrative, experiences interior doubt and questioning (see Acts 10:17, 19, 28–29). It is entirely appropriate at this moment, after his bold declaration of loyalty (Luke 22:33) and subsequent three-fold denial of Jesus (23:54–62), that Peter should “go away, marveling to himself at what had happened” (compare also Mary in Luke 2:19, 51).

The NRSV translation of the empty-tomb account reveals confusion concerning text-criticism and obliviousness with respect to the narrative connections revealed by the passage. The habit of translating passages in isolation—exaggerated by the perspectives of form-criticism—means missing the meaning embedded in passages by an author who is working out themes across the narrative as a whole.

Missing Literary Themes

The NRSV detracts from the narrative effect of Luke-Acts also by failing to recognize and exploit literary themes that run through the two-volume work as a whole. At this point it is fair to recognize that two distinct translational values may enter into conflict. The first is the principle that diction should always respect the immediate context and the usage appropriate to that context. Following this principle alone would mean that different English words might be chosen for the same Greek term no matter how frequently the Greek term is used by an author. The literary effect that is obvious in the Greek is ignored by the translator. The second

principle is that diction should attend to the rhetorical effects embedded in the Greek by an author, the point of which may not be immediately evident to the translator, but the presence of which cannot be denied. Following this principle alone would mean using exactly the same term in each case, even if such translation appears somewhat awkward in the specific context.

I recognize that some compromises must be struck when translating a substantial composition like Luke-Acts, which, in fact, draws readers through a long span of years, many characters, and diverse cultural settings. My complaint is that the NRSV—in this respect not totally unlike the RSV—seems simply to ignore the larger narrative effects intended by the author. In Luke-Acts, one of the author’s techniques is to show continuity across the two parts of the story, between characters in the story, and in God’s work throughout the story. Two examples in particular have confounded my efforts to communicate the effects of Luke’s literary art as found in the Greek, because the NRSV translation manages to make them either obscure or invisible. In the first case, the NRSV fails to correct the inadequacy of the RSV; in the second case, it abandons the RSV’s decent effort to capture the theme.

Righteous, Righteousness

It has long been recognized that New Testament authors other than Paul are concerned about and have given some thought to righteousness.⁶¹ Luke-Acts uses the noun *δικαιοσύνη* once in the Gospel (1:75) and four times in Acts (10:35; 13:10; 17:31; 24:25); the noun *δικαίωμα* once in the Gospel (1:6); the adverb *δικαίως* once in the Gospel (23:41), the verb *δικαιοῦν* five times in the Gospel (7:29, 35; 10:29; 16:15; 18:14) and twice in Acts (13:38, 39), and the adjective *δίκαιος* eleven times in the Gospel (1:6, 17; 2:25; 5:32; 12:57; 14:14; 15:7; 18:9; 20:20; 23:47, 50) and five times in Acts (4:19; 7:52; 10:22; 22:14; 24:15). Translation of these terms can swing in the direction of the broader biblical sense of “righteousness” in the sense of being in proper covenantal relationship with God, or more toward the narrower sense of “justified” within a forensic context. Recognizing the way Luke-Acts is saturated with Septuagintal diction, the NRSV correctly renders the majority of instances of *δικαιοσύνη* and *δίκαιος* as “righteousness” and

⁶¹ See A. Descamps, *Les Justes et la Justice dans les Évangiles et le christianisme primitive hormis la doctrine proprement paulinienne* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1950).

“righteous” (see Luke 1:6, 17, 75; 2:25; 5:32; 12:57; 14:14; 15:7; 18:9; 23:50; Acts 3:14; 4:19; 7:52; 22:14; 24:15). The reader is able to discern that righteousness is a thematic concern that Luke extends through both volumes.

So far, so good. But there are other cases where the theme disappears because of the NRSV’s rendering. In Luke 20:20, Jesus is confronted by those ὑποκρινομένους ἑαυτοὺς δικαίους εἶναι. It is not easy to render in English, but the NRSV’s “who pretended to be honest” misses a clear literary signal back to 18:9, and thus the clear identification of these hostile interlocutors as Pharisees. Better would be, “they sent as spies those who pretended that they were themselves righteous.” Similarly, it is difficult to know why Cornelius is characterized as “an upright and God-fearing man” in Acts 10:22, instead of “righteous and God-fearing.” Equally puzzling is the translation a few verses later of ὁ φοβούμενος αὐτὸν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην δεκτὸς αὐτῷ ἐστίν (Acts 10:35) as “anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

Much more problematic is the NRSV’s translation (here following the RSV) of the Centurion’s statement at the crucifixion of Jesus, ὄντως ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος ἦν as “Certainly this man was innocent” (Luke 23:47). This is a perfect example of a concern for the immediate context—presumably the interest of Luke in asserting the innocence of Jesus (23:14) and the historically outsider perspective of the Centurion—triumphing over Luke’s thematic interest in the narrative as a whole. The translation should be, “Truly this man was righteous.” Not only does this rendition correspond with Luke’s entire portrayal of Jesus in his passion account, but it leads to the declaration of Jesus in Acts as ὁ δίκαιος, “the Righteous One” (Acts 3:14; 7:52).⁶² The NRSV translates the latter passages correctly; the wonder is that the translators could not grasp the importance of translating Luke 23:47 in the same way.

The theme of righteousness is eliminated also by the way the NRSV handles passages in which δικαιοῦν appears. My criticism here is also directed at myself, for in my own translation of the Gospel of Luke, I missed these connections. In Luke 7:29, where Luke inserts an editorial comment contrasting the response of the Pharisees and Lawyers to John the Baptist with the response of the people and tax collectors. He says the first group “rejected God’s plan for them,” whereas the second group

⁶² See especially R.J. Karris, “Luke 23 and Luke’s Thematic Christology and Soteriology,” in *Luke, Artist and Theologian: Luke’s Passion Account as Literature* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 79–119.

ἐδικαίωσαν τὸν θεόν. I acknowledge the difficulty in rendering this.⁶³ The NRSV has “acknowledged the justice of God” and notes as an alternative, “praised God.” Neither translation captures the sense that the recognition of God’s way of making righteous is at stake. When the verb δικαιοῦν used again a mere 6 verses later, no one would suspect from the NRSV’s “wisdom is vindicated by all her children” (7:35), that Luke may have intended the two lines to be heard as call and response.

The usage in Luke 7:29 and 7:35 are truly difficult to render coherently, much less as part of a developing Lukan theme. The same cannot be said of the remaining instances of δικαιοῦν. If the NRSV translators had been paying attention to their own renderings of δίκαιος as “righteous,” they might have been able to follow through consistently in such passages as 16:15, where Jesus tells the Pharisees, ἔστε οἱ δικαιοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων (“you make yourselves righteous in the sight of others”), which the NRSV renders, “you justify yourselves in the sight of others,”⁶⁴ and especially in 18:9–14 (the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector), where the NRSV translates δίκαιος correctly in 18:9 (“he told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous”), but translate δικαιοῦν at the end of the parable as “this man went down to his home justified (δεδικαιωμένος) rather than the other.” The reversal effect of the parable would have been more evident if 18:14 were translated as “declared righteous” rather than justified.⁶⁵

More troubling is the NRSV’s translation of Acts 13:38–39. At the climax of Paul’s speech at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul turns from the corruption experienced by David to a restatement his claim in 13:30–35 that Jesus was raised from the dead: “But he whom God raised up experienced no corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this man Jesus everyone who believes is free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” The first thing that should be said about this rendering is that, for a translation than seeks to be gender-inclusive, this passage contains an unnecessary number of “he’s” and “man’s”; the phrase “this one” could have served throughout as an adequate rendering of οὗτος. Second,

⁶³ In fact my own translation, “justified God,” falls short of the proposal I make, although (given the luxury of notes) I trope my own translation as, “recognize the righteousness from God.” *The Gospel of Luke*, 121–123.

⁶⁴ I also use “justify” in my translation, but make the connection to 7:29, in *The Gospel of Luke*, 249–250.

⁶⁵ My own translation of 18:9–14 is inconsistent in just the same way.

the NRSV inserts the name "Jesus" where it does not appear in the Greek (acknowledging the addition in a note). Third, no one reading the English would recognize anything even remotely resembling Paul's teaching on righteousness through faith, or the climactic statement concerning the theme of righteousness in Luke-Acts.

Yet by using the verb *δικαιοῦν* twice, it is clear that Luke both wants to represent Paul's teaching (from his own perspective concerning the forgiveness of sins, to be sure), and align Paul with one of his important narrative themes. The NRSV's "free from sins" both adds the term "sin" where it does not appear in the Greek, and eliminates the theme of righteousness. A more accurate translation would be: "Let it be known to you, brothers, that through this one, forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed! And from all the things which by the Law of Moses you were not able to be made righteous (*οὐκ ἠδυνήθητε ἐν νόμῳ Μωϋσέως δικαιοῦσθαι*), in this one everyone who believes is made righteous (*ἐν τούτῳ πᾶς ὁ πιστεῦν δικαιοῦται*)."

God's Visitation

Another example of Luke's Septuagintal style is found in his frequent use of *ἐπισκέπτειν* and *ἐπισκοπή* in the sense of "God's visitation." In the LXX the terms are used most frequently to translate *קָרַב*, and suggest both the divine oversight of a human situation and an intervention of physical dimensions. Thus, in Genesis 21:1, the Lord "visited" (*ἐπεσκέψατο*) Sarah in the conception of Isaac; in Genesis 50:24, Joseph promises that the Lord will "visit" them to bring them up out of the land of Egypt; in Exodus 3:14 the Lord "has observed" what has happened to the people, and in Exodus 4:31, the Lord "visited" the people of Israel, and so forth. The verb and noun definitely carry some sense of "look upon" and "care for," but primarily they denote an actual physical presence in behalf of someone for good or ill. The RSV in both testaments tends to translate as "visit/visitation." That the translators of the NRSV are aware of this meaning is made clear from the rendering of passages outside Luke-Acts, as in Matthew 25:36, 43, "I was sick and in prison and you visited me," and in James 1:27, true religion is "to care for orphans and widows in their distress." The translators know that in the biblical idiom *ἐπισκέπτειν* means more than having a positive disposition toward someone. It involves approaching them.

The translators of the NRSV recognize this meaning in Luke-Acts as well. In 7:23, they have Moses "visit" (*ἐπισκέπτειν*) his relatives, the Israelites,

although this sounds a bit more like a Thanksgiving holiday than they perhaps intended. Similarly, they show Paul summoning Barnabas, “Come, let us return and visit (ἐπισκεψώμεθα) the believers in every city,” although this once more sounds more like a social call than a “visitation” that involves apostolic oversight. The NRSV translators even retain the reading of the RSV in Luke 19:44, “you did not recognize the time of your visitation (ἐπισκοπῆς σου)” although it adds the words “from God.” Unfortunately, in every other passage where ἐπισκέπτειν occurs, the NRSV translators alter the RSV and obliterate the traces of an important Lukan theme.

In Luke 1:68, where the RSV has “he has visited and redeemed his people,” the NRSV replaces with “he has looked with favor on his people and redeemed them.” Luke 1:78 is admittedly a difficult construction (διὰ σπλάγχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐν οἷς ἐπισκέπεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους), which the RSV renders as “through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn on us from on high.” The RSV adds in a footnote, “or whereby the dayspring will visit. Other ancient authorities read, *since the dayspring has visited.*” The note allows readers to see the theme of visitation underlying the freer translation. In the NRSV, there is simply, “by the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,” and the footnote has only, “other ancient authorities read *has broken.*” The theme of God’s visitation has disappeared completely from Zechariah’s song, even though Luke placed it there twice.

When Jesus raises the widow of Nain’s son, the crowd cries out (in the RSV), “‘A great prophet has risen among us’ and ‘God has visited (ἐπεσκέψατο) his people’” (Luke 7:16). Luke clearly wants the reader to identify God’s “visitation of the people” precisely with the prophet Jesus’ work among the people, and this prepares for Jesus’ later rebuke that Jerusalem missed the “time of your visitation” in 19:44. The NRSV, as I have shown, does have “visitation” in the second instance. But in 7:16, the NRSV has, “‘A great prophet has risen among us’ and ‘God has looked favorably on his people,’”—with no footnote. As a result of the elimination of the theme of visitation from 1:68, 1:78 and 7:16, the reader is ill-prepared to recognize in Luke’s reference to Moses “visiting his relatives” in Acts 7:23 as a deliberate evocation of the biblical language and part of Luke’s narrative strategy of portraying Jesus as the “prophet like Moses.” The final stroke by which this theme is eliminated by the NRSV, however, occurs in Acts 15, a passage I want to consider in great detail.

Acts 15:6–18

The account of the apostolic council in Acts 15 represents something of a watershed in the Acts narrative: the decision to include Gentiles without requiring circumcision and the keeping of the Law of Moses marks a transition from the preceding narrative, in which the stories of Peter and Paul were interwoven, to one which focuses almost exclusively on Paul's work among the Gentiles. Luke's version of the meeting also represents the climax of Luke's carefully composed narrative concerning the first steps toward Gentile inclusion extending from chapters ten to fifteen.⁶⁶ It would seem that here in particular sensitivity to Luke's literary concerns would characterize a translation. But such sensitivity is lacking in the NRSV. I note four aspects of its translation especially deserving comment.

1. The substantial citation from Amos 9:11–12 that James uses as scriptural support for the decision to follow God's initiative concerning Gentiles also defines the two essential stages of Luke's narrative "in sequence" (1:3): the restoration of the people Israel ("the dwelling of David") accomplished in the first Jerusalem community, and then the inclusion of the nations "over whom my name has been called." This citation of Scripture, as so often in Luke-Acts, depends entirely on the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew, and depends on the LXX version for its force. The MT goes in an entirely different direction. The LXX, however, is not a freewheeling alteration of the Hebrew, it simply vocalizes the Hebrew consonants differently, to yield "so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord" instead of "so that they may possess the remnant of Edom" in the MT.⁶⁷ This is surely a case needing a footnote to explain the glaring divergences between what readers find in their NRSV translation of Amos 9:11–12 and what must appear to them as James *mis*-citation. No such explanatory note appears either in the RSV or the NRSV; reference is simply made to Amos 9:11–12, Jeremiah 12:15 and Isaiah 45:21, which does nothing to clarify.
2. When discussing Luke's theme of righteousness, I noted above how in 13:38–39, the NRSV obscured the connection between faith and

⁶⁶ See Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 180–281; Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

⁶⁷ See L.T. Johnson, *Septuagintal Midrash in the Speeches of Acts* (The Pere Marquette Lecture in Theology; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002) 17–18; *The Acts of the Apostles*, 264–265.

righteousness. Paul's statement in that passage is just part of an intense concentration on Gentiles coming to faith in Acts 10–14 (10:43; 11:17, 21; 13:8, 12, 39, 41, 48; 14:1, 9, 22, 23, 27). We would therefore expect special attention to be given to the three occurrences of πιστεῦν (15:7, 11) and πίστις (15:9) in this passage. Once more, however, the NRSV obscures the literary (and theological) connections in Luke's narrative. The inherent difficulties of rendering πίστις/πιστεῦν in English is, to be sure, daunting, since English has no verb "faithing" and therefore must often use "believing." When an author's whole point is at stake, though, even some awkwardness in English should be tolerated for the sake of accuracy. In 15:7, Luke has Peter state that God chose him to be the one through whom the Gentiles should ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ πιστεῦσαι. The RSV has "hear and believe," which at least maintains the verbal quality of the infinitive. The NRSV has "become believers," which sounds as though the Gentiles simply joined the church rather than responded to the good news with faith. As a result, in both translations, readers are liable to miss the cumulative force of 15:9, when Peter states that because "God cleansed their heart by faith" he made no distinction between us and them.

Finally, this inconsistency means that the entire point of 15:11 is missed, apparently even by the translators themselves. Peter asks why they are testing God by putting a yoke on disciples, and concludes, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ πιστεύομεν σωθῆναι καθ' ὃν τρόπον κακεῖνοι. Following the RSV closely, the NRSV translates, "On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will." We can leave aside the question whether διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ might in this case better be translated exegetically, as "through the gift that is the Lord Jesus," and note that both the RSV and NRSV have mistranslated the main clause. It is not "we believe that we will be saved," but "we are having faith (or believing) in order to be saved." The grammar matches perfectly Acts 14:9, where Paul observes that the lame man ἔχει πίστιν τοῦ σωθῆναι, "had faith in order to be saved." The translation I suggest better respects the sequence of statements that Luke has placed before this in Peter's mouth in 15:7 and 15:9, and the entire narrative sequence preceding this passage. It also makes clearer why the means of *Gentile* salvation (that is, inclusion in the people)⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See L.T. Johnson, "The Social Dimensions of *Soteria* in Luke-Acts and Paul," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, edited by E.H. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 520–536.

is now seen as the norm even for the *Jewish* members of the community (καθ' ὃν τρόπον κακεῖνοι = according to the manner they also are).

3. Earlier in this paper, I noted how the important Lukan theme of God's visitation has virtually vanished in the NRSV. This passage contains the final and most revealing example. If the theme had been maintained throughout the translation, the reader would—with some attentiveness to be sure—been able to perceive Moses coming to the people as a visitation (Acts 7:23), the birth of John as a visitation (Luke 1:68, 78), and the ministry of Jesus as a visitation of God (Luke 7:16; 19:44). Now, James is about to quote Amos to the effect that God is extending the people also to the Gentiles. And preceding that citation, Luke has James begin, Συμεὼν ἐξηγήσατο καθὼς πρῶτον ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ. The RSV properly translates, "Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name,"⁶⁹ although "made visitation" would have better captured the formal character of God's intervention. In either rendering, the reader can perceive how Luke establishes a continuity between the stages of his narrative. In the NRSV, however, the weight of ἐπισκέπτειν is again missed: "Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name."
4. Finally, both the RSV and the NRSV mistranslate James' final statement leading up to his citation from Amos: καὶ τοῦτω συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν καθὼς γέγραπται. They have, "This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written." But Luke's grammar demands the opposite, with τοῦτω being in the dative case: the words of the prophets, he says, agree *with this thing*. There is great significance in getting this right. The RSV and NRSV translations imply that the Gentile faith and inclusion in the people fits within what was already known from Scripture. But as throughout his narrative, Luke wants the reader to see that it is God's working that opens up the Scriptures. God's visitation precedes the human understanding of its significance. The annunciation to Joachim and Mary precedes their interpretive hymns, Simeon receives the child before he gives voice to prophecy, Jesus is raised before the disciples understand his predictions and the sayings of the Scripture. So also here: it is God's visitation among the Gentiles that demands a reinterpretation of Amos, not a reading of Amos that legitimates the Gentile mission.

⁶⁹ N.A. Dahl, "A People for His Name' (Acts 15:14)," *NTS* 4 (1957–58) 319–327.

A Deeply Flawed Translation

Although the NRSV reads well, it fails significantly as a translation in terms of a faithful rendering of the original language of the New Testament. As this essay suggests, the closer one looks at a specific composition such as Luke-Acts, the worse the translation appears. There may be several explanations. Perhaps it was the result of the group process and the disproportionate influence of the final editing. Perhaps it was a lack of attentiveness to basic translation issues because of attention paid to inclusive language and euphony. I have argued here that among other causes, some blame also attaches to a habit of atomistic (passage-by-passage) translation that fails to take into account the larger narrative or rhetorical fashioning of a composition. In the case of the New Testament, at least, the NRSV does not provide a reliable basis of exegesis or Bible study for those without knowledge of Greek.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON LUKE 16:19–31

I take this exercise as one of discovering what can be learned about a specific text when it is approached from a variety of self-consciously adopted perspectives.¹ My perspective on Luke 16:19–31, as on any other Gospel passage, is that of narrative criticism. This is not, for me, so much a deliberately chosen approach as it is a perspective shaped by early practices of reading—specifically that of *lectio continua* in the Divine Office when I was a Benedictine Monk—and by youthful exposure to the New Criticism associated with Cleanth Brooks and company. Narrative Criticism, as it developed within New Testament studies, seemed to me merely to provide discipline for a self-evidently reasonable way of reading stories.

For contemporary readers as for ancient—the main difference being whether the text is experienced through oral proclamation or not—stories unfold their meaning in sequence or not at all; readers work with the text to construct meaning bit by bit, with each new segment of the narrative confirming, amplifying, or altering, the sense of the story as heard to that point. The critic simply occupies the position of a super-competent hearer, who has heard this story told before any number of times, and so is not utterly naive, yet whose discipline enables him or her to remain open to new ways of hearing at each repetition.

Fundamental to my approach is the premise that narratives create meaning precisely as narratives: the story is itself the vehicle of meaning. In terms of Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is the μῦθος ("Plot") and ἥθος ("Character") as fully developed that reveal the δικάσιμα ("Meaning" or "Argument"). Narrative is read, in short, as a form of rhetoric, in which both invention (the story elements chosen to relate) and arrangement (the sequence in which the story elements are told) work together to shape an argument. A second premise follows from the first, namely, that each part of the overall story serves a function for the shaping of the larger narrative argument. The narrative critic asks for any specific pericope of a Gospel, therefore,

¹ In this consultation on "Translating the New Testament: Text, Translation, Theology" at McMaster University, each contributor was asked to adapt a distinct "perspective" on an assigned passage.

not simply “what is it saying,” but also, “what is it doing?” Narrative interpretation requires the subtle evaluation of the reciprocal effect of the part on the whole and the whole on the part.

If we look at Jesus’ parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in isolation from its narrative context, we can make a number of interesting and even important observations. We can note its resemblance to other ancient Mediterranean stories of after-death reversal; we can see its narrative enactment of the Lukan beatitude (Blessed are you poor) and woe (Woe to you who are rich, Luke 6:20, 24); we can therefore correlate this story with other Lukan statements in order to construct the evangelist’s teaching on material possessions; we can draw some inferences concerning Luke’s understanding of eschatology and of the moral teaching of the law and prophets. We can even note the way in which this parable resembles another of Luke’s most memorable stories—the one about the lost son (15:11–32)—in appending a conversation between two characters at the end of the parable. These are all observations worth making.

But what reading the parable in isolation from its narrative context does not enable us to observe is precisely what narrative criticism allows us to see, namely what this parable is doing within the story and how it contributes to the construction of the larger story. Narrative criticism allows us to ask about the narrative function of the parable, to ask not only what it says, but also why it is being said here. This question is especially important for interpreting Luke-Acts, for in this composition, the *sequence* of the narration is distinctively significant: Luke regards a story told *καθ'εξῆς* as having a particularly convincing character (see Luke 1:3; Acts 11:4). In Luke-Acts, *where* something is said is as important as *what* is said.

Starting with the widest circle—the narrative of Luke-Acts as a whole—it is possible to spiral in a rapid series of turns to the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in its immediate narrative context, in order to ask just that question: what is it doing here? Allow me to stipulate, then, a number of points that can, and have been, supported by careful analysis, but will not be in this essay. Luke-Acts as a whole makes an argument in defense of God’s fidelity by using a prophetic model: the story of Jesus and the church not only fulfills God’s prophecies of old, Jesus and the apostles are themselves prophetic in speech and deed. Specifically, Luke constructs his story on the model of the prophet Moses, whose two-fold sending to Israel and two-fold rejection by the people is sketched in Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:17–50: the Gospel shows the first sending of Jesus as God’s prophet

who brings God's visitation, his first rejection, and his vindication by God; the sequel shows the second visitation of the people through Jesus' prophetic representatives, and shows how some of the people responded in faith, so that the mission to the Gentiles was an extension rather than a replacement of Israel as God's people.

The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man appears in a part of Luke's Gospel narrative that is entirely his literary construction, namely the long account of Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem that extends from 9:51–19:44. Having established that Jesus is the Prophet-Messiah who embodies God's visitation of the people in 3:1–7:50, and shown that prophet gathering a remnant people defined by faith around him in 8:1–9:50, Luke constructs this long journey that occupies a full ten chapters of his Gospel. As in Mark, this middle part of the narrative is marked by passion predictions: readers see Jesus as the prophet who is moving toward his destined death in Jerusalem. But while he is journeying, Jesus is also constantly teaching. Here is where Luke has placed the great bulk of the Q material he shares with Matthew and his own distinctive L material. In contrast to Matthew's habit of organizing Jesus' sayings into set discourses, however, Luke weaves his teaching with subtle verisimilitude into the situations Jesus' faces while on this great journey: sayings on hospitality are spoken at meals, calls to follow him are issued while Jesus is on the road.

Two further compositional features distinguish Luke's arrangement of these saying materials. The first is that he carefully distinguishes what sort of thing Jesus says to each of the three groups that are around him as he moves on his journey. To the anonymous crowd, he issues warnings and calls to discipleship; to those who join him on the journey, he provides instruction on the use of possessions, prayer, and patience in persecution; to his opponents, the Pharisees and Lawyers, he speaks words of rejection in response to their rejection of the vision of the world he offers through his deeds and speech. The second is that he arranges these in an alternating pattern, addressing first one audience, then another, thereby creating a sense both of movement and of growth, as Jesus gathers a remnant prophetic people around himself even as he spurs his enemies to their climatic rejection of him.

Now I must bring these sweeping claims to bear on the immediate context of our parable. I note first in the first place that the three parables of the lost and found (sheep, coin, son) in 15:3–32 are told not to the disciples, but specifically in response to the Pharisees and Scribes, who in 15:1–2 had grumbled because Jesus "welcomed sinners and ate together

with them.” The closing dialogue between the father and the elder son therefore unmistakably serve to interpret this narrative setting: the correspondence between the law-abiding elder son who rejects the table-fellowship to the sinful younger son, and the narrative setting established by Luke can scarcely be missed. The parable serves to interpret Luke’s larger story of the prophet and the people. I note in the second place that Jesus next turns in 16:1–13 to a parable and maxims delivered πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς (“to his disciples”), and however strange or difficult we find 16:1–13, it is clearly meant to be positive instruction concerning φρόνιμος (“cleverness/sagacity”) in the use of material possessions.

I note in the third place that the entire sequence of 16:14–31 is once more spoken to Jesus’ enemies, the Pharisees. In 16:14, Luke identifies them as φιλάργυροι (“lovers of money”) who reject Jesus precisely upon “hearing all these things” that Jesus said about sharing possessions through almsgiving. However difficult it is to find a connecting thread running through the obscure sayings in 16:14–18, it can be asserted with considerable probability that Luke intended them to serve the narrative function of distinguishing the teaching of the prophetic messiah from that of his opponents. And I note in the fourth and final place that in this sequence, the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man forms the same sort of climactic and interpretive role as did the parable of the Lost Son in the previous sequence—we see that in 17:1, Jesus once again addresses “his disciples.”

From this narrative perspective, then, we can conclude that the dialogue between Abraham and the Rich Man is far from an afterthought; it is, indeed, the intended climax of the parable, which serves to morally indict the rich man (and the money-loving Pharisees) in a manner that the basic story does not: if the Rich Man and the Pharisees had truly been committed to Moses and the Prophets, they would have recognized that the sharing of possessions with the poor among the people was at the heart of Torah and would never cease being normative for God’s people (see 16:17), and the Rich Man would have fed and clothed the man he passed every day at his gate (16:19).

We can conclude further that Luke placed the parable in this place to serve his narrative purpose at this place, which was to show the division within the people caused by the prophetic Messiah Jesus: the self-justifying Pharisees (see 16:15) are designated as “lovers of money” (16:14) precisely because they do not share Jesus’ prophetic vision of God’s care for the poor and therefore the covenantal obligation to share possessions with the poor.

We can conclude, finally, that Abraham's closing declaration, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rise from the dead" (16:31) serves as a narrative anticipation of Luke's second volume, when the proclamation and demonstration of Jesus as the prophet whom God has raised will again gather the outcast but leave the wealthy and powerful unconvinced (see Acts 2:41–5:42).

PART THREE

PAUL

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ROMANS 3:21–26 AND THE FAITH OF JESUS

By his recent article on the πίστις Χριστοῦ formulations in Paul,¹ A. Hultgren has performed the service of reviewing the scholarship devoted to this issue,² and discussing the syntactical points pertinent to the question.³ He has also shown that the resolution of the debate will come about not on the basis of linguistic analysis alone, but on the basis of exegesis.⁴ Unfortunately, his own exegetical observations, especially those concerning the critical passage, Rom 3:21–26, lack the necessary sharpness. In this short note, I join the growing number of those who are discontent with the abrupt dismissal of the “faith of Jesus” by E. Käsemann and other

¹ A. Hultgren. “The *Pistis Christou* Formulations in Paul.” *NovT* 22 (1980) 248–63. He discusses in particular Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20, 22; Phil 3:9.

² One can add to the works surveyed by Hultgren (*ibid.*, 248–53) G. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia* (SNTSMS 35; Cambridge: University Press, 1979), in which he again argues (pp. 57–65) that the “faith of Christ” means God’s fidelity in fulfilling the Abrahamic promises; R.B. Hays. “Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3,” *JBL* 99 (1980) 107–15. esp. p. 114 n. 32. which points in the same direction as this article; as well as S. Williams, “The Righteousness of God in Romans,” *JBL* 99 (1980) 241–90. who reaches conclusions compatible with those in the present article, esp. pp. 272–77.

³ Hultgren’s conclusion, “. . . on the basis of syntax alone—apart from theological considerations—the interpretation of the *Pistis Christou* formulations along the lines of the subjective genitive is excluded” (258), goes well beyond his own observations. He admits the weakness of the “articular” argument (253), and grants that the argument equating πίστις Χριστοῦ with a prepositional phrase can be taken in either direction (254); but in arguing against the subjective, he omits from consideration Col 1:4; 2:5 and misses the importance of I Thess 1:8 (254). He constructs a *petitio principii* in his analysis of Gal 2:16 (255), grants that Paul uses both objective and subjective genitives in prepositional phrases using anarthous nouns (255), and too quickly dismisses the strong support given the subjective reading by Rom 4:16b. τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ. Of course, the genitive Ἀβραάμ is “adjectival” (257)—all genitives are. Turner notwithstanding, however, it is precipitous to classify the use of οἱ ἐκ simply as a sectarian designation (256). The use in Gal 3:7, 9 as well as in Rom 3:26 argues against that designation. In Rom 4:16, the personal faith-response of Abraham remains central to the understanding of τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ. It is not simply formal. The weakness of the purely linguistic arguments against the subjective genitive is clear from Hultgren’s final translation: “One can speak (rather awkwardly) of ‘Christic faith’ or (more clearly) ‘faith which is in and of Christ,’ that is, the faith of the believer which comes forth as Christ is proclaimed in the Gospel (Rom 1:8, 17, Gal 3:2, 5).” This does not advance our understanding.

⁴ A. Hultgren. “*Pistis Christou*,” 263.

commentators,⁵ and who find that, simply on exegetical grounds, a subjective reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ (Ἰησοῦ) is not only sometimes possible, but at times (as in Romans 3:21–26) necessary.⁶ The basic pieces of my argument have been shaped before, especially by M. Barth.⁷ I will here try to refine his position, taking into account the excellent observations of S. Williams on Rom 3:21–26.⁸

The three phrases employing πίστις in Rom 3:22, 25, and 26 are awkwardly placed. If Paul was here adding clarification to a traditional formulation, he botched the job rather badly. There are problems with reading the genitives in these phrases subjectively, but they are small compared with those facing the objective rendering found in all the modern translations, and purveyed without question by the major commentaries.

First, we must note the literary function of this passage. Paul here restates the thesis of Rom 1:17, after elaborating its antithesis in 1:18–3:20. Two things follow from this simple observation: (1) Paul is here showing how God's way of making humans righteous is being revealed; the emphasis is on the gift, rather than on its reception. (2) There is a formal balance between the thesis and its restatement. Perhaps the simple exegetical technique of reading the passage without the phrases in question will help us see this. If we remove διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ from 3:22, διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως from 3:25, and ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ⁹ from 3:26, we see at once that Paul is stating in straightforward fashion what God has accomplished for humans in the death of Christ. The only place where the reception of that gift is mentioned explicitly is in 3:22, εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας.

If, with the RSV and most commentators, we read the three phrases as referring to faith *in* Christ, what happens to the passage? First, in 3:22 we have redundancy. Why should Paul add εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας, if

⁵ Cf. E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 94,101, also A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949) 150–61; F.J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: World, 1957) 99–101; C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Black, 1957) 74; H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (HTKNT 6; Freiburg im B.: Herder, 1977) 105, 115.

⁶ Rather than beginning with the notion that these formulations need always be read as subjective genitives, I think it better to ask whether they might *ever* be so read, and if so, what they might mean. Lumping them all together simply makes for poor exegesis. That is why I focus here on what I regard as the most compelling case.

⁷ M. Barth, "The Faith of the Messiah," *Heyf* 10 (1969) 363–70. Barth's treatment is especially good for its use of "obedience" as the content of "the faith of Christ."

⁸ In addition to "The Righteousness of God in Romans," see his *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept* (HDR 2; Missoula: Scholars, 1975) 34–56.

⁹ Accepting here the shorter reading in the genitive (of R, A, B, C, K, etc.).

he has just said, “through faith in Jesus Christ”? The added note of “all” (πάντας) lends some specificity, it is true, but not enough to make this added phrase necessary. On the other hand, a subjective reading makes the two phrases distinct. Now, with the righteousness of God being revealed *through the faith of Jesus*, the emphasis on God’s gift is maintained. Furthermore (and this is, I think, conclusive), we find a formal parallel to 1:17. As Paul there spoke of God’s righteousness being ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, so here the εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας corresponds to the second member of that balanced phrase, and διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ corresponds to the ἐκ πίστεως of 1:17.

The second phrase, διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως, in 3:25 is even worse, if read objectively. The RSV’s “to be received by faith” strikes one as a desperation move. The placement of the phrase between ἰλαστήριον and ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι is, as S. Williams has shown, extremely difficult.¹⁰ The least likely function of the phrase, however, is to refer to the reception of the gift. Precisely the awkward placement of the phrase demands that we regard it as modifying God’s action of putting forth Jesus Christ as a redemption, in the expiation effected by the shedding of his blood. The most obvious referent would be God himself. It was “through his faithfulness” that he put forward Jesus. This understanding of God’s fidelity is important in Romans.¹¹ But the close conjunction of the phrase to “in his blood” and “expiation” leads me to think that the phrase διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως here again (and awkwardly) refers to the disposition of the one who was shedding his blood, viz., Jesus. A decent translation is nearly impossible. I would hazard the following as at least an indication of how I understand the phrase working, “Whom God put forward as an expiation: through faith, in the shedding of his blood.” I am reading the last two phrases almost as a hendiadys. The faith of Jesus and the pouring out of his blood, together, form the act of expiation. Διὰ and ἐν are both to be taken as instrumental. This is convoluted, but it makes more sense than the objective rendering, and there is another place in the NT where an equally strange construction demands a similar construal (cf. 1 Pet 1:2).

¹⁰ *Jesus’ Death as Saving Event*, 41–44.

¹¹ Cf. A. Hultgren, “*Pistis Christou*,” 252; R.B. Hays, “Psalm 143,” 110–11; and H. Ljungman, *Pistis: A Study of its Presuppositions and its Meaning in Pauline Use* (Lund: Gleerup, 1964) 35–56. Paul’s ability to speak at once and in parallelism of God’s πίστις and his ἀλήθεια in Rom 3:3, 7 (cf. also Rom 15:8) alerts us to his willingness to use different words to point to the same reality. The theological weight does not come from ἀλήθεια itself, however, as the bearer of some “biblical” meaning, but from Paul’s usage.

The final phrase, τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ (3:26), is rendered by the *RSV*, “him who has faith in Jesus.” This is the least likely of all the objective readings, for it forces the simple meaning of the Greek. One would ordinarily (and free from other considerations) render this, “the one who shares the faith of Jesus,” meaning, “one who has faith as Jesus had faith.” The faith of the human being Jesus is here clearly intended. In 4:16, the same phrase occurs in reference to Abraham, τῶ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ. The *RSV* does not there translate, “those who believe in Abraham,” but (quite correctly) “those who share the faith of Abraham.”¹² So should we understand 3:26. This is supported by observing the way Paul uses Jesus’ personal name. This is the only time that πίστεως Ἰησοῦ occurs. Ordinarily, Paul uses the messianic title in such phrases, or in other statements of belief. Indeed, he does not often speak of Jesus simply by name. When he does, his emphasis appears to fall on Jesus’ human identity rather than on his messianic role (see esp. Rom 8:11; 1 Thess 1:10; 2 Cor 4:10–14). Paul’s meaning in 3:26, then, would seem to be that God, by revealing his saving action in the cross of Jesus, has not only shown himself to be righteous, but has shown himself to be one who makes righteous those who, on the basis of Jesus’ faithful death (I will return to this awkward expression) have faith in God.

By reading Rom 3:21–26 in this fashion, we not only respect its literary function as the restatement of Paul’s thesis in 1:17, but allow it to move naturally into the discussion of Abraham’s faith in 4:1–25, and (of even greater importance) allow it to be understood in the light of 5:12–21, where Paul again describes the gift of God’s grace brought about through Jesus. Indeed, I suggest that the key to understanding Rom 3:21–26 is found in its placement between 1:17 and 5:18–19. But before that can be made clear, a few preliminary points must be made.

It is not always obvious on what grounds resistance to the notion of “the faith of Jesus” is based. There may be fear of a notion of faith as a sort of “work” which might nullify the sovereignty of God’s grace, even if this happened to be a work by one whom we confess as God’s Son. Therefore, no matter what the plain sense of the Greek seems to demand, we conclude that Paul “cannot” mean that Jesus had faith, or, if he did, that this could not be soteriologically significant. Unfortunately, doctrinal presuppositions (from whatever direction) make for poor exegesis. But perhaps there is a more genuine difficulty upon which the resistance is

¹² A. Hultgren. “*Pistis Christou*,” 256–57; M. Barth, “Faith of the Messiah.” 367.

based, a failure of imagination. In what sense could Jesus *be* a believer? If Paul spoke of the “faith of Jesus,” what could he mean by it?

It is at this point that the severest criticism has been leveled at those studies which have tried to supply this imaginative picture out of a “biblical theology” perspective. Seeking a “biblical” understanding of πίστις, some have tried to read ΠΙΣΤΙΣ, or “faithfulness” wherever Paul has used πίστις or ἀλήθεια.¹³ Certainly, the severe criticism of some of these suggestions by J. Barr, for example, is correct.¹⁴ On the other hand, this negative reaction seems to have almost paralyzed the imagination of those who read Paul, so that πίστις and its cognates take only an almost univocal sense, and we find it more and more difficult to imagine how Jesus might have had πίστις, or how Paul might have spoken of it. For the discussion to proceed, I think it necessary to restate again some fairly simple, yet important distinctions. They are: Paul can use πίστις and its cognates in more than one sense; and, Paul can indicate the same reality by more than one word. To be specific, I recall here the distinction made already by R. Bultmann between πίστις as confession and πίστις as response to God;¹⁵ and I recall the connection drawn (again by Bultmann, and later by M. Barth) between faith and obedience in Paul.¹⁶ If the logic of these distinctions and connections is firm, then one can reach a satisfactory understanding of “the faith of Jesus” in Paul and see how Rom 5:18–19 explicates Rom 3:21–26.

Faith as the Confession of Christ

Πίστις as confessional is so important for Paul, and its use so pervasive, that it colors the whole discussion of πίστις Χριστοῦ. For purposes of clarity, I here leave aside for the moment the disputed cases. Apart from

¹³ Barth, (*ibid.*, 365–66) does not escape this entirely, but it is found particularly in G. Herbert. “Faithfulness and ‘Faith,’” *Theology* 58 (1955) 373–79; T.F. Torrance. “One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith,” *ExpTim* 68 (1957) 111–14.

¹⁴ *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1961). But two remarks should qualify Barr’s scathing critique. First, G. Herbert, in particular, made sharp exegetical observations which remain valid (see “Faithfulness,” 376–77). Second, although these writers cast their net too widely and indiscriminately, and without sufficient attention to context, it remains proper to inquire after the broader resonances of terms within the usage of a particular author, when the integrity of the exegetical method is observed (see R.B. Hays, “Psalm 143,” 110 n. 14).

¹⁵ See “Pisteuō,” *TDNT* 6:217–19.

¹⁶ Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951), 1.314; M. Barth, “Faith of the Messiah” 366.

these, we see in the plainest fashion that Paul makes Christ the object of faith. The clearest examples are when he uses the verb πιστεύω, as in Gal 2:16: καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεῦσαμεν, and in Phil 1:29: τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν.¹⁷ The noun form is used so unequivocally only in Col 2:5: τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν. The fact that Paul speaks so clearly of Christ being the object of belief cautions us against precipitous conclusions regarding the disputed genitive constructions. But in what sense does Paul speak of Christ being the object of faith?

Christ is the object of the Christian's faith in the sense of *specifying confession*.¹⁸ We do not find in these passages that "faith" describes a relationship of trust, fidelity, or obedience to the particular figure designated as Messiah, but rather, to God's offer of righteousness (salvation, redemption) through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. Paradoxically, the fundamental confession is not (for Paul) "Jesus is Christ," but "Jesus is Lord," and this is attached explicitly to "confession" language in Phil 2:11, καὶ πάντα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς, and in Rom 10:9, ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματι σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν . . .¹⁹ The confessional aspect of πίστις specifies the shape of the Christian response to God. Thus, not only "Christ" but also the gospel can be spoken of as the object of such faith.²⁰ Likewise, Christians can be referred to by Paul simply as the "believers" (οἱ πιστεύοντες),²¹ and those outside the community as ἄπιστοι.²² Such "faith in Christ" not only sets Christians apart from pagans "who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:5), but also from Jews, who have faith in the one God (Rom 2:17; 10:2), but who do not confess Jesus as Christ and Lord; i.e., they do not acknowledge God's way of revealing his justice in the present time.²³

In those places, then, where Paul is concerned to stress the *particular* shape of the Christian response to God (especially in contrast to non-

¹⁷ In spite of the ambiguity created by the use of scriptural citations, we should probably add Rom 9:33; 10:11, 14 to this category as referring to belief *in* Christ.

¹⁸ Cf. Paul's use of ἐξομολογέω in the citations of Rom 14:11 and 15:9, as well as the consistent Christological shape of the confession (ὁμολογέω) in 1 John 2:23; 4:2, 3, 15; 2 John 7.

¹⁹ Cf. N.A. Dahl, "The Messiahship of Jesus in Paul," *The Crucified Messiah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974) 40–43.

²⁰ Here is found the legitimate nucleus of Hultgren's remark about "Christic faith" coming through the Gospel ("*Pistis Christou*" 257). Cf., e.g., 1 Cor 2:4–5; 15:11, 14; and (possibly) Phil 1:27 and 2 Thess 2:12.

²¹ Cf. 1 Thess 1:7; 2:10, 13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Cor 1:21; 14:22.

²² Cf. 1 Cor 6:6; 7:12ff; 10:27; 14:22, 24; 2 Cor 6:14–15, and esp. 2 Cor 4:4.

²³ Cf. the use of νῦν in Rom 3:26; 5:9, 11; 8:1, 22; 11:5, 30; 16:26; 2 Cor 5:16; 6:2; Gal 1:23; Col 1:26.

Christian Jews), there are good reasons beforehand to suspect that a πίστις Χριστοῦ formulation would be an objective genitive. Such appears to be the case in Gal 2:16a. combined as it is with the already cited verbal form, “and we have believed in Christ Jesus.”²⁴ Yet, even here, where Paul’s contrast between faith and the works of the law is clear, a certain ambiguity is created by the presence of ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ in the same verse, and by the phrase, four verses later, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (Gal 2:20). With ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, one wonders whether the RSV has adequately captured the sense with “by faith in Christ.” for that leaves us with the same sense of redundancy as we had in Rom 3:21.²⁵ In the case of 2:20, one would like to follow the RSV in reading, “I live by faith in the Son of God,” were it not that, again, the sense is that one lives because of the gift and not because of the mode of its reception. It is not “faith in Christ” which gives Paul life. It is “Christ living in me” (2:20a). The “faith” here, one begins to think, may belong to “the one who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20b).²⁶ Even where “faith” appears to refer to specifying confession, therefore, we are faced with the possibility that it may be less part of the gift’s acceptance than of the gift itself, so that we need to read, “I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live in virtue of the faith of God’s Son, who loved me and gave himself for me.”²⁷ But this returns us to the problem with which we began. In what sense can we speak of Jesus having faith? Clearly, Jesus’ faith cannot be confessional. It cannot be faith in the Christ. It must be, therefore, faith in *God*, and this brings us closer to the primary meaning of πίστις in Paul.

Faith as Response to God

A more fundamental meaning of πίστις in Paul is that acknowledgement of God’s claim on the world (and on one’s life) which is the opposite of idolatry. It refers to that responsive hearing of God’s word which allows his way of making humans righteous to be the measure of reality, rather

²⁴ Cf. A. Hultgren, “*Pistis Christou*,” 254–55.

²⁵ The contrast established between πίστις Χριστοῦ and ἐξ ἔργων νόμου may appear at first to support the objective reading, but it only makes matters worse for it. We must understand the latter phrase, after all, as a subjective genitive, “the law’s works,” not as an objective genitive, “works in (?) the law.” The only way, therefore, that the two phrases can be functionally equivalent (as they appear to be, given the ἐκ and διὰ) is by both being read as subjective.

²⁶ Here, as in Rom 3:21–26, the function of the passage in context is critical.

²⁷ Cf. G. Herbert, “Faithfulness,” 377.

than human perceptions. It bespeaks that acceptance of God's grace as the source of authentic life which is the opposite of self-aggrandizement. This meaning of πίστις represents one of the two basic options available to human freedom in the world: openness to God, or a turning from him. It is this understanding of πίστις which enables Paul to make the otherwise outrageous claim, πᾶν δὲ ὁ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν (Rom 14:23). The sin which opposes faith is not an action, but a centering of existence in falsehood, i.e., idolatry. As idolatry begins with the refusal to acknowledge God's claim to glory as creator (Rom 1:18–23) and leads logically to the attempt to establish one's place in the world (righteousness) on one's own terms (Rom 10:3), so faith begins in the recognition of being God's creature and leads to accepting his way of making humans righteous before him (Rom 3:21–26). So fundamental an orientation of human existence can have as its object only God himself. Thus, Paul speaks of the Thessalonians' πίστις πρὸς τὸν θεὸν precisely in the context of recalling to them πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ (I Thess 1:8–9).

The *theological* object of this response is found most clearly in Paul's discussion of Abraham. When he cites Gen 15:6 in both Rom 4:3 and Gal 3:6, Paul says of him, ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην. The thematic connection between this sort of faith and righteousness does not require stressing, but we can note how emphatically Paul repeats that Abraham's faith is directed to God; in Rom 4:5, πιστεύοντι ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιούντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ; in Rom 4:17, κατέναντι οὗ ἐπίστευσεν θεοῦ τοῦ ζωοποιούντος τοὺς νεκροὺς. It is in this fashion that Paul can present Abraham's faith in God as model for the Christian response to God. So, in Gal 3:5–6, Paul's question to the Galatians places in opposition "the works of the law" and "the hearing which is faith" (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως, an exegetical genitive), as the source of their new life. With the καθὼς which immediately follows, Paul makes Abraham an example of such faithful hearing. He draws the connection securely in 3:7, οἱ ἐκ πίστεως οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ. As Abraham believed in *God*, so those called his children are regarded as ἐκ πίστεως (the resemblance both to Rom 4:16 and 3:26 is striking). Similarly, in Rom 4:22–24 the δικαιοσύνην reckoned to Abraham because of his faith is to be reckoned as well τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἐγείραντα Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἐκ νεκρῶν. The proper object of this fundamental faith, for the Christian as for Abraham, is the one who raises from the dead and calls into existence things which do not exist (Rom 4:17). This is not "faith in Christ", but faith in the one who raised Christ from the dead, God (πατὴρ θεός). If the confessional aspect of πίστις is encapsulated by Rom 10:9a, the response

aspect of faith is captured by the second part of that same verse, 9b: *καὶ πιστεύσης ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν σωθήσῃ*. Significantly enough, Paul then proceeds to attach *δικαιοσύνη* not to the confession of Jesus as Lord, but to this faith in God: *καρδίᾳ γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν* (Rom 10:10).

Faith as Obedience

It can be objected that Paul rarely uses *πίστις* and its cognates in this God-directed sense. But just as he can mean different things by *πίστις*, so can he use different expressions for this fundamental response to God. It is here, I think, that the discussions of the faith of Jesus have tended to go astray. The point of advance is not to be found in locating the possible Hebrew resonances of *πίστις* (in the direction of “fidelity”), as it is in finding how Paul himself understands the response of *πίστις* toward God. For Paul, faith as a fundamental human response is the only option to sin. There is no middle ground. Now, as sin in the fundamental sense is best understood under the category of disobedience (see Rom 5:19), so theological faith is best understood within the framework of obedience toward God.²⁸ Paul is particularly rich in this terminology, especially in Romans, where the two responses to God are described in what is, for Paul, almost a systematic manner.

The first noteworthy thing about his usage is that faith-language and obedience-language tend to overlap, functionally. We have seen how, when speaking of faith in a confessional sense, Paul could place Christ and the gospel as objects of this faith. In the same way, he can speak of obedience being directed to Christ, or to the proclamation of Christ in the kerygma. In 2 Cor 10:5, he speaks of taking every thought captive *εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (in contrast to *παρακοὴν*, 10:6). And in 2 Thess 1:8, he promises retribution to *μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ* (cf. also 2 Thess 3:14). In Rom 6:17, Paul gives thanks because *ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδασχῆς*, but states of Israel in 10:16, *οὐ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ*. As “faith” could specify the Christian response by being directed to Christ and

²⁸ In this, R. Bultmann is surely correct: “Paul understands faith primarily as obedience; he understands the act of faith as an act of obedience” (*Theology of New Testament*. I. 314; underscoring his). The elements of trust and fidelity are certainly to be found in Paul (cf., e.g., Rom 4:18–20; 8:24–25), but at the heart is obedient hearing.

to the gospel announcing God's work in Christ, so "obedience" can have this specifying role. Functionally, faith and obedience language overlap.

That Paul intends this convergence is indicated by the phrase he uses in Rom 1:5 and 16:26 to summarize the goal of his preaching, εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως (cf. also Rom 15:18). Several points should be made concerning this expression. First, whether the genitive is read here in a strictly epexegetical way ("the obedience which is faith") or in a more generally adjectival way ("faithful obedience"), Paul clearly brings the two terms together as mutually interpretative. Paul invites us, in effect, to understand faith as a response of obedience to God, and obedience as a response of faith (cf. Rom 10:16–17; Gal 3:4). Second, the use of this phrase does not seem accidental. Its placement at the very beginning and end of Romans forms something of an interpretative *inclusio* around the letter.²⁹ Third, the use of this phrase already in 1:5 conditions the way in which πίστις will be read subsequently in the letter, certainly as early as 1:17, and probably as well in 3:21–26.

Just as the confessional aspect of πίστις was more prevalent but less fundamental than the "theological" aspect, so also is it with ὑπακοή. This can be seen especially in Rom 6:12–19. Paul is there portraying the human condition under sin and under grace (with, again, but two options). Those under sin are led εἰς ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις (6:12), whereas those under grace are freed from this form of "obedience" (which is really disobedience to God, cf. Rom 1:24) and can serve righteousness (6:18), because they have obeyed (ὑπακούειν) the teaching given them (6:17). Paul's basic understanding of the matter is stated summarily in 6:16: οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ᾧ παριστάνετε ἑαυτοὺς δούλους εἰς ὑπακοὴν δοῦλοι ἐστε ᾧ ὑπακούετε ἢτοι ἁμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον ἢ ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην.³⁰ What is remarkable in this passage is that instead of speaking of πίστις leading to righteousness, Paul speaks of obedience leading to δικαιοσύνην. We will meet this again. For now, we note that the functional equivalence of faith and obedience is virtually complete. The same connection between obedience and righteousness is found in 6:17–19. Here, obedience is contrasted to sin as a fundamental response to God. Because Christians are not under sin but grace (6:14), they can present themselves to θεῷ as people living (as from the dead), and can direct their bodily members as weapons of righteous-

²⁹ Cf. also the parallelism of Rom 1:8 and 16:19, noted by R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1. 314.

³⁰ The same pattern (but involving φρόνησις) is in Rom 8:5–7.

ness to θεῶ (6:13). They are to consider themselves as dead to sin, but living to θεῶ in Christ Jesus (6:11).³¹

The point of these remarks, which have scarcely been novel, is simple and direct. When Paul speaks of obedience, we are justified in seeing at least one important aspect of what he means by faith: faith as the fundamental, responsive “yes” to God. Can we not, therefore, when we read of the *obedience* of Jesus, see there a possible understanding of Jesus’ faith? It will be noticed, that in speaking of Romans 1–4, we saw the connection between πίστις and δικαιοσύνη. In speaking of Romans 6, we focused on the connection between ὑπακοή and δικαιοσύνη. We should not be surprised if the connection between the two modes of speaking is to be found in Romans 5.

The Obedience of Jesus as the Faith of Jesus

The question now raised is whether Paul says anything about Jesus’ response to God in these terms. It would be surprising if it were entirely lacking. If human beings generally (in Paul’s mind) can respond to God only by sin or by faith (by disobedience or obedience), and if Abraham was able to respond to God by faith (which is obedience) and was on that basis justified (Rom 6:16), then Jesus’ lack of such response would leave him alone, of all Abraham’s children, without faith in God (cf. Rom 4:11–12). No matter how paradoxical Paul’s statements concerning the kenotic service of the Son (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), the logic of his thought would seem to demand a similar response of the human being Jesus. This becomes even clearer when we remember that it is by receiving the Spirit of adoption as sons that Christians are able to call “Father,” and, being children, are heirs together with Christ (Rom 8:15–17). If Christians are to be shaped into the image of this Son by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor 3:17–18) and are to present their members as the weapons of righteousness to God in a response of faith-obedience (Rom 1:5; 6:13; 12:1–2), it would be strange

³¹ This analysis is supported by Paul’s use in Romans of ἀπειθέω and ἀπειθεία. Apart from 2:8, these terms refer to disobedience shown toward God (10:21; I 1:30–32), a use reflected as well in Eph 5:6 and the textually disputed reading of Col 3:6. Likewise, Paul speaks of the ἀπιστία of Israel in the same way as of its disobedience. In Rom 3:3, Israel’s ἀπιστία is contrasted to the πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ. In 4:20, Abraham does not allow ἀπιστία to deflect the movement of his faith from directing glory to God. In 11:20, 23, Paul speaks of the ἀπιστία of Israel in exactly the same way as of its ἀπειθεία (cf. 11:32).

indeed if Jesus did not, in Paul's mind, so respond in his earthly life to the mystery of God with that obedience which Paul calls faith.

We need not, of course, rely upon surmise or logic. In fact, Paul speaks clearly of Jesus' obedience to the Father in his human condition. Whether or not the hymn of Phil 2:6–11 is traditional, it obviously corresponds with Paul's own sentiments. And whether or not the initial kenosis from the μορφή θεοῦ refers to a descent from a preexistent state,³² there is no question concerning the significance of 2:7b–8: καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. It was as a human being (ὡς ἄνθρωπος) that Jesus was obedient (ὑπήκοος) unto the death of the cross. We note here the same connection between the obedience and the sacrificial act that we suggested in Rom 3:25. The obedience, we see, is the attitudinal correlative to the act of sacrifice. That Paul wished to exploit just this aspect of the hymn is shown by Phil 2:12, "Ὡστε . . . καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπήκουσατε . . . The obedience of Jesus is a model for the Philippians' obedience. We might also suggest that Jesus' obedience was the *ground* for their own obedience. He made it possible for them to be obedient. If we transpose this obedience language to that of "faith," we can suggest that the "faith" of Jesus in God was the ground of possibility for their "faith" in God. The final expression of that faith in the death on the cross opened up that possibility by revealing the paradoxical power of God to save in weakness, i.e., it revealed his way of making humans righteous before him.

But is there reason to connect this response of obedience by Jesus toward the Father, to the gift of righteousness which comes to humans from God? There is explicit reason. It is found plainly and emphatically in a passage which has, strangely, drawn little attention in the whole discussion of the faith of Jesus, viz., Rom 5:18–19.³³ This is not the place to discuss the difficult question of the precise function of chap. 5 in the whole argument of Romans.³⁴ It is clear, however, that in 5:12–21, Paul is again

³² Recent exegetical work on the Philippians hymn has tended to support the view advanced already by L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of Saint Paul* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1951), that the hymn refers above all to the human disposition of the man Jesus as God's Servant. Cf. C.H. Talbert, "The Problem of Pre-existence in Philippians 2:6–11." *JBL* 86 (1967) 141–53; J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Christological Anthropology in Phil II. 6–11." *RB* 83 (1976) 25–50; G. Howard, "Phil 2:6–11 and the Human Christ." *CBQ* 40 (1978) 368–87.

³³ Käsemann's view is typically polemical: "Almost grotesque is the attempt, on the basis of the term ἄνθρωπος, to emphasize the humanity of the person of Jesus, to develop something like an anthropology of Jesus . . ." (*Commentary*, 143). But cf. M. Barth, "Faith of the Messiah." 366.

³⁴ Cf. N.A. Dahl, "Two Notes on Romans 5," *ST* 5 (1951) 37–48.

presenting (in somewhat different language) the nature of the gift which has been given humans by God. He does this by the systematic contrast of the two human figures (however representative they may be), Adam and Jesus. The actions or attitudes of these two human beings (and the consequences of them) are the focus of the presentation. Those powers of sin and grace which elsewhere appear in personified form are, in this argument, located in the attitudes and actions of human persons.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to note the resumptive force of 5:12–21. There is a close correspondence in form and in meaning between 5:15, ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπερίσσευσεν, and the statement of 3:24, δικαιούμενοι δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας of 3:22 matches well the εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς of 5:15. The disputed genitives concerning the “faith of” or “faith in” Christ follow this statement in 3:25–26, just as here, in 5:15–19, the language of Christ’s *obedience* dominates.

The most important thing to recognize, however, is that here, once more, what is being said of the man Jesus is described as part of God’s gift. Paul is describing the objective act of God (through Jesus) by which the gift (δῶρημα) was given to human beings εἰς δικαίωμα (5:16).³⁵ The contrast between Adam and Jesus is drawn most sharply in vv. 18 and 19. In v. 18 we read, “Therefore, just as through the trespass of one man the consequence was condemnation for all, so also the righteous deed (δικαίωμα) of the one man (Jesus) has led to δικαίωσιν ζωῆς for all.” Paul is ringing changes on “justice” language. But the point seems clear enough: the righteous deed of Jesus provided the basis for others reaching righteousness (an “acquittal” for life, or consisting in life). The doing of righteousness here has nothing to do with the response of Christians to Christ, or to the gospel, but everything to do with the response of Jesus to God his Father.

The next verse makes this even clearer. Paul says that many people were established as sinners because of the disobedience (παρακοή) of the one human being, Adam. In the same way, διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοὶ οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί (5:19). Here, the obedience of Jesus is explicitly said to be the basis for the righteousness of others. The future passive of the verb is important; it is on the basis of his past act that others will be established as righteous before God. The obedience of Jesus is

³⁵ Ibid., 45–46.

God's way of saving other humans. And by this obedience of Jesus, I suggest, Paul means, simply, Jesus' faith. The human faith of Jesus is certainly not a virtue, nor is it simply a matter of trust and fidelity. For Paul, it is essentially obedience. In Jesus, we see *ὑπακοή τῆς πίστεως* articulated in the death on the cross. The obedience/faith of Jesus is itself the expression of God's gift of grace to humans and, therefore, the way in which (in this present time, apart from the Law) God's way of making humans righteous is revealed. The faith of Jesus is soteriologically significant. Rom 5:19 is the plain explication of Rom 3:21–26.

I suggest, therefore, that the faith of Jesus is central to Paul's presentation of the gospel, and that the faith of Jesus, understood as obedience, is soteriologically significant. It provides the basis for the faith response of others. That this understanding does no violence to the principle of righteousness apart from the works of the Law is made clear from Rom 3:22 and 3:30. Nor is the point of Jesus' faith that his is just like the faith of Christians. Not at all. The point is (and I believe it is Paul's point) that by virtue of the gift of the Spirit the faith of Christians might become like that of Jesus.

The importance of recognizing the proper place of Jesus' faith within the heart of the Pauline gospel may ultimately be that we do not allow a (properly) kenotic Christology to become an (improperly) docetic one. It can happen. If the response to God available to Abraham and to those who have received Jesus' Spirit is systematically removed from the range of possibility of the Son himself, then Jesus has become a cipher. Finally, by reading Rom 3:21–26 in the light of Rom 5:18–19 and as the restatement of Romans 1:17, we might be moved to reflect once more on the precise significance of the citation from Hab 2:4 in Paul's thought and ask whether, for Paul, "the righteous one who will live by faith" might not refer first of all to Jesus.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TRANSFORMATION OF THE MIND AND MORAL DISCERNMENT IN PAUL

In this essay I examine the possible connection between two kinds of language in Paul's letters about the way human behavior is directed. The first kind of language is explicitly and obviously religious in character. It aligns human agency with a transcendental spiritual power. The second kind is moral or paraenetic in character.¹ It advocates the practice of virtue and the avoidance of vice. Is there an intrinsic link between these two modes of discourse? Does Paul himself indicate such a link? Is a connection to be inferred from language that Paul himself does not explicate?

To put the question another way: Does Paul allow his readers (whether ancient or contemporary) to appreciate any role for the human *psyche* between the power of the *pneuma* that comes from God and the disposition of the *soma* by human persons?² The question concerns consistency in Paul's thought, the way in which he did or did not think through his convictions concerning human relatedness to God (expressed in the symbols of Torah) and his directives concerning human moral behavior. The question is also critical to the appropriateness of speaking of "character ethics" in Paul.³

As always when asking such questions of Paul, the shape of the Pauline corpus makes methodology an issue impossible to avoid. The occasional character of Paul's correspondence means that we have in each composition only so much of his thinking on any subject as has been raised by the circumstances he considered himself to be addressing. The fact that many of the letters traditionally ascribed to Paul are also regarded by the majority of contemporary scholars as pseudonymous means that discussions of

¹ No one in our generation has done more to make us aware of this dimension of Paul's letters than Abraham Johannes Malherbe, among whose students I am proud to be included; see especially *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

² For the use of these terms in Paul's anthropology, see R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) 191–220, and J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 70–78.

³ An earlier draft of this essay was delivered to the "Character Ethics in the Bible" Consultation of the Society of Biblical Literature's Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 1996.

“Paul’s thought” are bound to be either conventional or contentious.⁴ The best way to overcome the problem of fragmentation is to embrace it. In this essay I take a single letter and try to figure out its logic. Such a procedure allows other Pauline letters and, as in the present case, other ancient compositions to serve as intertexture that might inform both ancient and present day readers as they try to fill those gaps that might have “gone without saying” for Paul, but may not have to his first readers and certainly do not to us.⁵

I argue a threefold thesis in this essay. First, Paul’s Letter to the Romans both presents the problem in the sharpest form and also provides clues to its solving. Second, placing Paul’s clues against the backdrop of Aristotle’s discussion of φρόνησις in the *Nicomachean Ethics* provides a framework that makes them more coherent. Third, the hypothesis thus derived from Romans is supported by evidence drawn from other Pauline letters and is disconfirmed by none of them.

A First Look at Romans

How can we account for the fact that the language about the Holy Spirit, which dominates the theological argument in Romans 5–8, is virtually absent from the moral instruction in chapters 12–14? To appreciate the difficulty, it is helpful to review the language in some detail. The “spirit of holiness” (πνεῦμα τοῦ ἁγίου) is introduced in 1:4 in connection with that power (δύναμις) designating Jesus as Son of God because of his resurrection from the dead. In 5:5, this Holy Spirit is given to those who have been made righteous, pouring out the love of God into their hearts. In chapter six, Paul shows the irreconcilability of “walking in newness of life” and continuing in sin (6:1–23). He does not speak there of the Holy Spirit, but as we see in 7:6, the power of the Spirit in this newness of life has been assumed, for Paul states there that they are now able to serve God “in the newness of the Spirit and not the oldness of the letter.”

The power of the Holy Spirit to direct human behavior is most extensively elaborated in Romans 8. The “law of the Spirit of life” has freed

⁴ My own position on these matters that all letters ascribed to Paul could well have been written during his lifetime in a complex process of composition that already involved his “school” is sketched in *Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* 2nd enl. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 271–73; 393–95; 407–12; 423–31.

⁵ For the notion of “intertexture,” see V.K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996).

them (8:2) and enables them to “walk according to the Spirit” (8:4–5). As in 5:5, the presence of this Spirit is expressed by terms of astonishing intimacy: they are “in” the Spirit, the Spirit of God “dwells in” them, and they “have” the Spirit of Christ (8:9). The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead—note the echo of 1:4—“dwells in them” (8:11). As a result, they have received a “spirit of adoption” making them children of God (8:15). As children of God, furthermore, they are “led about” by the Spirit (8:14), who testifies with their own spirit concerning their identity as God’s children (8:16), comes to their assistance when they are weak (8:26), prays for them when they are unable (8:26), so that God, who knows the “intention of the Spirit” (8:27) heeds their prayer. Finally, as Paul begins his long exposition concerning Jews and Gentiles in God’s plan, he begins by invoking the “shared witness” of his own and the “Holy Spirit” to the truth concerning his loyalty to his own people (9:1).

Reading Romans to this point could easily conclude that God’s Holy Spirit was most actively and intimately involved in the moral life of believers. Everything in Paul’s argument leads the reader to this expectation. Yet when Paul turns in 12:1 to the moral consequences of his argument (note the οὖν), such language about the Holy Spirit virtually disappears.⁶ Especially intriguing is 12:1–2, the statement by which Paul makes a transition from the indicative to the imperative mood often in the participial form frequently used in paraenesis (see especially 12:10–13).⁷ Paul says his readers should present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, their “reasonable worship (λογικὴν λατρείαν).” He spells out this general imperative in three discrete stages. Negatively, they are not to “conform themselves” (συσχηματίζεσθε) to this world. Instead, they are to be “transformed by the renewal of the mind” (μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς). The purpose of this renewal is to enable the “testing (δοκιμάζειν) of what is God’s will, the good, the pleasing, and the perfect.”

I note at once that each stage is assumed to be under their control. It is done, the reader might assume, by their own capacities, not under the control of another, such as God’s Holy Spirit. Observe further that there is an emphasis on the readers’ cognitive capacities rather than affective dispositions: they are to offer reasonable worship (or the worship of their

⁶ For taking the οὖν at its full weight, see D.J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 748.

⁷ For discussion of the use of the participle as imperative, see W.T. Wilson, *Love without Pretense: Romans 12:9–21 and Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom Literature* (WUNT 2.4 6; Tübingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991) 156–165.

minds), they are to avoid one way of measuring, they are to change their “mind,” and they are to test. These are all mental activities. And here, where we most might have expected it, we find no role at all assigned to the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the next part of the letter (12:3–13:14), which is usually considered to be a classic example of paraenesis in the proper sense of the term, that is, a set of exhortations or maxims of a traditional character joined together without any obvious line of argumentation,⁸ the only mention of spirit is in a threefold exhortation, “do not be lacking in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (12:11). This may or may not refer to the Holy Spirit; it may equally likely refer to simple spiritual fervor. Likewise in Paul’s subsequent discussion of differences in worship and diet (14:1–15:12), he makes only one reference to the Holy Spirit, when he declares, “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but rather righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17). Only at the very end of this discussion does Paul revert to language about the Holy Spirit, when he prays: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your believing, so that you may overflow in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit” (15:13). Finally, turning to his own work as an apostle, Paul mentions the “power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit” that has accompanied his preaching among the Gentiles (15:16–19).

It seems, therefore, that Paul’s language in Romans about the work of the Holy Spirit is restricted to what might be called *religious* relationships. It does not appear to affect, except in the most formal and tangential fashion, his language about *moral* behavior among believers. Between pneumatology and ethics there is no obvious connection. Unless we are missing something.

A Second Look at Romans

What we may be missing are subtle connections Paul establishes at the level of the Greek text which have largely escaped translators into English, but which may have been recognized by ancient readers.

1. The use of the noun νοῦς in 12:2 deserves attention. What does Paul mean by “mind” or “intelligence” here? The question is made more pertinent

⁸ For discussion and literary parallels, see Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, 71–81, 91–125.

by the omission, in the best manuscripts and the Nestle-Aland 27th edition, of the personal possessive pronoun, “your” (ὁμῶν).⁹ The absence of the pronoun leaves some ambiguity about whose mind Paul means. We remember that νοός also appeared in 7:23–25, with Paul declaring in 7:23 that his inner self agrees with God’s law, but that he also sees another law in his members warring against “the law of my mind (τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοός μου).” And in 7:25, he states, “Therefore with my mind (τῷ νοῷ) I serve the law of God, but with my flesh (τῇ σαρκί) the law of sin.” As a Jew, Paul has the proper understanding of the relationship with God (2:18–20) but under the influence of the flesh, lacks the capacity to live it out.

Even more pertinent is the way 12:2, addressed to Gentile believers (see 11:13), reverses the situation of the Gentiles that Paul had developed in 1:18–32. There he had argued that idolatry had rendered Gentiles foolish in their ways and he mocked their self-proclaimed wisdom; each stage of alienation from God, in fact, leads them to a further corruption of understanding: “Having not decided (οὐκ ἐδοκίμασαν) to hold God in recognition (ἐν ἐπιγνώσει), God handed them over to an undiscerning mind (or “untested mind,” ἀδόκιμον νοῦν), doing what they should not (τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα), filled with every sort of wickedness, evil...” (1:28–29). Paul concludes with the list of Gentile vices that flow from such perverted understanding in Romans 1:29–32.

2. Note further that the *renewal* of the mind in 12:2 has as its purpose that Paul’s Gentile readers will be able to discern or test the will of God (compare 2:17) in practical circumstances. The phrase εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ is surely an intentional echo and response to the ἀδόκιμον νοῦν ascribed to the Gentiles who did *not* “present their bodies as living sacrifice that is pleasing to God, a rational, worship,” but whose preference for the creature over the creator led to the darkening of their own minds and hearts. Paul shares the logic of ancient moralists, who assume that moral behavior follows upon right perception, enabling ancient polemic to argue that just as good perceptions led to proper behavior, so did wicked deeds suffice to demonstrate a derangement in thinking.¹⁰

⁹ The pronoun is read by Sinaiticus, the first corrector of Bezae, \aleph , 33, the Koine tradition, some old Latin MSS and the Syriac. It is absent from p46, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, the original hand of Bezae, F, G, and many other witnesses.

¹⁰ See L.T. Johnson, “2 Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers: A Reexamination,” *JRS* 6/7 (1978–79) 1–26, and, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” *JBL* 108 (1989) 419–41.

Thus, just as the “untested mind” of idolaters led inevitably to vice, so the “renewed mind” of the Gentile believer is to lead to virtue. The link between this understanding and specific attitudes and actions is a process of mental testing (δοκιμάζειν).

3. The connection between νοὸς and δοκιμάζειν, in turn, allows us to take with full seriousness the remarkable incidence of φρον-cognates in this section of Romans: φρόνιμος occurs in 11:25 and 12:16; φρόνημα in 8:6, 7, and 27; ὑπερφρονεῖν in 12:3, and φρονεῖν in 8:5; 11:20; 12:3; 12:16 (twice); 14:6 (twice), and 15:5. The threefold usage in 12:3 is especially striking, since it picks up directly from δοκιμάζειν in 12:2: Λέγω γὰρ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι παντὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ’ ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν ἐκάστω ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισε ν μέτρον πίστεως.

The statement is difficult to translate. Standard translations miss the important play on words represented by φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν. The Douay version has “Let him rate himself according to moderation;” The Jerusalem Bible, “Let him judge himself soberly;” the New American Bible, “estimate himself soberly;” the Revised Standard Version, “think with sober judgments;” the New Revised Standard Version, “think with sober judgment;” the New International Version, “think of yourself with sober judgment.”¹¹

The problem with the translations is twofold. First, they miss the link to Greco-Roman moral philosophy established by σωφρονεῖν.¹² Second, by translating εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν adverbially, they miss the parallelism to εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν in 12:2. Both constructions are final clauses expressing purpose and/or result.¹³ Just as εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν is correctly rendered, “in order to test/discern,” or “so that you can test/discern,” so should εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν be translated as “so that you can think rightly/moderately.” Among recent scholars, Stanley Stowers has correctly suggested the importance of this

¹¹ A glance at several standard commentaries shows a similar consistency: E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) has “think with soberness”; J.A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; Garden City: Doubleday, 1992) “think of yourself with sober judgment”; J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), “observe proper moderation”; D.J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), “think with sober thinking.”

¹² The commentaries recognize the allusion, but give it scant attention. They invariably refer in passing to the article by U. Luck, “*sōphōn, ktī*,” in *TDNT* 7: 1097–1102.

¹³ Moo (*Epistle to the Romans* 760, note 12) recognizes that the construction could indicate purpose, but prefers to see it functioning adverbially.

statement within Paul's argument as a whole.¹⁴ Paul's language points us to discussions of practical reason, and the role of prudence (φρόνησις), in moral discernment. The solemn warning not to overestimate oneself, but to φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν is programmatic for Paul's entire moral argument concerning life in the community.

A Glance at Aristotle

No extended justification is required for a turn to Aristotle in any discussion of "character ethics," nor for the use of his *Nicomachean Ethics* as the main point of reference.¹⁵ It may be helpful, however, to recall the key role played by prudence in Aristotle's discussion of moral virtue. For example, Aristotle concludes in *NE* II, 5, 6 that "if virtues are neither emotions (πάθη) nor capacities (δύναμις), it remains that they are dispositions (ἕξεις)," and he states briefly concerning prudence (φρόνησις): "Virtue then is a settled disposition (ἕξεις) determining the choice of actions and emotions, consisting essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us, this being determined by principle (λόγῳ), that is, as the prudent man would determine it (ὅ ἄν ὁ φρόνιμος ὀρίσειεν) (*NE* II, 6, 15)."¹⁶

Aristotle delays a direct discussion of prudence until *NE* VI, 5, 6. Here he characterizes ὁ φρόνιμος as ὁ βουλευτικός (VI, 5, 2), so it may be useful to note how he speaks of "deliberation" in III, 3, 10–11:

Deliberation (τὸ βουλευέσθαι) then is employed in matters which, though subject to the rules that generally hold good, are uncertain in their issue; or where the issue is indeterminate . . . and we deliberate not about ends (περὶ τῶν τελῶν) but about means (περὶ τῶν πρὸς τὰ τέλη).

This statement is particularly important for its distinction between means and ends, and for its recognition of the element of "indeterminacy" that

¹⁴ See S.K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 42–82. Given the weight he has assigned to the entire theme of σωφροσύνη, however, Stowers gives little specific attention to the actual verses where Paul's argument becomes explicit on the point. Likewise, W.T. Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, 141, provides some comparative passages but does not develop the theme.

¹⁵ Käsemann certainly saw the connection: "Thereby he falls back surprisingly on Greek ethics. For Aristotle, σωφροσύνη is in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1117b.13 one of the four cardinal virtues."

¹⁶ Throughout this discussion, I use the translation of H. Rackham, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912).

calls for deliberation or prudence: between the general rules and the specific applications, some mediation is required.

Aristotle's explicit discussion of φρόνησις begins in *NE* VI, 5, 1. He observes that the definition of prudence is best learned by observing "the persons whom we call prudent (τίνας λέγομεν τοὺς φρονίμους)." Distinguishing prudence from science and art, he considers it "a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good and bad for human beings" (VI, 5, 4; see also VI, 5, 6). It is therefore pre-eminently a form of *practical* reasoning, the ability to discern what is good and bad for oneself (and, in the case of statesmen like Pericles, for others as well) amid the complexity of changing circumstances (VI, 5, 6).

Aristotle can speak of deliberative excellence as "correctness in deliberation" (ὀρθότης βουλές ευβουλία) in the sense of "arriving at something good" (ἡ ἀγαθού τευτική) [VI, 9, 4]. At the start of his treatise, Aristotle places prudence among the intellectual rather than the moral virtues (I, 13, 20), but by the end of his discussion, he recognizes that "prudence is intimately connected with moral virtue, and this [viz. moral virtue] with prudence, inasmuch as the first principles (ἀρχή) which prudence employs are determined by the moral virtues, and the right standard (ὀρθόν) for the moral virtues is determined by prudence" (X, 8, 3).

Four aspects of Aristotle's rich discussion of φρόνησις are of particular pertinence for the reading of Romans:

1. Like Paul in Rom 12:3, Aristotle connects φρόνησις to σωφροσύνη. Having declared that prudence is the faculty for discerning what things are good for the self and (for statesmen like Pericles, for humankind), he says, "This accounts for the word temperance (σωφροσύνη) which signifies "preserving prudence" (σώζουσιν τὴν φρόνησιν) (VI, 5, 6). We may question the etymology and wince at the pun, but his point is serious: temperance does in fact keep intact the apprehension (ὑπόληψιν) that is critical for moral discernment. Vice will not destroy one's capacity to perceive mathematical truths, says Aristotle, but love of pleasure or fear of pain can disable the ability to perceive clearly the moral ἀρχή (first principle), and therefore the person thus corrupted "cannot see that he ought to choose and do everything as a means to this end and for its sake; for vice tends to destroy the sense of principle" (VI, 5, 6). This, I submit, sounds a great deal like Paul's view of how the Gentiles' corruption of mind disabled them from seeing clearly and led them ever deeper into darkness and vice (Rom 1:18–32).

2. The resemblance is not accidental, for Aristotle also establishes an explicit if complex link between the νοός and φρόνησις, just as Paul does in Rom 12:2–3. In NE VI, 6, 2, Aristotle says that the νοός is that which apprehends first principles (ἀρχή) by which prudence is guided in its decision making. “Intelligence νοός apprehends definitions, which cannot be proven by reasoning, while prudence deals with the ultimate particular thing, which cannot be apprehended by scientific knowledge” (VI, 8, 9; see also VI, 11, 4). Since prudence depends on experience, it cannot be asked of the young: “Prudence includes a knowledge of particular facts, and this is derived from experience, which a young man does not possess, for experience is the fruit of years” (VI, 8, 5). On the other hand, “Intelligence (νοός) is both a beginning and an end (ἀρχή και τέλος), for these things are both the starting point and the subject matter of demonstration” (VI, 11, 6).

Aristotle distinguishes cleverness and prudence by making one a natural facility and the other a virtue: “True virtue cannot exist without prudence. Hence some people maintain that all the virtues are forms of prudence” (VI, 8, 3). This is because “. . . it is a disposition (ἔξις) determined by the right principle; and the right principle is the principle determined by prudence” (VI, 13, 4). Does this sound convoluted? It must have to Aristotle as well, for he tries once more, “Virtue is not merely a disposition conforming to right principle but one cooperating with right principle, and prudence is right principle in matters of conduct” (VI, 13, 5).

If I understand this rather tangled exposition correctly, Aristotle is struggling to express the dialectical relationship between that “mind” (νοός) that can understand “first principles”—which is the realm of properly human action having to do with moral virtue, and which here stand as the “end” toward which specific actions ought to tend, and that form of practical intelligence (φρόνησις) which is able in specific complex circumstances to rightly determine those “means” that tend toward the desired “ends,” namely the ways of acting that “cooperate” with or conform to those first principles of morality apprehended by the mind (ἢ μὲν γὰρ τὸ τέλος ἢ δὲ' τα πρὸς τὸ τέλος ποιεῖ πράττειν, VI, 13, 7). Understanding makes judgments, and prudence issues commands, “since its end is a statement of what we ought to do or not to do” (VI, 10, 2).

3. Aristotle recognizes that prudence “is commonly understood to mean especially that kind of wisdom which is concerned with oneself, the individual,” leading people to use the term “to mean those who are wise in

their own interest" (VI, 8, 3). At the same time, he notes that the term has wider application, as in the case of statesmen like Pericles, who have the capacity to discern "what things are good for themselves and for mankind" (VI, 5, 5), and notes that "prudence is indeed the same quality of mind as political science, though their essence is different" (VI, 8, 1). Indeed, the two realms cannot entirely be separated: "Probably as a matter of fact a man cannot pursue his own welfare without domestic economy and even politics," although "even the proper conduct of one's own affairs is a difficult problem and requires consideration" (VI, 8, 4). For the present analysis, it is sufficient to note that Aristotle's understanding of moral (or prudential) reasoning includes consideration for others, under the category of "what is equitable," for "equitable actions are common to all good men in their behavior toward each other" (VI, 11, 2–3). We see the same tension between the individual and the community concern in Paul's discussion.

4. Finally, for Aristotle, the role of prudence in moral discernment is to hit the "mean" between two extremes wherein Aristotle thinks virtue is to be found, and doing it well: "Hence, while in respect of its substance and the definition that states what it really is in essence, virtue is the observance of the mean, in point of excellence and rightness it is an extreme" (II, 6, 17). And finding this mean "is determined by principle (λόγῳ), that is, as the prudent man (φρόνιμος) would determine it" (II, 6, 15). The point I make here is that the determination of virtue is with reference to a measure or framework. Prudence itself is guided by those moral "first principles" (ἀρχή) perceived by the νοῦς and seeks to express them in action. In this light, Paul's otherwise obscure references to a "measure of faith" (μέτρον πίστεως) in 12:3 and "proportion of faith" (ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως) in 12:6 might appear more intelligible. We note that in each case, it is a question of standard: φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν ἐκάστῳ ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως, and, εἴτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως. It will be remembered how critical the concept of "proportionality" (ἀναλογία) is to Aristotle's notion of that "mean between two extremes" that is justice (δικαιοσύνη) [see NE V, 3, 1–12].

I do not suggest that Paul was writing with a copy of the Nicomachean Ethics in hand, or that Aristotle was a direct influence.¹⁷ I am suggesting

¹⁷ See Stowers, *Rereading Romans* 58–65, for a good discussion of the widespread theme of self-mastery in Hellenistic Jewish literature; see also Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, 137.

that Paul's language about moral discernment follows a strikingly similar kind of logic. In Paul as in Aristotle, the capacity to "test" or "estimate" morally derives from the νοῶς, not simply intelligence as a capacity, but perhaps something closer to what we would call a "mind-set," that is, a moral intelligence that grasps certain fundamental principles or values. In Paul and in Aristotle, The corruption of the νοῶς makes moral discernment impossible rather than simply difficult. In Paul and Aristotle, prudence or discernment involves what is good for the individual but inevitably involves as well what is good for other humans. And in both writers, moral deliberation takes place within a framework that enables it to be measured.

To this point, my exposition of Romans 12:1–6, especially in its emphasis on the relationship between νοῶς in 12:2 and the language of φρόνησις has shown an impressive resemblance to Aristotle not least in the way both authors lack any transcendental referent when speaking of moral decision-making, which appears in both to be entirely rational in character. I seem to have failed in my effort to link Paul's religious and moral discourse, his language about Holy Spirit and his language about virtue. Unless still something else has been missed.

The Measure of Faith and the Mind of Christ

What I have missed is that although Paul shares with Aristotle the terms and understandings of νοῶς and μέτρον and ἀναλογία, he gives each of them a distinctive turn. Here is the first way in which Paul's religious and philosophical language can be seen as merging.

1. Paul could not be clearer in 12:3 that the framework for prudence/discernment is not a theory of virtue, a matter of hitting the mean between two extremes, for example, but "the measure of faith," (μέτρον πίστεως) and that this measure comes not from human calculation but from God: φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν ἑκάστῳ ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως. Each phrase has its own difficulty. Does ἑκάστῳ refer back to the act of discerning, so that Paul's readers are to exercise moral discernment appropriately *toward each one* according to the measure of faith? In that case, the dative ἑκάστῳ refers to other members of the community. Or does it anticipate the second clause: "as God has given to each one (ἑκάστῳ) a measure of faith." The word order suggests the first option, and I consider it the more likely reading. Commentators, however, tend to take ἑκάστῳ as referring

to the recipient of the measure of faith.¹⁸ In either case, however, the norm for measuring moral deliberation is that of faith.¹⁹

Similarly in 12:6, the phrase *κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως* should be taken as referring not simply to the exercise of prophecy, but to the measurement of all the *χαρίσματα διάφορα* according to the gift given to them,²⁰ the gift-giver understood once more as God; although we can note once more in passing that Paul does not use the explicit language of the Holy Spirit here either.

If *μέτρον* can be understood as a measure, then what are we to understand by Paul's use here of the term "faith?" Rather than repeat the several opinions offered by the commentators ranging from charismatic gift to community creed²¹ we should proceed exegetically by observing the way Paul speaks of faith in this part of the letter. If we take as a hypothesis that *πίστις* serves as a measure for moral discernment, we can make good sense of Paul's otherwise odd usage in 14:1. Discussing diversity of practice in the community, Paul instructs his readers to "receive those who are weak in faith." Since the context concerns believers who eat everything and the weak who eat only vegetables (14:2), the clear implication is that "weakness" here means an inability to live according to the measure given by faith. This becomes even clearer in 14:22–23:

The faith you hold, hold according to yourself before God. Happy is the one who does not condemn himself in his discerning. But the one who is doubtful yet eats has already condemned himself, for it was not out of faith. And everything that is not out of faith (*ἐκ πίστεως*) is sin (*ἁμαρτία*).²²

2. The obvious question raised by making faith the measure for moral discernment is, "whose faith?" In one sense Paul clearly refers to the faith and the mind of the individual believer: "the faith that you hold" (14:22). So he says also in 14:5, "One person judges a day over a day; another judges

¹⁸ See Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 645–46; Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 721; Moo, *Romans*, 760; Käsemann, *Romans*, 331.

¹⁹ For the different possible understandings of "measure of faith," see Moo, *Romans*, 760–761; Käsemann, *Romans*, 335; Fitzmyer, 645–646. Since my own reading resembles Fitzmyer most, but moves in another direction, I will not try to adjudicate between the opinions. But I vigorously take exception to Dunn's view that "it is very unlikely here that *μέτρον* has sense of 'standard by which to measure, means of measurement'" (*Romans*, 721). That is precisely what it means.

²⁰ See especially Käsemann, *Romans* 333–334.

²¹ E.g. Käsemann, 335; Moo, 761; Dunn, 722; Fitzmyer, 647.

²² Among commentators, Käsemann in particular notes the pertinence of 12:3 for the understanding of *πίστις* in this statement (*Romans*, 379).

all days [alike]. Let each one be fully assured in his or her own mind (ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῦ). The one who chooses (φρονεῖ) the day chooses (φρονεῖ) the Lord.” But can Paul also mean more than the individual’s personal faith? Can there be another Mind involved here and functioning as a measure beyond that of the individual believer?

It is at this point that Paul’s way of speaking of Jesus with reference to the moral behavior of believers in this part of Romans becomes pertinent. Immediately after the statement in 12:3 warning against self-overestimation and calling for φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν according to the measure of faith, Paul draws the comparison between a body with many parts and many functions, and the community: “in the same way we are one body in Christ, individually members related to each other” (12:4–5). Depending on how strongly we take this metaphor of “the Messiah’s body,” we might ask whose νοῦς is directing it.²³ The link between the dead and raised messiah Jesus and this specific human community is for Paul very real (see also 1 Cor 6:15–20; 10:16–17; 12:12–31; Col 3:15; Eph 4:4, 15). The one who lives by the rule of God in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit is “one who serves Christ in this way” and is pleasing to God as well as approved by humans (14:18, compare the language of 12:1). Even more emphatically, Paul states in 14:7–9:

None of us lives for oneself and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether we should live or die, we are the Lord’s. Because it was for this reason that Christ died and came back to life, that he might be Lord over the dead and the living.

Two aspects of this intense and intimate relationship between the risen Christ as Lord and the believer as obedient servant deserve special attention.

1. In a statement that connects moral activity and the bond between believers and Jesus in the most explicit fashion, Paul reminds his readers that they should no longer “walk” as in the night but “decently” (εὐσχημόνως) as in the day with no more revelry, drunkenness, debauchery and licentiousness, contention and jealousy. The vice-list reminds us of the one in Rom 1:29–32 that condemned Gentile behavior as directed by an ἀδόκιμος νοῦς. Instead, they are to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision (πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιήσθε) for the flesh” (13:14). The metaphor of “putting on” a quality as one puts on clothing is not uncommon in Paul; just before this,

²³ The use of σῶμα in 12:5 is particularly intriguing only four verses after Paul tells his readers to present τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν to God as living sacrifices.

Paul says that they must “put on” the weapons of light (14:12; compare 1 Thess 5:8; Col 3:10, 12; Eph 6:11, 14; 2 Cor 5:3; 1 Cor 15:53–54). But what does it mean to “put on” a person? At the very least, it suggests that the qualities found in that person are to be the qualities adopted by them. So Paul speaks in Eph 4:24 of “putting on the new person,” and in Gal 3:27, he says that those who have been baptized into Christ have “put on Christ.” Certainly, such language allows the inference that the same “mind” that was in Christ should also be in the believers. Paul’s statement in 14:14 would seem to support this suggestion: “I know and have become fully convinced (οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι) in the Lord Jesus that nothing is common (κοινὸν) by itself, but for the person reckoning it as common, for that person it is common.” The grammatical relationship between Paul’s mental conviction and the phrase “in the Lord Jesus” can be construed in such fashion as to point at just such an adoption of the “mind of the messiah” as I am suggesting.

2. Paul invokes the example of Jesus himself as a guide to the moral behavior of his readers. Thus he warns those who consider themselves free to eat any food: “Do not by your eating destroy that one for whom Christ died” (14:15b; compare 1 Cor 8:11). Explicit in the statement is the mutual relatedness of all in the community to the one Lord Jesus (see 14:7–9). But the exhortation also implies that just as Jesus died for another, so should their behavior follow a similar pattern: they should walk according to love and not grieve a brother or sister by their behavior (14:15a).

The exemplary role of the human Jesus is manifest in 15:1–3. Paul says that those who are strong should bear with the weaknesses of those who are not strong, *and not please themselves*; rather “each one should please the neighbor unto the good thing for the sake of building up the community.”

For Christ also did not please himself, but as it is written, “the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen upon me” . . . may the God of patience and comfort give to you so that you might think the same way (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν) toward each other, according to Christ Jesus . . . therefore accept one another, just as Christ accepted you unto the glory of God (15:3–7).²⁴

If we place these pieces against the backdrop of Aristotle’s discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can at least entertain the possibility that Paul

²⁴ See R.B. Hays, “Christ Prays the Psalm,” in *The Future of Christology* ed. W.A. Meeks and A.J. Malherbe (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 122–136.

understands the process of moral discernment within the community to be exercised not only within the measure of faith, but specifically within the “faith of Christ” (see 3:21–26, 5:12–21) that was demonstrated by Jesus’ obedience to God and loving self-disposition toward others.²⁵ The transformation of believers “in the renewal of mind” means therefore their “putting on” the mind of Christ, so that the process of φρόνησις is aligned with the ἀρχή apprehended by their νοῦς thus renewed and informed.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

We have seen that Paul’s religious and moral language do coincide in Romans 12–14, but the role of the Holy Spirit remains elusive. If we read only Romans 8, we might conclude that the Spirit completely took over the direction of human freedom, yet Romans 12–14 has shown that moral discernment is very much an exercise of the human νοῦς. I have suggested that Paul implies that this human νοῦς is itself shaped by the νοῦς χριστοῦ. But Paul does not draw an explicit connection between the Spirit given to humans and this process of moral testing and decision-making. Closer examination, however, reveals a number of important implicit connections.

1. The Holy Spirit empowers moral choice in accord with God’s will (8:1–3), so that human φρόνημα can be “according to the Spirit” and not simply “according to the flesh” (8:5–8). This power of the Spirit comes to the assistance of human “weakness” (ἀσθενεία), so that when “we” don’t know how to pray, the Spirit prays and God who knows the hearts (of humans!) knows the φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος! Here, Paul brings this spirit of God into the closest possible connection with the disposition of human freedom. Note also that Paul concludes the moral instruction of 12:1–15:12 so otherwise devoid of language about the Spirit with a prayer that concludes, “in the power of the Holy Spirit” (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου).
2. The Holy Spirit “leads” humans who are “children of God” (8:14), and Paul’s readers have “received not a spirit of slavery leading you again

²⁵ In the ever-growing literature devoted to the question of the faith of Jesus, see R.B. Hays, “*Pistis* and Paul’s Christology: What’s at Stake,” *SBLSP* 30 (1991) 714–29; S.K. Stowers, “*ek pisteos* and *dia pisteos* in Rom 3:30,” *JBL* 108 (1989) 665–74; L.T. Johnson, “Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus,” *CBQ* 44 (1982) 77–90.

into fear, but a spirit of sonship by which we cry ‘Abba, Father’ ” (8:15). Shortly after declaring how the Spirit assists them in their weakness (8:27), Paul asserts that God has set aside those whom God has chosen “to be conformed (συμμόρφους) to the image of his son, so that he can be the first-born of many brothers” (8:29). Here, the close identification of believers and Christ is mediated by the Spirit. The Spirit itself testifies “to our spirit” (or “with our spirit”) that “we are children of God” (8:16). Those who call out to God as “sons” can be said to have “the mind of Christ.”

3. Indeed, the Spirit “dwelling” in them is at work to replicate the same pattern of dying and rising as in Jesus: “If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit which dwells in you” (8:11). We remember the first appearance of the “spirit of holiness” in Rom 1:4, in connection with the resurrection of Jesus and his demarcation of Son of God in power.
4. Paul uses “newness” language only three times in Romans. The first instance speaks of the “newness of life” (καινότητι τῆς ζωῆς) in which those baptized were supposed to “walk” (that is, conduct their moral lives): “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, we too might walk in newness of life” (6:4).²⁶ The second speaks of the “newness of the Spirit” (or “that comes from the Spirit”) that enables service of God: “now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we may serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (καινότητι του πνεύματος)”. Finally, in 12:2, Paul tells his readers to be transformed “in the newness of mind” (τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς).
5. Paul declares that the one thing owed to each other is love (13:8), since love fulfills the other law by doing no harm to a neighbor (13:9–10).²⁷ Paul follows this with the command to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (13:14). We remember that the “love of God” was said to be poured into

²⁶ In his response to the original form of this paper, Professor Stephen Fowl helpfully pointed out that Paul also anticipates chapter 12 by his heavy use of cognitive language in Romans 6; see ἡ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι (6:3), τοῦτο γινώσκοντες (6:6), πιστεύομεν (6:8), εἰδότες (6:9) and οὕτως καὶ λογίζεσθε (6:11).

²⁷ I follow the minority view by translating ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν in this fashion. For the more common translation of ἕτερος as referring to the neighbor (“the one who loves the other has fulfilled the law”) see Dunn, 776–777 and Fitzmyer, 678.

the hearts of believers “through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.” Once more, the connections between the work of the Spirit, the model of Christ, and moral discernment, are intricate.

In Romans as in Aristotle, then, moral discernment (φρόνησις/δοκιμάζειν) is a fully rational exercise of the human intelligence (νοῦς) that operates within a certain framework and according to certain first principles. But in Romans, the measure is faith rather than virtue, and the human νοῦς is in process of renewal by the mind of Christ, so that the expression of φρόνησις within the community that is the body of the Messiah is to act according to the pattern of life demonstrated above all in the obedient faith and self-disposing love of Jesus. In a shorthand that is anachronistic but also useful, the Holy Spirit may be seen as the effective cause of this transformation, and the messianic pattern as the formal cause.

Evidence from Other Letters

The *Nicomachean Ethics* proved helpful in filling what appeared at first to be some logical gaps in Paul’s moral exhortation in Romans 12–14. Even more support is offered by three of Paul’s letters: 1 Corinthians, Philippians, and Galatians bring together in the same combination the elements we have identified in Romans.

1. Paul’s attempt in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 to rectify his readers’ perceptions concerning their call and identity is of particular interest, not least because of his flat affirmation in 2:16, “we have the mind of Christ” (νοῦς χριστοῦ), which makes implicit what I suggested was implicit in Rom 12:2. The νοῦς χριστοῦ in this case is explicitly connected to the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit (2:10–11). In a contrast not unlike that in Rom 12:2, Paul opposes the “spirit of the world” to the “spirit of God” (πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ) which the believers have been given (2:12a), and the function of this Spirit is to enable them to know the things given to them by God (2:12b), in other words, to exercise discernment. Paul insists that such discrimination is not available to the “natural person” (ψυχικός) because they are “spiritually discerned” (πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται, 2:14).

Paul’s presentation of Jesus in 1 Cor 1:18–30 is directly pertinent to his discussion of spiritual discernment, for the cross is the supreme example of that which was “given by God” but could not be “spiritually discerned” by those lacking God’s Spirit (1:18; 2:8), whereas for believers the crucified

messiah is “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:24). The “hidden wisdom” in Christ that the rulers of this world could not see is the way in which God chooses to exercise power through weakness; but this is both the message Paul proclaims and the manner of his proclamation (2:2–4), in order that their faith be based not in human wisdom but in the power of God (2:5). And as the rest of 1 Corinthians as well as 2 Corinthians makes abundantly clear, this same pattern of exchange based on the obedient death and self-disposing love of Jesus (foolishness for wisdom, weakness for strength, sin for righteousness, poverty for wealth, death for life) is to be the pattern that structures their moral thinking within the community (see, e.g. 1 Cor 6:7; 8:11–13; 9:19–22; 10:31–11:1; 11:23–29; 13:1–7; 14:1–5; 2 Cor 4:7–12; 5:16–21; 8:9; 13:3–10).

2. In Philippians 2:2, Paul appeals to his readers to “think in the same way” or “think one thought” (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες). He uses the same language for moral discernment that we found in Aristotle and Romans (see also the use of φρονεῖν in Phil 1:7; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10). He joins this manner of moral reasoning to the comfort that is “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) and the fellowship that is “of the Spirit” (κοινωνία πνεύματος, 2:1). This link is unsurprising, since in Phil 1:19, Paul speaks of the πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ that is at work among them.

In Rom 12:16, Paul warned his readers against thinking too highly of themselves and recommended associating with the lowly (ταπεινοῖς). Here in Phil 2:3, their φρόνησις is likewise to avoid overestimation of the self: “in lowliness (ταπεινοφροσύνη) reckon others as having it over yourselves.” The use of “reckon” (ἡγούμενοι) is important both because it will run through Paul’s argument in chapters 2 and 3,²⁸ and also because it suggests once more the genuinely *rational* character of moral discernment. We note further that as “putting on the Lord Jesus Christ” in Rom 13:14 was opposed to “contention and jealousy” (Rom 13:13), so here the attitude of considering others more than oneself is contrasted to the measurement of strife and vainglory (Phil 2:3).

Aristotle recognized that prudence inevitably involved looking to the common good as well as that of the individual, but he agreed with the common recognition that φρόνησις had as its main task seeking what was good for the individual. As in Rom 12:4–5, Paul reverses the priority: they

²⁸ See W.S. Kurz, “Kenotic Imitation of Paul and Christ in Phil 3 and 2,” in *Discipleship in the New Testament* ed. F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 103–126.

can look to their own interest, but must *prefer* that of others: μή τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστοι σκοπουντες, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἑτέρων ἕκαστοι.

Finally, as we know, Paul presents to them the pattern of the obedient servant who did not “reckon” his own interest in being equal to God but emptied himself out in an obedient death (Phil 2:6–11), introducing the example with the exhortation: τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, a phrase almost impossible adequately to translate. The RSV does not do badly when it supplies, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,” but the substantive “mind” however appropriate and accurate an echo of 1 Cor 2:16 and Rom 12:2 misses the dynamism of the present imperative (“keep on discerning”), and more important, the phrase ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ should be rendered, “which is also in Christ Jesus.” The τοῦτο and ὁ connect: the “way of thinking” that they should pursue is the “way of thinking” that is found in Jesus.

That Paul intends the Christ-hymn to be understood as exemplary²⁹ is demonstrated by the way he proceeds to offer three other examples to the Philippians of a “moral reckoning” that gives up an individual’s interest for the sake of the greater good: Timothy (2:19–24), Epaphroditus (2:25–30), and Paul himself (3:1–16). Having given these moral examples, he says in 3:16, “therefore let us think this way (τοῦτο φρονῶμεν) whosoever are perfect (τέλειοι). And if you are thinking in another way (τι ἑτέρως φρονεῖτε), God will show you this way (τοῦτο). But we should stay in line with what we have reached.” And he concludes, “Brethren, become imitators together and pay attention to those who walk thus, just as you have us for a model.”

3. In Galatians 5:13–6:5, we find the same elements as in the other letters. Most striking here is the way Paul’s moral instruction is folded almost entirely into his religious language. The struggle to act according to one’s perception of what is right is now described as a battle between the flesh and the spirit (5:17). The vice list of 5:19–21 are the “works of the flesh” that exclude people from inheriting the “kingdom of God” (5:21). In contrast, the virtue list of 5:22–23 is described as the “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22). And the moral life is defined directly in terms of the Spirit’s guidance: “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (5:18), and “if we live

²⁹ See M.D. Hooker, “Philippians 2:6–11,” in *Jesus und Paulus* ed. E.E. Ellis and E. Crasser (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 151–64.

by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit (or: align ourselves with the Spirit)" (5:25).

Yet there is also the very clear sense that the Galatians have the freedom to dispose of themselves in a manner not in accord with the Spirit: they can "provide opportunity for the flesh" (5:13).³⁰ It is striking that, as in the other letters we have examined, Paul does not define such fleshly behavior primarily in terms of bodily excess but in terms of anti-social and solipsistic behavior: the rivalry that leads to snapping and biting at each other to their mutual destruction (5:15), the vices of enmity, rivalry, jealousy, rage, party spirit, divisiveness, sect-forming, envy (5:20–21), the attitude of vainglory, the practice of mutual provocation, the presence of mutual envy (5:26).

Paul tells his readers that those elevating themselves are self-deluded (6:3). Rather, each person is to "test" one's own deeds (6:4) and each person is to carry one's own burden (6:5). Against solipsistic tendencies Paul proposes "serving one another through love, for the entire law is fulfilled in this one saying, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (5:13–14). This means in practice that those who are "spiritual" (οἱ πνευματικοί) will look after a fellow-member in trouble; they will not use the failure as a basis to build themselves up, but (looking to themselves and knowing that they too can be tested) they tend to such a one in the spirit of meekness (6:1).

They are in fact to "bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (νόμος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 6:2). Paul's constant punning makes such language hard to render. Surely here he means much the same as he meant by the *νοὸς χριστοῦ* in 1 Cor 2:16, or the "way of thinking that was in Christ Jesus" in Phil 2:5, namely that pattern of life revealed in the Messiah Jesus, obedient faith toward God and loving service to others. That Paul intends his readers to reach just this conclusion is supported by 5:24: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Conclusion

This investigation into the connection between Paul's religious and moral language, between his pneumatology and ethics, has shown that while Paul's moral logic is remarkably similar to the character ethics of Aristotle,

³⁰ Note the similarity between Gal 5:13, *μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῆ σαρκί*, and Rom 13:14, *καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιείσθε εἰς ἐπιθυμίας*.

so much so that some of the assumptions that Paul leaves unexpressed can helpfully be supplemented by reference to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the framework for that logic is pervasively colored by his religious convictions. Human prudential reasoning and testing is demanded, but it is informed not only by one's own mind but also by the mind of Christ. The capacity to see truly and to act appropriately is enabled by the Holy Spirit. The point of prudence is not only one's own interest but above all the good of the community that is the body of Christ. The measure of sound moral reasoning is not hitting the mean which is virtue but corresponding to the faith of Christ which is spelled out in lowly service to others.

In short, the habits Paul seeks to shape in his readers are the habits of Jesus, the character he seeks to mold in his communities is the character of Jesus Christ.³¹

³¹ It is perhaps worth noting that in the character ethics of Thomas Aquinas, which depends so heavily on Aristotle, we find in at least two places the effect of reading Paul. In *Summa Theologica* II, II, 47, 10, Thomas explicitly departs from Aristotle with respect to the private nature of prudence, using Paul specifically 1 Cor 13:5 and 10:33 to argue that prudence must include concern for the neighbor as well as the self. And in II, II, 52, 1–2, Thomas argues that the human virtue of prudence is helped by the divine gift of the Holy Spirit, specifically the Gift of Counsel.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT:
THE ONTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESURRECTION
IN 1 CORINTHIANS

The resurrection is undoubtedly the foundation for all Christian confession and practice. The statement, “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3) definitively distinguished the first believers from other Jews and continues to demarcate Christians from all other religions. The confession has three essential parts: first, it states something about Jesus, a historical Jewish man of the first century who was executed under Roman authority. Second, the implied verb “is” makes a declaration about a present situation, rather than a past event: the confession concerns the status of Jesus now. Third, it declares that the one who was crucified (a historical fact) is now Lord. That is, he fully participates in divine life and rule, since the term *κύριος* bears with it the full weight of the divine name, following the Septuagint’s use of *κύριος* to render the tetragrammaton.¹

Two further preliminary observations on this simple but all-important confession. Linguists term this a performative statement; that is, it does not merely state a fact potentially observable to all but it declares a personal commitment to a reality that perhaps others cannot perceive.² As Paul says in 1 Cor 8:6, although there are many so-called gods and lords in the world, “for us” there is but one Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, indeed, Paul insists that no one can make the performative utterance, “Jesus is Lord” except in or through the Holy Spirit (*ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ*, 1 Cor 12:3).

The significance of the title *κύριος*, moreover, is clarified by the NT’s frequent use of Psalm 110:1 (LXX 109:1) with reference to Jesus’ resurrection: “The Lord (*κύριος*) said to my Lord (*κύριος μου*), sit at my right hand until I place your enemies beneath your feet.”³ The Lordship of Jesus, that is to say, the resurrection of Jesus, is understood as royal exaltation: Jesus enters fully into the life and rule of God. The confession “Jesus is Lord” is

¹ As in Gen 2:4; Ex 3:15–16; 34:6; Ps 24:1; Isa 53:1.

² See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (ed. J.O. Umson; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

³ D.M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (SBLMS 18; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

the resurrection confession, involving or implicating both Jesus and the one who confesses.⁴

Jesus' resurrection is the starting point, the good news from God. Such good news, however, is both amazing and confusing in that a singular human being, to say nothing of an executed criminal,⁵ should after his death enter into the life and power of God. Small wonder then that almost from the start, even Christians have struggled to grasp the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:14) in its fullness, and have tended, in a variety of ways, to slip away from the full paradox of the resurrection faith.

Some have diminished the confession's power by making it exclusively about the believer: Jesus "lives on" in some spiritual fashion in the lives of his followers through the memory of his teaching or the imitation of his acts or the continuation of his prophetic program or even through a form of self-knowledge that constitutes an elevation of the individual psyche. But, while the earliest Christian writings do attest to these post-mortem presences of Jesus, they are never identified with the resurrection presence.

Others, concerned that the subjective interpretation seems too subjective, seek to secure the objective character of the resurrection by insisting that it was, on some level, a historical event. Jesus was not killed, someone else was; Jesus got really sick but then got better. Or more often, Jesus died but was resuscitated, proof of which was found in the empty tomb and Easter appearances. Making the resurrection historical, that is, making it an event in time and space that can be empirically verified also falls short of the confession that Jesus is Lord. In resuscitation, mortality is not transcended but deferred; it means simply continuing on the same plane of empirical human existence rather than sharing in God's rule of the universe.⁶

Christians today likewise are unsteady in their grasp of the central truth of their existence, the reality that alone makes real everything they say and do in the name of Jesus. Rather than being the ground and power of every act of preaching, the resurrection becomes a past event proclaimed once

⁴ For a discussion of the resurrection as the fundamental experience that generates the Christian movement, see L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (3d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 95–107.

⁵ See M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Cross* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

⁶ For these options, see L.T. Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

a year as part of the liturgical cycle.⁷ Rather than a being a celebration of the greatest display of God's power to "bring into being that which is not" (Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 1:28), enabling us to gladly use the language of myth and mystery (1 Cor 2:1–5), the resurrection is an embarrassment that must be defended or explained away, using the very Enlightenment-based epistemological instruments that make its serious interpretation impossible.⁸

A key element in the present diminished appreciation for the resurrection among Christians—to the extent that some seriously consider a reconstruction of a "historical Jesus" to be an adequate norm for Christian identity⁹—is the lack of an appropriate language. It is difficult to speak of "Holy Spirit" with no phenomenology.¹⁰ In a world that rejects the notion of soul and in which intellectuals eschew talk even about "mind" for "brain chemistry," how can "spirit" be discussed in any meaningful way? How can "spiritual body" be addressed without first considering the meaning of any form of embodied existence apart from the default Western image of body that is derived from Descartes?¹¹ The same conceptual/linguistic flattening affects our very reading of the NT witness concerning the resurrection so that even when the text is plainly speaking of something more than resuscitation, Christians insist on thinking it is speaking of something historical.

This essay engages some very difficult texts in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the first extended and explicit discussion of the resurrection, dating from about 25 years after Jesus' crucifixion,¹² in order to show how Paul's language demands of us an ability to think and speak in ontological

⁷ See L.T. Johnson, "Preaching the Resurrection," in *The Living Gospel* (ed. L.T. Johnson; New York: Continuum, 2004).

⁸ So, despite every effort to the contrary, N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

⁹ See especially L.T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

¹⁰ The work of Karl Rahner has had a great influence on me; for an orientation, see the short entries by L.B. Puntel, "Spirit," and K. Lehmann, "Transcendence," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: the Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. K. Rahner; New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 1619–21, and 1734–42.

¹¹ See especially the important monograph by W.C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

¹² For my position concerning the date, occasion, and argument of 1 Corinthians, see Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, 261–77. The date of this discussion is all the more important, when it is remembered that Paul here speaks of events within his and the community's experience some 15 years before the most plausible date for a narrative gospel.

rather than exclusively historical terms.¹³ This essay begins with 1 Corinthians 15. Although Paul's statements concerning the resurrection come at the end of the composition, they provide, like the truth of the confession itself, the ground for everything he has said previously.¹⁴

Paul's Argument in 1 Corinthians 15¹⁵

The first 11 verses of Paul's discussion are a robust reminder to the Corinthians of both dimensions of the resurrection confession: as it concerns them and as it concerns Jesus. First, as it concerns them, the good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is ἐν πρώτοις among the "first things" (or "things of first importance") that Paul proclaimed to them (15:3). They accepted this good news (15:1); they stand in it and are now being saved by it, if they indeed remain in it (15:2). Second, as concerns Jesus, the Scriptures attest to his death and his resurrection on the third day (15:3–4). He was seen as resurrected by many witnesses, some of who are still alive (15:5–6), and he was seen by Paul himself (15:8; see also 1 Cor 9:1), who has expended all his efforts on the basis of this gift (15:10). Paul draws the two dimensions together when he declares in 15:11, "whether then it was I or they (the other witnesses), so we preach and so you believe." The death (and burial) and resurrection of Jesus are the bedrock of the shared apostolic proclamation and of shared Christian identity, what Paul calls earlier in the letter, "fellowship with [God's] son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:9).

Paul next reasserts the centrality of the resurrection against the claim, apparently made by some among his readers, that "there is no resurrection of the dead" (15:12–19). It is not clear who made this declaration or what precisely they meant by it.¹⁶ Following Paul's logic in the subsequent argument, however, it seems safe to conclude it involved these people's

¹³ I speak of "ontological" in the looser philosophical sense as roughly equivalent to "metaphysical," that is, thought engaged with questions of existence/being (*esse*) as such, rather than with the study of individual existents or events; see A. Keller, "Ontology," *Encyclopedia of Theology*, 1106–10.

¹⁴ See, for example, A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1169.

¹⁵ I offer my own reading of 1 Corinthians 15 in the following paragraphs. For analysis of specific issues, see especially R.F., Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 525–84; G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 713–809; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (trans. J.W. Leitch; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 248–93; and A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1169–1314.

¹⁶ For a survey of theories, see Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 7–15.

perception of their own present and future. They saw no need for a resurrection of the body because they were so impressed by the “already” of God’s rule active among them. Paul begins his letter, in fact, with an acknowledgement of being enriched with every kind of knowledge and speech (1:4), and his discussion of τὰ πνευματικά (“spiritual powers”) in 12–14 recognizes the existence of such impressive displays of speech and knowledge among them. If Paul’s mockery of them in 4:8 is read in this connection, then they saw themselves, in their present bodily condition, as “already ruling,” that is, already fully entered into God’s kingdom and exercising authority within it.¹⁷

Paul’s response in 15:13–19 has a powerful rhetorical structure, built on three conditional sentences (15:13, 15:16, and 15:19). The first two are identical, “If the dead are not raised, then neither is Christ raised,” and are followed by, “but if Christ is not raised.” In each case, the protosis is followed by three distinct apodoses that deal not with Christ but with the state of believers.

In 15:14, the set is the emptiness of the proclamation, the emptiness of their faith, and the preachers as false witnesses against God. In 15:17, it is the foolishness of their faith, the continuation of the condition of sin, and the loss of those who have already died in Christ.

The point of stressing the resurrection of Christ as the test-case for the truth of the resurrection is that, without Jesus’ resurrection, “the good news they received, in which they stand, and by which they are being saved” (15:1–2) is total fantasy. The resurrection is not simply about Jesus but about them, their present way-of-being in the world. Thus the force of Paul’s final conditional sentence in 15:19, “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, then we are the most pitiable of humans.” For Paul and all those who preach as he does, the resurrection of Jesus is not about Jesus alone, it is not simply an event of the past, it is an existential reality that at once determines their present existence and shapes their future hope.¹⁸

¹⁷ “You are already satisfied (κεκοροσμένοι), you have already grown rich (ἐπλουτήσατε), you have become kings (ἐβασιλεύσατε) without us. Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might also become kings with you” (NAB). Paul’s argument of chapter 15 is here contained *in nuce*: the presence of resurrection power does not yet mean the full realization of God’s βασιλεία. They are like pretend monarchs sitting on imaginary thrones.

¹⁸ Using a term like “reality” illustrates both the necessity and difficulty of using ontological language. Christ’s resurrection as his exaltation to God’s presence is, for Paul, “real” in a way that transcends empirical categories and at the same time, it creates a new “state of existence” among humans still very much within empirical constraints. Yet neither aspect of this conviction can adequately be expressed in historical terms.

Having secured the link between Christ's resurrection and their present condition, Paul turns to the "future hope" intimated by 15:19: their future is to go where Christ has already gone. He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.¹⁹ Christ is as paradigmatic for humanity's elevation in life as the first human was paradigmatic for humanity's standing under death (15:21–22): in Christ all will be brought to life (πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται).²⁰ But by saying that "each one will be brought to life in his own rank" (15:23), Paul reminds those who think that they already have the fullness of resurrection that they are wrong. Indeed, not even the exalted Lord has yet reached the *telos* of God's plan (15:24). Christ's dominion has yet to conquer all inimical powers and authorities or even the ultimate enemy of death; when all that has been accomplished, then Christ will hand over rule to God, who will be, at the last, [τὰ] πάντα ἐν παύσει (15:24–28).²¹

During the course of his argument, Paul's language has shifted from the historical (what was preached to them/Jesus' death and resurrection) and the experiential (those who witnessed him/the present faith and salvation of the believers) to the mythological (the parousia of Christ/his enthronement/his triumph over all enemies/his handing over the kingdom to God). How could it not?²² The matters of which Paul now speaks are not on the present empirical plane of Paul and the Corinthians but on a future, cosmic plane, where the exalted Christ, spiritual powers, and God are the contenders. When Paul concludes with the statement, "so that God might be all things in all things," however, his language becomes unavoidably metaphysical/ontological/existential. He makes a declaration concerning the invisible but real cause of all that exists with respect to all things (visible and invisible) that exist, in a relation (ἐν) suggesting immediate power and presence, or even identity: God being all that is with, or

¹⁹ Paul's use of ἀπαρχή here and in 15:23 echo the LXX's translation of אֲשֶׁר־יִתּוּב in passages such as Ex 23:19; Lev 2:12; 23:10; Num 15:20–21; 18:12; Deut 18:4; 26:2; 33:21. Whereas the offering of the sacrificial "first-fruits" represent the "part for the whole," however, Paul's use here and in Rom 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; and 1 Cor 16:15 indicates that ἀπαρχή means "first of the whole," as is made clear in 15:23: "Christ the first-fruits, then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ (οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ).

²⁰ The same verb, ζωοποιεῖν, recurs decisively in 15:45.

²¹ The MSS evidence for the inclusion or exclusion of the definite article is well split, making the precise rendering of the phrase even more problematic; The avoidance of ontological language among scholars is illustrated by Fee's agreement with C.K. Barrett that the words "are to be understood soteriologically, not metaphysically" (Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 760.

²² Paul's language in 15:24–28 is mythic in the proper sense: it has a narrative form (this will happen, then that will happen). God and God's agent are actors; death and sin are personified as cosmic enemies; and none of the statements is even potentially verifiable.

within all that is. The resurrection/exaltation of Jesus as Lord, it appears, has consequences for the very structure of reality.

After a series of statements in 15:29–34 that rhetorically connect to the earlier objection to the reality of the resurrection (15:12), and point forward to the argument's final moral exhortation (15:58),²³ Paul returns to the mystery of Christ's (and their) future exaltation. He responds to a question posed by an imagined interlocutor, "How will the dead be raised? With what sort of body do they come" (15:35). His first response is a dismissive "you fool!"

Given Paul's assumptions, the question appears foolish on two counts. First, it seems to assume that the dead who are raised will have empirical bodies like those of the presently alive Corinthians. Perhaps this is for some of them, as it is for many present-day skeptics, a major stumbling block to a whole-hearted acceptance of future resurrection. Besides sounding a bit like the classic horror movie, "The Night of the Living Dead," the misconception of a steady increase of material bodies simply leaves no room. A simple coming back to empirical life is not good news for the earth or for the ones awakened. Second, the question is also foolish because no more than any other human on this side of mortality, Paul was scarcely in a position to describe "what sort of body" the resurrected might possess or be possessed by.

But Paul does have a way of getting at the question that will also address the arrogant assumptions of the readers who consider themselves "already ruling." Paul can argue about the future resurrection of all by drawing an analogy between it and the resurrection of Jesus, since he has already intrinsically linked the two. What does not work analogously is the status of Christ as Lord, or his exaltation to God's right hand. But on the question of the "kind of body"—again, an inescapably ontological query—Paul can draw some analogies.

He prepares them for his central analogy by drawing them into observations of the natural world (as they understand it). Seeds that are sown must die before they come back to life, and when they do, God gives the bare seed that was sown a "proper body" (ἴδιον σῶμα, or "body of its own")

²³ Paul poses two "Why" questions based on practice: Why does the community practice baptism for the dead if the dead are not raised (15:29); Why does Paul endure dangers rather than simply pursue pleasure, if mortal life is all there is (15:30–32). He concludes by exhorting them to virtue rather than be influenced by the bad morals of those who "are ignorant of God" (15:33–34).

as God wills (15:36–38).²⁴ He reminds them of the different kinds of “flesh” (σάρξ) to be observed in humans as distinct from birds and beasts and fish (15:39), and of the qualitative differences between the “bodies” (σώματα, 15:40) on earth and those in the heavens. Here, Paul introduces the term “glory” or “radiance” (δόξα) to distinguish the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, stars—from the earthly; indeed, he says, stars differ from stars in their radiance/glory (15:41).²⁵

The effect of these comparisons is to emphasize two points. The first is that while there is some continuity between what is sown and what is raised, there is even greater discontinuity. The second is that God can surprise with new bodies, and God’s range of inventiveness with respect to bodies is displayed not only on the earthly level, the diverse meanings of “flesh” when applied to animals and humans, but on the heavenly level, where radiance/glory defines the meaning of “body.”

With the transition, “Thus also it is with the resurrection of the dead” in 15:42, Paul turns to his main analogy between the resurrection of Christ and the future state of the resurrected dead. The adverb “thus” (οὕτως) suggests that the same two points made by his earlier analogies (continuity/discontinuity; God’s range of creativity with respect to bodies) carry over as well to this prime example. He begins with three dramatic contrasts that not only echo his earlier comparisons but also reflect language that he used earlier in the letter when speaking of God’s surprising creation of the Corinthian community.²⁶ The body is sown in corruption but is raised in incorruptibility, sown in dishonor but raised in glory/radiance, sown in weakness but raised in strength. These three sets anticipate the fourth, for Paul’s language clearly points to the contrast between the merely material, which is always corruptible, weak, and liable to shame, and the more-than-merely material, a body that shares in incorruption, glory, and strength.

The fourth contrast is between the ψυχικός and the πνευματικός. Both terms are more obscure than the ones preceding them, but if Paul is

²⁴ This is not really an “argument from nature” in the scientific sense, because Paul inserts God’s will directly into the choice of the plant’s body (θεὸς διδωσιν...καθὼς ἠθέλησεν, 15:38).

²⁵ Elsewhere, Paul uses δόξα primarily with respect to God (see Rom 1:23; 2:7; 3:7; 4:20; 5:2; 6:4; 1 Cor 11:7; 2 Cor 3:8–10, 18; Phil 2:11; 1 Tim 1:11; 3:16) and the human future with God (Rom 8:18–21; 9:23; Phil 3:21; Col 1:27).

²⁶ In 1 Cor 1:20–28, Paul opposes foolishness and wisdom, strength and weakness, glory and shame, and uses for the God’s election language that echoes creation itself: God chose τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταισχύνῃ.

consistent in his contrast, then ψυχικός must align with the “merely material” or empirical, that is, always corruptible, subject to dishonor, and weak. By the same logic, πνευματικός must align with the strength, incorruptibility, and radiance of the more-than-merely material, or the super-empirical.

Paul insists on the seriousness of this last, most important contrast by adding, “if there is a ψυχικός σῶμα there is also a πνευματικός σῶμα (15:45).²⁷ All these disjunctions contrast the kinds of flesh or bodies with which we and the Corinthians are familiar, bodies that are fleshly, corruptible, liable to dishonor and weakness, with bodies with which they are unfamiliar, unless they think of those far-off bodies of the sun, moon, and stars and think of them as radiant, incorruptible, and strong, because they partake of πνεύμα. By using the term σῶμα πνευματικός, however, Paul pushes the Corinthians—and modern Christians—beyond the range of the empirical and verifiable to the realm of the ontological and non-verifiable. A “spiritual body” is at the very least oxymoronic. Within contemporary cosmology, the two terms do not seem to go together.

But Paul’s next statements make clear that his speaking of a spiritual body is not language he has stumbled into. Rather, it is where his entire argument has been heading, as he shows immediately by supporting it by a scriptural citation from LXX Genesis 2:7, which he reads retrospectively from the perspective of the resurrection. The text of Genesis has, “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” Paul quotes only the last line, εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν. As earlier, the term “psychic,” refers here to ordinary human existence. Paul has this term characterize ὁ πρῶτος . . . Ἀδὰμ in order to set up the typology (employed also in Romans 5:12–21) between the first and new creations.²⁸

²⁷ This disjunction also appears earlier in Paul’s distinction between persons in the Corinthian community: the ψυχικός ἄνθρωπος does not receive the “things of the spirit of God” (τὰ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ, 1 Cor 2:14). For discussion, see B.A. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism* (SBLDS 12; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973). Notice that this distinction corresponds to that between σαρκίνοις (“fleshly”) and πνευματικοίς (“spiritual”) in 1 Cor 3:1: “I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as fleshly.” The Corinthians engaging in rivalry are “fleshly,” that is, “all too human.” Paul again contrasts fleshly and spiritual with respect to the collection in Rom 15:27.

²⁸ I have already pointed to Paul’s use of creation language concerning the election of the Corinthians in 1:28. The reality brought into being through the resurrection of Jesus is understood by Paul as a “new creation.” See above all 2 Cor 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, they have become

The first Adam became a living being, because God's breath animated the clay from which he was formed. But Paul contrasts the first human (a paradigm for all humans) with the one he calls ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ ("the last Adam"), who became εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν (15:45). The phrase is important not simply because it opposes ψυχικός and πνεῦμα, but because the adjective ζωοποιοῦν, "life-giving" can be applied properly only to God.²⁹ The contrast between Adam and Christ, then, is between natural life and resurrection life. But in the case of Christ, resurrection means exaltation into the presence and power of God, since God alone is giver of life.

Paul drives home his point in 15:46–48: the πνεῦμα was not first (with respect to humans) but the ψυχή; the first human was drawn from clay, while the second human (Christ) was from heaven. And as before, he makes the connection between the paradigmatic human and those "in his image":³⁰ as with the earthly one, so with those who are earthly; as with the heavenly one, so with those who are heavenly. If humans have borne the "image" of the one made from clay, so do they now also bear the image of the one from heaven. Once more: although followers of Christ have not reached the state of being "life-giving" like the exalted Jesus, they do participate somehow in his image—and Paul suggests that the medium of this participation, both for the future and the present, has to do specifically with πνεῦμα.

Paul closes his argument in chapter 15 not with exposition but exhortation. He turns to the behavioral correlates of "standing in the good news" of Christ's resurrection. The message is simple: they must change. Full participation in God's rule is not available to "flesh and blood," that is, ordinary human existence, much less such an existence defined precisely by "flesh." The corruptible—that is the mortal—cannot without change inherit immortality (15:50). Whether believers die before the coming of Christ or not, all will necessarily be changed (15:51). The dead will rise

new (καινά). See also Gal 6:15, and the startling statements in Romans 4:17–25: Abraham "believed in the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist" (ἐπίστευσεν θεοῦ τοῦ ζωοποιούντος τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ καλούντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα, 4:17); God brought life to the womb of Sarah, although Abraham was "as good as dead" and Sarah's womb was "dead" (4:19); God "raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (4:24).

²⁹ See LXX 2 Kgs 5:7; Neh 9:6; Job 36:6; Ps 70:20; As pointed out in the previous note, Paul uses the verb for God's creating power in Rom 4:17 and specifically with reference to the future resurrection in Rom 8:11, "he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life (ζωοποιήσῃ) also to our mortal bodies." In Gal 3:21, he denies this life-giving ability to the Law, and in 2 Cor 3:6, he declares, "for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ).

³⁰ For Paul's use of εἰκόν, see Rom 1:23; 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7; 2 Cor 3:18, 4:4; Col 1:15; 3:10.

ἀφθαρτοι (incorruptible) and “we will be changed” (15:52): “this corruptible being will be clothed with incorruptibility and this mortal being will be clothed with immortality” (15:53).

The process of this ontological transformation through the πνεῦμα, however, begins already in this mortal, empirical existence that humans share. They simultaneously bear both the image of Adam and Christ. It is entirely legitimate to read in this connection a passage from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, which serves as a virtual commentary on the argument Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 15: “Now the Lord is the Spirit (ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν), and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image (τῆν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα), from glory to glory, as from the Lord, who is spirit (ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος)” (2 Cor 3:17–18). Reading the passages from the two Corinthian letters side by side, it seems evident that Paul sees the process of ontological transformation as already at work through the resurrection spirit that defines the resurrected Jesus as “life-giving spirit.”

For Paul in 1 Corinthians, however, such ontological change demands also a moral change. He speaks of death as the last enemy conquered by resurrection in the end-time, but insists that the sting of death is sin (15:56). He declares that if the resurrection is not real, then they are still in their sins (15:17), and he says of those who live as though there were no future resurrection (“Let us eat, and drink, for tomorrow we shall die”) that they are self-deceived, and their influence is dangerous: “bad company corrupts (φθείρουσιν) good morals” (1 Cor 15:33).³¹ He tells them, “Become sober righteously and stop sinning. For some of you do not know God” (15:34). Such insistence on moral change extends throughout the letter (see especially 14:20). But 1 Corinthians 15 provides the eschatological-ontological assumptions underlying Paul’s moral exhortations, and makes of them something much more than mere moralism.

This essay has shown how Paul refers to the exalted Lord Jesus as “Life-Giving Spirit” (τὸ πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν) and of the future bodies of the resurrected believers as “spiritual bodies” (σώματα πνευματικά). It is appropriate, then, to pursue the question of the ontological implications of the resurrection by inquiring into the role of the πνεῦμα throughout 1 Corinthians.

³¹ The choice of “corrupt” (φθείρουσιν) in the present context cannot be accidental (see 15:42, 50).

The Functions of the Holy Spirit

Since Paul nowhere defines πνεῦμα, we are required to learn how he understands it from the terms he uses in association with it and by the functions he assigns to it. The eschatological discourse of chapter fifteen has linked πνεῦμα to the incorruptible rather than the corruptible, to the immortal rather than the mortal, to strength rather than weakness, to glory rather than shame; it has been described as “life-giving.” That discussion, in short, connects πνεῦμα to the divine rather than to ordinary human existence.

As we turn to the earlier parts of Paul’s composition, however, we see at once that he confuses the issue slightly by speaking with some frequency of πνεῦμα, not as an eschatological, divine reality, but as a present-time dimension of ordinary human psychology. Thus, Paul can speak of being holy both in body and spirit (1 Cor 7:34) or of having his spirit refreshed (1 Cor 16:18) or of someone’s spirit praying when speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:14) or of an excommunicated man having his flesh destroyed so that his πνεῦμα might be saved (1 Cor 5:5). When he says he will come to the community in a “spirit of mildness,” he refers to his own human disposition (1 Cor 4:21).

Even some of these statements, though, suggest that Paul understands the human spirit to have characteristics that might apply as well to the way he thinks about God’s spirit. Thus, in 1 Cor 2:11, he speaks of the human spirit in terms of a power of introspection: “among human beings, who knows what pertains to a person except the spirit of the person that is within (εἰ μὴ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ)?” And in 5:3, Paul tells his readers that although he is absent in body he is “present in spirit (παρὼν δὲ τῷ πνεύματι),” suggesting that even at the level of human psychology, πνεῦμα is not confined by space or the individual body. The same passage, indeed, describes a gathering of the community in which, Paul says, “I am with you in spirit with the power of the Lord Jesus” (5:4).³²

Most of the time in 1 Corinthians, however, Paul’s language about πνεῦμα refers to “the Holy Spirit” (6:19; 12:3) or the “Spirit from God” (2:11–12; 2:14; 3:16; 6:11; 7:40; 12:3), even in cases where he omits such specific qualification. At least three aspects of such usage requires attention as we inquire into the ontological implications of resurrection.

³² The passage reads, ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου [ἡμῶν] Ἰησοῦ συναχθέντων ὑμῶν καὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ πνεύματος σὺν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ.

1. Paul closely associates πνεῦμα with Jesus, not the Jesus of human history, but the Jesus who is κύριος. Most dramatically, Paul makes the Spirit the basis for the confession of Jesus as Lord: “Nobody speaking by the spirit of God (ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ) says, ‘Cursed be Jesus’”—that is, sees Jesus simply as a false messiah cursed by God—and nobody is able to say, “‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ)” (12:3). Similarly, when speaking of the Corinthians’ transition from their former vice to a state of being cleansed, made holy, and made righteous (6:11), Paul combines the instrumentality of “the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” and “the Spirit of Our God.” This Spirit of God is thus closely linked to the risen Jesus as Lord.

2. The spirit also mediates the presence of Jesus as risen Lord to believers. After declaring the intimate unity that results from sexual relations—“the one who clings/adheres to a prostitute becomes one body, for it says, ‘the two become one flesh’”—Paul makes this remarkable statement about another form of intense intimacy: “And the one who cleaves/adheres to the Lord is one πνεῦμα (we must supply ‘with him’)” (6:16–17). Note how this pneumatic unity has somatic implications for believers, a theme pursued in another essay. Note, for now, another text pointing to the spirit as mediator of presence: “For by means of one spirit we have all been baptized into one body, whether Jews or Hellenes, whether slaves or free, and we have all been made to drink the one spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

3. Paul sees the Spirit’s relation to humans as a form of intimacy or even interiority. The Corinthians have received the spirit that comes from God (2:12), the spirit that penetrates the deep things of God in the way that a person’s own spirit examines the self (2:10), so that they can know the gifts given them by God. The Corinthians are to discern “spiritual things” (τὰ πνευματικά) “spiritually” (πνευματικῶς) because they are “spiritual people” (πνευματικοί) who have been “taught by the spirit” (διδακτοῖς πνεύματος, 2:12–13). Or at least, that is the ideal if they are mature (τέλειος).

In fact, Paul regards them as immature, as babes, as fleshly and as psychic, because their competitive behavior shows them to “not get” what the spirit is about (3:1–4; see 2:14). He needs to remind them repeatedly about the ontological implications of resurrection. “Do you not know that you (plural) are God’s sanctuary and that the spirit of God dwells in/among you (οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν, 3:16). This is something they should know but they act as though they did not, so he warns them, “If any one destroy/corrupt (φθηρεῖ) God’s sanctuary, God will destroy this one” (3:17). He tells them again in his discussion of sexual immorality, “Or do you not know that

your (plural) body is the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit within/among you, which you have from God, and you are not your own?" (6:19).

These three aspects are in truth closely interconnected. If Paul uses spirit-language for the designation of Jesus as Lord, and for the intimate presence of Jesus to believers, this has implications for other places in this letter where Paul speaks of Christians' being "in Christ" (11 times) and "in the Lord" (9 times). Just as he can speak of "drinking the one spirit" and of the Spirit "dwelling in them" so, he can speak of them being "in Christ" and "in the Lord." The manner suggests a sharing or communication at the level of being, rather than at the level of shared physical space or a sphere of moral influence. The conclusion that seems to be demanded by the way in which Paul uses language in 1 Corinthians is that the mutual indwelling of the risen Lord Jesus, the Spirit, and the Corinthians is, at the very least, a mutual influence at the level of energy, power, and presence.

Such an impression is not diminished when we turn to the functions that Paul ascribes to the Spirit. Thus, in 1:5–6, he thanks God for the enrichment of the Corinthians in speech and knowledge, "just as the witness of Christ was confirmed among you." But in 2:4, he speaks of his kerygma as accompanied not by convincing words of wisdom but "by the demonstration of the Spirit and of power," so that their faith might be based "not in the wisdom of humans but in the power that comes from God" (2:5). The powerful demonstration of the Spirit is precisely the way the witness of Christ "was confirmed/established" among them.

Similarly, in 2:10, Paul speaks of the Spirit as the one who has revealed the mysteries otherwise unknowable to humans. Paul and his associates speak with words taught by the Spirit rather than in words taught by human wisdom (2:13). The contrast here is between mere human capacity and the empowerment given by the Spirit. Paul is taught the words to say by the Spirit; the Spirit's power confirms his proclamation. He works in an energy field that comes from the risen Lord in whose name he speaks (see 1:2, 10; 5:4; 6:11), and the energy field is the Spirit.

Not only does the Holy Spirit empower the words of the Apostle, so that he can declare, "I think that I too have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 7:40), but the Spirit also lifts and transforms the words of the community as it engages in worship. The Spirit bestows and energizes all the gifts within the community. Paul's explicit elaboration of this truth in 1 Cor. 12:4–11 falls between two statements concerning the spirit described above. The first, in 12:3, declares that only in the Holy Spirit is it possible to declare that Jesus is Lord. The second, in 12:13, states that Paul and his readers have all drunk the one spirit, and have all been baptized in one spirit into

one body. Between these statements, which intimately link the power of the spirit both to Jesus and to the community, falls Paul's declarations concerning the spiritual gifts (τὰ χαρίσματα / τὰ πνευματικά) given to the community.

This well-known passage offers three points that are particularly pertinent. First, and most obviously, all the "manifestations of the Spirit" (φανερώσεις τοῦ πνεύματος, 12:7) and "gifts" (χαρίσματα, 12:4) of which Paul speaks serve to elevate human existence through the exercise of powers not ordinarily available to them. Some are notably exceptional to normal human experience, such as the gifts of healing and the performance of wonders, prophecy, tongues, the discernment of spirits, and the interpretation of tongues (12:9–10). Others appear as a heightened expression of more ordinary human capacities: words of wisdom, words of knowledge, even faith (12:8–9). But all are elevations of human ability through the spirit's power.

Second, Paul here speaks of the Spirit in distinctly personal terms. In 12:11, he declares that the Spirit gifts each one "as he wills." The Spirit is not simply an impersonal energy, but freely chooses in the manner of God (1:28). The rhythmic assertions of 12:4–6 also assert the personal character of the Spirit: "There are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are a variety of ministries, but the same Lord; and there are a variety of activities, but it is the same God who activates them all in every way (τὰ πάντα ἐν πάσιν)."³³ Scattered references are concentrated in a single affirmation: God, the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit join in providing the elevation of human capacities.

Third, Paul insists in 12:7 that the manifestation of the Spirit to each individual is πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον ("for the common good") a theme that he will develop explicitly in his discussion of tongues and prophecy in chapter 14, and is stated as a fundamental principle in 1 Cor 6:12, 7:35, 10:23 and 33.

Conclusion

Observations concerning Paul's discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, and his use of spirit-language throughout that composition, lead to five conclusions and two questions.

³³ The use of the same phrase for the distribution of gifts in the community and for the final eschatological victory of God in 15:28 cannot be accidental.

Conclusions

- (1) The resurrection is, for Paul (and those who preach as he did) more than a historical event of the past concerning Jesus. It is an eschatological reality that affects believers in the present and anticipates the character of their future existence in which God will be “all things in all things.”
- (2) The exalted Lord Jesus in life-giving Spirit and the source of the power that touches and transforms the Corinthians. The confession of Jesus as Lord and the possession of the Holy Spirit are correlative and mutually defining realities.
- (3) The Holy Spirit that examines the deep things of God and is the medium of the risen Lord’s presence to the Corinthians is also the medium of an intense and mutual indwelling among God and humans: the Corinthians have drunk the one Spirit, and the Spirit dwells in them: they are in the spirit, and in Christ and in the Lord. The consistent use of such locative prepositions connotes a deep and intersubjective relationship.
- (4) The presence of the Holy Spirit among and within the Corinthians is the basis for the process of their personal and social transformation. Once sinners, they are now made clean, made holy, made righteous (6:11); the “Spirit from the Lord” has empowered them to know, speak, and perform in ways not available to, and not grasped by, the “merely natural man.”
- (5) The resurrection, therefore, initiates what Paul elsewhere calls a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), and indeed a “new humanity” (Col 3:9–10; Eph 4:24), based on the “last Adam” who became “Life-Giving Spirit.” Not a forgiveness of sins from the outside is here meant, but an ontological change in the structures of human existence.

Questions

Such conclusion, in turn, raise important questions, two of which form a transition to a study of the “Body in Question: the Social Consequences of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians”:³⁴

³⁴ L.T. Johnson, “The Body in Question: The Social Consequences of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians” in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: Studies in the Synoptics and Paul: Festschrift for Frank Matera* ed. K.R. Iverson and C.W. Skinner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 225–247.

- (1) If the end-point (*telos*) of the new creation is a “spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν), what are the implications here and now, in the perdurance of the empirical body, for the understanding and use of the body? How does the ontology of resurrection require a reconsideration of body? How seriously should we take Paul’s calling the Corinthian assembly “Christ’s body” (σῶμα Χριστοῦ)?
- (2) If, as Paul states, “we must all be changed,” how does the process of moral growth work for the transformation of the individual and social self?³⁵ Or, to put it another way, how can living according to the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) direct Christ’s body to its proper goal (*telos*)?

³⁵ See the effort to follow this line of thought in Romans, in L.T. Johnson, “Transformation of the Mind and Moral Discernment in Paul,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. J.T. Fitzgerald et al.; NovTSupp 110; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 215–36.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE BODY IN QUESTION: THE SOCIAL COMPLEXITIES OF RESURRECTION IN 1 CORINTHIANS

In an earlier essay on 1 Corinthians, I argued on the basis of a close examination of chapter 15 as well as of Paul's language about *πνεῦμα* throughout the composition, that Paul sees the resurrection as more than an event of the past that involved Jesus alone.¹ Instead, he understands resurrection as a reality of the present that involves, indeed defines, the present existence of believers. The crucified Messiah Jesus has been exalted. As Lord he shares God's rule over all things. He has become not simply a living being (through resuscitation), but life-giving Spirit—that is, a source of the spirit who gives life (1 Cor 15:45). An analysis of Paul's language about the Holy Spirit, in turn, shows that it is precisely the presence of that Holy Spirit among and in believers that enables them to confess Jesus as Lord, that gifts them with extraordinary capacities, and that makes them holy. Paul's language about the Holy Spirit is a way of speaking about the resurrection/exaltation of Jesus as a new creation that fundamentally affects human existence. I suggested, further, that this state of affairs demands of us, in turn, a mode of thinking and speaking that engages the conditions of human existence (that is, ontology) and not merely the actions of human agents (that is, history).

Paul's way of thinking and speaking about Spirit (*πνεῦμα*), in turn, demands as well a fresh consideration of body (*σῶμα*).² Three statements in 1 Corinthians impel such reconsideration. First, when Paul responds

¹ See "Life-Giving Spirit: the Ontological Implications of the Resurrection," *The Stone-Campbell Journal* 15 (2012): 75–89.

² My claim to "freshness" here is relative rather than absolute. Certainly, Paul's language about *σῶμα* has received massive attention, especially by scholars interested in Paul's theological anthropology: see, e.g., J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Wyndham Hall Press, 1988 [1952]); R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1953) 1:190–210; R.H. Gundry, *SOMA in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (SNTSMS 29; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); R. Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 55–78. Such analyses, however, have tended to be both synthetic (drawing from all the "great letters"), and lexical (focusing, for example, on the semantic nuances of *πνεῦμα*, *σῶμα*, and *σάρξ*). My essay more modestly seeks only to

to the question of an imagined interlocutor concerning the future resurrection, “with what sort of body do they come” (15:35), he ultimately replies that the body “is raised a spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν, 15:44). Second, in his discussion of sexual immorality, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for forgetting that “your bodies are members of Christ” (6:15). Third, he states flatly in 12:27, “You (plural, ὑμεῖς) are the body of Christ.” The three statements point to three aspects of Paul’s perception of the body among those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and profess Jesus as exalted Lord: a) the future condition of body as totally suffused with Spirit; b) the persistence of the empirical body (σῶμα ψυχικόν) that remains at the disposal of the individual as the medium of worldly (and spiritual) expression; c) the communal or collective σῶμα of the community which is at once the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (3:16–17), and the σῶμα of the Messiah. Given these three aspects, the meaning of σῶμα in any specific instance will not necessarily be perfectly clear. The presence of the resurrection πνεῦμα complicates the language of the body.

Thinking Body

A good preparation for examining Paul’s language about πνεῦμα and σῶμα is to recollect how our default mode of thinking about the body—inherited from Descartes and extended by science and technology—prevents us from truly engaging what Paul is saying.³ Our tendency is to think in terms first of the individual human body. Pervasive individualism—evident above all in contemporary American culture—makes talk about a “social body” seem secondary and derivative, at best a metaphor.⁴ The individual body, moreover, tends to be considered in isolation from the world and from other bodies. The sense of separate somatic existence is expressed and reinforced by the development of distinctive posture,

examine the complexities of σῶμα in view of the resurrection πνεῦμα, and stays almost completely within the frame of 1 Corinthians.

³ W.C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

⁴ The premise of the American experiment—derived from John Locke (*Second Treatise on Government*, 1690) and other Enlightenment thinkers—is that society is formed by contract among independent individuals, who must “consent” to being governed by common rules or authority; more recently, see J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

clothing, housing, and variable zones of personal safety.⁵ In pathological cases, the bodies of others—whether the “others” are animals, people, microbes or even food—are viewed essentially in terms of threat to the integrity of the individual organism, which must maintain itself against dangerous entanglement.⁶

The individual body, furthermore, is considered in purely physical terms. Indeed, the progression in contemporary thought has been from the ghost in the machine to simply the machine, or perhaps better, the workings of brain chemistry within the machine.⁷ Finally, the body is thought of in terms of problem-solving: the dramatic exchanges of blood and vital organs in medical technology is matched by the routines of exercise and diet, and more drastically, in the kind of body-engineering expressed by fetal-harvesting, gender-changing, plastic surgery and cloning.⁸ In this construal, the body is considered as a form of property. It is something I have. I own it, and can dispose of it as I choose. I can sell my body for profit. I have rights over my body just as I have rights over my other property.⁹

The development of cultural criticism has slightly modified such a mechanistic view of the body by alerting us to the ideological interests that can be at work in the social construction of the body in diverse cultures.¹⁰ Such analysis reminds us that different cultures have different notions of what is beautiful or admirable in human bodies—bald is not always bad and bowed legs can suggest qualities of leadership¹¹—and that body-typing can and has played a role in a variety of racist and sexist

⁵ A direct symbolic line runs from the “body language” of individualism to the acquisitive use of possessions: corresponding to the *noli me tangere* of political individualism is the *keep off the grass* of gated “communities;” for a brilliant fictional rendering, see T.C. Boyle, *Tortilla Curtain* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

⁶ See, e.g., N. Baker, *The Body Toxic* (New York: North Point Press, 2009).

⁷ For accessible discussions of the complex issues in the philosophy of mind, see J. Heil, *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2004), and W. Jaworski, *Philosophy of Mind: A Comprehensive Introduction* (John Wiley and Sons, 2011).

⁸ One must wonder whether any sense of irony went into the efforts of J. Villepique and H. Rivera, as they wrote *The Body Sculpting Bible for Women: The Way to Physical Perfection* (Hatherleigh Press, 2006) and the companion volume for men.

⁹ The premise is foundational especially for early feminist discourse; see, for example, *Our Bodies Our Selves: A Course by and for Women*, by the Boston Women’s Health Course Collective (Boston: New England Free Press, 1971).

¹⁰ The work of M. Foucault in this regard is of fundamental importance; see, for example, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

¹¹ See the instructive essay on ancient body assumptions in A.J. Malherbe, “A Physical Description of Paul,” in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 165–170.

political programs.¹² But the modification offered is slight, for the body is still regarded as a problem to be solved, or as an object to be manipulated, or as a property to be negotiated. And it is still the individual rather than the social body that is of primary interest.

A more fruitful way of thinking body is through reflection on our own bodily experience. When I reflect bodily—that is, tap my foot, wrinkle my brow, sigh deeply, ponder the itch in my left ankle, and above all, perform the amazing mental trick of remembering the former me—I realize that every sense of my self is of my bodily self. As long as I remember me I remember my body. I cannot conceive of me absent from my body. Although my cells have sloughed off and been replaced endlessly, somehow what I call me has been borne through the years—and through entropy to every greater corpulence—by the body. I realize then, that whereas there is some truth to the claim to “have” my body—I can indeed dispose of it in a variety of ways—there is an equal truth to the claim that I “am” my body. I cannot dispose of body completely without also disposing of me. In the strict empirical sense, when my body disappears, so do I. Likewise, when I commit my body, I commit me. This is the basis of all covenant and all witness.¹³

If this is so, and all our experience confirms that it is, then the body does not lie outside myself as a problem to be solved, as a sculpture to be carved, as a project to be engineered. If I so objectify my body, I alienate myself from my true somatic condition. As the philosopher Gabriel Marcel has instructed us, the body-self does not lie in the realm of the problematic but properly in the realm of the mysterious.¹⁴ I cannot detach myself from my body as though it were not me. That way lies the most profound alienation. The mysterious, Marcel tells us, is that in which we are inescapably involved as persons.¹⁵ A budget is a problem, marriage is a

¹² Obvious examples are the propaganda posters produced in Nazi Germany depicting Jews with subhuman features, and the stereotypical representations of African-Americans in USA during the era of segregation; similar are the pictorial representations of “the Hun” and the “Yellow Peril” by World War II Allied propaganda.

¹³ For the connection between body and possessions, see L.T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: What Faith Demands* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 1–10, 29–34; for the body as basis of witness and covenant, see L.T. Johnson, “The Revelatory Body: Notes Toward a Somatic Theology,” in *The Phenomenology of the Body*, ed. D.J. Martino (Pittsburgh: Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center at the University of Duquesne, 2003), 69–85.

¹⁴ See especially G. Marcel, “Outline of a Phenomenology of Having,” in his *Being and Having* (London: Collins, 1949), 168–89.

¹⁵ See G. Marcel, *Mystery of Being, Vol 1: Reflection and Mystery* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950), 242–70.

mystery. A broken timepiece is a problem, but a dying friend is a mystery. Making budget decisions mysterious is simply silly, but treating a marriage like a problem is tragic. Weeping over a stolen automobile shows confusion; failure to weep for a dying friend reveals alienation.

My body, furthermore, is not isolated from its physical environment.¹⁶ The world is as much within me as outside me. The microbes, thank goodness, are not simply out there, they are in here, doing their quiet good work. I suck in and expel the world's atmosphere, in the process feeding the green things around me which also in turn feed me. I have, in fact, eaten quite a considerable part of my environment over the past 65 years, and while retaining some of it in storage, have also returned an astounding mountain of body-stuff for the world's cycle of regeneration. As I take, so do I gift, as I eat, so am I eaten, while alive and assuredly when I die.¹⁷ My body is not the exception to the world, it is the rule; it is not separate from the world, it is the world in concentrated form.

Finally, my reflection on my own experience of being and having a body suggests to me that thinking first if not always in terms of my individual body rather than in terms of the social body is also, in its way, a form of alienation. It is obvious that we are born out of the bodies of others, and in fact, bear their bodies within us, just as when we give birth, our bodies are carried forth by our children and their children. Just as we derive from the bodies of others so also are we dependent on other bodies. Not only at birth but also at burial, not only in first but also in second infancy, we are utterly dependent on other bodies, other selves, in all essentials.¹⁸ These moments of entry and departure, however, only accentuate the fundamental dependence of any individual body on the bodies of others throughout human life; indeed, a life cut off from other bodies becomes less and less human. When John Donne declared that "no man is an island, entire of itself,"¹⁹ he spoke the soberest truth.

¹⁶ The intersection of theology and ecology is currently a busy one; see, among many offerings, K.S. Van Houtan, *Diversity and Dominion: Dialogues in Ecology, Ethics, and Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010); T.J. Oord, *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation: Wesleyan Forays in Science and Theology of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009); my own small contribution, see L.T. Johnson, "Caring for the Earth: Why Environmentalism Needs Theology," *Commonweal* 132 (2005): 16–20.

¹⁷ A point made brilliantly by Jim Crace, *Being Dead* (New York: Picador Press, 1999).

¹⁸ See especially T.P. Jackson, "A House Divided Again: 'Sanctity' vs. 'Dignity' in the Induced Death Debate," in *In Defense of Human Dignity* (ed. R. Kraynak and G. Tinder; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 139–63.

¹⁹ John Donne, *Meditation 17*.

Such reflection on the lived experience of somatic existence does not bring us all the way to Paul's perceptions, but it serves to call into question the default sense of the body peddled by radical individualism and late-capitalist commodification. When we recognize how, even when thinking the empirical body, we can speak of being as well as having body, and can perceive that the membrane distinguishing the human body from the world is permeable with traffic moving both ways, and can acknowledge the ways in which the body of every individual person is willy-nilly implicated in the bodies of others, we are better able to consider the statements that Paul makes as he seeks to sort out the complexities of somatic existence in light of the resurrection and the empowerment of the Corinthian community through the Holy Spirit.

It is precisely in the turn to language about πνεῦμα and σῶμα that we encounter the greatest difference between Paul's assumptions and our own. Whereas the two terms seldom touch for us,²⁰ for Paul they are always mutually implicated. Paul would have agreed with his contemporary James that "the body without a spirit is dead" (James 2:26), but he also shared the conviction of the entire prophetic tradition that spirit without a body is powerless and inarticulate. Spirit, even God's Holy Spirit, requires a body for its self-expression. We do not find in 1 Corinthians any trace of a dualism that privileges the spirit and seeks its release from the body; instead, we find spirit and body in mutual dependence. What makes the language in 1 Corinthians so complex, however, is that Paul does not have in mind only the animate (natural) body that he calls ψυχικός, but the consequences for human bodies of being animated by God's πνεῦμα. Thus, Paul refers to God's breathing into the clay so that the first Adam became a living being, ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, but his concern throughout the letter is the social implications of Christ becoming "life-giving Spirit" (πνεῦμα ζωοποιόν, 15:45).

The Assembly as the Σῶμα Χριστοῦ

Unlike our contemporary focus, Paul's attention is given primarily to the social rather than the individual body. As with his language of the πνεῦμα, he can speak of the individual's σῶμα in terms of self-disposition. Thus, husband and wife each have ἐξουσία over the body of the other in their

²⁰ Our usage retains a vestigial element of the ancient strong conviction when we refer only to a living ("animate") human's "body" and to a dead human's "corpse."

sexual relationship (7:4) and the unmarried woman whose concern is for the things of the Lord is holy in “body and spirit” (7: 34). Paul pummels and enslaves his own body to keep himself worthy of proclaiming to others (9:27). He proposes the possibility of “handing over” his own body (13:3). But in the majority of instances, σῶμα has a collective sense.

The body is one of three metaphors that Paul uses for the Corinthian assembly as such: in 3:6–9, he tells them that they are God’s field (γεώργιον), which Paul has planted and which Apollos has watered, but to which God gives growth. They are also God’s building (οἰκοδομή), whose foundation of Jesus Christ Paul, as a wise builder, has established, and on that foundation others can build (3:9–15). And because the Holy Spirit dwells in/among them (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν), they are in fact God’s temple sanctuary (ναός, 3:16–17). Paul’s favorite metaphor for the assembly, however, is that it is the Messiah’s body, which he develops fully in chapter 12, and exploits also in chapters 6 and 10. That this is Paul’s favorite community metaphor is indicated by his use of it throughout 1 Corinthians, and with some frequency elsewhere in his letters.²¹ The metaphor is not a passing figure that Paul seizes on to make a single point, but rather represents a fixed conviction concerning the character of the assembly. The fact that Paul uses it so widely and in such differing contexts, plus the fact that he develops it so extensively in 1 Corinthians, raises the question whether σῶμα Χριστοῦ is only a metaphor, or is it, for Paul, perhaps something more?

We are able to ask this question more responsibly in 1 Corinthians 12 because, as most commentators observe, the use of “body” as a metaphor for the city-state was common among ancient rhetoricians.²² Especially when the topic was one of political harmony addressed to city-states in conditions of discord and strife, the metaphor was frequently and usefully deployed. Members of a society should think of themselves as analogous to a human body, all of whose parts work together peacefully for the common good. It would be foolish to deny that Paul’s language about the body in 1 Corinthians 12 bears precisely the same sort of force and points in the same direction. This is a community, after all, whose fleshly, all-too-human condition is described in terms of rivalry and competition and

²¹ See Rom 12:1:4–5; Eph 4:4–16; 5:30; Col 1:18, 24; 3:15.

²² See M.M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 157–64; also, D. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 38–46.

strife and schism (3:1–4), and it is incontestable that Paul seeks among them harmony and cooperation rather than division (1:10). Paul's emphasis in chapter 12:14–26 on unity within diversity, and on the mutually useful functions of the parts of the body, make the political point in a fairly conventional fashion.

Several aspects of Paul's discussion, however, suggest that something more than a political metaphor is at work.²³ We note at once that as he discusses the mutual functions of the members, he twice states that it is God who has placed the members as they are and has arranged the social body the way it is (12:18, 24). While an appeal to divine order would not in the least be out of place in a Greco-Roman discourse on harmony,²⁴ there is a directness and concreteness to Paul's statements that is exceptional. When we look at how Paul sets up this discussion, moreover, we see that he has prepared his hearers for God's direct involvement in the social body.

Paul says in 12:3 that no one can declare "Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit." This statement is followed by a series of affirmations concerning the Spirit. In 12:4–7, Paul attributes the diversity of gifts, the diversity of ministries, and the diversity of powerful deeds, respectively to "the same spirit, the same Lord, the same God," concluding that "It is the same God who works τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν ("all things in every one," 12:6), a phrase that provocatively anticipates Paul's later description of the eschatological *telos* as ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν ("God will be all things in all things," 15:28). The specific presence of the Spirit within all the communities activities is repeated several times in the verses that follow: gifts are given "through the spirit" and "according to the spirit" (12:8), "in the same spirit," and "in the one spirit" (12:9). Paul concludes, "all these the same spirit energizes, distributing specific [gifts] as it chooses" (12:10). To summarize: the Holy Spirit not only enables the confession of Jesus as Lord, but the spirit is the power (ἐνέργεια) at work in every activity of the assembly.

When Paul subsequently states in 12:12 that, just as bodies have many members but are nevertheless one body, "so also [is] the Christ,"

²³ While impressed by the wealth of comparative material and etic analysis brought to bear on the question of the body in 1 Corinthians by, respectively D. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 87–103, and J.H. Neyrey, *Paul, In Other Words: A Cultural Reading of his Letters* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 102–46, I find their approach less satisfactory than a more traditional emic appreciation. It is noteworthy that neither study pays sufficient attention to the ways in which πνεῦμα and σῶμα interpenetrate in 1 Corinthians.

²⁴ See, for example, Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 38:9, 11, 18, 20, 51; 39:8; 40:5, 15, 35; 41:10.

he requires us to think in terms other than of simple comparison. The “Christ” in this context cannot be the empirical Jesus who ministered in Palestine some twenty years earlier and then was crucified. It can refer only to the present social body that is the assembly, which Paul daringly terms “the Christ.” Paul means, I think, that the Corinthian assembly *is*, in a very real, that is, in an ontological and not merely moral sense, a bodily expression of the risen Jesus who has become life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:45). Certainly, it is not yet the *σῶμα πνευματικόν* of the eschatological resurrection. But it is definitely an anticipation of that spiritual body. If Paul were asked, “Where is the body of the resurrected Jesus now,” he has given his response in 1 Corinthians 12: “The body of the resurrected Christ” is this assembly—together with all those who call on the name of the Lord in every place, theirs and ours” (1:2).

Such, I think, is the conclusion to be drawn from Paul’s statement in 12:13, “For in one spirit we have all been baptized (*ἐβαπτίσθημεν*) into one body—whether Jew or Hellene, whether slave or free—and we have all been given to drink (*ἐποτίσθημεν*) one spirit.”²⁵ The Spirit stands instrumentally at the beginning and end of this statement. The ritual of baptism into the community is also, by means of the Spirit, a baptism “into the body” that is Christ; such baptism is, says Paul, also a matter of this body “drinking the one Spirit.” In light of Paul’s later declaration in 15:45 that the eschatological Adam became “life-giving spirit,” as well as Paul’s alignment of Spirit-Lord-God in 12:4–7, there cannot be any doubt, I think, that Paul regards the Corinthian community as the bodily expression of the resurrected one, living through the Spirit that comes from him. Thus, he concludes in 12:27, “You (pl) are Christ’s body, and individually members [of it].” This is more than metaphor for Paul. Perhaps a better term would be symbol, in the strong sense of a sign that participates in that which it signifies.²⁶

Taking Paul’s language so seriously makes more intelligible two further features of his language concerning the community. In his discussion of eating foods offered to idols in 8:1–13, Paul makes a distinction between a knowledge that puffs up the individual and a love that builds

²⁵ The balanced passive verbs perhaps suggest the ritual actions of initiation into the community: being plunged into water (by others) and being given to drink (by others). Compare the similar constructions in Gal 3:27 (“you were baptized into Christ, you were clothed [*ἐνεδύσασθε*] with Christ”).

²⁶ See J. Splett, “Symbol,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. K. Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 1654–57.

up the other (8:1). When Corinthians convinced of the rightness of their position concerning idols act without consideration for the effect their actions might have on others, they are puffed up but do not build up: “the weak person is destroyed by your knowledge, the brother for whom Christ died” (8:11). Paul here uses a fragment of the Jesus-story to provide a norm for behavior that “builds up,” namely, living (and dying) for the sake of others as Christ did for them.²⁷ In contrast, the one acting obliviously to the effect on others does not build up but tears down. But this is not a mere matter of imitation (= act toward others as Christ acted for them); it is more a matter of identification; Paul adds, “Thus, by sinning against the brothers and by pummeling their conscience while it is weak,²⁸ you are sinning against Christ (εἰς Χριστὸν ἀμαρτάνετε, 8:12). The phrase “sinning against Christ” assumes the strongest sort of connection between each member of the community (or the community as a whole) and the resurrected Lord.²⁹

The second aspect of Paul’s language that gains greater intelligibility in light of his understanding of the church as the body of Christ is his striking use of the phrase “mind of Christ” (νόος Χριστοῦ) in 1 Cor 2:16. The phrase occurs at the conclusion of Paul’s discussion of the wisdom that has been given to the Corinthians through the Holy Spirit. They have received, he says, not the spirit from the world but the spirit that is from God, so that “we might know the gifts that have been given to us by God” (2:12). Rather than the spirit as the power of extraordinary performance (as in tongues, healing, and prophecy), Paul here stresses the Spirit as means of elevating and shaping human thinking. The context of this passage makes it clear that the most important spirit-guided perception is the recognition that the crucifixion of Jesus has reversed ordinary human status markers. The Cross that appears to the world as weak and foolish is God’s strength and

²⁷ Here, the reference to the Jesus-story is an allusion; in 11:24 (“this is my body for you”) it takes the form of a direct citation of the words of Jesus. The implication in both instances is the same: the pattern of Jesus’ self-donation is to be the pattern of their own. For Paul’s subtle use of the Jesus-story, see especially R.B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: the Narrative Substructure of Gal 3:1–4:11* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

²⁸ For the translation of τύποντες, see A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); 654–55.

²⁹ It is clearly impossible for a member of the Corinthian assembly to “sin against” the human Jesus; commentators are correct to see in this passage an assumption concerning the identification of Christ and the church implied by Acts 9:5, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Something more than a moral “identifying with the weak” is meant here. See A. Wikenhauser, *Pauline Mysticism: Christ in the Mystical Teaching of Saint Paul* (Freiburg: Herder, 1960).

God's wisdom (1:18–31). Paul wants them to measure themselves by this paradoxical, cruciform, norm. Thus, they also were among the weak and foolish, among the things that are not, which God has brought into being (1:26–29). But having “the mind of Christ” pushes the perception given by the Spirit even more. As Paul's use of the Jesus-story in 8:11 (“the brother for whom Christ died”) makes clear, the Spirit is to lead the community to perceive and act in imitation of Jesus. Having “the mind of Christ” enables the members of the body to act in harmony, to seek the good of the whole rather than the good of the individual alone, to build up the body of Christ through love. If the Corinthian community is for Paul the body of Christ, then the mind that guides this body's behavior should be Christ's own mind.³⁰ Growing progressively into such maturity through mutual love and service is the sort of moral activity that transforms Christians according to the image of Christ in anticipation of full participation in God's life that is future resurrection.

Sexual Involvement

The two behavioral issues most preoccupying Paul's readers in Corinth involve sex and food. Paul's perception of the community as the body of the messiah, enlivened and empowered by the Holy Spirit, profoundly affects his treatment of each subject. Almost all of 1 Corinthians 5–7 deals in one way or another with sexuality.³¹ I will comment briefly on Paul's discussion of marriage in 7:1–40 and on his instruction for excommunication in 5:1–12, before concentrating on his puzzling statements in 6:12–20.

Readers familiar only with the stereotype of Paul as misogynistic and against sex are surprised to discover not only the most liberated ancient discussion of sexuality (Paul addresses both genders equally in terms of power, and refuses to define females in terms of marriage and progeny),³²

³⁰ On this, see L.T. Johnson, “Transformation of the Mind and Moral Discernment in Paul,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. J.T. Fitzgerald (NovTSupp 110; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 215–36.

³¹ Helpful guidance is found in W. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Cor 7* (SNTSMS 83; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); O.L. Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul* (SBLDS 80; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); and, most recently, R. Von Thaden, *The Wisdom of Fleeing Porneia: Conceptual Blending in 1 Corinthians 6:12–7:7* (Emory University PhD Dissertation, 2007).

³² In sharp contrast to a standard treatment of *oikonomia* (such as Xenophon's), Paul does not address men as householders with young wives whom they must instruct, but begins his discussion in 7:2–3 by addressing both female (*gynē*) and male (*aner*) with

but also one of the most robust and positive treatments of sexual activity anywhere.³³ Let us grant that Paul prefers celibacy in the present circumstances as a way of dedicating oneself to the Lord without anxiety (7:1, 7, 32–34); let us grant as well that Paul regards marriage as a means of avoiding sexual immorality (πορνεία) and disordered passion (7:2, 9). But when Paul speaks of sexual activity within the covenant relationship of marriage, he is entirely positive, and his discussion reveals, indirectly, some of his basic assumptions about spirit and body.

Husbands and wives have authority (ἐξουσία) over each other's bodies—that is, each can expect the other to engage sexually. They are to “give what is owed” (τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω, 7:3) to each other. Indeed, so seriously does Paul take this that he forbids withdrawing from sexual activity except by mutual consent, and then only for a time, and then only in order to pray. After a short time, they are to “come together again” (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ, 7:5). More prolonged sexual abstinence in marriage allows Satan to test the couple through their lack of self-control (ἀκρασία, 7:5). Even more striking is Paul's statement concerning the spiritual effect of married sex. He considers that, although such is not always the case (7:16), it is possible that an unbelieving man in a mixed marriage is “made holy” (ἡγιασται) through the (believing) woman and the unbelieving woman is “made holy” through the (believing) man. He is convinced of this, it seems, from the conviction that the children of such a relationship are also made holy (ἅγια, 7:14). His language almost suggests that holiness is a kind of infection that can be sexually transmitted.³⁴ I pause over this point because it shows us how Paul thinks of body not in mechanical but in relational terms, so that the body sexually engaged with another has spiritual implications.³⁵

regard to their reciprocal sexual rights and responsibilities, and continues with the same reciprocity through 7:10–16. Similarly, Paul's discussion of the unmarried in 7:32–40 makes it clear that the value of women is not totally defined by their role in the household. In this respect, Paul is more “liberated” than the closest parallel in Greco-Roman philosophy; see R.B. Ward, “Paul and Musonius on Marriage” NTS 36 (1990) 281–89.

³³ A failure to seriously engage Paul is a notable deficiency in M. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* 3 volumes (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); for a creative effort at engaging Paul and Foucault, see V. Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self: Thinking with Paul and Michel Foucault* (Emory University PhD Dissertation, 2010).

³⁴ Both Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words*, and Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, are helpful in providing anthropological perspectives on such language.

³⁵ Note in 7:34, that Paul states “being holy both in body and spirit (καὶ τῷ σώματι καὶ τῷ πνεύματι)” as the goal.

This same potentially “infecting” power of sexual activity—now opposite the “holiness” that is communicated through sex within marriage—lies behind Paul’s command to the Corinthians in 5:1–12 that they excommunicate a member whose *πορνεία* (sexual immorality) is grotesquely incompatible with a holy community. Paul shows himself concerned more with the integrity of the body of the church, than the body of the man living in (at least legal) incest (5:1).³⁶ He draws the comparison to yeast that infects a whole lump of dough—so can such immoral sexual activity infect the common body of the church (5:6). Paul expects the members to gather together and “expel from your midst the one who has acted this way” (5:2). They are not to “mingle” (*συναναμίγυσθαι*) or to “eat with” (*συνεσθίειν*) such a one (5:11).³⁷

Two aspects of this intriguing passage are of special interest to our topic. The first is the way Paul speaks of the man being handed over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord” (5:5). The image of Satan as an inimical power on the fringes of the community is found elsewhere in Paul,³⁸ and anticipates the statement we have just seen in Paul’s discussion of marriage (7:5). That the individual man’s fleshly (that is, merely human) body is affected by such excommunication is clear.³⁹ But whose *πνεῦμα* is being saved? Is it his, or is it the Holy Spirit of the community? If we avoid harmonizing this passage with the more clearly pedagogical intention expressed by the parallel in 1 Timothy 1:20, excommunication in the 1 Corinthians passage seems entirely for the purpose of protecting the holiness of the corporate body of the church.⁴⁰

³⁶ See the discussion with ancient references in Thistleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 382–88; also G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 194–228.

³⁷ The command here is directly contrary to the advice in 7:5, where temporary separation is to be followed by being *ἐπι τὸ αὐτὸ*; in both cases, however, the premise is the same: somatic contact bears pneumatic implications.

³⁸ See 2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 2:9; 1 Tim 1:20, 5:15.

³⁹ But not without ambiguity: The noun *ἄλθερος* (“destruction”) is clear enough (see 1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 1:9; 1 Tim 6:9); but given the semantic range of *σάρξ* in Paul’s correspondence, the destruction could be to the “fleshly body” itself, or to the “fleshly dispositions” leading to immorality (compare Gal 5:13, 16–17, 19); see A.C. Thiselton, “The Meaning of *Sarx* in 1 Cor 5:5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of Logical and Semantic Factors,” *SJT* 26 (1973) 204–28.

⁴⁰ See L.T. Johnson, “The Social Dimensions of *sōteria* in Luke-Acts and Paul,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, ed. E.H. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 520–36. Paul’s express wish in 1:7–9 is that the community be prepared for the day of the Lord.

The second aspect is the way Paul describes the communal act of expulsion. Paul is absent in body, he says, but is present in spirit, and has already made his judgment on the case (5:3). Now, the entire assembly is to come together in the name of the Lord (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ), with Paul's and their spirit gathered together (συναχθέντων ὑμῶν καὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ πνεύματος) with the power of the Lord Jesus (σὺν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, 5:4). The assembly is not merely a gathering of individuals that votes on membership. It is the body of Christ that acts in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the way Paul expresses the corporate action of the community in the act of excommunication, we detect the premises for his later explicit designation of the church as the σῶμα Χριστοῦ.

The final passage concerning sexual activity is both the most important for appreciating Paul's extraordinarily strong view of the body as redefined by the resurrection of Christ, and, alas, also the most difficult. It is difficult above all because Paul's language about the body shifts between the singular and the plural. In 6:12–14 he speaks of the individual bodies of the Corinthians. He begins by citing (or crafting) the slogan “food for the belly, the belly for food,” whose implication is that sex is a closed physical transaction with no further meaning.⁴¹ Paul clearly rejects this position, not only for sex, but as we shall see in a moment, for food as well. He redirects the Corinthian's perception by insisting that the σῶμα is not for sexual immorality, but “for the Lord,” and, reciprocally, “the Lord is for the body” (6:13). The singular term “body” (σῶμα) here still seems to mean the individual, but stated without qualification, it points the way toward the collective meaning.

What does Paul mean by stating that the body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body? He asserts the impact of the resurrection on the understanding of the human body: “The Lord both raised the Lord and will raise us by his power” (6:14). At the very least, Paul here establishes the connection between the (past) raising of Jesus and the (future) resurrection of believers. The implications Paul draws from his statement, however, indicate that, for him, the reality of the resurrection is not merely either past or future; it is above all a present reality. The power of the Lord is already present and active in the somatic existence of the all-too-

⁴¹ Determining whether Paul is citing slogans of the Corinthian assembly (perhaps deriving ultimately from his own preaching) or is setting up straw-positions of fictive interlocutors, is difficult; among responsible discussions, see J.C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 2nd edition (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), and M.M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 65–99.

empirical Corinthians to whom Paul writes. He therefore reminds them of this reality of which they should have been aware: “do you not know that your bodies (both terms plural, τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν) are members (τὰ μέλη) of Christ?” (6:15).⁴² The moral inconsistency of having sex with a prostitute—Paul uses the expression μὴ γένοιτο⁴³—derives from the fact that believers’ individual bodies also form the body of the resurrected one: “Shall I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?”⁴⁴

As in chapter 7, Paul’s understanding of sexual intimacy bears ontological implications; Paul implicitly rebukes the Corinthians (οὐκ οἶδατε, “do you not know”) for their failure to recognize the meaning of Genesis 2:24, which he quotes, “the two shall become one flesh,”⁴⁵ when he affirms, “the one who clings to a prostitute becomes one body [with her]” (6:16). Using the same participle (κολλώμενος), he adds, “but the one who clings to the Lord is one spirit (πνεῦμα) with him” (6:17). Everything we have seen in the discussion of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we find also in this discussion of sexuality: the individual members are, because of the resurrection of Jesus, intimately joined to his Spirit, and by that means also, become the bodily expression of the life-giving spirit in the world. Their actions involve not simply their own private bodies and spirits; they implicate the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Once more in 6:19, Paul reminds them of what they already should know: their (plural) body (singular) is the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit which they (plural) have from God that is “among/within them” (plural).⁴⁶ And they do not, therefore, belong to themselves. They have been bought for a price, and should therefore glorify God in their (plural) body

⁴² Paul concentrates his use of the implied rebuke, οὐκ οἶδατε (“do you not know”), in this discussion of sexual behavior (5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19). The statement that they are members of Christ’s body clearly anticipates 12:27.

⁴³ See A.J. Malherbe, “*me genoito* in the Diatribe and Paul,” in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 25–34.

⁴⁴ “The members” (τὰ μέλη) respectively “of Christ” (τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and “of a prostitute” (πόρνης) might refer to the bodily parts of the individual Christian engaged in sex with a prostitute—the body parts that belong to Christ should not be made the property of a prostitute—as in Rom 6:13, 19; 7:5, 23), or might refer to the community members who are μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ who are entangled sexually with the body parts of prostitutes.

⁴⁵ In 1 Cor 15:45, Paul also cites the second chapter of Genesis when he refers to the first Adam becoming “a living being” (εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, Gen 2:7), in contrast to the eschatological Adam who is σώμα πνευματικόν. The use of Genesis 2 in the present passage testifies to the in-between state of the Corinthian bodies: they are possessed by the spirit, but are still empirically involved, and not yet at the stage of being “spiritual bodies.”

⁴⁶ ὁ σώμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐστὶν οὗ ἔχετε ἀπὸ θεοῦ (6:19).

(singular, 6:20).⁴⁷ By “glorifying God,” Paul means that they must recognize and live by the recognition that God is indeed present among them, both individually and corporately.⁴⁸ Only such a strong ontological sense of the unity between the spirit of the resurrected one and the community can make intelligible Paul’s command and explanation in 6:18. Flee sexual immorality, he tells them. This is the straightforward moral implication of what he has been telling them. But his explanation appears extremely odd.

Paul declares that every sin a person commits is outside the body (ἐκτός τοῦ σώματος), but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body (εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἀμαρτάνει). But surely this is wrong if we understand things in a common-sense fashion. Many sins are “inside the body” and affect one’s “own body” with at least the same severity as does fornication. Drunkenness has obvious physical consequences; so do rage, gluttony, and sloth. If we think of body simply in terms of the individual, Paul is certainly mistaken. But perhaps by “his own body” (τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα), Paul does not mean the individual but the corporate body, the body, that is, of Christ. We remember his statement concerning making another stumble, “by sinning against your brother for whom Christ died, you have sinned against Christ” (8:12). By implicating body and spirit sexually with the body and spirit of a prostitute, Paul thinks, harm is done to the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit in a distinctive fashion. We might still debate the proposition’s truth or falsity. But it makes sense at least if Paul’s intended meaning for “one’s own—proper—body” is, in fact, the Body of Christ.

The Implications of Meals

When we turn to the way Paul connects the Corinthian meals with the resurrection—and thereby further complicates the social meanings of body—we must acknowledge from the start that some of Paul’s language is strange to us not because of his distinctive theological perspective but because he shares ancient cultural convictions concerning meals that are no longer our own. In no other context is the default enlightenment

⁴⁷ ἡγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς· δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν (6:20).

⁴⁸ The meaning of δοξάζειν here is that found in Rom 1:21: to “glorify God” is to recognize and respond to the claims of God; see L.T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 32–36.

understanding of the body—especially in first-world countries—revealed than with respect to eating food. Americans mostly eat apart rather than together; food is fast and take-out and devoured in the car, or if at home, before the television.⁴⁹ We obsess about food, but mostly in terms of the technology of the body: its safety in processing, its fat and sodium content, its nutrients, how it will make us slimmer or fatter. Food is certainly not a mystery, it is a problem. As Robert Farrar Capon has astutely observed, contemporary Americans neither fast nor feast—both profoundly religious responses to reality—we diet.⁵⁰ Dieting is the supreme expression of body technology, and the triumphal expression of somatic individualism.

In contrast, ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish culture agreed with most cultures in most times and places in regarding meals as the most profound expression of human communion. Meals were magical because they both made and expressed the one social body that consisted in many individual members.⁵¹ Meals, indeed, enabled those not joined by biological or ethnic ties to establish *κοινωνία*. The ancient conviction that “friendship is fellowship” (*φιλία κοινωνία*) meant the most profound sort of sharing at both the physical and mental levels: physical through the sharing of possessions (*τοῖς φίλοις πάντα κοινά*), and mental through the sharing of ideas and ideals (friends are *μία ψυχή*).⁵² It is not an exaggeration, I think, to state that for Paul’s world, meals were a far more important means of expressing such unity and intimacy than was sexual activity. To eat together signified spiritual agreement, just as spiritual estrangement was expressed by inhospitality, or as we have seen in 1 Cor 5:1–12, excommunication.⁵³ Eating together was serious business, all agreed, because eating expressed and established spiritual bonds. Cultic meals both in Judaism and in Greco-Roman religion extended this understanding by regarding meals partaken in honor of the god—and in which the god partakes through sacrificial offering—as establishing and celebrating a specific unity (vertically) between the god and worshippers and (horizontally)

⁴⁹ For a snapshot, see C. Lambert, “The Way We Eat Now,” in *Harvard Magazine* 106.5 (July–August, 2004): 50–58, 98–99.

⁵⁰ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

⁵¹ See L.T. Johnson, “Meals Are Where the Magic Is,” in *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 137–79.

⁵² For the *topos* on friendship, see G. Staehlin, “φίλος, φίλη, φιλία” *TDNT*, 9 (1974), 146–57; G. Bohnenblust, *Beitraege zum Topos Peri Philias* (Berlin: Universitaets-Buchdruckerei von Gustav Shade, 1905).

⁵³ Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity*, 163–79.

among the worshippers of the god.⁵⁴ Our interest, then, is how Paul's convictions concerning the presence of the resurrected Christ in the church affects such shared cultural norms.

After delicately examining the issues of conscience and community concern in his discussion of food offered to idols—he agrees with the strong that idols are not real, since “for us” there is one God and one Lord, but he rebukes the strong for their willingness to exercise their freedom without concern for those less strong in their convictions (1 Cor 8:1–13), and after presenting himself as an apostolic example of relativizing individual rights for the sake of others (9:1–27)—Paul warns his readers in 10:14–22 against participation in meals at idol shrines. Idols may not be real, but idolatry is real, and the act of eating in the presence of idols, just as sexual activity with a prostitute, affects the social body that is the church. Paul considers things offered to idols as sacrifices to demons, and eating at the table of idols as a fellowship (κοινωνία) with demons (10:20–21). He relies here on the common view of Jews, found already in the Septuagint's translation of Psalm 95:5, “all the gods of the nations are demons.” Participation in a common meal signifies for Paul participation in the powers present at the meal. He reminds his readers that this is the premise of Jewish sacrifice as well: “those who eat the sacrifices are sharers (κοινωνοί) in the altar” (10:18).

The most powerful backing for Paul's warning, however, comes from his readers' experience of their own common meals, which include the blessing of a cup and the breaking of a loaf of bread. Paul asks them rhetorically, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a κοινωνία (“participation”) in the blood of the Messiah; the bread that we break, is it not a κοινωνία in the body of the Messiah?” (10:16). He wants them to answer resoundingly, “Of course they are!” The physical sharing of the cultic meal establishes and expresses the fullest sort of fellowship between worshippers and the one worshipped, and Paul assumes that his readers understand the matter in precisely the way he does. I need not point out, I hope, that such “fellowship” supposes the presence and power of the resurrected one among them—a presupposition running all through this letter. Paul then adds a statement that fills out the ancient understanding of fellowship: those who share in the meal are also “one body”; “all those of us who

⁵⁴ See J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 116–43.

partake of the same loaf, are one bread, one body" (10:17). Just as Paul will speak in chapter twelve of the ritual of baptism as a drinking of the one spirit that makes them the body of the messiah, so does he here understand the cultic meal in the same highly realistic terms, as an eating of a loaf that makes them partakers of the body of Christ and one body.

In 11:17–34, Paul returns to the common meals of the Corinthians by way of rebuke, for their “coming together” is not for the better but for the worse (11:17). There are parties formed among them when they “gather together” (11:18–19); in fact, when they “gather together” they do not really celebrate “the Lord’s banquet” (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον), that is, a meal of fellowship with the resurrected Lord as the body of Christ (11:20). Instead, they falsify the act of gathering into a body, because their party spirit is revealed by each one eating “his own meal,” with the result that some become drunken with excess, while others go hungry (11:21). They bring into the cultic meal the individualism and competition that belongs in the world not in the body of Christ. As a result, they show contempt for God’s assembly and they shame the poor (11:22). We cannot be certain precisely what the Corinthians are doing—it is reasonable to suppose, as some studies have suggested, that the practices common to patronage may be at play.⁵⁵ More important is Paul’s perception that the cultivation of the individual interest to the shaming of the poor and weak offends in a fundamental way the meaning of living according to the mind of Christ, and building the messiah’s body. The Corinthians may gather at a meal as a body but their behavior fragments and weakens that body.

Paul understands the effect of this weakening quite literally. Because some eat and drink “without discerning the body” they eat and drink judgment (κρίμα) to themselves (11:29, 34),⁵⁶ and their condemnation is expressed by some of them “being weak, and without health, and not a few dying” (11:30). In the case of the excommunicated man, the immoral person was turned over to the zone of danger and destruction that Paul designates as Satan, for the destruction of the flesh and for the saving of the spirit (1 Cor 5:5). When the Lord’s banquet is corrupted by selfishness and competition, the damage to the body of Christ is expressed internally by the mortal weakness and even death of the members of that body. Paul connects such judgment with “not discerning the body” (μὴ διακρίνων τὸ

⁵⁵ See G. Theissen, “Social Integration and Sacramental Activity: An Analysis of 1 Cor 11:17–34,” in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 145–74.

⁵⁶ For κρίμα in the sense of condemnation, see Rom 2:2–3; 3:8; 5:16; 13:2; 1 Tim 3:6; 5:12.

σῶμα, 11:29), and with “eating the bread and drinking the cup unworthily (ἀνάξιος, 11:27).”

These statements follow immediately upon, and logically refer to, Paul’s citation of the words that the Lord Jesus spoke “on the night he was handed over,” words that Paul received from the Lord—we know not how—and handed on to the Corinthians as the inner meaning of the meal they called the Lord’s Banquet (11:23–25). Many things can be said about these words, which represent one of the clearest cases of Paul handing on specific Jesus traditions. Given the interest of the present essay, I focus on three. First, the “body which is for you” and the “covenant in my blood” clearly interpret the bread and wine of Jesus’ final meal with his disciples in terms of Jesus’ death for others. Second, this is the part of the Jesus story that is most intimately associated with their celebration of the *κυριακὸν δεῖπνον*—in his remembrance (*ἀνάμνησις*), that is, in the form of ritual memory that makes actual in the present the effect of what was done in the past.⁵⁷ The words spoken at the ritual meal communicate and remind the Corinthians *in nuce* of “the mind of Christ” (2:16) that is to guide their mutual behavior. Third, it is striking that Paul quotes Jesus as telling them not to “say this,” but rather “do this (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, 11:24).” The eating and drinking in the assembly in remembrance of Jesus is to enact the meaning of his death for others. The point is made clear when Paul adds that whenever they eat this bread and drink this cup they proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (11:26).

Paul means, not the fact of Jesus’ death, as in a historical report, but the meaning of that death, as an expression of the mind of Christ. Thus, the “body given for you” must remind us, and it should have the Corinthians, of “the brother for whom Christ died” (8:11), just as their shaming the poor should have reminded them that “when you sin against your brother you sin against Christ (8:12). So it is that when they eat and drink unworthily—by not discerning the body of Christ that is the church—they are “liable for the body and blood of the Lord” (11:27).

Here is the perfect example of how Paul perceives the ontological transformation of the Corinthian body through the power of the Holy Spirit as demanding moral transformation as well. The mind of Christ (2:16) requires of them that they dispose of their individual bodies in service to each other for the common good (*πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον*, 12:7), for the building up of the common body through love (8:1; 13:1–13). Rather than threaten

⁵⁷ See N.A. Dahl, “*Anamnesis: Memory and Commemoration in Early Christianity*,” in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1976), 11–29.

the health of Christ's body through a competitive eating that mirrors the "spirit of the world," the "spirit they have received from God" (2:12), should lead them, "when they come together to eat," to "wait upon one another" (11:33) as Christ has shown them how to do through the gift of his body for them (11:24).

Conclusions

I offer a series of short conclusions in summary of what 1 Corinthians says about *πνεῦμα* and *σῶμα*.

1. Paul's understanding of the human body is complex: it is both the self and what the self can dispose in relationships with others. Sexual activities and eating meals establish and express powerful spiritual realities.
2. Paul's default understanding of the body is not the individual but the community; specifically, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit given by the exalted Lord Jesus, he perceives the community to be the body of the resurrected Christ in the world.
3. When Paul, speaking of baptism, says that believers have been given to drink of the one spirit, and when, speaking of the Lord's Banquet, he declares that those who have eaten the one loaf are one body, his language pushes beyond metaphor to symbolism in the proper sense.
4. Because of the resurrection of Jesus and his exaltation as Lord, the primary *πνεῦμα* both of the individual and the community is the Lord's, and the primary loyalty must be to the Lord.
5. Paul understands both sin and holiness to have an infectious character because of the psychosomatic complex that is the individual and social body. Sexual immorality threatens the holiness of the church; covenantal sexual love makes partners and children holy. Eating with demons weakens and sickens the church; eating at the table of the Lord saves and makes holy.
6. In contrast to the forms of individualism and competition that characterize the spirit of the world, Paul demands that the spirit from God find expression in Christ's body through a pattern of moral behavior that is directed by and conforms to "the mind of Christ:" the spirit works for the common good, the members serve each other and build each other up according to the pattern of the one who gave [his] body for them.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

PAUL'S ECCLESIOLOGY

Addressing Paul's understanding of the church (ἐκκλησία) means raising other difficult questions that a brief essay cannot adequately answer. The most critical question concerns which of the letters ascribed to Paul should be considered. Ephesians and 1 Timothy, for example, provide fuller information on aspects of the church than do some undisputed letters. But they are commonly regarded as pseudonymous. Should they be excluded altogether, read as a faithful continuation of themes in the authentic letters, or adjudged betrayals of the authentic Paul's spirit? In order to maintain conversation with the dominant scholarly position, this essay will discuss the evidence of the undisputed letters before that in Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Letters, even though there are strong reasons for accepting all thirteen letters attributed to Paul as authored by him through a complex process of composition. The present analysis does, however, emphasize thematic links between the disputed and undisputed letters, in order to respect the genuine lines of continuity among them and the marked diversity within even the collection of undisputed letters.

Another procedural question concerns consistency and variation among the expressions of Paul's thought. Which images and understandings are of fundamental character, and which are only brought to the surface by the peculiar circumstances that Paul faces in a specific community? Is it accurate, for example, to call Paul's basic outlook 'charismatic' if he deals extensively with the spiritual gifts in only one letter (1 Cor 12–14)—cautiously—and briefly in two others (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Thess 5:19–21)? Is Paul's commitment to an egalitarian membership (Gal 3:28) absolute, or a function of his concern about competitiveness? This question reminds us of the occasional character of the Pauline correspondence. By no means are his letters simply spontaneous outpourings of the moment; recent analysis has confirmed how pervasively Paul used the conventions of ancient rhetoric in his letters. They are, however, genuine letters that respond to situations—sometimes critical—in Paul's own ministry or in the life of his communities. We never find Paul's thought on any subject laid out systematically, therefore, but only as directed to a specific occasion.

Finally, it is difficult to assess the impact of social realities on Paul's statements concerning the ἐκκλησία. The basic structure of the Greco-Roman club or society, already substantially appropriated by the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue, was immediately available for Paul's congregations as he worked in the diaspora. And the fact that his churches met in the οἶκος (home) of leading members (e.g. Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2) had a number of implications, supplying a range of metaphors, a model of leadership functions as well as a source of leaders, as well as a source of tension in deciding the appropriate social roles for women and men in the assembly. This short essay cannot take up these disputed questions, but can remind the careful reader to assess the following summation, which is necessarily general, in light of the complex and diverse witness of the letters themselves.

Paul's Ecclesial Focus

The main point on the topic of Paul's ecclesiology can, nevertheless, be stated clearly and emphatically: the central concern in Paul's letters is the stability and integrity of his churches. He was the founder of communities (1 Cor 4:15; Gal 4:13; 1 Thess 1:5), and expended his energies on their behalf. He lists his "daily care for the churches" in climactic position in his list of tribulations (2 Cor 11:28). When absent from his churches, Paul sought to visit them (e.g. 1 Cor 4:18; 1 Thess 2:17–18). When he was not able to visit, he stayed in contact through the sending of his delegates (e.g. Phil 2:19; 1 Thess 3:2) and the writing of letters. It is significant that all but one of Paul's letters are to be read in churches. The only truly private letter is 2 Timothy. Although addressed to an individual, Philemon includes members of the local church in its greetings (Phlm 3); 1 Timothy and Titus, as *mandata principis* ('commandments of the ruler') letters, have a semi-public character. Paul's primary concern in his letters, furthermore, is not the individual but the community as such. He appeals to all the members of the church as his readers, and in the letters to his delegates, his focus is on their administration of a local community in Paul's absence. Paul characteristically addresses his readers as "brothers" in the plural (e.g. Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 2:1), and his instruction is directed to their life together, rather than to the good of any individual. As a moral teacher, Paul seeks to shape communities of character. The intrinsic legitimacy of certain practices—such as circumcision, visions, or spiritual gifts—is less his concern than

the possible divisiveness such practices might generate within communities through rivalry and competition. Ecclesiology is as central to Paul as soteriology. Indeed, it can be argued that for him soteriology *is* ecclesiology: all of his language about salvation (σωτηρία) has a communal rather than an individual referent (e.g. Rom 1:16; 8:24; 11:11, 14).

The Pauline church resembled other ἐκκλησίαι such as the many clubs and philosophical schools of the Hellenistic world in its basic structure, its location in the household rather than the cult shrine, and its patterns of mutual assistance. Paul is also capable of presenting himself in terms used by Greco-Roman philosophers (1 Thess 2:4–12; Gal 4:14). The inherently fragile nature of the ἐκκλησία as an intentional community—that is, one dependent on the commitment of its members rather than natural kinship—helps account for Paul's constant concern for “building up” the church by mutual exhortation and example (1 Thess 5:11; 1 Cor 8:1; 14; Eph 4:12, 16). Paul shows himself willing to exclude or even dismiss those in the church whose behavior threatens the stability or integrity of the church (e.g. 1 Cor 5:1–5; 2 Thess 3:14–15; Gal 4:30).

Paul's understanding of his own work and that of the church owes more, however, to the symbolic world of Torah and the heritage of Judaism. He speaks of his own role as an apostle in terms reminiscent of the call and work of God's prophets (Gal 1:15), who were sent out to speak God's word. He refers to the church in terms of God's “call” (καλεῖν, κλησις; Rom 11:29; 1 Cor 1:26; 1 Thess 2:12), giving the noun ἐκκλησία some of the resonance of God's קהל (assembly) in scripture (Deut 23:1–2; Josh 9:2; Ps 21:22). Thus, members of the community have not simply chosen to belong to the church as another club; rather, God has called them out of the world. Even with his Gentile communities, Paul can employ the narratives of Torah concerning the people of Israel as exemplary for the church (1 Cor 10:1–13; 2 Cor 3:7–18; Gal 4:21–31). Similarly, the church is to be characterized, as was ancient Israel, by holiness: “this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3). The boundary between those in the church and outside it is marked by a ritual act (baptism), but is defined by moral behavior rather than ritual observance (Rom 6:1–11). Formerly, members lived in the vice typical of those who are “without God in the world” and given to idolatry (1 Thess 1:9; Rom 1:18–32). But by the ritual washing of baptism (Eph 5:26), they have been cleansed morally, and now are called to holiness of life. This basic distinction is expressed by Paul as the contrast between “the world” and “the saints” (οἱ ἅγιοι, the holy ones; 1 Cor 6:2).

Israel and the Church

In some real sense, therefore, Paul sees his churches as continuous with Israel, considered not simply as an ethnic group but as God's elect people. But three elements in Paul's experience introduced an element of discontinuity with the Jewish heritage as well. The first (in chronological order rather than order of importance) was his own life-experience as one who had persecuted the church precisely out of zeal for Torah (Gal 1:13–14; Phil 3:6). The appeal to Deut 21:23 (“Cursed be everyone who hangs upon a tree”), as a rebuttal to those who would claim Jesus as the righteous one, may well have been Paul's own before his encounter with the risen Jesus (Gal 3:13). His statement, “no one in the Holy Spirit can say, “Cursed be Jesus” (1 Cor 12:3), may well have an autobiographical basis. For Paul the Pharisee, if one held to the Torah as absolute norm, then one could not claim Jesus as Lord. It was the experience of Jesus as the powerfully risen Lord that put Paul in a state of cognitive dissonance. If Jesus is the righteous one, then Torah cannot be an absolute norm: God is capable of acting outside God's own scriptural precedents.

The second element follows the first: Paul perceives the resurrection of Jesus as something more than the validation of a Jewish Messiah in the traditional sense of a restorer of the people. The resurrection of Jesus is more than a historical event like the exodus. It is an eschatological event that begins a new age of humanity. Indeed, the resurrection is best understood as new creation: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, everything is new” (2 Cor 5:17).

The third element is Paul's sense of his own mission and its consequences. If Paul was sent to the Gentiles with the good news of what God had done in Jesus (Gal 1:16), and if Gentiles were to be included in the church without the requirement of circumcision (Gal 5:1–6), then the perception that the resurrection is a new creation and Jesus is a new Adam is confirmed (1 Cor 15:45; Rom 5:12–21). If, as he had done, Paul's fellow Jews reject that proclamation despite their zeal for Torah (Rom 9:30–10:3), and if, as he had done, Paul's fellow Jews even resist and persecute the proclaimers of the good news (2 Thess 2:13–16), then there is some real rupture within God's people that must be reconciled. For Paul, then, the relationship between the church and Israel is not simply a matter of continuity or of discontinuity; it must rather be seen in terms of a dialectic within history.

In Paul's undisputed letters, the various sides of this dialectic are expressed in several ways. An obvious example is the way Paul appeals to the principle that “in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor

female, slave nor free" (Gal 3:28), thereby rendering the three great status markers dividing people (ethnicity, gender, class) nugatory for those in the church ("in Christ"). Paul makes this appeal most emphatically in the context of resisting those within a Gentile community who seek to be circumcised, and who would thereby make the church a community in which Jews and males have higher status than Gentiles and women. Note that at the end of Galatians he puts two statements in tension, saying first, "Neither circumcision counts nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal 6:15), but then also, "peace upon the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). In Galatians, Paul's polemic would lead one to conclude that the "Israel of God" was made up only of Gentile believers, so severe are his characterizations of the law (3:19–22) and of "the present Jerusalem" (4:25). Indeed, in his more negative moments, reacting against the resistance or harassment of fellow Jews, Paul even designates them as "false brethren" (2:4), unbelievers who are perishing, blinded by "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:3–4), unable to understand even their own scripture, and subject to the wrath of God (1 Thess 2:16).

On the other side of the dialectic, Paul confirms the truth of Torah's narratives (Rom 4:1–25) and the words of the prophets (11:8–27; 15:4), recognizing moreover that, unlike Gentile idolaters, the Jews had not only the "words of God" (3:2) but also the knowledge of God's will (2:18). Thus, although he insists that Jew and Gentile stand in fundamentally the same relationship before God both in their sin and in their capacity for faith (3:9, 22), he also acknowledges that the Jew has a considerable advantage because of the knowledge of God's revelation (3:1–4).

The full dialectic is worked out in Romans 9–11, the climax of Paul's most extended reflection on his mission to the Gentiles. Beginning with three unshakable convictions—his solidarity with his fellow Jews (9:1–3), God's election and blessing of the Jews (9:4–5), and the infallibility of God's word (9:6)—Paul engages in a midrashic reflection on scripture impelled by the implications and consequences of the Gentile mission. He interprets the present situation (9:30–10:4) in terms of a longer history of election and rejection (9:6–29), and understands himself with other believing Jews as a faithful remnant (11:1–6). Jews who now stumble over the crucified Messiah will perhaps, out of jealousy for the favor God is now showing to those who formerly were "no people", also in the end be joined to the increasingly Gentile church, and "thus all Israel will be saved" (11:13–32). While passionately committed to the cause of the mission to the Gentiles, Paul remains as unswervingly devoted to his own people and to the fidelity of the God who had elected them.

Mission of the Church

Paul never describes the church's mission in terms of a specific task that it is to perform, but in terms of a character of life that it is to exhibit. It is to "walk worthily of its call" (Eph 4:1). At the most obvious level, this involves a life of righteousness before God (Rom 6:13, 18). Just as it is not physical circumcision but the circumcision of the heart expressed in obedience to the commandments that identifies the genuine Jew (Rom 2:25–29), so within the church, it is not a matter of circumcision or not but of "keeping the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19). Like Jesus and James, Paul identifies the love of neighbor as the perfect summation of God's commandments, because "love does no harm to the neighbor" (Rom 13:8–10). Paul thus emphasizes a communal understanding of righteousness; it is not only a matter of being right with God but also a matter of being in right relationship with others (1 Cor 8:1–3; Rom 14:17). Here it is impossible not to detect the influence of the story of Jesus on Paul's understanding of the church. In 1 Cor 1:18–2:5 Paul challenges the arrogance and rivalry of his Corinthian readers by appealing to the message of the cross, which demonstrates how God's power works through weakness and God's wisdom through foolishness. The cross that reverses human valuations is the paradigm for those in the church who "have the mind of Christ" (2:16): they are to live together, not in competition but in cooperation, not in rivalry but in mutual edification.

Paul shows little or no concern for the perfection (τελειωσις) of individuals, but is constantly concerned that his churches mature as communities of reciprocal gift-giving and fellowship. And the norm is the human Jesus: "Little children, how I am in labor until Christ be formed among you" (Gal 4:19). Paul understands Jesus as the one "who loved us and gave himself for our sins" (Gal 1:4). Jesus' kenotic (self-emptying) and faithful obedience towards God, which implied the rejection of any competitive claim towards God (Phil 2:5–11), and which established the possibility for all to be righteous through sharing his faithful obedience (Rom 5:18–21), is also the perfect expression of Jesus' love for humans, and therefore the model for relations within the church. Those who "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:14) are able to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed [them]" (Rom 15:7). Those who "bear one another's burdens" also "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). Those who are guided by love are willing to give up their rights for the sake of "the brother for whom Christ died" (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11). Paul considers attitudes of envy and rivalry to threaten such relationships (Gal 5:16–21). Envy and rivalry foster

a spirit of competition that seeks the good of the individual at the expense of the community (Gal 5:13). Paul therefore advocates another spirit, that of fellowship or reconciliation (Gal 5:22–24; Phil 2:1–4). In his view, the paradigm of God's saving action as revealed in the faith and love of Jesus demands of the strong in the community not to dominate or assert their will, but in service and humility to place themselves at the disposal of the weak (1 Cor 8:7–13). As he measures the integrity of his own mission by this norm of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:12–21), so does he measure the integrity and maturity of his churches (2 Cor 13:1–11). The task of collecting money from Gentile churches for the impoverished church in Jerusalem, a task to which Paul committed himself in agreement with the Jerusalem leaders (Gal 2:10) and to which he devoted—with varying degrees of success—his best energies (1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9), and for which he was willing to risk even his life (Rom 15:24–32), becomes the body-language of the church's identity as a place of reconciliation.

The Church in Metaphor

Paul's understanding of the church is expressed as much by a series of metaphors as by propositions. Metaphors, especially root metaphors, are much more than rhetorical ornaments; they structure a perception of reality. The metaphors that Paul employs for the church combine elements of a living organism and structure. The simplest metaphors of this kind are agricultural and used only once, perhaps because of Paul's limited ability to handle horticultural terms. The church is a field that Paul has planted and Apollos has watered, but God gives the growth (1 Cor 3:6–9). Similarly, God's people is a domestic olive tree (the Jewish people) that, although pruned, is "holy in root and branches" (Rom 11:16). God has grafted the branch of a wild olive (Gentile believers) onto it, and is capable of grafting the domestic olive on again (Rom 11:16–24)—a clumsy metaphor indeed. These agricultural metaphors were probably derived from the imagery of the prophets.

A much more complex metaphor drawn from Paul's Jewish heritage is that the church is a family. The note of continuity with Judaism is found in the designation of Abraham as "our father" (Rom 4:1) and the affirmation that the Gentiles are the "children of Abraham" through faith and thus part of Israel, indeed more so than those Jews who are not believers (Gal 3:4). Also in continuity with Judaism, Paul calls the creator God "Father" (Gal 1:1; Rom 1:7). But Paul connects God's fatherhood directly

to “our Lord Jesus Christ”, whom he recognizes as “Son of God” (e.g. Rom 1:4; 2 Cor 1:19). Jesus, however, was intended by God to be “the first-born of many children” (Rom 8:29). Believers become children of God through “the spirit of adoption” that they receive at baptism (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). The church is therefore a fictive family in that it is not made up of biologically related people, but because of Paul’s realistic sense of the Holy Spirit as “indwelling” humans (Rom 8:11), the bonds connecting members of the community are not, for him, simply imaginary. When Paul addresses his readers as “brothers” (ἀδελφοί) or refers to co-workers as “brother” (ἀδελφός) or “sister” (ἀδελφή) (Rom 15:14; 16:1; 1 Cor 1:11), this kinship language works powerfully to strengthen community identity and unity. And since in antiquity the relationship between brothers is the supreme paradigm for fellowship (κοινωνία), kinship language also encourages the patterns of equality and reciprocity that are Paul’s moral concern.

A third metaphor is found in only two of the undisputed letters (1 Cor 12:22; Rom 12:4–5) but is attested also in two of the disputed letters (Col 1:18; Eph 4:12). Although it derives from Greco-Roman politics rather than Torah, Paul’s use of it is distinctive. In this metaphor, the church is the body of the Messiah. The metaphor of the body combines the sense of a living organism and an articulate, many-membered structure. Paul’s use emphasizes the legitimacy of many gifts in the community (1 Cor 12) and the need for those gifts to be used for the “building up” (οἰκοδομή) of the community as a whole (1 Cor 14:26). Once more, however, Paul’s perception of the community’s life as one that is literally given by God through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) and shaped by transformation into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:17–18) gives the metaphor both depth and complexity. Since Paul can speak of the resurrected Jesus as “life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45), and can declare, “we have all drunk of the one spirit” (12:13), it appears that the metaphor of the body may better be called a symbol in the strict sense, that is, a sign that participates in that which it signifies. Such participation seems demanded by Paul’s language concerning the implications of eating the body of the Lord (10:16–22), and the ambiguity of reference present in his statement concerning “disregarding the body” at the Lord’s Supper (11:27–30). When, in the same letter, Paul says of the community (using the plural), “and we have the mind of Christ” (2:16), it is legitimate to ask whether Paul might truly understand the church as the bodily presence of the resurrected Jesus. Such a mystical understanding—supported by a variety of other expressions (e.g. Gal 2:20; 1 Cor 6:17)—may also in turn undergird his statements concerning the disposition

of the physical body (as in sexual relations) by members of the church (1 Cor 6:15–18; 7:14).

The previous two metaphors reveal the important roles Paul assigns to the Holy Spirit in his ecclesiology as the source of its (divine) life and as mediator of its (Christic) identity. The spirit “dwells in” the community (Rom 8:9, 11) As a result, Paul also speaks of the community as being “in Christ” (Rom 6:11; 1 Cor 1:2) and “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:22; Gal 5:10), as shorthand for the sphere of influence (or energy-field) that is the community. As with the contrast between the saints and the world, these designations serve to remind members powerfully of their special identity: they are “in Christ” as “the body of Christ”, and they are “in the Lord” because they “belong to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:13). It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Paul’s understanding of the church involves a deep and mystical identity between this community and the risen Jesus mediated by the Holy Spirit.

Another metaphor is the church as a building (οἰκοδομή; 1 Cor 3:9). Once more, the image combines unity and multiplicity, and has roots in Torah, in Greco-Roman political philosophy, and in the social situation of early Christians whose ἐκκλησία, in fact, met in the houses of wealthier members. The house is a root metaphor that generates a number of other images: Paul and his associates are household managers (οἰκονόμοι; 1 Cor 4:1–2) who dispense the mysteries of God; members of the community whose speech and actions serve to strengthen the community are said to “edify” the church (οἰκοδομεῖν, to build a house; 1 Cor 8:1; 1 Thess 5:11). Paul’s distinctive version of the metaphor once more comes from his sense that the community derives from and is ordered by God. The church is therefore “God’s house”. Given Paul’s sense of the community as enlivened and guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, furthermore, it is but a short step to a refinement of the house metaphor, the church is God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16–17). This image combines the elements of unity and multiplicity together with a profound sense of the divine presence within the community, and supports as well the mandate to holiness of life within the church.

Organization in the Local Church

The notion that Paul’s churches either were directed exclusively by the apostolic authority of Paul himself or were charismatic organisms guided exclusively by the Spirit without any human organization is contradicted

both by sociological logic and by evidence in the undisputed letters. Paul's frequently expressed frustration reveals how his own visits, the sending of his delegates, and even his letters failed to enable him to resolve even the larger crises of his churches, much less the everyday affairs (τὰ βιωτικά, 1 Cor 6:3–4) that require attention in every community. Intentional communities do not survive without mechanisms that enable them to carry out common tasks and make decisions. On the one side, they need to settle disputes; on the other side, they need to provide hospitality, organize fellowship, care for the sick, even receive and read letters from the apostle. They can take communal action in such matters as the collection (1 Cor 16:1–4) or providing supplies requested by Paul's agent for a future mission (Rom 15:24; 16:1–2). Pauline churches had available to them from the start, moreover, the simple and flexible structure of the Greco-Roman ἐκκλησία and the Jewish synagogue. The diaspora synagogue had a board—often made up of wealthy benefactors of the community—that administered finances and settled disputes and oversaw the study and teaching of Torah, as well as the system of organized charity to the needy within the community.

The undisputed letters provide sparse but significant evidence that some such simple structure was present also in Pauline churches from the beginning. Paul can speak of those in the Thessalonian church—presumably in existence for a very short time—who preside over others and exhort them (1 Thess 5:12). Paul is angry at the Corinthians for picking inadequate members to settle disputes over τὰ βιωτικά in that church (1 Cor 6:18). In 1 Cor 12:28 he lists “governing” as one of the gifts of the Spirit (see also Rom 12:8), and instructs the Corinthian church to “be submissive” to such benefactors (and householders) as Stephanas and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15–18). Galatians recognizes that there are those who instruct others in the word who should receive financial support in return (Gal 6:6). The letter to Philemon assumes that the addressee has some authority over the ἐκκλησία that meets in his house (Phlm 1–3, 21–22). Finally, Paul addresses ἐπίσκοποι (supervisors) and διάκονοι (helpers) in the Philippian church (Phil 1:1). These brief notices support the conclusion that Paul's churches had local leadership. Equally significant is the fact that Paul treats such leadership in purely functional terms, without providing any theological legitimation in its support.

The Church in Colossians and Ephesians

The letters to the Colossians and Ephesians form a set within the Pauline corpus much like Galatians and Romans. In addition to sharing substantially in diction and style, the two letters work at similar themes from slightly different perspectives. As the position worked out polemically in Galatians is shaped by Romans into a magisterial argument, so also is the position worked out polemically in Colossians shaped by Ephesians into a magisterial reflection. Neither Colossians nor Ephesians adds significantly to our knowledge of structure in the Pauline church, although Ephesians does include a list of ministries (Eph 4:11). But both letters share Paul's focus on the ἐκκλησία as a community of mutual upbuilding and reconciliation. Their distinctive contribution is to heighten the sense of mystical identification between Christ and the church found also in the undisputed letters.

In Colossians, Paul opposes those who seek to measure maturity by the addition of circumcision (2:11), ascetical observances (2:21–22), and even mystical experiences (2:18), by appealing to the adequacy of the Gentiles' experience of God through baptism into Christ (2:9–15). Against the individualism inherent in the competition for higher status within the community (2:16, 23), Paul calls for a new sense of humanity that unites rather than divides persons on the basis of their status (3:11), and for a maturity based on an ever deeper insight into the mystery of Christ, spelled out in attitudes of mutuality and cooperation (3:5–17). To support the "fullness of God" that is made accessible through baptism into Christ (2:9–12), Colossians emphasizes the primacy of Christ over both creation and the church (1:15–20). In this letter, the church is the body, but Christ is the head (1:18, 24; 2:19).

Ephesians, which may well have been a circular letter, lifts the local concerns found in Colossians into a reflection on the nature and mission of the church which is the fullest and most mature in the Pauline collection. Virtually every ecclesial theme of Paul's other letters is brought together in Ephesians in a manner so metaphorically complex as to deflect easy summation. In brief, Paul portrays God's will in terms of an οἰκονομία (household administration, 1:10; 3:2) that has cosmic range: God seeks the reconciliation of all humans (1:9–14). The need for reconciliation between God and humans because of sin is expressed socially in alienation among humans. The prime example is the enmity between Jews and Gentiles (2:11–12). Jesus' death and resurrection had the goal of reconciling humans

to God and humans to each other in a new humanity that is created in his image in the Holy Spirit (2:13–18). Eph 2:1–11 elaborates these points through extraordinarily complex metaphors of body, house, and temple that make it clear that as the Jewish temple symbolized lack of access to God for all humanity and with it the enmity between Jew and Gentile (2:14–15), the church is to be the new house of God in the Spirit where all have equal access to God (2:19–22). The church is the place in the world where this mysterious plan of God is being revealed (3:9–11). The nature and mission of the church is therefore the same: to be the symbol of the world's possibility by being the place in the world where human differences do not separate but provide the basis for a deeper unity in the Spirit (4:11–16). The measure of the community's life is therefore "the bond of love in the Spirit" (4:3), and every behavior that falls short of "doing the truth in love" (4:15) must be rejected. If the church fails to be a community of reconciliation, it has no reason to exist. Positively, the love between female and male in marriage (5:22–31) points to the reconciliation possible between Jew and Gentile: "This is a great mystery, by which I mean Christ and the church" (5:32).

The Church in the Pastorals

The letters to Paul's delegates Timothy and Titus are regarded by the majority of scholars as inauthentic and as representing a development of Pauline ecclesiology in the direction of institutional complexity. Whether the judgment concerning authenticity is correct or not, it is not substantially supported by differences in ecclesiology. Indeed, it is a mistake in method to combine these three letters as though they were uniform. 2 Timothy focuses completely on the character and behavior of Paul's delegate in contrast to the practices of false teachers (2 Tim 2:14–4:5). The church enters the discussion only implicitly when the author develops the metaphor of the great house in which some vessels are destined for honorable use and others for shameful (2:20–23), as an encouragement to become a "proven workman for the Lord" within the community of faith (2:15). In Titus, the only explicit mention of ecclesial organization comes in the instruction to establish elders/supervisors in every church, with a short list of qualities desirable in the supervisor (Titus 1:5–9). Otherwise, Titus concentrates on the threat that is implicitly posed to the church by the disruption of households by those challenging the adequacy of grace and advocating observance of the law (1:10–16).

It is 1 Timothy that provides a fuller view of the church, most obviously in its description of the moral and intellectual qualities desired in those who hold the positions of supervisor (*ἐπίσκοπος*, 3:1–7), helper (*διάκονος*, 3:8–10, 12–13), and female helper (3:11). Although these descriptions are not found in the undisputed Pauline letters, we have seen that the titles themselves occur in Philippians. Since there is no description of the duties attached to these offices, furthermore, it is only by inference that we conclude that they involved oversight of the community's finances, teaching, settling disputes, and administration of charity—the same functions that we infer fell to those designated as “standing over” others in the undisputed letters. Most strikingly there is also no theological legitimation of these positions. As in the other Pauline letters, the positions are assumed to be in existence and are regarded in purely functional terms.

1 Timothy shows Paul excommunicating those upsetting the community (1:20) and refusing women permission to speak in the assembly (2:11–15), but these reflexes are also found in the undisputed letters (1 Cor 5:1–5; 14:33–36). Of the major Pauline metaphors for the church, 1 Timothy develops only that of the household (*οἶκος*). Management ability in one's household is a good indicator of leadership ability in the *ἐκκλησία* (3:4; cf. 1 Cor 16:15–18). False teaching draws attention away from “God's ordering of things” (*οἰκονομία θεοῦ*), to which faith responds (1:5). And in an explicit development of the metaphor, good behavior in the *ἐκκλησία* enables one to be a “pillar and support of the truth” within the “household of faith, which is the church of the living God” (3:15).

Conclusion

There is great diversity within the Pauline collection concerning the images used for the church or the precise aspect of the church under discussion. But the letters are remarkably consistent in their basic understanding of the church as a community defined by its relationship with God through the risen Lord Jesus Christ, and called to be a community of moral character, recognizable for its patterns of mutual support and fellowship.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

2 TIMOTHY AND THE POLEMIC AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS: A RE-EXAMINATION

It is not surprising that the passages in the Pastorals which deal with false teachers continue to present problems for interpreters of those letters. In spite of the amount of attention paid to false teachers (some 47 out of 242 verses) little specific information about them can be gained. The few allusions to doctrinal or ascetic positions are vague,¹ and the terms of condemnation, while vigorous, tell us little about the content of their teaching.² It is well known that the author of the Pastorals, in contrast to the Paul of 1 or 2 Corinthians, is less concerned with refuting the theological positions of the heretics than in cautioning against their methods, morals, and insidious results of their teaching.³

Attempts to reconstruct the theological positions of these adversaries have not proven very satisfactory. The picture of rigorist, mythically-oriented, quasi-gnostic Judaizers results from pushing the few concrete hints to their limit, and sometimes beyond, and still lacks any convincing

¹ The heretics claim to possess some sort of gnosis (1 Tim 6:20); some among them are teaching the resurrection has already taken place (2 Tim 2:17–18); forbid marriage and the eating of certain food (1 Tim 4:3); they claim to teachers of the Law (1 Tim 1:7); the remarks on physical discipline (1 Tim 4:8) also refer to an ascetic bent.

² It would be difficult to be more general than Tit 1:11: διδάσκοντες ἃ μὴ δεῖ. Their teaching included myths (1 Tim 4:7), genealogies (1 Tim 1:3), “speculations” (1 Tim 1:4, 6:4; 2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9), which Paul calls “godless chatter” (1 Tim 6:20, 2 Tim 2:14–16), “foolish” (Tit 3:9, 2 Tim 2:23), and “ignorant” (2 Tim 2:23). Their disputes were characterized by bellicosity and harshness (1 Tim 6:4; 1 Tim 2:14, 23; Tit 3:9).

³ The gist of the moral condemnation is conveyed succinctly by Tit 1:16: θεὸν ὁμολογοῦσιν εἰδέναι, τοῖς δὲ ἔργοις ἀρνοῦνται. As 2 Tim 3:6 indicates, the vice list of 3:2–5 applies to the false teachers. It is remarkable primarily for the number of “misanthropic” vices it contains. The emphasis is always on belligerence of these false teachers. On the vice-list, cf. N. J. McEleney, “The Vice-Lists of the Pastoral Epistles,” *CBQ* 36 (1974), 203–219. Although it can generally be stated that the author does not rebut theologically to any great degree, it should be pointed out that in addition to 1 Tim 4:1–5, examined by Karris, “The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral sties,” *JBL* 92 (1973), 549, one should add 1 Tim 1:8–11 and 6:6–8; in each a “misconception” is corrected by the proper understanding. In general, however, the case is accurately stated by N. Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (RNT 7; Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1969), “Man kann den Tatbestand so umschreiben, daß die Pastoralbriefe nicht eigentlich die Irrlehre, sondern die Irrlehrer bekämpfen” (39).

specificity.⁴ More seriously, these attempts at defining the heretics have not advanced our understanding of the letters to a significant degree.

A sounder approach to these polemical passages was initiated by Dibelius⁵ and taken up by Conzelmann.⁶ They noted that the vocabulary and tone of the polemic is strongly reminiscent of the polemics frequently found in hellenistic writings directed against Sophists. This sort of polemic, which can be found in Aristophanes,⁷ had by the Roman Period become a stereotyped *topos*, employed both by rhetoricians and philosophers.⁸ Because such *topoi* are by nature conventional, it is hazardous to seek within them the individual traits of opponents.⁹ More recently, Karris has provided extensive evidence in support of this *topos* in philosophical writings,¹⁰ and has shown that the language of the Pastorals' polemic can

⁴ Cf. W. Mangold, *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe* (Marburg: Elwert'sche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1856); W. Luetgert, *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe* (Guetersloh, 1909); M. Dibelius, *Die Briefe des Apostels Paulus an Timotheus I, II, an Titus* (HNT 11,2; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1913), 166–68; N. Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 31–39; C.K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 12–16; J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper and Row), 10–12; W. Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 5–8; W. Lock, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC: New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), xvii; E.F. Brown, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Methuen, 1917), 5; F.J. Schierse, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (Duesseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1968), 31; C. Spicq, *Les Epîtres Pastorales*, 4th rev. ed. (EB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1969), 1, 85–119.

⁵ M. Dibelius, *Die Briefe des Apostels Paulus* (1913), 149.

⁶ M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 2 and *passim*. Spicq, 1, 85ff. has not only seen the pertinence of this sort of polemic, but has collected an enormous number of references to the hellenistic material. Unfortunately, this mass of material is somewhat undigested and does not come into play significantly in his interpretation. Certain aspects of this polemic were also spotted by F.H. Colson, "Myths and Genealogies: A Note on the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles," *JTS* 19 (1917–18), 265–71.

⁷ *The Clouds* (ca. 417 B.C.E.) already attacked Socrates and his students with most of the criticisms later applied to Sophists and Philosophers: their distinctive appearance; their complicated syllogisms and discussions which obfuscated truth; their arrogance and argumentativeness; their greed; their subversiveness. Cf. *Aristophanes*, trans. B. Rogers (LCL, 1924), I, 275–359.

⁸ This was not entirely a literary game or matter of academics. Philosophers in particular were distrusted by Roman authorities, and the worthiest of them suffered exile: Musonius Rufus, Dio Chrysostom, Epictetus. Seneca's vicissitudes at court are well known. For the imperial attitude toward philosophers, cf. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F.C. Conybeare (LCL, 1927), IV, 35; V, 19; VII, 4; and Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, trans. E. Cary (LCL, 1955), VI, 175. Cf. also R. Macmullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1966), 46–94. For a lively portrait of the philosophic ethos during the Roman Period, cf. S. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (1904; Meridian Press reprint, 1956), 289–440.

⁹ Dibelius-Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 2.

¹⁰ R. Karris, "The Background and Significance," 551–555. Cf. also his unpublished dissertation, *The Function and Sitz-im-leben of the Parenthetic Elements in the Pastoral Epistles* (Harvard, 1971), 3–39.

best be understood in the light of this literary schema.¹¹ In spite of the traditional nature of much of this polemic, Karris suggests that a redactional analysis of the Pastorals reveals enough deviations to allow a tentative description of the false teachers.¹²

Although the basic direction established by these authors is correct, and the wealth of materials they adduce from Hellenistic materials is impressive, there remains a certain lack of precision with regard to the *function* of these polemical materials, both within the Hellenistic writings and the Pastorals themselves. This lack of precision regarding function derives from too little attention to the literary form of the writings in which such polemical language appears. After listing the elements of the polemical schema, Karris states:

The schema is intended to cause aversion for the sophists and sympathy for the writer's position in the minds of his readers . . . perhaps the most significant function of the schema was to demonstrate who had the right to and actually did impart genuine wisdom and truth.¹³

But although it can be argued that the purpose of such polemic was frequently or even generally as Karris suggests, it is important to note that there are instances where the function is quite plainly different.¹⁴ As I will

¹¹ Karris, "Background and Significance," 556–562.

¹² *Ibid.*, 562–563; "The opponents are Jewish Christians who are teachers of the Law . . ." A similar conclusion was reached by P. Dornier, *Les Epîtres Pastorales* (SB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1969), 14–16.

¹³ Karris, "Background and Significance," 556.

¹⁴ The documents Karris employs are all directed against Sophists, which is fair enough. But certain methodic qualifications should be noted. (1) It is not the case that the polemic was one-sided; just as philosophers attacked sophists, so did sophists (or rhetoricians) attack philosophers. The most outstanding example is Aelius Aristides' (ca. 117–182 A.D.) *Platonic Discourses*, especially the second, "HUPER TŌN TETTARŌN," in *Aristides*, ed. W. Dindorf (Leipzig, 1829), 11, in which the typical elements of polemic appear: philosophers dress ascetically but are interiorly corrupt (307:10); they are pleasure-lovers (307:15), money-lovers (308:5, 10); they are revilers (309:45); they preach virtue but don't practice it (307:6); and their discourses are without profit (309:14–15). (2) The slanders against false philosophers are found in disputes between different *schools* of Philosophy. Cf., e.g., Epictetus, 1, 5, 9; 11, 20; 11, 23, 21ff.; 11, 7, 21. (3) The language of slander is to be found in discourses advocating the philosophic way of life. We will look at some of these later, but in addition to those, cf. also Epictetus IV, 8, 5ff.; Julian the Apostate, *Oration VI*, "To the Uneducated Cynics," and *Oration VII*, "To the Cynic Heracleios," in *The Works of the Emperor Julian* (LCL, 1913). (4) Both sophists and philosophers are attacked with the same sort of slander by *satirists*. We have referred to Aristophanes above. See also the many places in Lucian of Samosata, e.g., *Zeus Rants*, 11, 27; *Icaromenippus*, 5; *Philosophers for Sale*, 20–23; *The Double Indictment*, 22, 34; *Dialogues of the Dead*, 332, 369; *Timon*, 54; *The Fisherman*, 31; *The Runaways*, 4, 14, 19; *Hermotimus*, 18, and many more. (All titles and references to Lucian are as found in LCL). (5) The slander is not always used in an apologetic way, that is, as a negative defense of one's own teaching. The references to Lucian support this

show in more detail later in this essay, the same polemical language is frequently employed, not to establish the credentials of a writer for his audience, but to provide an antithesis to the description of the ideal teacher, that is, in paraenetic or protreptic discourses.¹⁵ Though the language in these writings is virtually identical to that in the writings cited by Karris, the *function* of the language is altogether different.

When he applies his analysis of the polemical schema to the Pastorals, Karris concludes that “on analogy” with the way the schema was employed in the Hellenistic writings, the author of the Pastorals wished to

... [D]issociate his teaching from that of the heretics . . . to show that he alone has the right to and actually does impart the truth, that he and his disciples alone have the power to teach correctly . . . to cause aversion for his opponents in the minds of his readers and to establish a strong alternative to their view of Pauline tradition.¹⁶

The problem with this conclusion is that it does not correspond to the actual literary shape of the Pastorals. There is no evidence in the Pastorals that the author was attempting to convince readers of his own credentials, or used the polemic as a device to this end. The authority of the author is never in question; it is assumed. The audience, moreover (at least in literary terms), is not the community at large, but the author’s personal delegates, themselves Christian teachers. He has no need to convince them of his authority.¹⁷ Further, the entire focus of the letters is on the proper attitudes and methods of these delegates *as* teachers. The contrast provided by the false teachers is to them and their teaching, not to the author. The author does not need to clear the way for the acceptance of his own teaching by denigrating the heretics or by confronting them face to face. Both the author and his delegates share the same teaching and recognize the author’s authority. The answer to Karris’ important question, “Why does the author employ the schema of philosophers against

distinction. Karris (555) is correct in noting, however, that most frequently it is *teachers* of one sort or another who are the targets for such slander.

¹⁵ Later in the article we will look in some detail at Epictetus 111, 22, Dio Chrysostom’s *Oration* 77/78, and Lucian of Samosata’s *Demonax* and *Nigrinus*.

¹⁶ Karris, “Background and Significance,” 563–564.

¹⁷ The assertion of Dibelius-Conzelmann (*The Pastoral Letters*, 7) that “The emphasis upon tradition in the Pastorals means that Paul is being established as the authority for the Church” is based on inferences which depend on the putative purpose for writing. In terms of literary presentation, at least, that is, insofar as the author and his designated readers are concerned, Paul’s authority is not in question.

sophists?"¹⁸ is, I suggest, different than the one he offers. The evidence for this must be sought in a careful literary examination of the Pastorals, as well as of the Hellenistic materials pertinent to the investigation.

In this essay I will try to show more precisely the function of the polemical language of the Pastorals, first by a close examination of 2 Timothy's literary form, second by a review of Hellenistic materials with pertinent parallels, and third by a brief look at similar structures in 1 Timothy and Titus. The reason for looking at 2 Timothy apart from the other Pastorals is that the literary pattern I hope to demonstrate is found most clearly there, and that, too frequently the Pastorals are considered *en bloc*, with little attention paid to their distinguishing characteristics.¹⁹

2 Timothy: A Personal Paraenetic Letter

The tone of the letter is strikingly personal, not only in the reminiscences of Timothy's youth (1:5; 3:15), but in the description of Paul's own career (1:12–13, 15–18; 3:10–11; 4:6–18).²⁰ In this letter, there is no discussion of church order, no *Haustafeln*.²¹ The focus of the letter is entirely on Timothy and those who are to share his teaching role. Twice (2:1, 14) these other

¹⁸ Karris, "Background and Significance," 563.

¹⁹ While it is true that the Pastorals share many features, it is not good method to ignore the important differences between them. In discussions of the "theology of the Pastorals" or the "life-setting of the Pastorals", evidence is too frequently garnered indiscriminately, without careful enough consideration given to the distinct coloration given to shared elements by the tone or form of each letter. What often results is a construct drawn almost entirely from 1 Tim and Titus. Cf. e.g., W. Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 212–215; W.G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 378–387; Spicq, I, 65–83; Dornier, 16–20; Lock, xiii–xxii. Dibelius-Conzelmann give more attention than most to the distinguishing literary features in the Pastorals (5–7), but conclude, "So the Pastoral Epistles, taken together, are all three expressions of one and the same *concept*" (8) (italics mine).

²⁰ Throughout this article I will use "Paul" when referring to the author of all three Pastorals. It is not appropriate here to rehearse all the old and new arguments concerning authenticity. In my opinion, the question is at present moot, especially with regard to 2 Tim. Cf. E.E. Ellis, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1961), 49–57; and J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 67–85. The use of "Paul" here expresses fidelity to the presentation of the documents as a real personality writing to other equally real individuals, and not as a cipher for later Church discernment.

²¹ When defining the purpose of the polemic as causing aversion for the opponents so that positive teaching can be given, Karris, 563–564, says that this teaching is to be found in the office of the Bishop, who hands on Paul's understanding of grace, and in the *haustafeln*. But in 2 Timothy there are neither Bishops nor *haustafeln*. What, then, is the function of the polemic in this document?

teachers are mentioned; in both instances the emphasis falls on Timothy's responsibility for rightly instructing them. Otherwise, the letter deals consistently with the attitudes and practices which should characterize Timothy himself. Paul is instructing his disciple in proper Christian pedagogy; the handing on of that pedagogy to others is important, but secondary.

Is this new teaching which Paul is giving Timothy? No. Rather, the letter presents a series of *reminders* to Timothy. Paul is exhorting Timothy to act in a way of which he was already well aware (cf. 1:6, 13; 2:8, 14; 3:10, 14–17). The purpose of Paul's reminders is to "rekindle" in Timothy's mind and heart what he had already received, from the gift of God, from Paul (cf. 1:6, 13). What are the stimulants to this remembering? They include traditional, trustworthy sayings (cf. 2:11, 19) and the Scriptures (3:15). But above all, Timothy is to be stirred into new enthusiasm (into active "memory") by the example of Paul's own words (1:13; 2:2; 3:10) and personal example (1:8–2:13; 3:10–11; 4:6–8). This reminding of traditional teaching is paraenetic in nature. Timothy is a personal, paraenetic letter.²² We can look at the literary structure of 2 Timothy more closely and see how the polemical language fits within that structure.

1. **The first section of the letter** (1:3–2:13) focuses entirely upon Timothy's attitudes. There is throughout this section a subtle interplay of the notions of memory and model. Explicit statements to this effect are supported by word-play involving "shame" and "suffering". The idea of memory enters

²² This is recognized by Dibelius-Conzelmann, 7, and certain features of paraenesis are noted throughout their commentary (e.g. 107–109) but they do not systematically pursue the implications with regard to the content. Indeed they are so persuaded of the relationship of the Pastorals to documents like the *Didache* and the *Letter of Polycarp* (6–7) that they can state, "... the personal sections of *all three epistles* at once fade into the background; their primary purpose, is at any rate, to demonstrate the authorship of Paul," (8; italics mine). In this article I hope to demonstrate that the personal sections are the main focus of each letter; that this is so at least in the case of 2 Timothy will be established. It is sometimes asserted that the Pastorals, and in particular 2 Timothy, should be viewed as examples of Farewell Discourses. The major influence here has been J. Munck, "Discours d'adieu dans le Nouveau Testament et dans la littérature biblique," *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne* (Mélanges Maurice Goguel; Neuchatel: Delacheaux et Niestlé, 1950), 155–170, esp. 162–163. Munck himself refers to E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1955), 344–347, though Stauffer did not include the Pastorals in his comparative tables. Spicq, I, 45, says, "C'est surtout la seconde lettre qui est un authentique *Testament* . . .", but he does not pursue this in his exegesis. Cf. also Schierse, 97, and Dibelius-Conzelmann, 107. Incisive remarks on this "Testimonial" form can be found in J. Neyrey, *The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter* (Unpublished Yale Dissertation, 1977), 99–103. Part two of this article will demonstrate a more convincing literary form from Hellenistic materials.

at once in the thanksgiving. Paul remembers Timothy constantly in his prayers (v. 3), he remembers his tears (v. 4), and, finally, remembers the sincere faith which was in Timothy as it was in his mother and grandmother (v. 5). The last phrase of v. 5, however, may reveal a certain anxiety: *πέπεισμαι δὲ ὅτι καὶ ἐν σοί*.²³ Paul is evidently concerned that Timothy is weakening in some fashion, because of Paul's imprisonment or his own difficulties in the ministry. In v. 6 Paul states the purpose of the letter. It is to remind Timothy (*ἀναμνησκω*) to stir up again the gift of God which he had received from Paul's hands. The *δι' ἣν αἰτίαν* is particularly interesting. It is Paul's memory of Timothy's heritage of faith, which moves him to stir Timothy's memory of that same reality.²⁴

The point of Paul's reminder is to be found in the nature of the gift they share. God had not given them a spirit of cowardice (*δειλίας*), but one of power and love and self-control (v. 7). Therefore (*οὖν*), Paul is able to tell Timothy, "Do not be ashamed," (*μὴ ἐπαισχυνθῆς*).²⁵ Of what should he not be ashamed? Either of his own witnessing to the Lord,²⁶ or of Paul the prisoner of the Lord. Rather, Timothy is to "join in the sufferings for the Gospel," (*ἀλλὰ συγκακοπάθησον τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ*).²⁷ This verse brings together the notions of suffering and shame. Timothy is not to be ashamed (fearful) because he has been called to be a minister of the Gospel as has Paul. Paul now suffers for the Gospel (*πάσχω*) but himself is not ashamed in that suffering (*ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπαισχύνομαι*) because of his great faith (v. 12).

Already, it is clear that Paul is presenting himself as a model for Timothy to follow. As Paul was called to be a minister of the Gospel, so was Timothy; as Paul has had to suffer for the Gospel, so must Timothy; and as Paul was not filled with shame because of this suffering, but rather with confidence, so should Timothy. This is the anamnesis to which Paul stirs his delegate: the recollection of his calling and the model he is to follow.

²³ Spicq, II, 706, takes the *πέπεισμαι* at face value, as showing Paul's absolute confidence in Timothy: "Le parfait à valeur superlatif." But in the overall context of encouragement, and especially in the light of v. 7, the expression appears to reveal hesitancy.

²⁴ Spicq, II, 707, notes the powerful effect of the fourfold repetition of the idea of memory in these verses. Cf. also Brox, 228; Barrett, 93.

²⁵ Clearly a reminiscence of Paul's own self-characterization. Cf. Rom 1:16; II Cor 10:8; Phil 1:20. Spicq, II, 711, calls it a form of *litotes*: what is being called for is *παρρησία*. For "shame" in confessing, cf. Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26. For the psychological verisimilitude in regard to Timothy, cf. I Cor 16:10.

²⁶ In the context, the genitive appears to be objective. Cf. Kelly, 160; Spicq, II, 711.

²⁷ The expression is used only here and 2:3 in the N.T. it is not uncharacteristic of Paul to form such *συν-* compounds, of course. Likewise Pauline is the notion of suffering for the Gospel. Cf. Phil 1:16, 2 Cor 4:11-12.

That Paul is a model for Timothy is made explicit in 1:13: ὑποτύπωσιν ἔχε ὑγιαίνοντων λόγων ὧν παρ' ἐμοῦ ἤκουσας ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. Timothy is told to hold to the example provided by Paul's words.²⁸ His manner of "holding on" is specified as "in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."²⁹ The gift which Timothy and Paul received was characterized by power and love and self-control (1:7); and Paul is able to suffer because of his conviction (πέπεισμαι) that the Lord was able (δυνατός) to guard until that day what was entrusted to him (παραθήκην μου φυλάξαι, 1:12). Because Timothy is enabled by the same Spirit (1:14), he too can "guard what has been entrusted to him" (τὴν καλὴν παραθήκην φύλαξον). Paul's model, therefore, is not simply in the words he has spoken, but also his manner of life, especially his suffering for the Gospel in the faithful conviction that the Lord would enable him to endure.

At first sight, vv. 15–18, which describe Paul's prison conditions and his abandonment, appear to be a digression. But the clear inference to be drawn about those who have abandoned Paul (1:15) is that they have done so out of that spirit of cowardice (δειλίας) against which Paul is warning Timothy. Onesiphorus, on the other hand, is praised because he alone was not ashamed of Paul's chains (οὐκ ἐπαισχύνθη, 1:16). Onesiphorus, therefore, presents another model for the edification of Timothy of confident service in the midst of suffering.³⁰

The Σὺ οὖν τέκνον μου of 2:1 must be seen as following directly from these examples.³¹ The "therefore" has the force of "seeing that you have these examples of how it can be done". Timothy is to be strong in that grace which, again, is characterized by power (cf. 1:7). 2:2 advances the thought of 1:13. Timothy is not only to hold to the example of Paul's words and keep them as a deposit, he is also to hand them over to other men

²⁸ Cf. E.K. Lee, "Words Denoting 'Pattern' In the New Testament," *NTS* 8 (1962), 166–175, esp. 168–172, where he shows the relation between ὑποτύπος and ὑπόδειγμα.

²⁹ The placement of the phrase is difficult; cf. Dibelius-Conzelmann, 105, and Barrett, 97. It seems better to attach it to v.13 than to v.14. Spicq, II, 721, says that the phrase could be attached to the actual hearing of Paul's words, but would better modify ἔχε; Timothy is to hold to the model in this fashion. Cf. also Kelly, 166–167. This would fit better with the depiction of Timothy as model in 1 Tim 4:12, where a similar construction is found.

³⁰ Dibelius-Conzelmann, 106; Kelly, 168. The οἶδας of v. 15 and συ γινώσκεις of v.18 frame the passage and emphasize a note of urgency. Spicq, II, 731, suggests the οἶδας τοῦτο has the strength of exhortation, "Pay attention to this!" Cf. also, Schierse, 108.

³¹ Dibelius-Conzelmann, 107, see this verse as beginning a new section of the letter, the "actual paraenesis." It is better to see the first section as continuing through v. 13, for although it is true that Timothy is here commanded, the theme of the model has not yet been fully elaborated, and, as we shall see, the establishment of a model is a distinct aspect of this sort of paraenesis. The concrete directives begin in v. 14.

(also faithful, *πίστοις*), who will be able to teach still others. Having so briefly specified Timothy's task of transmitting the tradition, Paul returns to his main paraenetic emphasis: the necessity of suffering for the Gospel. The *συγκακοπάθησον* repeats Timothy's essential way of modeling himself on Paul (cf. 1:8). The three examples of the soldier, athlete, and farmer present respectively three aspects of the rigors of suffering and its reward. The soldier who keeps himself unentangled with the cares of life suffers thereby, but pleases his commander; the athlete who competes by the rules suffers thereby, but wins a crown; the farmer who labors hard suffers thereby, but shares the first fruits of the harvest (2:4–6). What unites all three examples is the necessity of suffering if anything good is to come.³²

Vv. 8–13 bring together the themes of remembrance, model, and suffering. Timothy is told again to remember (*Μνημόνευε*), this time Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead and for the preaching of whom Paul suffers (*κακοπαθῶ*, 2:8–9). As in 1:8, Paul's own sufferings for the Gospel are to be the model for Timothy's (cf. 2:3). But the remembrance of Jesus is not simply of his glorious resurrection; the remembering here is a taking part in the sort of suffering Jesus himself endured.³³ This is made clear from 2:11: *εἰ γὰρ συναπεθάνομεν, καὶ συζήσομεν*. If both Paul and Timothy suffer together with the Jesus whom they proclaim, they will both share his life. Here, Paul presents both the ultimate model of the suffering teacher and the ultimate motivation for following that model. We notice, too, that v. 12 picks up on v. 10. Paul endures all things (*πάντα ὑπομένω*) for the sake of the elect. In v. 12 we read, *εἰ ὑπομένομεν, καὶ συμβασιλεύσομεν*. This *λόγος*, which is itself *πιστός*,³⁴ specifies for the Christian ministers the pattern of suffering and reward intimated by the three examples of 2:3–6.

We have seen that the first section of 2 Timothy is carefully constructed. Paul is attempting to stir the teacher Timothy to new enthusiasm. To do this, he presents himself as a model, not only of sound teaching, but, more importantly, of that way of faithful suffering which was demonstrated by Jesus and which leads to the reward of life with Jesus. In this section, there has been no mention of false teachers and only the barest reference

³² Barrett, 102; Dibelius-Conzelmann, 108.

³³ The resurrection of Jesus here is equivalent to the fourth example, and the ultimate one, of suffering followed by reward.

³⁴ On *πιστός* ὁ *λόγος* (v.11), cf. Dibelius-Conzelmann, 28–29; Spicq, I, 277, n. 1; J.G. Duncan, "Pistos Ho Logos," *ExpT* 35 (1923–1924), 141. However stereotyped the phrase, we note that it establishes another point of unity between the teaching (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Tit 1:9; 3:8) and the teachers (1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:2); both are "faithful". But God alone is truly *πιστός* (cf. 2 Tim 2:13).

to the faithful men to whom Timothy is to entrust the task of teaching others. The entire focus has been on Timothy's need to gain confidence in the face of suffering. Neither has there been attention paid to the way in which Timothy is to teach. It can also be pointed out that the kind of suffering undergone by Paul and enjoined on Timothy is not said to be physical suffering, but seems to have a lot to do with being confined and with being abandoned by others. We can bear this in mind as we look further into the letter.

2. **The second section of the letter** (2:14–4:8) has the same paraenetic intent as the first section, though the literary structure is different. As we shall see, the importance of Paul as the model will reappear in significant places (3:10–11 and 4:6–8), but this example is placed within a different structure than in the first section. Having sketched in 1:3–2:13 the essential outlines of the model Timothy is to follow,³⁵ the author now explicates and elaborates that model by means of concrete directives. The basic structure of the section is formed by a series of longer and shorter antitheses. Characteristic here is the dominance of the singular imperative (always addressed to Timothy—his attitudes and methods are always in view), alternating with third person plural descriptions of the false teachers.³⁶ The commands to Timothy are basically to shun or avoid certain things and to follow or do certain others.³⁷ It is most important to note that the descriptions of the false teachers—their attitudes and methods—are always contrasted to the attitudes and methods which should characterize Timothy, and in every case, the emphasis falls on what Timothy should do, in contrast to what they do.

Two further aspects of these antitheses should be noted. First, since Timothy models himself on the “sound words” (ὕγιαίνοντων λόγων) he has

³⁵ Lee, “Words Denoting ‘Pattern’”, 172, stresses this aspect of the term ὑποτύπωσις; the model, like a mold, needs filling in with specific directives.

³⁶ The imperatives to Timothy: 2:14, 15, 16, 22 (2), 23; 3:1, 5, 14; 4:2 (5); 4:5 (4); excluding participles, the verbs designating the false teachers: 2:16, 18; 3:2, 6, 8, 9, 13.

³⁷ Negative injunctions to Timothy: περιίτασο (2:16); φεύγε (2:22); παραιτοῦ (2:23); ἀποτρέπου (3:5). Positive injunctions: ὑπομίμησθε (2:14); σπουδάσον (2:15); δίδωκε (2:22); γίνωσκε (3:1); μένε (3:14); κήρυξον, ἐπίστηθι, ἔλεγξον, ἐπιτίμησον, παρακάλεσον (4:2); νῆφε, κακοπάθησον, ποιήσον, πληροφόρησον (4:5). The false teachers are ones who fall away or turn away (ἠστόχησαν, ἀνατρέπουσιν, 2:18); they “stand against” (ἀνθίστανται, 3:8). They also “advance” (προκόψουσιν, 2:16; 3:13). It is against this “advance” that Timothy is to remain (μένε, 3:14) and stand fast (ἐπίστηθι, 4:2, cf. also ἐπιστώθης, 3:14). The visual imagery is arresting. Even though the false teachers are advancing, Paul is sure that they will be found out and will not “advance” (προκόψουσιν, 3:9).

heard from Paul (1:13), his own teaching was to be characterized by the same “healthful” qualities in contrast to the “diseased” teaching of the opponents (2:15–17; 3:2–5); in the same way that Paul’s teaching was gentle and patient (3:10), so was Timothy’s to be kindly and forbearing (2:24; 4:2) in contrast to that of the false teachers, whose methods are characterized by harshness and battles over words (2:14; 2:23–24; 3:2). Second, it should be observed that Timothy’s opponents are not utterly condemned. It is part of Timothy’s task to be a teacher of all, even of his opposing teachers (2:24), and the possibility is held that such patient teaching will lead to their repentance. This is stated explicitly in 2:25.

We can see more clearly how this pattern works as we read carefully through the section. The contrast is established immediately in 2:14. Timothy has remembered the model of Paul’s teaching and behavior; now he is to remind others how they should teach (Ταῦτα ὑπομίμησθε). This reminder is intended for him as well; for the focus shifts directly in 2:15 to his own attitude. We note that the negative characteristics to be avoided (following here the punctuation of the UBS text)³⁸ are balanced by the three positive qualities which Timothy is to pursue and that these three qualities flow from the model presented earlier. Thus, Timothy is to be δόκιμος (a term associated with endurance of suffering or rejection);³⁹ to be an “unashamed workman” (ἀνεπαίσχυντον), which clearly recalls 1:8, 12, 16; and one who handles rightly the word of truth (cf. 1:13). The “godless chatter” (βεβήλους κενοφωνίας) of the false teachers is to be avoided by Timothy (2:16). The description of this chatter, engaged in by Hymenaeus and Philetus, ends with its result, the upsetting of some peoples’ faith (2:18). This picks up from 2:14c: ἐπὶ καταστροφή τῶν ἀκουόντων. For our purposes, it is important to note that the emphasis here is entirely on Timothy’s mode of teaching, and the description of the opponents serves as a contrast to the positive picture of 2:15.

The passage 2:19–21 is a bit confusing.⁴⁰ The author’s intention in alluding to the Scripture in v. 19 seems to be to support the motif of *avoidance* established in 2:16. Those who call on the name of the Lord are to depart from iniquity. But are they to depart from, separate themselves

³⁸ Both text and syntax are difficult here. For the textual problem, cf. Spicq, I, 308; for the sense, Lock, 98; Dormier, 212; Dibelius-Conzelmann, 110. The general meaning is, in any case clear enough.

³⁹ For δόκιμος, cf. I Cor 11:19; II Cor 10:18; James 1:12; for ἡ δοκιμή, cf. Rom 5:4; II Cor 8:2; 9:13. In reference to Timothy, Phil 2:22.

⁴⁰ Cf. Barrett, 107–108.

from, the *iniquitous*? The image of the great house with vessels of varying worth makes the picture more obscure. V. 21 indicates that a vessel can change from unworthy to worthy by purifying itself. But in that case, the ἀπὸ τούτων, must refer to those vessels that are unworthy, namely, the false teachers.⁴¹ This would fulfill the demand of the Scripture in v. 16. Interpreting the passage in this way would make 19–21 another antithesis to the false teachers. By avoiding them, Timothy will be purified and be a vessel prepared for every good work.⁴²

Vv. 22–24 present two contrasts. In each, the negative quality is presented first, followed by the positive attitude of the ideal teacher. Thus in 2:22, Timothy is told to flee from (φεύγε) youthful (or revolutionary?)⁴³ passions, and to pursue (δίωκε δὲ) justice, faith, and love. It is intriguing that he is to do this with (μετὰ) those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. This clearly recalls both v. 19 and v. 21 and seems to strengthen the interpretation of vv. 19–21 as advocating Timothy's avoidance of false teachers. The second contrast again first states what Timothy is to avoid (παραίτου): stupid, senseless controversies because they lead to quarrels (μάχας).⁴⁴ In contrast, the servant of the Lord is not to be quarrelsome (οὐ δεῖ μάχεσθαι), but to demonstrate those qualities of gentleness and forbearance which may lead to the conversion even of the opponents (2:24–26). We see here again that the characteristics of the false teachers function simply as contrast to the image of the ideal Christian teacher.

The alternating pattern continues in 3:1–10. In this passage we find the longest and most detailed description of men who are vice-ridden and among whose number (3:6) are the false teachers opposed to Timothy. The traditional nature of much of this polemic has rightly been pointed out by Karris.⁴⁵ It is equally important to note, however, that this polemical language occurs in the same pattern we have been describing. 3:1 begins: Τοῦτο δὲ γίνωσκε. The adversative δὲ should be taken at full force here. These characteristics of the false teachers stand in opposition to the ideal

⁴¹ Cf. Kelly, 188; Lock, 101.

⁴² For this interpretation, cf. Spicq, II, 762–763; Dibelius-Conzelmann, 113. It is, of course, of considerable importance that the Church is not pictured in sectarian terms; it contains within itself good and evil. Cf. Schierse, 119.

⁴³ Νεωτερικὸς is a biblical hapax. Spicq, II, 764, notes that it is used elsewhere with a nuance of violence, a seeking after novelty which overthrows accepted ways. Reading the verse in this way would shift attention away from Timothy's personal youthfulness to the novelty-seeking of the false teachers.

⁴⁴ The theme of v. 14, μὴ λογομάχεσθαι is here picked up again.

⁴⁵ Karris, "Background and Significance," 560–561; Spicq, II, 771–778, typically has a wealth of illustrative material.

sketched in the preceding verses, and their manner is one Timothy should be aware of. The description is broken in 3:5b by the warning to Timothy: *καὶ τούτους ἀποτρέπου*. As in 2:16ff., it is Timothy's avoidance of such as these which is of paramount concern. 3:6–9 continues the description of the methods of these false teachers, and the contrasting picture is found immediately in 3:10ff.: *Σὺ δὲ παρηκολούθησας μου τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ*, ktl.⁴⁶ Timothy has a different model than that provided the false teachers or their forbearers, Jannes and Jambres. His is the model provided by the teaching, the attitudes, and the suffering demonstrated by Paul.⁴⁷ The necessity of suffering for all who wish to lead godly lives is reasserted in 3:12.

To this positive picture is quickly juxtaposed, in 3:13 (though very briefly), the manner of the false teachers: *πονηροὶ δὲ ἄνθρωποι καὶ γόητες προκώψουσιν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον πλανῶντες καὶ πλανώμενοι*. But, again, the emphasis falls on Timothy's positive attitude in contrast to these: *σὺ δὲ μένε ἐν οἷς ἔμαθες καὶ ἐπιστώθης* (3:14). After describing the inspired Scripture as that which is able to equip Timothy for every good work (which here clearly means the work of teaching), Paul continues with his most solemn injunction to his delegate, that he should preach the word in every circumstance (4:1–2). Again, when we look at the qualities of such preaching, we see that it is to be done *ἐν πάσῃ μακροθυμίᾳ* (4:2) as was Paul's own (3:10).

The final contrast in 4:3–8 is a poignant one. 4:3–4 describes, not the methods of the false teachers, but the success they will enjoy. Paul is certain that men will not want to hear sound teaching, but will follow after the mythical seductions of teachers who tell them what they want to hear. In contrast to this "turning away" and "wandering off", Timothy is told: *σὺ δὲ νῆφε ἐν πάσιν, καταπάθησον, ἔργον ποιήσον εὐαγγελιστοῦ, τὴν διακονίαν σου πληροφόρησον*. Timothy is to remain steady in his ministry of teaching. The resumption of the note of suffering here is most interesting. Is not the real suffering facing Timothy very close to that then being experienced by Paul? Paul was left all alone, abandoned (1:15), everyone had deserted him (4:16); he was suffering and wearing chains like a criminal (2:9). In spite of this, he carried on, unashamed (1:12), convinced that the Word of God was not fettered (2:9), and that his suffering had a positive effect for

⁴⁶ The verb *παρακολουθεῖν* further emphasizes the paraenetic nature of the letter. Paul is not giving Timothy new teaching; he is reminding him of what he "has followed". The subsequent elaboration of Paul as model further strengthens this aspect. Cf. Kelly, 198; Spicq, II, 781.

⁴⁷ The fact that "the Lord rescued me from all of them," continues the pattern of suffering-reward established earlier and gives hope to Timothy that he too will find release from his suffering.

the elect (2:10). Now we see that Timothy must face abandonment, when men do not wish to listen to his words, but follow after false teachers (3:1, 4:3). He will face abandonment just as did the Apostle. In the face of this, Timothy is to willingly take part in the suffering, to persevere in his work of preaching and teaching, not filled with cowardice (1:7) or shame (1:8; 3:15), but empowered with that Spirit who is able to sustain him through suffering and rejection (1:8; 2:1) just as he had Paul (1:12).

In this light, the γὰρ of 4:6 is striking.⁴⁸ Timothy must carry on because Paul himself, who had held the deposit faithfully (1:12), had fought the good fight and kept the faith (4:7), now was at the point of death. What remained to him was the reward for those who suffer with the Lord (4:8; cf 2:5, 12). The final note of comfort and encouragement to Timothy is that this crown is not for Paul alone, but for all who have loved His appearing (4:8). Timothy, if he endures in the face of suffering and rejection, will receive the same reward which Paul now expects.⁴⁹

This analysis of 2 Timothy leads to the following conclusions: (a) the letter is one of personal paraenesis; the entire focus is in the ideal of the Christian ministry of preaching and teaching to be carried out by Paul's delegate, Timothy, (b) The first part of the paraenesis centers on the presentation of Paul as the model for Timothy's words and attitudes; the letter functions as a reminder of this model, (c) The second part of the paraenesis uses Paul as a model, but within a framework of concrete commands and warnings which spell out the implications of Paul's example, (d) These commands and warnings follow a pattern of contrasts, in which the emphasis always falls on the picture of Timothy as the ideal, (e) The polemical language concerning the false teachers functions within this pattern as the antithesis to that ideal. The false teachers are not spoken of or addressed, except in relation to Timothy. They serve entirely as contrast.

⁴⁸ As Dibelius-Conzelmann note, "Vv. 6–8 comprise the solemn conclusion of the paraenesis" (121).

⁴⁹ Our close analysis of 2 Timothy stops here, but certain aspects of the remaining 13 verses should be noted, (a) Although the subject is now ever more personal, dealing with Paul's circumstances and needs, the passage is still carried by the typical singular imperative to Timothy: σπούδασον (v.9); ἄγε (v.11); φέρε (v.13); φυλάσσου (v.15); ἄσπασαι (v.19); σπούδασον (v.21). (b) One of the false teachers is mentioned by name, Alexander the Coppersmith (v.14), whom we meet with Hymenaeus in 1 Tim 1:20. (c) Typically, the verse about Alexander is structured antithetically: 1. He did me much harm. 2. You stay away from him. 3. He strongly opposed our words. This snippet follows the same pattern as the rest of the letter. (c) Now concerning Paul, we see again the notion of being "strengthened" by the Lord, so that the Gospel preaching might be "fulfilled"; earlier we saw these concepts applied to Timothy (2:1, 4:5). Paul continues to the end as modal.

Hellenistic Materials Pertinent to Understanding 2 Timothy

In searching for Hellenistic materials which will shed some light on the function of polemical language in 2 Timothy, we need to consider both the form and the content of those materials. Although it has been recognized that 2 Timothy is a type of paraenesis, little attention has been paid to the literary structure of this paraenesis within the epistolary form.⁵⁰ A.J. Malherbe, by assembling and analyzing paraenetic materials from a variety of Hellenistic sources, has done much toward providing a more coherent approach to the literary form of paraenetic letters.⁵¹ His application of this approach has been applied to I Thessalonians. Here, I hope to extend his insights to 2 Timothy, where, if anything, the pattern he discerned in I Thessalonians is even more clearly present.

Even though their publication took place after the first century and the attributions of authorship are pseudonymous, the handbooks of rhetorical schools concerning proper letter writing contain a variety of letter forms (together with examples) which shed considerable light on New Testament epistolary style.⁵² In the extensive list of letters categorized by Ps-Libanius, we find a παραινετική επιστολή.⁵³ He defines a paraenetic letter as one in which “we exhort (παραινούμεν) someone, advising him (προτρέποντες) to pursue (ὀρμησαι) something, or to abstain (ἀφεχεσθαι) from something.”⁵⁴ He then gives a sample of this sort of letter:

⁵⁰ Karris, “Background and Significance,” 559–560; Dibelius-Conzelmann, 7. For a broader discussion of New Testament paraenesis, cf. Dibelius-Greeven, *James* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 1–11.

⁵¹ A.J. Malherbe, “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament,” to appear in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Roemischen Welt*, ed. H. Temporini, Teil II, ‘Religion’. In addition to surveying the work done on N.T. paraenesis, this article brings together a mass of Hellenistic material pertinent to the subject and interprets I Thessalonians as a paraenetic letter.

⁵² For a discussion of the dating, authorship, and contents of these handbooks, cf. H. Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n.Chr.* (Helsinki, 1956), 54–63; K. Thraede, *Grundzuege griechischroemischen Briefepik* (Munich: Beck, 1976), 25–27; and A.J. Malherbe, “Ancient Epistolary Theorists,” *Ohio Journal of Religion* 5 (1977), No.2, 3–77. Malherbe includes texts and translations of the pertinent parts of the handbooks, as well as a wider assortment of theories on letter writing from Greek and Roman authors. The Greek text (with Latin translation) of Ps-Libanius and Ps-Demetrius’ handbooks is available in R. Hercher, *Epistolographi Graeci* (Paris, 1873), reprinted in 1965 by A. Hakkert, Amsterdam.

⁵³ Hercher, 8.

⁵⁴ This is very close to the “συμβουλευτικός” letter listed by Ps-Demetrius (Hercher, 3), in which προτρέπομεν ἐπὶ τί ἢ ἀποτρέπομεν ἀπὸ τίνος. On this similarity, cf. Koskenniemi, 56–57.

Ζηλωτῆς ἀεὶ, Βέλτιστε, γίνου τῶν ἐναρέτων ἀνδρῶν· κρεῖττον γάρ ἐστι τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ζηλοῦντα καλῶς ἀκούειν ἢ φαύλοις ἐπόμενον ἐπονείδιστον εἶναι τοῖς πᾶσιν.⁵⁵

Always be an emulator, dear friend, of virtuous men. For it is better to be well spoken of when imitating good men than to be reproached by all for following evil men.

It can be seen from this sample that a paraenetic letter was not conceived of simply as a random listing of commands, but as a form of exhortation. In the description, we notice that the exhortation is stated antithetically: we exhort someone to follow this and avoid that. In the sample letter, again, we are struck by the role of models.⁵⁶ Rather than simply following instructions, the reader is first of all to be an imitator, an emulator. He is to base his conduct on that of virtuous men. The models themselves are presented antithetically: one can imitate good models or bad. Finally, we note that the motivation for such conduct is the hope for good reputation.

Already, we can see how precisely 2 Timothy follows this form. Paul is presented as a model to Timothy, and Timothy's mode of teaching is presented by means of antithesis to false teachers. He is to pursue certain things and to avoid others.

It is rare that an actual writing so faithfully follows a schoolbook model as Ps-Isocrates' *Ad Demonicum* does that of Ps-Libanius' paraenetic letter form.⁵⁷ Already in 1913, Dibelius had remarked in passing on the similarity between this document and 2 Timothy, but did not pursue the points of resemblance, particularly the formal ones.⁵⁸ In this work, which could well have been a letter,⁵⁹ the author addresses a single person, the young Demonicus, whose father was friend to the author. The point of the mis-sive is made at once:

⁵⁵ Hercher, 8.

⁵⁶ Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists," establishes that these formal characteristics are found in the actual letters of Seneca, Pliny, and Cicero, with numerous examples. In addition to the references he gives on the role of model and memory in paraenesis, the following can be added from Ps-Isocrates' *Ad Nicoclem* I; 13, 26, 31, 35, 37, 38; and from *Ad Nicoclem* II; 59, 60, 61. Especially striking is *Ad Nicoclem* II, 57: προτρέπετε τοὺς νεώτερους ἐπ' ἀρετὴν μὴ μόνον παραινουντες ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τὰς πράξεις ὑποδεικνουντες αὐτοῖς υἱοὺς εἶναι χρὴ τοὺς ἀνδρας τοὺς αγαθοὺς.

⁵⁷ *Isocrates* (LCL, 1928), I, 4–35. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists," quotes extensively from the first part of this work in demonstrating the salient features of paraenesis.

⁵⁸ Dibelius (1913), 138; cf. also Dibelius-Conzelmann, 7.

⁵⁹ Ἀπέσταλκέ σοι τόνδε τὸν λόγον δῶρων, *Ad Demonicum*, 2. References throughout are to paragraph numbers.

Since I deem it fitting that those who strive for distinction and are ambitious for education should emulate (μιμητές εἶναι) the good and not the bad, I have sent you this discourse . . . (2)

The author distinguishes his work from those protreptic discourses (προτρεπτική λόγοι), usually written for the young, which encourage them to learn the tricks of sophistry (3). He is writing, not a hortatory exercise (παράκλησιν), but a moral treatise (παραίνησιν), that is, paraenesis, which will show what things young men should aspire to (ὀρέγεσθαι) and avoid (ἀπέχεσθαι) on their way to virtue (5).⁶⁰

He begins by proposing models whom Demonicus might imitate. After citing Heracles and Theseus (8), he proposes Demonicus' own father as the best model he could follow:

Nay, if you will but recall (ἀναμνήσθεις) also your father's principles, you will have from your own house a noble illustration (καλὸν ἔχεις παράδειγμα) of what I am telling you. (9)

Isocrates begins to sketch this model for Demonicus. He does this by means of three antithetical statements, structured by οὐ . . . ἀλλὰ, in each case with the negative quality offset by and pointing to the positive. Thus, Hipponicus, the father, was not an indolent man given to pleasure, but trained his body vigorously; he did not cling to wealth, but handled his cares with detachment; he was not small-minded, but generous (9–10). Isocrates despairs of presenting the model adequately, and so concludes,

For the present, however, I have produced a sample (δείγμα) of the nature of Hipponicus, after whom you should pattern your life as after an example (ὡσπερ πρὸς παράδειγμα), regarding his conduct as your law, and striving to imitate (μιμητήν) and emulate (ζηλωτήν) your father's virtue (11).

We should note here the combination of memory and model, so frequent in this type of writing, and which we found in 2 Timothy. It is by *remembering*, by calling back into his mind, the virtuous life of his father, that Demonicus has a model on which to base his own life. The establishment of this model is the most important consideration for Isocrates, but he considers it necessary to amplify the model by means of moral precepts, for

. . . It is not possible for the mind to be so disposed unless one is fraught with many noble maxims; for as it is the nature of the body to be developed by

⁶⁰ Cf. also *Ad Nicoclem* II, 2: ὀρεγόμενος . . . ἀπεχόμενος.

appropriate exercises. It is the nature of the soul to be developed by moral precepts (12).⁶¹

Again, as in the letter form of Ps-Libanius, the purpose of the moral instruction is "... progress in virtue... highest repute in the eyes of all other men (12)."

The moral precepts make up the bulk of the work. They follow in no discernible order. The simple singular imperative dominates throughout, as in 2 Timothy. There is not a rigorously antithetical pattern to the injunctions (such as we saw in the sketch of the model, 9–10), but with some frequency, a positive ideal is set off by contrast to its negative (cf. e.g., 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 23, 24, and especially 38). When he completes the listing of precepts, Isocrates returns to the models. The examples of Heracles and Tantalus (both, appropriately, sons of Zeus, and representing examples of virtue and vice) are held up as models of how good is rewarded and evil punished (50). Isocrates concludes:

With these examples before you, you should aspire (ὀρέγεσθαι) to nobility of character (51).

In *Ad Demonicum*, we have found paraenesis structured around a model, the remembering of which provides an example of the virtuous life. The model is sketched by means of antithetical statements. The presentation of the model is followed by a list of moral precepts, many of which are stated antithetically. Finally, the models are presented again. There is here not only a faithful rendering of the form of a paraenetic letter, but the closest resemblance to the structure of 2 Timothy.

What about the differences? *Ad Demonicum* intends to teach virtue to a young man and presents by means of model and precept the ideal of the virtuous man. 2 Timothy, on the other hand, is concerned to inculcate the ideal of the Christian teacher. Although Timothy's personal attitudes and virtue are important, they are so as a quality of his faithful fulfillment of the ministry to which he was called. These differences in content are real and should be recognized. Nevertheless, the form is nearly identical. Perhaps we should ask how *Ad Demonicum* would look if it were a proreptic discourse, if it were encouraging a young man to, say, the calling of a true philosopher?⁶² In fact, we have such discourses available to us,

⁶¹ On the role of precepts in paraenesis, cf. *Ad Nicoclem* I, 41, as well as the numerous examples cited by Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists."

⁶² We have already noted that Isocrates distinguished his paraenetic work from the προτρεπτικοί λόγοι. His reason is interesting. He says such discourses ignore the most

and they will show (naturally in differing degrees) a similarity both to *Ad Demoniacum* and 2 Timothy.

In examining these writings, we are looking in particular for the presentation of a model to the prospective philosopher, and the presentation of the philosopher as model for others to follow, as well as the explication of the ideal by means of antithesis. In these antithetic statements we are interested in discovering whether polemical language against false philosophers (whose original context must be sought, as Karris notes, in philosophic/sophist disputes) serves in this new context a paraenetic or protreptic purpose, that is, to offset by means of contrast the positive ideal.

1. Epictetus was not the sort of philosopher of whom Dio Chrysostom would approve, for his arena was not the marketplace, but the lecture hall.⁶³ Epictetus was not only a philosopher himself; he was also the teacher of young men who wished to be philosophers. Throughout his *Diatribes*⁶⁴ we hear him exhorting his students to stop glorying in their abstract discussions and to put virtue to work.⁶⁵ In one sense, nearly all his discourses can be called protreptic. This is certainly the case with the famous discourse on the ideal Cynic (III, 22). It is addressed to young men (though the interlocutor is typically singular) who wish to take up the cynic's calling. Epictetus uses the occasion to draw a highly idealized picture of the philosopher's calling and way of life.

vital part of philosophy, τὸ κράτιστον τῆς φιλοσοφίας, that is, the inculcation of virtue, and merely encourage skill in oratory (*Ad Demoniacum*, 3). In the discourses we will be considering, Isocrates' viewpoint will be very much shared. The point of these discourses is not oratorical skill but the virtuous life, lived philosophy. This is clear in Epictetus III, 23, 33–34. After castigating his students for being preoccupied with clever speechifying, he recognizes the value of a protreptic discourse (ὁ προτρεπτικός), placing it with refutation (ὁ ἐλεγκτικός) and teaching (ὁ διδασκαλικός), but separating it from orations made for display (ὁ ἐπιδεικνόν). As far as Epictetus is concerned, the style of the protreptic discourse is found in the ability to convince hearers of their erring ways and move them to conversion (34–37). It is in this broad sense that the term protreptic is used here. For the relation of such discourses to philosophic conversion, cf. H. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 282–283; and A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford: University Press, 1933), 164–186.

⁶³ Cf. the description of the “so-called philosophers” (οἱ καλούμενοι φιλόσοφοι) to whom Dio contrasts himself in Oration 32:8–9; (LCL, 1961), 178.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Epictetus* (LCL, 1965), II vols.

⁶⁵ Cf. I, 4, 5; I, 8, 4–10; II, 1, 31; II, 9, 17–20; II, 10, 30; II, 12; II, 16; II, 17, 20; II, 18; III, 2, 6; III, 3, 17ff.; III, 5, 17; III, 6, 3; III, 13, 23; III, 24, 38; IV, 4; IV, 5, 36–37; Frag. 10.

Although the term never occurs, the role of models is important throughout the discourse. The great model of the Cynic is, of course, Diogenes, both in his manner of speaking and in his way of life (24, 57, 80, 88, 91–92). Socrates (26) and Heracles (57) are also held up as models for the philosopher. The true cynic not only patterns himself on the words and deeds of the philosophers of old, but himself becomes a model of the philosophic life to others. He demonstrates in his life that a truly virtuous life is possible (87–88).⁶⁶

Also of interest to us is the way the ideal philosopher is contrasted to the false, or would-be philosopher, by means of antithetical statements. It is here that we find language about false philosophers which would be entirely at home in polemical contexts; here, it is used for protreptic purposes. Thus, in paragraph nine, Epictetus says, Καὶ σὺ βούλευσαι περὶ τοῦ πράγματος ἐπιμελῶς· οὐκ ἔστιν οἶον δοκεῖ σοι, and follows with this thumb-nail sketch of the phony philosopher:

I wear a rough cloak even as it is, and I shall have one then; I have a hard bed even now, and so shall I then; I shall take to myself a wallet and staff, and I shall begin to walk around and beg from those I meet, and revile them; and if I see someone who is getting rid of superfluous hair by the aid of pitch-plasters, I will come down hard on him (10).⁶⁷

Epictetus cautions: “If you fancy the affair to be something like this, give it a wide berth, don’t come near it, it is nothing for you” (11). Again, after sketching an ideal Cynic, Epictetus declares, “Lo, these are the words that befit a cynic, this is his character, and his plan of life,” and follows with the antithesis,

But no, you say, what makes a cynic is a contemptible wallet, a staff and big jaws; to devour everything you give him, or to stow it away, or to revile tactlessly the people he meets, or to show off his fine shoulder.⁶⁸

He warns, “Think the matter over more carefully!” (50–53). Again, in 97–100, we find the ideal contrasted to its negative followed by a reiteration of the ideal.

⁶⁶ The true Cynic says, “ἰδοὺ και τοῦτο μάρτυς εἰμί ἐγώ και τὸ σῶμα τὸ ἐμόν,” III, 22, 88.

⁶⁷ For the outer garb of the philosopher as a cloak for vice, cf. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, II, 29; Julian, *Oration* 7:223C and 225A; Dio, *Oration* 35:2, 3, 11; Lucian, *Timon*, 54; *The Runaways*, 19; *The Fisherman*, 42; *The Double Indictment*, 6.

⁶⁸ For φιλαργυρία as a vice of false philosophers, cf. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, I, 34; Julian, *Oration* 6:181C; 198B; Dio, *Oration* 32:9, 35:1; Epictetus I, 29, 45–47; 1, 9, 19–20; II, 17, 3; III, 24, 78; IV, 1, 139; Lucian, *The Runaways*, 14; *Philosophers for Sale*, 24; *Timon*, 56; *Menippus*, 5; *Hermotimus*, 9–10; *Dialogues of the Dead*, 374; *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 15–16; *The Parasite*, 52.

The castigation of false teachers is as harsh as those found in polemical contexts. But here the language of slander serves to highlight the ideal of the true philosopher. We can note, finally, that Epictetus views the ideal Cynic as one who will undergo *suffering* for his calling (54), and who has the attitude of a *physician* towards the souls of others (72–73).⁶⁹ These themes recur repeatedly in this literature.

2. Lucian of Samosata's attitude toward Philosophy was decidedly ambivalent; while being attracted to the ideals of the philosophic way of life, he was repulsed by its practitioners, and he uses every opportunity to lampoon them mercilessly.⁷⁰ It is the more surprising, then, to find in his works two discourses which present a favorable, even idealized, portrait of two otherwise unknown philosophers, Demonax and Nigrinus.⁷¹

He says that he himself was a student of Demonax, who, together with Sostratus, was a man “worthy of fame and remembrance,” λόγου καὶ μνήμης ἀξίων, (1). The reason he writes about Demonax, “The best of all philosophers I know about,” is to provide a model for those who wish to follow the philosophic life:

[T]hat he may be retained in memory (δια μνήμης) . . . and that young men who aspire (ὀρμῶντες) to philosophy may not have to shape themselves by ancient precedents alone (τὰ ἀρχαία μὲν τῶν παραδείγματων) but may have a more recent pattern (ἐμμετεροῦ βίου κανονα) to emulate (ζηλῶν) (2).

We see again that the true philosopher provides a model to the prospective philosopher, a model which is made effective through memory. Lucian continues the model theme in paragraph three:

He despised all that men count good, and committing himself unreservedly to liberty and free-speech (ἐλευθερία καὶ παρρησία) was steadfast in leading a

⁶⁹ Cf. also Epictetus, III, 23, 30: “Ἰατρειὸν ἔστιν ἄνδρες, τὸ τοῦ φιλοσόφου σχολεῖον.”

⁷⁰ Lucian's sharp tongue lashed out at all philosophers without much discrimination. But he treats sympathetically the philosopher Cyniscus (*The Downward Journey*, *Zeus Cathechized*), delights in the freedom and free speech of Diogenes and Menippus (*Dialogues of the Dead*), and even portrays Pythagoras, so often a figure of fun for him, discoursing reasonably in *The Dream*. He likes the skepticism of the Epicureans before the charlatan Alexander (*Alexander the False Prophet*). In the *Fisherman*, he paints an admiring portrait of philosophy and claims, like Aristides, that he attacks not true philosophy, but the imposters who do harm in its name. He even has an honored place for philosophy in his ideal educational program (*Anacharsis*). It is freedom and free-speech that Lucian likes most about philosophy, and, given the sorry state of most philosophers, he thinks those ideals should be sought in the life of the “common man” away from the ambit of professional philosophical schools (*Menippus*, 21; *Hermotimus*, 84).

⁷¹ For both *Demonax* and *Nigrinus*, cf. Lucian (LCL, 1921).

straight (ὀρθῶ) sane (ὕγιει) irreproachable life (ἀνεπιλήπτω βίῳ) and in setting an example (παράδειγμα) to all who saw and heard him, by his good judgment and the honesty of his philosophy.

Lucian sketches the ideal, picture of Demonax by means of nine antithetical statements, many of them in the οὐ . . . ἀλλὰ form we met in *Ad Demonicum*. In each case, the positive ideal of Demonax is contrasted to other practitioners of philosophy. As examples, Demonax did not alter his way of living in order to cause wonderment among men, but led a simple life and maintained his place in society (thus contrasted to the showy manner of wandering Cynics).⁷² He did not cultivate irony or harshness of speech, but spoke with Attic charm, so that his hearers were not sent away gloomy, but full of joy (thus contrasted with Socrates, and the harsh manner of the Cynics).⁷³ Noteworthy above all was his gentleness, even when he had to rebuke (ἐπιτιμᾶν) someone. He had the attitude of a doctor, who hated sickness but could feel no anger toward the sick (7). Like the ideal teacher of 2 Timothy, then, he was himself healthy and tried to make others healthy. But even though Demonax was much admired, he too suffered hatred from the masses, and had enemies who charged him with crimes (11). The discourse continues with a lengthy recital of Demonax's jokes and a pious recountal of his last moments and death (12–66). At the very end of the discourse, (67), Lucian states, "These are a few of the things, out of many, which I have recalled (ἀπεμνήμονευσα) to give my readers a notion of what sort of man he was." His writing has been an act of reminiscence, of memory.

In Demonax we have seen a work which is explicitly protreptic (it wishes to encourage young men to follow the philosophic way), which presents the memory of a model for imitation, which explicates the model by means of antithetical statements, within the negative part of which appears language condemnatory of unworthy philosophers. The function here is not to denigrate them in order to establish Demonax's teaching,

⁷² On the love of glory as a philosophic vice, cf. Dio, *Oration* 32:10, 11, 19, 20, 24; 33:1, 9–10; Julian, *Oration* 6:190D, 197B, 200C, and *Oration* 7:226A; Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* 1, 4, 20, 38, 42; *The Fisherman* 31, 34, 46; *The Parasite* 52; *Menippus* 5; *The Runaways* 12, 19; *Dialogues of the Dead* 369, 417.

⁷³ The philosopher's speech must be characterized by directness, freedom, and even severity (Dio, *Oration* 77/78: 45; 33:13). Dio says, "A good prince is marked by compassion, a bad philosopher by lack of severity," *Oration* 32:18. But this severity must not be mere abuse (cf. Dio, *Oration* 4:19, 74; Epictetus III, 22, 10 and 90).

but to provide a negative shading to the ideal, so that those who wish to be philosophers will know what to avoid as well as what to imitate as they follow that life.

Lucian's *Nigrinus* is a more complex work. It is in the form of a dialogue in which an eager convert to philosophy recounts for a friend the experience which converted him to that life, his association with the philosopher Nigrinus. The major portion of the dialogue consists in a recountal of one of Nigrinus' lectures. Though the work is not explicitly protreptic, it functions as such, for the result of the recountal is the desire of the second young man to seek the philosophical way of life, and they go off together to "seek healing" from the philosopher who had wounded them, that is, spoken in such a way as to stimulate conversion (38). Thus, the literary complexity. Nigrinus spoke in the first instance, and converted the first man; the recital of that conversion causes the second to convert; and the implied result of reading this whole dialogue is that the reader, too, will experience such a conversion.

The function of memory in bringing to life the model is particularly well described here. The enthusiastic convert says, "I take pleasure in calling his words to mind (μεμνήσθαι) frequently" (6), and he compares himself to lovers away from their beloved, who, "by applying their minds to memory of the past (τῆ μνήμῃ τῶν παρεληλυθότων) give themselves no time to be annoyed by the present." So he is separated from the master, but is comforted by the memory of his words, even calling to mind his face and the sound of his voice (7).

Nigrinus did not teach only by words. In all that he did, he set "no mean examples" (οὐ μικρὰ . . . παραδείγματα) for those who wished to imitate him (τοῖς ζηλοῦν ἐθέλουσι), (26).

The ideal represented by Nigrinus is sharpened by attacks on "those self-styled philosophers" (24) who behave contrary to that ideal and their own philosophic precepts. Thus, he condemns those who, even when dressed in their ascetic garb, carouse at parties (the φιληδονη motif, (25), and those who "put virtue on sale," teaching in lecture halls for hire the φιλαργυρία motif, (25). In contrast to them, Nigrinus not only taught contempt for money, but demonstrated it in his own life (26) Nigrinus also condemned those who advocated violent physical exercises as a part of philosophic training, considering it better to create toughness in the soul (28), and he himself provided the model of a well-ordered, strenuous but well-balanced life (27). The antitheses in paragraphs 24–29 run: negative, negative, positive, positive, negative, positive.

In this protreptically oriented dialogue, we find the picture of the ideal philosopher, who is a model for others, and whose words and manner are brought alive by memory. The ideal is expressed in antithetical statements. In the negative statements, we find polemical language typically used against false philosophers. In this literary context, the function of the language is not to establish the teacher's credentials, so that his teaching will be accepted, but to make a negative foil to the ideal, so that hearers will know what to avoid as well as what to follow.

3. When we turn to Dio Chrysostom, we find that in four of his orations (12, 32, 33, 35), he approaches a new audience by distinguishing himself from other popular preachers, the sophists in particular, but also other kinds of philosophers.⁷⁴ In those discourses, he uses the language of polemic precisely the way Karris has suggested, namely, to clear the way for his own presentation by establishing his superior credentials and authority. But that use of polemic, we have already seen, is not the same as in 2 Timothy.

There remains another discourse of Dio's which deserves closer consideration. Oration 77/78 does not present itself as a protreptic discourse for future philosophers, nor do we find in it the notions of memory and model. What we do find is that Dio presents the picture of the ideal philosopher, and in that picture employs polemical language to establish an antithesis to the ideal. Most interesting here is the way attention is focused on the philosopher's mission of teaching, and how that teaching is to be carried out. In this regard, the discourse resembles 2 Timothy.

Oration 77/78 begins as a discourse on envy (*φθόνος*). By paragraph 19, however, the dialogical form is dropped, and Dio launches into a sustained discourse; at the same time, the focus of discussion shifts from envy as such, to the depiction of the noble man who is untouched by envy (26). Imperceptibly, the image of the noble man becomes the picture of the ideal philosopher and his mission. This shift in direction seems to be stimulated by Dio's attention to false, or so-called philosophers (*τοὺς καλούμενους φιλόσοφους*) in paragraph 34.

⁷⁴ In addition to the materials on sophists cited by Karris, one can mention Dio, *Oration* 4:28, 38; 6:21; 8:9; 10:32; 11:14; 33:4–5, 14–15; 35:3–8; 55:7; 66:12; 77/78:27. On false philosophers, in addition to 77/78 which we will look at, cf. 70:8–10, which is, again, structured antithetically, it should be noted in particular that these passages in Dio contain a remarkably high number of verbal agreements with the Pastorals.

Dio compares these so-called philosophers, who hang about the doors of the rich and toady to them, to the cowardly (δειλοῖς) lions who guarded Circe, lions who were in reality, “wretched men, foolish, corrupted by luxury and idleness,” (δύστηνοι ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἀνόηται, διεφθαρμένοι διὰ τρυφῆν καὶ ἀργίαν). In contrast to them, the man of virtue not only refuses to abandon his freedom and liberty of speech (ἐλευθερία καὶ παρρησία) for any payment of riches (χρημάτων) or power (δυνάμενος), but does not envy those who do so sell themselves; rather, he pities (ἐλέων) them (37).

Having distinguished the true philosopher from the false, Dio continues with the positive description. The philosopher is one who not only practices virtue and sobriety himself (ἀρετὴν καὶ σωφροσύνην), but tries to lead all men to do the same (πάντας ἐπὶ ταύτα αγωγόν). What is distinctive about the following passage is the way it resembles 2 Timothy in its attention to the task of teaching. We must notice the antithetical structure and the sort of language frequently found in polemic: the philosopher is to teach

partly by persuading and exhorting (πείθων καὶ παρακαλῶν), partly by abusing and reproaching (λοιδορούμενος καὶ ὀνειδίζων) in the hope that he may thereby rescue somebody from folly and low desires and intemperate and soft living (ἀφροσύνης καὶ φαύλων ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ ἀκρασίας καὶ τρυφῆς), taking them aside privately one by one, and also admonishing them in groups. . . . he is sound in words and sound in deeds (ὕγιής μὲν ἐν λόγοις ὕγιής δὲ ἐν ἔργοις) (38–39).

The resemblance to 2 Timothy 2:23–24 is unmistakable. Dio presses home the ideal way of teaching by means of antithesis:

Not arousing strife (στάσιν) or greed (πλεονεξίαν) or contentions (ἔριδας) and jealousies (φθόνους) and base desires for gain (αισχρὰ κέρδη) but (δέ) by reminding them (ὑπομνησκῶν) of sobriety (σωφροσύνης) and justice (δικαιοσύνης) and promoting concord (ὁμόνοιαν). (39)

At times, the philosopher will suffer defeat and be powerless (40); those who see him training his body will scorn him (καταφρονοῦσι) and consider him mad (μαίνεσθαι νομίζουσι) and dishonor him (ἀτιμάζουσιν). But he (ὁ δὲ) does not grow angry (ὀργίζεται) and is kinder (εὐνοώστερος) to them than a father or brother or friends (42). He tries, as far as he is able, to help all men (40).

As we have seen repeatedly in these descriptions of the ideal philosophic teacher, the image of the physician is employed. Dio says that the severity and honesty of the true philosopher is like the severity of the physician, and his only concern is the healing of souls (43–44). He concludes,

far worse than a corrupt and diseased body is a soul which is corrupt (ψυχὴ διεφθαρμένη), not, I swear, because of salves or potions or some consuming poison, but rather because of ignorance (ἀγνοίας) and depravity (πονηρίας) and insolence (ὑβρεως) and jealousy (φθόνου) and grief (λύπης) and unnumbered desires (ἐπιθυμιών). This disease and ailment is more grievous than that of Heracles and requires a far greater and more flaming cautery; and to this healing (ἴασιν) and release (ἀπέλυσιν), one must summon without demur father or son, kinsman or outsider, citizen or alien. (45)

The points of contact between this oration and 2 Timothy are numerous.⁷⁵ The false philosophers are described, not in opposition to the speaker, but to the ideal being depicted. The same sort of language as found in polemical documents is here employed. The true teacher does not follow a method which will disturb and upset others, but in a variety of ways *reminds* them (in his words and by the example of his own life) of the way of virtue. He will experience rebuff and mocking, but he tries to help all. He is like a physician, combining severity and gentleness.

From an examination of these materials, we have located precedents both for the form and content of 2 Timothy. We have seen that 2 Timothy follows with considerable fidelity the form of personal paraenesis described by Ps-Libanius and illustrated by *Ad Demonicum*. In discourses exhorting others to become philosophers, the ideal teachers of virtue in Hellenism, we found the use of polemical language, ordinarily employed in disputes, to provide a contrast to the ideal model being sketched. It is among these writings, I suggest, that we find the real parallels to the function of the polemical language in 2 Timothy.

⁷⁵ *Oration 77/78:37–45* contains these significant verbal parallels to the passages in the Pastorals which deal with false teachers: δειλός (cf. 2 Tim 1:7); ἀνόητοι (1 Tim 6:9, Titus 3:3); διεφθαρμένοι (1 Tim 6:5; cf. 2 Tim 3:8); νοσητέω (Titus 3:10); φθόνος (1 Tim 6:4, Titus 3:3); διαφυλάττειν (of the philosopher; cf. φυλάσσω in 1 Tim 5:21; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14; 4:15); σωφροσύνη (1 Tim 2:9, 15; cf. Titus 2:6); παρακαλῶν (1 Tim 1:3; 2:1; 5:1; 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit 1:9; 2:6, 15); ὀνειδίζων (var. reading in 1 Tim 4:10); φαύλων (Titus 2:8); ἐπιθυμία (1 Tim 6:9; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:6; 4:3; Titus 2:12; 3:3); ὑγιής λόγος (Titus 2:8; cf. ὑγιαίνουσα, 1 Tim 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1–2); ἔρις (1 Tim 6:4; Titus 3:9); αἰσχροῦ κέρδους (Titus 1:11); δικαιοσύνη (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:16; 4:8; Titus 3:5); καθαίρω (2 Tim 2:21; cf. καθαρός, 1 Tim 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3; 2:22; Titus 1:15); μαχόμενος (positively for Dio, negatively for 2 Tim 2:24; cf. also μάχας, 2 Tim 2:23; Titus 3:9); μένω (of the philosopher; cf. 2 Tim 3:14; πλουτεῖν (1 Tim 6:9); νοσοῦντας (cf. νοσέω, 1 Tim 6:4); ἀγνοίας (cf. ἀγνοέω, 1 Tim 1:13); πονηρίας (cf. πονηρός, 1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 3:13); ὑπομνήσκω (2 Tim 2:14).

Paraenesis and Polemic in 1 Timothy and Titus

My treatment of these letters must necessarily be schematic and suggestive. We must recognize first the obvious and important differences between these letters and 2 Timothy. The tone is less personal, especially in Titus. The concern of the author is not simply the character and methods of his delegates, but the task they are to perform within the Church. 1 Tim 3:14–15 appears to state the theme of that letter: ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι. Timothy must not only regulate the affairs of the Church; he must also know how to deal with different groups within the Church. In Titus, too, the commands concerning Church order follow upon the opening commission, “This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.” (1:5)

This awareness of the Church extends to its relations with outsiders. The “lack of shame” in 2 Timothy changes to “blamelessness” (ἀνεπίλημπος), a more outward-looking expression, and one which runs through both letters (cf. 1 Tim 3:2, 7; 4:15; 5:7, 14; 6:1, 11; Tit 1:6, 7; 2:4, 10; 3:8). It affects as well the treatment of the false teachers. 1 Tim 1:4 mentions that they are more concerned with their speculations than with the οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ,⁷⁶ and Tit 1:11 says, ὅλους οἴκους ἀνατρέπουσιν. Probably as a consequence, the role of the delegates as contrasted to them is described in more militant terms than in 2 Timothy (cf. 1 Tim 1:5, 18, and especially Tit 1:9 and 11). But even this militancy is mollified, as in 2 Tim, by a desire for the heretics’ conversion: δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν ἐλεγχε αὐτοὺς ἀποτόμως, ἵνα ὑγιαίνωσιν ἐν τῇ πίστει (Tit 1:13). We cannot, therefore, simply assume that the function of the polemic in these letters is the same as in 2 Timothy. But if we find there is a close similarity and that certain structural/thematic elements are present in both, the case for 2 Timothy is strengthened.

1 Timothy

It is striking that in the parts of 1 Timothy which deal with the determinations of Church order and the evangelist’s relations to groups within

⁷⁶ Whether one reads οἰκονομίαν here (as the textual evidence demands) or οἰκοδομή (as D*, lat, Iren, Ambrst), the “household” associations of the image remain—not only individual believers, but the whole “ordering” of God is being upset by the heretics. Cf. Dibelius-Conzelmann, 17; Brox, 103; Spicq, I, 323–324; Kelly, 45–46.

the community, there is no mention of the false teachers. Nor is there a separate section set aside for an orderly refutation or condemnation of them. Rather, the material dealing with the false teachers occurs in four distinct units: 1:5–20; 5:14–4:16; 6:2–16 and 6:20–21. Let us look at each unit in turn.

A. The first unit, 1:5–20, has a triadic structure: (1) the first charge to Timothy (5–11); (2) the example of Paul (12–17); (3) the commission to Timothy repeated (18–20).

(1) The first description of false teachers depends on the first command to Timothy: he is to charge certain ones not to teach falsely (1:5). The description of their preoccupations (1:4) is followed immediately by the characterization of the *παραγγελία*, as love which flows from a pure heart, good conscience and a sincere faith (1:5), qualities Timothy himself possesses (1:19), but which the heretics have abandoned: ὧν τινες ἀστοχῆσαντες (1:6), ἦν τινες ἀπώσάμενοι (1:19). The heretics are described as those wishing to be teachers of the law (6–7). This is countered (8–11) by the proper understanding of the law shared (οἴδαμεν δέ) by Paul and Timothy.

(2) The second part of the triadic structure (1:12–17) is particularly interesting. The last thought of v. 11, that Paul had been entrusted with the Gospel, is developed into a reflection on Paul's career.⁷⁷ That the sinner Paul has been saved stands as proof of the saying that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Paul presents himself as a model, not in his words and actions, as in 2 Timothy, but of one who had been shown mercy. He is a ὑποτύπωσιν τῶν μελλόντων πιστεῦειν ἐπ' αὐτῷ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον (1:16). The meaning here is obviously different than in 2 Timothy, but here again, in the middle of a section dealing with false teachers, Paul appears as a model.

(3) The third element of this triadic section repeats the charge to Timothy. Paul solemnly commissions Timothy with his charge: Ταύτην τὴν παραγγελίαν παρατίθεμαί σοι. Timothy is to act in accord with the charge itself, with faith and a good conscience (cf. 1:5). Timothy's approach to the false teachers is described as a warfare (στρατείαν). The false teachers are briefly described (1:19), and Paul says he handed over two of them to Satan (1:20); Timothy, we suppose, should follow suit.

⁷⁷ We noted a similar shift in 2 Tim 1:9–11.

In the first unit of material dealing with false teachers Paul is presented as a model for Timothy and all believers, and the descriptions of the false teachers are placed in antithesis to the proper teaching that Timothy, the receiver of Paul's commission, was to carry on.

B. The second unit dealing with false teachers (3:14–4:16) follows a similar pattern. Paul writes instructions to Timothy, so he will know how to behave until Paul comes (3:14). The vagaries of the false teachers are recounted in 4:1–3a. This is countered (as in 1:8–11) by a proper understanding (4:3b–5). Timothy is told that if he puts “these things”, that is, the proper teaching, before the brothers, he will be a καλῆς διδασκαλίας (4:6). The next verses elaborate this image of the good minister. Timothy is to avoid (παραιτοῦ) the kinds of myths associated with false teachers. Positively, he is to exercise (γυμνασία) himself in Godliness (4:7). Vs. 8a may present the negative alternative of excessive bodily exertion; the value of training in godliness is superior (8b).

In 4:11, the command to Timothy is repeated: Παράγγελλε ταῦτα καὶ δίδασκε. In 12–13, the model motif recurs. Now, Timothy is to be the model: τύπος γίνου τῶν πιστῶν ἐν λόγῳ, ἐν ἀναστροφῇ. Typically, he is to be an example both in words and manner of life. But Timothy's role as a model is subordinate to Paul's. His continues ἕως ἔρχομαι (4:13). The paraenetic commands come quickly in vv. 15–16: “Practice these duties, devote yourself to them . . . take heed to yourself and your teaching, hold to that.” The result of Timothy's striving to be the καλὸς διάκονος is that his “progress will be manifest to all,” (15b) and he will save not only himself but those who hear him (16b); this is the reason for being a model.

The focus in this unit is unswervingly on Timothy's role as teacher in Paul's absence. We see again the role of the model, the positive and negative commands explicating the model, and the description of the false teachers functioning as foil to this positive presentation.

C. The third unit dealing with the false teachers (6:2–16) is also the most detailed in slander. Here, again, we see that the section opens with a command to Timothy: Ταῦτα δίδασκε καὶ παρακάλει, namely, the directives Paul established for various groups in the community. The false teachers are those who refuse to accept the things handed on by Timothy from Paul. Their description continues until 5b, where the motivation of the heretics is said to be love of money. As in 1:8–11 and 4:3b–5, their misconception is countered by the proper understanding. The profit gained from the ministry is not riches, as they think, but “godliness in contentment” (6:7–8).

This correction is followed by a continuation of the polemic against false teachers (6:9–10). The climax of the section is reached in the command, once more, to Timothy: Σὺ δέ, ὦ ἄνθρωπε θεοῦ, ταῦτα φεύγε. Timothy is to avoid both their motivation and methods. Rather, (δέ) he is to pursue (δίωκε) justice, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness (4:11). The similarity to 2 Tim 2:22 is here particularly strong. As in 2 Tim 4:1ff., also, Paul then continues with a solemn exhortation to Timothy to hold on faithfully in his teaching office. Again, in spite of the extended description of the false teachers in this unit, it seems clear that their characterization has the function of providing a sharp contrast to the path Timothy himself is to follow.

D. The final unit (6:20–21) is the shortest and ends the letter. It contains the typical antithesis. Timothy is to guard what has been entrusted to him (παραθήκη φύλαξον, cf. 2 Tim 1:14) and avoid (ἐκτρέπομενος) the ways of the false teachers which lead to an abandonment of that deposit.

If one were to eliminate the rest of 1 Timothy and link together the four units dealing with Timothy the ideal teacher as opposed to the false teachers, one would have a fairly coherent personal paraenetic letter, much like 2 Timothy. This suggests, at least, that in spite of the distinguishing characteristics of the letter which we earlier noted, the polemic against the false teachers functions here, as in 2 Timothy, as an anti-type to the ideal teacher, who finds his model in Paul and is himself a model in word and in deeds, to the faithful.

Titus

The literary pattern in Titus is less clear. The first mention of false teachers comes in contrast, not to Titus, but to the Bishop. The Bishop must be a man who is able to teach sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it (1:9). He must do this because there are many who are insubordinate (1:10). The Bishop, we are to understand, is responsible for seeing that they are silenced as they should be (1:11).

But in 1:13, the attention shifts to Titus' own role: "Therefore rebuke them sharply." The continuing description of the false teachers (1:14–16) is then contrasted to the positive teaching of Titus: Σὺ δὲ λάλει ἅ πρέπει τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ, a general enough command, clearly to be contrasted διδάσκοντες ἅ μὴ δεῖ in 1:11.

Paul does not appear as a model in this letter. It is Titus who is the model for the faithful: *περι πάντα, σεαυτὸν παρεχόμενος τύπον καλῶν ἔργων* (2:7). He is to be a model in both words and deeds. This model precludes the accusations of the false teachers.

Again in 2:15, we find the command to Titus to be a teacher: *Ταῦτα λάλει καὶ παρακάλει καὶ ἔλεγχε μετὰ πάσης ἐπιταγῆς*. Finally, in 3:8, Paul orders Titus to insist on the things he teaches, for they are *useful* to men. In contrast to this, he is to avoid (*περιῖστασο*) the foolish teachings of the opponents because they are not useful (3:9). Titus is to admonish them once or twice, but then avoid (*παραιτοῦ*) them (3:10).

Titus does give us the picture of the delegate of Paul as the ideal teacher who is a model for the community. His way of teaching is contrasted to that of his opponents by means of antithetical statements, within which we find the typical polemical language.

Conclusions

In this essay, I have tried to show that the polemical language against false teachers in 2 Timothy has the function within a paraenetic framework of providing a contrast to the ideal Christian teacher. I have suggested that the Hellenistic materials pertinent to understanding this function are, with regard to form, letters of personal paraenesis, and, with regard to content, philosophic protreptic discourses. I have tried to demonstrate, though schematically, that 1 Tim and Titus, each in its own degree, use the polemical language in a way closely similar to 2 Timothy.

By accepting the position that the polemical language is to a large extent stereotyped and that identifying the opponents is hazardous, I do not suggest that there were no real opponents. The polemic against false teachers in the Hellenistic materials is stereotyped, but there is more than enough evidence that the disputes between philosophic schools and teachers of all sorts were real and bitter. Nor does the position that these polemical passages in the Pastorals serve the paraenetic function I have suggested lead to the inference that the false teachers were just “straw men,” propped up only to be demolished. The anxious tone of the letters does not permit such a purely literary understanding. But the position I have argued for may help the reader grasp the central interest of the author of the Pastorals and the real point of his teaching. The Pastorals are not thereby diminished, but illuminated.

CHAPTER TWENTY

OIKONOMIA THEOU: THE THEOLOGICAL VOICE OF 1 TIMOTHY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

The point of this thought-experiment is to assess the theological character of 1 Timothy. The perspective assumed—not argued for—is that of Pauline authorship: at the very least, this means that the letter is to be read as a production of the Pauline mission under the authority of Paul himself within his lifetime.¹ The reader of the present essay should constantly bear in mind that the goal here is not to demonstrate the validity of such a perspective but to use it as a way of viewing this literary composition from what is today considered an unusual angle.

Clarifications and Caveats

Adopting the perspective of Pauline authorship still leaves a number of important questions concerning how 1 Timothy is to be approached. Preliminary discussion of two questions may help prevent later deflections and distractions. The first concerns the corollaries of Pauline authorship: what does it mean for evaluating the data? Certainly, in determining the historical circumstances for the letter's composition it is possible to use the evidence of Acts and the undisputed Pauline letters as evidence: the letter can be read in the context of the mid-first century Pauline mission concerning which we have considerable evidence, rather than in a hypothetical second-century context concerning which we have little evidence. The striking similarities between 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, for example, might be read not in terms of one letter imitating the other, but of both letters being written to similar situations in similar communities during the same period of Paul's ministry. 1 Tim 1:3 says Paul has left Timothy in charge for a short period of time while he travels to Macedonia (see also 3:14; 4:13). We can begin by taking that self-presentation seriously and seeing where it leads. We can appraise information about the community

¹ See the discussion of Pauline "authorship" in Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 250–259.

situation, such as the identity and ideology of those whom the author opposes, without reference to other letters. 1 Timothy can be read in terms of itself rather than with reference to 2 Timothy or Titus, just as Galatians is read in terms of itself rather than with reference to Romans.

1 Timothy, in short, is to be treated here like other Pauline letters. It is not assumed to be part of a package composed all at once, and therefore needing to be put at a certain point at the end of Paul's active ministry or after it. Likewise its literary form is not automatically connected to second-century productions, but is compared to other first-century compositions. Its directives are read not as though coming from the time of Polycarp and Ignatius but from the generation of Cephas and James. Its thought is not correlated without further ado with Titus and 2 Timothy, but is compared to other Pauline letters that might be assumed to have already been written. Thus, if the circumstances presented by 1 Timothy suggest a dating around 55 (the time of Paul's Aegean travels), comparisons are most naturally made with the Thessalonian and Corinthian letters.²

A second preliminary question concerns the meaning of theology when used with reference to Paul's letters. The present essay does not assume the existence of a "Pauline theology" as a system of doctrines that exists outside the various compositions bearing his name, or that is identifiable and locatable in specific passages or propositions within those compositions. It does suppose that Paul's language in all his letters is not only religious in its sensibility but also derives from and helps construct a construal of reality that can be properly called "theological." To search for the theology of 1 Timothy, then, is not to seek for those statements that appear to agree or disagree with another set of statements that are identified as "Paul's theology"—a set of statements, furthermore, drawn from a group of compositions that have already been designated as authentically Pauline and against whose steady and secure norm any pretenders must be measured—but is rather to seek for the larger construal of reality as defined by God within which the specific statements in 1 Timothy gain their specific point and distinctive coherence. Only when the individual voice of 1 Timothy is fairly and adequately heard should it be placed into conversation with the voices of the other Pauline letters, in a larger and more complex conversation that might properly be designated as "Pauline theology."

² See John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 54, 82–85.

Composition and Setting

The operative assumption here is that 1 Timothy is a real letter written to Paul's delegate, Timothy, during the time of his Aegean ministry. Analysis of the composition's voice can begin with the classic questions of historical criticism. In the case of a letter, we become better readers to the degree that we can grasp something of the form of the composition, the way it constructs its implied author and readers, and the situation it addresses. We work at these questions although we are aware that, even in the case of real letters written to real people, the world thus constructed is not necessarily one its putative participants would have recognized; at best, we gain knowledge of the writer's perception of things.

We begin with the observation that the portrayal of the respective roles of Paul and Timothy make sense within those inscribed for each in the other sources for Paul's mission.³ Paul is a founder of churches who also travels. He uses associates such as Timothy and Titus as his delegates to local communities in his absence. Their function is to represent Paul to the community, "to remind [them] of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (1 Cor 4:17). In the present case, Timothy is to provide the Ephesian community with "an example in speech and conduct, in love and faith, in purity" (1 Tim 4:12) and until Paul's return from his travels, is to oversee the church's worship (4:13) and to communicate Paul's commands (*παράγγελλαι*) on a number of issues (1:3, 5; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17, 18).

The delegate's obligation to be both personal example and surrogate administrator helps account for the peculiar literary form of 1 Timothy. At first glance, the letter appears as a hodgepodge of paraenesis and instruction, without much coherence. The classic explanation considered the personal exhortation as the fictive paraphernalia of pseudepigraphy, and the commands as the first step toward Church Orders.⁴ More recent analysis has led to a better classification of 1 Timothy as a *mandata principis* letter.⁵ Such letters were written by rulers to their representatives in

³ See Margaret M. Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus," *JBL* 111 (1992) 641–662.

⁴ See Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 5–7.

⁵ See the discussions in Benjamin Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (AB 105; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986); and Michael Wolter, *Die Pastoralbriefe als Paulustradition* (FRLANT 146; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988) 164–177.

particular localities, and are attested before the first century C.E. One of the fullest extant examples, *Tebtunis Papyrus* 703, combines a variety of specific directives that the delegate is to have carried out (dealing with agriculture, waterworks, officials' salaries, transport, deserting soldiers), with an exhortation concerning the personal character of the delegate (see lines 257–280). The letter gains its distinctiveness from its mix of private and public elements; it clearly intends a readership wider than the named addressee. When read aloud in the assembly or published by being posted in a public place, such a document accomplished two things: for the delegate, it provided authorization for the practical chores the ruler wanted carried out; for the community, it provided a norm of good behavior in office, against which the delegate could be measured. 1 Timothy perfectly fits the form and function of such a *mandata principis* letter.

If 1 Timothy is a real letter intended to be read by Paul's delegate and his community, then we should inquire as well into Paul's relationship with this community, such as we can reconstruct it from the remaining evidence, as well as Paul's perceptions of this community, such as they are constructed by this composition. This is particularly important, since the "theology" of the letter emerges by way of response to the particular features of that situation.

The account in Acts suggests that although Paul was not really the one who started the Christian movement at Ephesus (18:20–21, 24–28), he was an important presence (19:1–7) over a more than two year period (19:10) before becoming *persona non grata* with the authorities (19:23–41), requiring his poignant farewell to the Ephesian elders to take place in nearby Miletus (20:17–35).⁶ That Paul's experiences in Ephesus were not entirely pleasant is shown by his statement, in a letter probably written from that city, that in addition to the great opportunity presented to him there, Ephesus also contained "many opponents" (ἀντικείμενοι πολλοί, 1 Cor 16:9). In the same letter, he mentions "fighting with beasts in Ephesus" (1 Cor 15:32)—which may well refer to his struggles with opponents⁷—and in 2 Cor 1:8 he speaks of the "tribulation that befell us in Asia." The letter written to the church at Ephesus in Rev 2:1–7 also suggests that the Pauline character of Christianity in that city was scarcely absolute.

⁶ For the peculiarities of the Acts narrative in this section, see Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992) 327–367.

⁷ See Abraham J. Malherbe, "The Beasts at Ephesus," in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 79–89.

From an analysis of Paul's comments and commandments concerning the community, four salient features emerge. First, this is a church that has been in existence for some time, as indicated by the presence of a leadership structure, an established order of worship and teaching, and a system of caring for widows in the community. One need not suppose much time required for such protocols to emerge, for Paul assumes some form of local leadership even in youthful communities (see 1 Thess 5:12–13), and models were readily available from both *collegia* and synagogues.⁸ Second, there are strong indications that some members of the community enjoyed a significant amount of wealth: it is possible for the author to be concerned that women appear at worship in gold or pearls or costly attire (2:9); some female heads of households can assume the financial burden of caring for their relatives who are widows (5:16); some in the community are slave-owners (6:2); and some are sufficiently wealthy to be termed “the rich in the present age” (τοῖς πλουσίοις ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι, 6:17), and to be thought of as having “set their hopes on uncertain riches” (6:18).

1 Timothy also portrays the community as having within it “certain ones” (τινες; see 1:3, 1:19 and 6:3) who are “teaching otherwise” (ἕτεροδιδασκαλεῖν, 1:3). Two of them, Hymenaios and Alexander, Paul has “handed over to Satan, so that they might be taught not to blaspheme” (1:20). Otherwise, these would-be teachers of the community are not identified. The delineation of Pauline opponents is always problematic, and the heavy use of stereotyped polemic against the opponents in the Pastorals makes the task even more difficult.⁹ The charge that rival teachers are “lovers of money,” for example, is used so indiscriminately in antiquity that it is impossible to say whether the charge in 6:5 that some consider godliness a source of profit has any referential value.

The depiction of the opponents in 1 Timothy is, however, distinctive. The author uses relatively less vilifying rhetoric and relatively more specific characterization of their teaching. In contrast to 2 Timothy, the opponents are not said to hold a position concerning the resurrection. In contrast to Titus, they are not explicitly identified as belonging to the circumcision party or to be concerned with purity regulations. 1 Timothy is

⁸ See now the important monographs by James T. Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Service and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).

⁹ See Robert J. Karris, “The Background and Significance of the Polemic in the Pastoral Epistles,” *JBL* 92 (1973) 549–64; Luke T. Johnson, “2 Timothy and the Polemic against False Teachers: a Re-examination,” *JRS* 6/7 (1978–79) 1–26.

also distinctive among the Pastorals for actually engaging the issues purportedly advanced by the opponents. We shall find this engagement to be an important dimension of the composition's theology.

For now, we can note that these characters are presumably members of the community, that they want to be teachers of law (νομοδιδάσκαλοι, 1:7), that they indulge in investigations or disputations (ἐκζητήσεις) concerning myths and endless genealogies (1:4), that they forbid marriage and the eating of certain foods (4:2–3), that they (apparently) favor physical asceticism (4:7–8), that (possibly) they think religious profession should lead to profit (6:5), and that what the author calls their “contradictions” (ἀντιθέσεις), they consider to be “knowledge” (γνώσις, 6:20). In short, they appear as intellectual elitists who seek to impose standards of behavior on the community on the basis of their expertise. For Paul, they have rejected conscience and shipwrecked faith (1:19).

Finally, the Ephesian church is portrayed as having a leadership crisis. In part, this conclusion can be drawn from the attention given to the moral and managerial qualities desired in those to be chosen as supervisors (ἐπισκόποις, 3:1–7) and helpers (διάκονοι, 3:8–13), and in part from reading between the lines of Paul's instructions to his delegate concerning the elders. When we put together the remarks that some think godliness is a source of profit (6:5), that the faults of some people appear only over the course of time (5:24), that Timothy is to avoid haste in appointing leaders and avoid participating in the sins of another (5:22), that charges are being brought against elders (5:19), and that elders who serve well should receive double payment (5:17), we have grounds for concluding that all is not well in the Ephesian *presbyterion*.

1 Timothy constructs the profile of a community that is established in its basic structures, but is experiencing a leadership crisis involving a lack of management ability and moral weakness; that has a number of members who challenge the Pauline leadership and who claim on the basis of superior knowledge the right to dictate behavioral norms concerning food and marriage; and that has some wealthy members whose display raises serious issues concerning the boundaries between the measure of the world and the measure of faith.

It may be instructive to note how many parallels there are between the situation sketched in 1 Timothy and that found in 1 Corinthians. In each case, Paul uses his delegate Timothy as his representative to remind the community of his teaching and his “ways” (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10–11 // 1 Tim 1:3; 4:11–14). In each case, Paul tries to establish boundaries by “handing over to Satan” those upsetting the community (1 Cor 5:1–5 // 1 Tim 1:20).

Each community contains a certain number of wealthy persons who can disrupt worship by the display of social status (1 Cor 11:17–22 // 1 Tim 2:9–10), and whose ownership of slaves occasions questions concerning the relationship of Christian identity to social class (1 Cor 1:11; 7:21–23 // 1 Tim 6:1–2). In each church, heads of households are recommended as leaders (1 Cor 16:15–18 // 1 Tim 3:4, 12). In each letter, in fact, the image of the “house of God” is applied to the church (θεοῦ οἰκοδομή in 1 Cor 3:9–11 // οἶκῳ θεοῦ in 1 Tim 3:15). Each letter also presents a remarkably similar set of behavioral issues. Some in the community consider themselves possessed of a superior wisdom or knowledge (γνώσις; 1 Cor 1:17; 3:18–19; 8:1 // 1 Tim 1:7; 6:20–21). There are problems with charges being made or lawsuits being instituted (1 Cor 6:1–5 // 1 Tim 5:19–20). There are problems revolving around sexuality: in each case, the statement must be made that women can or should have a husband (1 Cor 7:2 // 1 Tim 5:14) and that marrying is not a sin (1 Cor 7:36 // 1 Tim 4:3); in each church as well, the precise place of widows is uncertain (1 Cor 7:8, 39 // 1 Tim 5:3–16). The place of women in the assembly arises in both churches, revolving in part around what women should wear (1 Cor 11:2–16 // 1 Tim 2:8–10), and in part around whether they should speak or keep silent—in this last case, both letters have Paul respond by an appeal to Torah (1 Cor 14:33–36 // 1 Tim 2.11–15).

Both communities have internal disputes over the eating of certain foods (1 Corinthians 8–10 // 1 Tim 4:3). Finally, in each church, the issue of financial support for ministers is raised (1 Cor 9:1–12 // 1 Tim 5:17–18). Recognition of this range of parallels serves to give some further plausibility to the assumption that 1 Timothy can be read as a “Pauline” letter of the first generation, and strengthens the proposal that 1 Corinthians is the appropriate “authentic” composition to which 1 Timothy ought to be compared; at the same time, it enables a more precise delineation of the theological voice that speaks in each letter.

The Theological Perspective of 1 Timothy

Paul’s response to the crisis posed by a challenge to a weak local leadership is twofold. First, he engages in an explicit rebuttal of the opponents’ positions. His strategy here is different than that in 2 Timothy, but is functional for a letter in which instructions to his delegate are “overheard” by a larger readership. Second, Paul seeks to strengthen community structures, particularly those dealing with leadership in the community. This twofold

strategy, it is argued here, can be subsumed under Paul's overall understanding of *οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ τὴν ἐν πίστει*.

This key expression occurs at the very beginning of the letter. Paul instructs Timothy to order certain people to stop "teaching otherwise," being preoccupied with myths and genealogies which generate debates "rather than *οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ τὴν ἐν πίστει*" (1 Tim 1:4). The placement and the form of the statement would seem to suggest its importance, particularly when Paul then proceeds to spell out the *τέλος* of the commandment in terms of love, faith and a good conscience, in opposition to the empty words of those wanting to be teachers of the law (1:5–7). Its precise point, however, seems to have escaped some early scribes, who replaced *οἰκονομίαν* with *οἰκοδομήν*.

English translations, in turn, vary tremendously. They include such renderings as "godly edifying which is in faith" (KJV, reading *οἰκοδομήν*); "the divine order which belongs to faith" (Moffat); "the divine system which operates through faith" (Goodspeed); "the design of God which are [sic] revealed in faith" (JB); "God's plan for us, which works through faith" (NEB); "God's work—which is by faith" (NIV). The most recent widely used scholarly translations appear to be wildly undecided. The RSV has "divine training that is in faith," but offers in a note, "or: 'stewardship that is in faith,' or 'order that is in faith.'" The NRSV has "divine training that is known by faith," or "divine plan that is known by faith." The NAB provides as a first option, "plan of God that is received by faith," with the backup of "God's trustworthy plan," or "the training in faith that God requires." If 1 Tim 1:4 is critical for understanding the theological perspective of this composition, such a wide range of renderings does not inspire confidence that this perspective has been comprehended.

Part of the problem here is how to translate a cryptic phrase in a way that fits its context. The noun *οἰκονομία* has as its first meaning, "household management," but can be extended from there to notions of "ordering" or "dispensation" in larger spheres, without necessarily losing its basic point of reference in the *οἶκος*.¹⁰ The genitive *θεοῦ* can be read as subjective or objective: is this God's way of ordering things, or is it the management of a household with reference to God? Finally, what does the prepositional phrase *ἐν τῇ πίστει* modify? Does it specify a mode of the ordering/management, or does it refer to the sphere within which the ordering is to

¹⁰ For a review of the cognates, and their various uses, see Otto Michel, "*oikos*," TDNT 5:119–59.

be placed? All these considerations must be taken into account, making some variety in translations understandable. But a larger problem is the failure to take with sufficient seriousness the metaphorical implications of *οικονομία*, which help give coherence to the rest of the composition.

For the purposes of the present argument, let us translate the phrase as “God’s way of ordering reality as it is apprehended by faith.” Not terribly elegant, but decisive. The problem with the opponents, Paul says in 1:4, is that they are not paying attention to God’s activity, an activity that structures reality, an activity that must be perceived and responded to by faith. Beginning with that working translation, we can begin to see how far it can draw us into the theological perspective of 1 Timothy.

Our starting point is a consideration of the metaphorical implications of *οικονομία*. It will be remembered that for the most part—or at least in our surviving literature—the Greco-Roman world did not, as those who are heirs of Rousseau and the age of Revolution tend to do, sharply distinguish between humans in their natural state and in their social arrangements. The ordering of society, beginning with the arrangement of its basic unit, the *οἶκος*, was not perceived as “the social construction of reality” based in equal parts of rational calculation and symbolic need, but as a manifestation of human nature itself. The order of society should be *κατὰ φύσιν*, a reflection of the innate characteristics of humans. The assignment of complementary roles in the household was based on the qualifications assigned by nature.¹¹ For those who attributed nature itself to a creating God, it would not be much of a step to perceive such arrangements as the *οικονομία θεοῦ*.

Just such a perception seems to be at work in 1 Timothy. For this composition, there is no radical discontinuity between the will of God and the structures of society; rather, the structures of *οἶκος* and *ἐκκλησία* are not only continuous with each other, but are part of the dispensation of God in the world. Timothy’s work to stabilize and secure such structures is therefore to be in service to the *οικονομία θεοῦ* as an expression of *πίστις* (1:4).

Because of the tendency to collapse the Pastoral Letters into each other, it is important to be precise on this point. 1 Timothy’s attention is not specifically directed to the *οἶκος* but to the *ἐκκλησία*, not to the

¹¹ “See especially Xenophon, *Oec.* 111, 10–15; VII.5–43; IX, 15–X, 5, and Aristotle, *Pol.* 1252b; 1253b; 1254b; 1259b–1260a; 1277b; 1334b–1337a. Even Plato’s utopian subversion relies on the same premise: see *Resp.* 455C–457E; 459C–461E; 540C; *Leg.* 781A–D; 783E–785B; 802E–803C; 804E–807D; 813C–814B; 833D.

household but to the assembly; it is Titus 2:1–10 that addresses duties within the οἶκος. 1 Timothy distinguishes the two at the level of social entity. Thus, the supervisor and helper are qualified to manage the assembly *because* they are good managers of their own household (3:1–12). In the discussion of the support of widows in 5:3–16, a sharp distinction is made between the obligations of household and the obligations of the assembly. Children or grandchildren of a widow have a religious duty to support their own family members (5:4); failure to do this is to “disown the faith” and to become worse than an unbeliever (5:8). Note the force of this language: part of apprehending the οἰκονομία θεοῦ “in faith” is to perform those obligations incumbent on one as a member of a household. Likewise, a believing woman with relatives who are widows should assist them (5:16). We assume that such a woman is head of a household and able to dispense its resources, much like the younger women Paul mentions in 5:14, whom he wishes to marry, bear children, and “rule their households.” In this last case, however, the care for relatives within the οἶκος is explicitly to relieve the ἐκκλησία of a burden it cannot sustain, so that it can take care of “real widows” (5:16).

In one case, Paul acknowledges a clear tension between the social obligations inherent in the οἶκος and the social ethos of the ἐκκλησία. The need to tell slaves of “believing masters” (πιστοὺς δεσπότας) that they should not “despise” them because they are “brothers” (ἀδελφοί), but should serve them as an act of benefaction, clearly arises from the dissonance between the community ethos of egalitarianism (“they are brothers”) and the household reality of slavery (“they are masters”). Paul does not resolve the tension structurally (“Masters, release your slaves who are brothers”), but spiritually (“Slaves, act as though you were the masters”), testimony enough to the social conservatism embedded in the perception of society as part of the οἰκονομία θεοῦ.

When, therefore, Paul refers to the “assembly of the living God” in 3:15 as the οἶκος θεοῦ, we understand that any instructions concerning “how one ought to behave” in this assembly will tend to move in the same conservative direction. If we read the final phrase of 3:15 as a delayed apposition to “how to behave,” we see him making the application immediately and directly: a person who knows how to behave properly is a “pillar and foundation for the truth.”¹² The essential point, then, is that the assembly

¹² It ruins the metaphor to have the assembly be at once “house” and “pillar/foundation”. Proper behavior within the “house of God” enables one to be a pillar of the truth (compare the use of στῦλος in Gal 2:9 and Rev 3:12).

of the living God is continuous with those social arrangements that are assumed to be set by creation, rather than discontinuous with them; both can be apprehended “in faith,” and the proper modes of behavior in one are transferable to the other.

The same perspective is operative in 1 Timothy’s response to the “so-called γῶσις” of the opponents. In 4:3, we see that their “forbidding marriage [and enjoining] abstinence from foods” is attributed to “their consciences being cauterized.” To this Paul opposes the perception of those “who have faith and have come to know the truth,” namely, that God created such things to be received with thanksgiving. Note the implications for the broader understanding of οἰκονομία θεοῦ in Paul’s flat statement: “everything created by God is good and in no way to be rejected when it is received with thanksgiving” (4:4). Once more, the “sanctification” of the created order by “the word of God and prayer” confirms the goodness inherent in creation itself (4:5).

Likewise, Paul’s response to those who seek in εὐσέβεια a means of profit (6:5) is couched in terms of an attack on φιλαργυρία (“love of money”) as the root of every sort of evil (6:10). The desire for wealth is itself a “wandering from the faith” (6:10). Those who seek to become rich fall into temptation and a trap; their senseless and hurtful passions drive them into ruin and destruction (6:7). It is easy to recognize here the standard τόπος on φιλαργυρία.¹³ And Paul’s alternative, that εὐσέβεια should be accompanied by ἀντάρκεια (6:6), is also standard philosophical fare. If they have food and covering, they should be content (6:8).¹⁴ But when he spells this out in terms of the nakedness of the human condition—“for we brought nothing into the world, because neither can we take anything out of it” (6:7)—the verbal allusion to LXX Job 1:21 is less impressive than the obvious thematic link to the biblical creation story in which humans as created are naked (Gen 3:7, 11), and in which disobedience to God problematizes food and covering (Gen 3:20–24). The rejection of acquisitiveness, in other words, is connected to a claim about the human condition as created by God. Contentment with the meager food and clothing required for survival is to affirm the οἰκονομία θεοῦ in faith.

¹³ See, e.g., Dio, *Or.* 32:9, 11; 35:1; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.9.19–20; 1.29.45–47; 3.16.3; 3.24.78; Lucian, *Fug.* 14; *Vit. auc.* 24; *Bis. ace.* 31; *Tim.* 54; *Hermot.* 9–10.

¹⁴ On ἀντάρκεια, see Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Handbook* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 112–114, 120, 157; also, Dibelius and Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 85.

The sense that the *οικονομία θεοῦ* includes the way humans are created and the way humans are arranged socially helps account for this composition's view of women. It is entirely consistent with the understanding that social roles should follow on natural or created capacities, to state that young women should marry and bear children and rule their own households (5:14). It is consistent with the position that *φιλαργυρία* is opposed to faith, to urge women not to wear braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire, but "to adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel," and with "good deeds, as befits women who profess *θεοσέβεια*" (2:10).¹⁵ It is consistent with a view of gender roles as complementary, that women might be allowed to be helpers (*διάκονοι*) within the *ἐκκλησία* if they are "faithful in all things" (3:11), but not a supervisor (*ἐπισκοπος*), whose role is analogous to authority over a household (3:4). Finally, it is consistent with such a creationist perspective that the submissive role of the woman within the *οἶκος* is carried over into the assembly, with Paul refusing a woman authority over a man, or the role of teaching, but restricting her role to the domestic one of bearing and raising children in the faith. As in the case of *αὐτάρκεια*, furthermore, the order in the household and assembly is buttressed by the biblical accounts of the creation and fall (2:11–15; see Gen 1:27; 3:6, 13). In short, the position on the role of women adopted by 1 Timothy is what readers of today would call the "downside" of that positive perception of the order of creation and of society that—on the "upside"—enables in 4:3–5 such a firm rejection of a world-renouncing asceticism. To this point, our examination of the thematic phrase *οικονομία θεοῦ* has focused on the ways in which 1 Timothy perceives the order of creation and the order of society as continuous with each other, and in a very deep sense as continuous with the household which is the assembly of the living God, as well.

It is important to note also, however, that 1 Timothy places equal or even greater emphasis on the one doing the creating and the ordering, namely, the living God. The phrase "the living God" occurs first in 3:15 to specify the character of the *ἐκκλησία*, and is used once more in 4:10, when in contrast to the value of physical training for the present life, Paul proposes the training in godliness, which "holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (4:8), adding as a reliable warrant for this

¹⁵ See the texts displayed in David Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981) 101.

affirmation, “because we have placed our hope in the living God who is the savior of all humans, especially of the faithful” (4:10). The explicit affirmation of θεός as “the living God” expands the understanding of οἰκονομία θεοῦ beyond the order of creation to the order of salvation, and leads to the ways in which the gospel is not only continuous with the structures of society but also transcends them.

Paul exhorts the community to pray for all people, for “this is good, and acceptable in the sight of God our savior, who desires all humans to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2:1, 3). God’s desire to save humans—all humans—is the distinctive element in “glorious good news concerning the blessed God” with which Paul has been entrusted (1:11; 2:7), just as the revelation of Jesus as the “one mediator between God and humans” (2:5) is the distinctive μυστήριον τῆς εὐσεβείας that is confessed by the household of God as the “assembly of the living God” (3:16). God’s οἰκονομία of salvation is grounded in particularity—it is the “human person Jesus Christ” who is the one mediator—yet in scope is universal. It is particular: the human person Jesus “appeared in the flesh” (3:16); the “sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:3) are remembered and applied to the life of the community, as in the matter of payment for teachers (5:18; see Luke 10:7); his good confession before Pontius Pilate (6:13) is the model for “the good confession before many witnesses” of the delegate, Timothy (6:12); and Jesus’ act of giving himself as a ransom for many is his μαρτύριον for the appropriate seasons (2:6). It is also universal: the God who “gives life to all things” (6:13) raised Jesus from the dead, so that he was “justified in the Spirit, appeared to angels, was preached among nations, was believed in the world, was taken up in glory” (3:16). Note how the resurrection and glorification of Jesus are linked to his “being preached among nations.”

Jesus’ resurrection establishes him as more than a single nation’s messiah; he is the revelation of a “hope” (1:1) for all peoples rooted in the power of the living God, that they might share ultimately in God’s own life. We remember that Paul’s response to physical asceticism was cast in terms of the usefulness of training in godliness, which held a promise for this life and the one to come, “for we have placed our hope in the living God who is the savior of all humans” (4:10). Likewise, the “genuine widow” is one who is aged and left alone, who “has placed her hope in God and has devoted herself to prayers night and day” (5:5). And finally, those who are “rich in this world” are warned “not to hope in deceptive wealth, but in God who richly furnishes us with everything for enjoyment” (6:17).

If they expend their wealth in good deeds and generosity, they will “lay up a treasure for themselves for the future, so that they may take hold of that life which is life indeed (τῆς ὄντως ζωῆς)” (6:19).

The God who “orders reality,” in short, is a living God who encounters humans and calls them beyond the frame of creation and the structures of society to “a real life” that can come only from God. This brings us, again, to the opening sequence in 1 Tim 1:3–17. We have seen that Paul contrasts the *οἰκονομία* θεοῦ ἢ ἐν πίστει, whose goal is “love from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith,” with the disputes concerning myths and endless genealogies of those who “teach otherwise” (1:4–5). He then connects their foolish speech, which “swerves away” from the qualities of love, conscience and faith, to a desire to be “teachers of law” (*νομοδιδάσκαλοι*) without any awareness of what they are asserting (1:6–7). The next verses (1:8–11) are notoriously difficult to disentangle: on one side, the goodness of the law is asserted when “lawfully used”; on the other side, it is said “not to apply” to the person who is righteous (1:9) according to the good news with which Paul has been entrusted.

The key to understanding the passage is Paul’s thanksgiving, which follows it in 1:12–17. Far from being a change of subject, the thanksgiving is Paul’s direct witness to the *οἰκονομία* θεοῦ which is to be apprehended by faith. Like those wicked folk listed in 1:9–10, Paul also had been “a blasphemer and persecutor and arrogant man” (1:13). What changed him was an overflowing gift from the Lord (1:13), an empowerment that came “from Christ Jesus our Lord” (1:12) as an act of mercy (1:13). In a word, it was not the law or knowledge of the law that rendered Paul “faithful” (1:12), but the action of the living God through the resurrected Jesus. What happened to him stands as experiential proof for the declaration that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1:15). The *οἰκονομία* θεοῦ that is to be apprehended by faith is, then, not simply the work of God in creation, but above all the work of God in the salvation extended to all humans through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is an *οἰκονομία* that only God can accomplish. Human wit and work cannot effect it, not by law nor by asceticism, for human effort alone can serve only for this life, whereas God’s *οἰκονομία* extends beyond this life: “I received mercy for this reason, that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1:17).

Understanding this, we are also in a position to appreciate why 1 Timothy places such emphasis on “faith” (1:2, 4, 5, 14, 19; 2:7, 15; 3:9, 13; 6:1, 6, 12; 5:8, 12; 6:10, 11, 12, 21), and characterizes the false teachers as having “swerved from” faith (1:19; 6:10, 21); why he places such an emphasis on

“conscience” (1:5, 19; 3:9), and characterizes the false teachers as having “their own consciences cauterized” (4:2). Paul calls for a living response to the living God, which is a matter of attitude even before action. Thus, as the gift of the Lord Jesus was abundantly given to Paul “with faith and love” (1:14), so is the goal of the commandment “love from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and sincere faith” (1:5). The living God cannot be comprehended by human reason; God alone “has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no human has ever seen or can see” (6:16). Neither, then, can the response to the living God be constrained by the dictates of law; in response to the faith and love shown humans in the human person of Jesus, only the flexibility of a living faith and the discernment of a good conscience are appropriate.

Conclusion

This sketch of the theological perspective of 1 Timothy has assumed Pauline authorship of the letter, but has not really relied on that assumption to establish its reading, except insofar as the self-presentation of the letter and the circumstances it addresses have been taken seriously, and the literary texture of the composition has provided the basis for analysis. The difficult question of how 1 Timothy’s theological perspective might be brought into conversation with other Pauline letters must remain unexamined here, but it is clear that if any such conversation is to prove beneficial, it must begin with just such careful inquiry into each composition’s voice. Further investigation of the similarities between 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians might be a profitable starting point. We have seen a remarkable array of parallels in the situations sketched by each letter. Closer analysis will surely also locate points of divergence in each composition’s response to its implied situation. But it is at least worth noting how in 1 Corinthians, Paul calls the church θεοῦ οἰκοδομή (3:9), speaks of the ministry of himself and Apollos as οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ. (4: 1)—a role that demands of them above all that they be πιστοὶ (4:1)—and refers to his own work of proclaiming the good news as οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι (9:17).

Response to Margaret Mitchell

Professor Mitchell has given a thorough and fair reading to my paper and has raised some important questions. I am pleased to have this chance to respond to them, especially since, written as an effort to stimulate a conversation among other interested scholars in the spirit of an essay

rather than a finished publication, the paper has nevertheless—with all its shabbiness—found its way into a public forum. Although Professor Mitchell makes some eight separate points concerning my paper, they can, I believe, be gathered around two fundamental issues. The first concerns the way I conceived and carried out the task of the paper. The second concerns the correctness of my translation of 1 Tim 1:4 and the role I assigned to it. Because the reader of this journal has both my essay and Professor Mitchell's critique, my response can be relatively brief.

1. *The Search for a "Theological Voice."* Mitchell thinks, despite the attention I give to the similarities between 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, that I do not really come clean on Pauline authorship: do I think 1 Timothy is by Paul or not? Similarly, she asks why I refer to the "theological voice of 1 Timothy" rather than "Paul's theology in 1 Timothy"—are these the same for me? For that matter, why seek for a single characterization or organizing principle in the first place? And isn't my definition of theology suspiciously like that I ascribe to 1 Timothy—haven't I rigged the game? Finally, I have described 1 Timothy's theological voice in what Mitchell call's "narrative" terms, and she asks why I have shown "no interest in the ontological reality of God as described in the text." I will respond to this cluster of questions with a series of short replies:

A. My definition of theology was as broad and as neutral—and minimal!—as I could make it. And I do not think that "God's way of ordering reality" exhausts the theology of 1 Timothy. Rather, I used that expression in 1 Tim 1:4 as a means of entry into the distinctive theological perspective of the letter. Like all rubrics, its adequacy is tested by how much of what is essential to 1 Timothy it can encompass and how much of what is essential to 1 Timothy it must exclude. By that measure, I think my choice is defensible.

B. The reason why a single rubric or characterization is chosen is because the search is not for everything theological said by a composition but rather its distinctive way of doing theology. I hope that Professor Mitchell would agree that "reconciliation" would serve in the same fashion for 2 Corinthians, and "fellowship" for Philippians; the value is heuristic.

C. Such attention to the distinctive setting, language, and themes of *all* the letters ascribed to Paul is, I think, a necessary prerequisite to any attempt to construct a "Pauline theology." All efforts to describe such a Pauline theology have fallen short because of a failure even to acknowledge, far less deal with, the irreducible diversity in the traditional Pauline

corpus, or even that smaller collection called “the undisputed letters.” Attention to the distinctive voice in a letter is all the more critical in the case of the disputed letters.

D. As with other letters attributed to Paul it is appropriate to consider the ways in which other such letters resemble or differ from the one under immediate consideration. Thus, it is important to see the ways in which 1 Timothy’s use of *ὄβολος* and *οἰκονομία* resemble the usage in 1 Corinthians. I have suggested there is more resemblance than difference. But it is equally important to avoid employing such usage to interpret that in 1 Timothy. Meaning is contextual, and the rhetorical context of each letter must be taken into account when making such comparisons.

Similarly, I used considerable space to show that 1 Timothy—so often considered a second-century pseudonymous composition—actually faced a rhetorical situation not totally unlike that in the mid-first century, undisputed, 1 Corinthians. My point was not thereby to demonstrate Pauline authorship but to show that the premise of Pauline authorship was by no means silly if comparisons are carried out rigorously and fairly.

E. Do I, finally, think that Paul wrote 1 Timothy? Those who have read my *Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (2d ed.; Fortress, 1999) know that I take what might be called a radical conservative position on this question. I think the criteria used to challenge the Pauline authorship of various letters are demonstrably either wrong-headed or inapplicable. But I also think that the standard model of Pauline authorship is inadequate, since it does not take into account the complexity of factors involved in the production of all his letters. Since I think that a “Pauline School,” while only a hypothesis for the time after Paul’s death is actually demanded for the composition of these diverse letters during his lifetime, then the consideration of letters such as those to Paul’s delegates ought, in my view, to be taken up on more neutral grounds, such as I have tried to supply in this essay. My conclusion, after considering all these issues in my forthcoming commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy for the Anchor Bible, is that there is more reasons than not to read 1 Timothy as authored by Paul (in the sense I have defined) during his lifetime.

F. Why did I not show “any metaphysical interest in the ontological reality of God as described in the text?” Mainly because my task was the descriptive one. I do not deny that the text can be engaged metaphysically (as much of Patristic interpretation engaged it), but such engagement involves the use of a second-order discourse, or perhaps better, transposition to another set of categories than the ones 1 Timothy is using.

2. *The Translation and Function of 1 Timothy 1:4.* Mitchell says, in the kindest way possible, that I goofed in my translation of 1:4. I don't think so, but before I say why, I want to acknowledge that she has raised a very legitimate point, that her interpretation of the evidence is both possible and arguable, and that I failed to support my own (implied) translation in the essay to which she responded. Let me add also that 1:4 is simply difficult, whichever way it is construed. Mitchell says that I have mistaken the syntax of the sentence, that the verb *παρέχειν* should be seen as governing two contrasting accusatives: on one side, speculations, and on the other, *οικονομίαν θεοῦ*. She thinks this is the only possible syntax, since the earlier verb *προσέχειν* can only take the dative case, whereas *παρέχειν* can only take the accusative. Since I implied that Paul's readers were "attending to" speculations rather than God's way of ordering reality, Mitchell concluded that I had mistakenly taken *προσέχειν* as the verb governing *οικονομίαν θεοῦ*. She says this is impossible. Furthermore, since, as she claims, *παρέχειν* means "produce/cause," my reading of *οικονομίαν θεοῦ* as "God's way of ordering reality" is all the more unlikely, for how could humans cause or produce this? Finally, Mitchell challenges the rhetorical centrality of 1:4, since she does not see it as establishing a theme developed by the rest of the letter.

I respond with these quick observations:

A. On the translation: a study of Liddell-Scott shows that both *παρέχειν* and *προσέχειν*, as their very construction would suggest, have a variety of meanings. It is too narrow to restrict *παρέχειν* to "produce/cause" and then declare my translation suspect, for it can also mean "to hand over," to "furnish," to "provide," to "afford," to "yield," and, most pertinent, to "give oneself up" (with the reflexive pronoun often suppressed). Likewise *προσέχειν* can mean to "hold to" as well as "offer," "turn to or toward," and "attach oneself to." The terms, in other words, can mean different things depending on usage and context—which is precisely at issue here.

B. The two verbs, furthermore, contrary to Mitchell's claim, can each take the accusative or the dative, depending on the usage. Thus, while Liddell-Scott gives evidence mostly for *παρέχειν* taking the accusative, when it means "give oneself over to," it has been used with the dative. More pertinently, *προσέχειν* often takes the accusative case, especially when the verb means "to turn towards" something. It is possible, therefore, for the phrase in the accusative following *μᾶλλον ἢ* to be governed by *προσέχειν*. It is not obvious or easy, and it would demand of the author

the use of two cases for the same verb, but such inconsistencies are not unknown in the Pastorals—or for that matter in Paul’s other letters.

C. Since it is impossible, as Mitchell notes, for Paul to be saying that humans can “cause/produce” God’s way of ordering reality, he must be saying something else. Some early scribes seem to have shared Mitchell’s concern, for they supplied *οἰκοδομήν* as a (humanly achievable and eminently Pauline) alternative. But since *οἰκονομίαν* is almost certainly the correct reading, we must deal with it. My translation provides the sort of adjustment that Mitchell recognizes as possible in her footnote discussing Kelly’s translation, “apprehension of God’s saving plan” to make sense of the verb and contrast with *ἐκζητήσεις*, although she says “there is no justification for this in the wording itself.” All translations, though, must make such accommodations if they are to get at the meaning. In this case, Mitchell’s dilemma must be resolved on the side of compromising the (most obvious) reading of the syntax. In my forthcoming commentary, I provide this translation: “. . . not to teach different doctrine or devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These encourage speculations rather than faithful attention to God’s way of ordering things.” I think the translation gets close to the meaning.

D. Mitchell’s objection that 1:4 does not function thematically for the letter simply puzzles me, for the bulk of my paper tried to show the ways in which it did this, both through the condemnation of the speculations of the would-be teachers, and through the positive corrections offered in response to them. It was my hope, furthermore, that precisely the combination of these elements throughout the letter would support not only the rhetorical function I assign the verse but also the translation I have given it. I think I have made that case, but it is clear I have not made it for all readers!

I appreciate the positive comments Professor Mitchell made about my paper, and even more her sharp queries. Both exemplify the spirit of collegiality by prompting this set of what I hope are useful clarifications.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1 TIMOTHY 1:1–20 THE SHAPE OF THE STRUGGLE

The letters to Paul's delegates seem to require a declaration concerning one's presuppositions concerning the nature of the compositions as a whole before undertaking the examination of any part, because the basic options concerning the historical placement of these letters appear to demand quite different strategies of reading. One must, it seems, choose between regarding these letters as authentically Pauline—produced in the apostle's lifetime under his authorization—or as pseudonymous productions of a later generation.

Among contemporary scholars—and those taught by them—the view that “the pastoral letters” are pseudonymous has the status of a virtual dogma. In the face of such overwhelming opinion few are willing to risk embracing them as authentic Pauline compositions. Such was not always the case. Indeed, for eighteen centuries all readers of these compositions assumed that they were by Paul. Such widespread acceptance is the more notable because of the willingness to challenge the authenticity of other NT compositions. The Pauline character of Hebrews was challenged very early, and in the period of the Reformation, the apostolic authorship of James was questioned.¹ Yet, until 1807, when Schleiermacher issued the first public challenge to Paul's authorship of 1 Timothy and in the course

¹ Eusebius reports on the doubts concerning the authorship of Hebrews expressed by Origen (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.25.11–24) and others, including the church at Rome (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.3.5). The apostolic authorship of James was challenged by Erasmus in *Annotationes in Epistolam Jacobi* [1516], Thomas de Vio (Cajetan) in *Epistolae Pauli et aliorum Apotolorum ad Graecam Castigate* [1529], and Martin Luther, *Preface to the New Testament* [1522].

of the 19th century a completely different consensus was forged,² all three letters were read as Pauline in every respect.³

Each option has its own angle of vision: if the letters are authentic, we hope to learn something about Paul's thought in response to first-generation ecclesial situations; if they are pseudepigraphical, then we expect to learn something about late 1st or early 2nd century ecclesial conditions and a forger's ideological position with respect to them.⁴ Each position has its corollaries: if regarded as authentic, the letters can be read in the same manner as Paul's other missives, that is, as real letters written to actual situations in specific communities, with literary and thematic connections possible with all the other letters; if regarded as inauthentic, they are read not as real but as fictive letters, pieces of a single literary enterprise, and to be interpreted, not in the context of Paul's other letters, but with respect only to each other.⁵

² J.E.C. Schmidt had three years earlier questioned the possibility of placing 1 Timothy into the ministry of Paul (*Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in's Neue Testament* (Giessen: Tasche und Muller, 1804), but it was Freidrich Schleiermacher who explicitly challenged the Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy—partly by contrasting it to the other Pastorals!—in his public letter to J.C. Gass, *Über den sogenannten Ersten Brief des Paulus an den Timotheus: Ein Kritisches Senschreiben* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1807). Despite extensive and vigorous rebuttals of Schleiermacher, the adoption of his position by such prominent scholars as J.G. Eichhorn (1812), F.C. Baur (1835), and W.M.L De Wette (1844) swung scholarly opinion toward his position. By the end of the century, the massive authority of H.J. Holtzmann *Lehrbuch der historischkritisch Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (1892) established the pseudonymity of all three writings as the only acceptable scholarly position. For this history, see L.T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 35 A; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 42–54.

³ Martin Luther began a series of lectures on 1 Timothy in 1535, in which he finds nothing that he does not recognize as Pauline. He considers Paul's words on the law in 1:8, for example, "a fine passage about the understanding, or knowledge of the law. Paul explains it more fully in Rom 7." See *Luther's Works* 28:229. And in a sermon devoted to 1 Tim 1:5–7, he says, "Now these are deep and genuinely Pauline words, and besides they are very rich, so we must explain them somewhat in order that we might understand it a little and become accustomed to his language" (*Luther's Works* 51:267).

⁴ Thus, already with Schleiermacher, and then more elaborately in F.C. Baur, the ecclesial situations addressed by the Pastorals were considered to be the second-century controversies stirred by Marcion and the Gnostics. More recently, the letters are read as a reaction to women's ministry by an increasingly patriarchal male leadership; see, e.g. D.R. MacDonald, "Virgins, Widows, and Paul in Second-Century Asia Minor," 1979 *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, ed. P. Achtemeier (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979) 1:165–184; J. Bassler, "The Widow's Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Timothy 5:3–16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984) 23–41; S.L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocrypha/Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

⁵ Unfortunately, one of the effects of the near-universal acceptance of the Pseudonymity hypothesis is that even the few scholars wanting to assert Pauline authorship fall into the trap of reading these letters in isolation from the other Pauline letters.

The passage I consider in this essay sharply exposes the two basic options. In 1 Timothy 1:1–20, do we find the first-century Paul instructing his delegate Timothy about real opposition that has arisen in the church at Ephesus in the form of those seeking to be teachers of law? Read this way, the passage enables the interpreter to pose questions about an actual reader and real opponents.⁶ The context for answering these questions, in turn, is provided by Paul's ministry as we know it from Acts and his other letters.⁷ Read from the perspective of pseudonymity, in contrast, the passage appears to establish a framework of Pauline authority to ground a set of ecclesiastical directives that are thought to be pertinent to Pauline churches in the late first or early second century.⁸ The literary presentation is to be understood as a form of code: these are not three letters but a single composition in the form of three discrete letters; the "opposition" (a composite drawn from all three letters) is not set against the Paul and Timothy of the first century, but against unnamed second-century leaders represented by the "Timothy" of the composition who remain loyal to "Paul" in changed circumstances.⁹

When I began to learn biblical criticism as a young monk, I had absolutely no difficulty accepting the dominant hypothesis, in part because I did not have any reason to question the superior judgment of recognized scholars when delivered with such unanimity and authority, in part because I found no theological difficulty associated with pseudonymity; the letters remained part of the canon and therefore part of Scripture, whether they were by Paul or not. I began to break from the scholarly majority only when I began teaching theology students New Testament Introduction at Yale Divinity School in 1976.

⁶ The "Timothy" to whom the letter is addressed would be constructed from the evidence provided by Acts 16:1; 18:5; 19:22; 1 Thess 3:2; Phil 2:19; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10–11; Rom 16:21, a real historical figure with a definite character, who, besides serving as Paul's delegate, also was co-sponsor of six of Paul's letters (Philemon, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians). The profile of the opponents, in turn, would be drawn—as in the analysis of other Pauline compositions—from indicators found in 1 Timothy alone, in contrast to the practice of constructing a composite opposition drawn from evidence of all three letters.

⁷ For just such an effort to reconstruct the social and ecclesial context of 1 Timothy, see L.T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*.

⁸ See, e.g., M.Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (SNTSMS 60; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁹ See, e.g., Y. Redalié, *Paul après Paul: le temps, le salut, la morale selon les épîtres à Timothée et Tite* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994).

I found that, however much energy and intelligence I put into the task, I could not convincingly defend the reasons adduced for the hypothesis, discovering at the same time that most scholars who asserted the position offered at best only the evidence in favor of the scholarly consensus and none of the evidence that a considerable and substantial body of scholarship had adduced against it.¹⁰ More troubling, I began to see that for many scholars and students alike, there were theological implications deriving from pseudonymity. If not Pauline, then the letters were not considered authoritative, and were increasingly moved to the edge or even out of the canon of Scripture.¹¹

The main argument against authenticity today is the sheer weight of scholarly consensus. Many commentaries and New Testament Introductions don't even bother arguing the case, contenting themselves with a short recitation of selected data that supports the hypothesis of pseudonymity with no consideration of counter-evidence; the position is not presented as a hypothesis or theory but as a scholarly dogma.¹² Scholarly monographs simply assume the dominant hypothesis and build upon it as though it were solid rock.¹³ Yet the criteria for testing the authenticity first developed by Schleiermacher (placement within Paul's ministry, consis-

¹⁰ See, e.g., W.G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 366–387; for a rapid survey of the works that brought significant arguments against pseudonymity, especially in the early years of the 19th century, see Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 46–47.

¹¹ As A. Schweitzer acutely noted in *Paul and His Interpreters: A Critical History* (1911; reprint New York: Schocken Books, 1964) 27, the rejection of six letters as inauthentic meant that for discussions of Paul and his theology, even those advocating authenticity were forced to use as evidence only those letters agreed by all to be by Paul. A revealing example is found in V.P. Furnish, "Pauline Studies" in *The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters*, edited by E.J. Epp and G.W. MacRae (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 326. Furnish accurately reports that the Pastorals are not regarded by most as authentic and gives them no more attention. Fair enough. But whereas the volume contains essays on Gnostic writings, apocryphal gospels and acts, and all the other NT writings (at least in clusters), it has no essays devoted to the disputed Pauline letters. Out of Paul means out of canon, and even out of mind.

¹² On scholarly construals achieving the status of dogma, see the remark of B. Weiss concerning the majority position on the Letter of James: "The newer critics also have their unshakable dogmas and tenacious traditions!" See *Der Jakobasbrief und die Neuere Kritik* (Leipzig: Diekert'sche, 1904) 50. I provide a list of the overwhelming number of contemporary histories, introductions, and commentaries, in which the majority position is stated with virtually no genuine argument in support, in *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 50–53.

¹³ See, e.g., M.Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*; B. Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (Analecta Biblica 105; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986); M. Wolter, *Der Pastoralbriefe als Pseudotradition* (FRLANT 146; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988); D.C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBLDS 71; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983); P. Trammer, *Die Paulustradition*

tency in style and teaching, nature of opposition, degree of institutionalization) have not significantly been developed over the centuries nor have they gained in plausibility; if anything, the opposite is the case.

The criteria are both formally problematic¹⁴ and materially insufficient.¹⁵ Above all, the hypothesis is shaky because of its dependence (since the time of Eichorn) on the logical fallacy of *petitio principii*.¹⁶ The three letters to Paul's delegates are measured together against an assumed consistent norm found in the 7 or 10 other letters of Paul. This procedure emphasizes the agreement among the three segregated letters and their contrast to an abstracted characterization of the undisputed letters. But this procedure assumes what must be demonstrated.

While recognizing the distinctive character of these three letters among Paul's letters, I do not regard their collective character as more distinct than that exhibited by any of the other obvious clusters within the Pauline corpus. If we were to segregate and treat separately—emphasizing at every point elements of discontinuity rather than of continuity—it would be child's play to “demonstrate” that any of the groups that any reader of Greek can discern as stylistically and thematically discrete (Galatians/Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; 1 and 2 Thessalonians; Colossians/Ephesians) are not “authentic” when measured against a norm consisting of all the

tion der Pastoralbriefe (Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie 8; Frankfurt: Lang, 1978).

¹⁴ The premise that an ancient author should reveal a consistent Greek style—to be determined by word-statistics or use of particles—not only flies in the face of common sense (diction alters according to subject matter) and the actual evidence (Lucian's *Satires* reveal a wide spectrum of styles, Luke-Acts demonstrates distinct styles in different settings, there are real differences within the undisputed letters), but ignores the fact that in ancient rhetoric, the stylistic principle of *prosopōpoia* (writing in character or according to circumstance) was paramount.

¹⁵ It is certainly the case that these letters are difficult to “fit into Paul's ministry”—especially Titus—but the same can be said of the majority of letters ascribed to Paul, and the analysis is not made easier by the insistence that all the letters have to come from the same setting. Using Acts and the entire Pauline corpus, we can with some degree of certainty locate 1 Thessalonians and (if authentic) 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans. Galatians is notoriously difficult to locate either spatially or temporally. And the captivity letters (including Philemon, Philippians, 2 Timothy, Colossians and Ephesians) are all capable of being placed in diverse times and places. The fact that scholars invent an Ephesian captivity unattested in any source in order to account for the (equally dubious) theory of multiple notes written to the Philippians, should indicate that the situation with respect to 1 and 2 Timothy is more severe.

¹⁶ The principle that the Pastorals must rise or fall together with regard to authenticity was enunciated by J.G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* Vol. 3, part 1 (Leipzig: Weidmanischen Buchhandlung, 1812). Eichhorn in fact claims that he had questioned the authenticity of the Pastorals in his lectures before Schleiermacher's book appeared.

remaining letters. Indeed, I am as impressed by the way these letters differ from each other as I am by their clear similarities.¹⁷

The appeal of the pseudonymity hypothesis is that it enables a plausible explanation for the way in which these letters are Pauline (the forger is imitating Pauline models) and also not authentically Pauline (the imitation is faulty and the situations anachronistic). The weakness of the hypothesis—quite apart from the weakness of the arguments against authenticity in general—is that the distinctiveness of this particular Pauline cluster can be accounted for on grounds other than the passage of time, circumstance, and author. In fact, they can be accounted for in much the same manner as the distinctive Thessalonian or Corinthian correspondence.

In my own work, I have tried to assess the particular character of the three letters to Paul's delegates in terms of four factors: the shape of Paul's ministry, the character of Paul's correspondence—especially the meaning of "authorship" as applied to any of his letters, the role of Paul's delegates, and the literary form of the respective letters.¹⁸ Then, I try to consider the specific situation and rhetoric of each letter as I would with any other Pauline epistle, entering into comparison and contrast with other compositions only when the self-presentation of each letter has been given full weight.¹⁹

¹⁷ Not least do they differ with respect to their genre. Contrary to common opinion, 2 Timothy is *not* a form of testamentary literature (which by its very nature demands pseudonymity), but is the New Testament's most perfect example of a personal paraenetic letter—in form—with elements of protreptic as appropriate to the situation of addressing a delegate. 1 Timothy and Titus, in turn, are *mandata principis* letters, mixing the ἐντολαί concerning community life that the delegate is to enforce, and advice directed to the moral character of the delegate; see Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* 137–142, 320–324.

¹⁸ In addition to my Anchor Bible commentary, see L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); *Introduction to the Letters of Paul III: Colossians, Ephesians, Pastorals* (Invitation to the New Testament; New York: Doubleday, 1980); *First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus* (John Knox Preaching Guides; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), and *Letters to Paul's Delegates: A Commentary on 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus* (New Testament in Context; Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

¹⁹ Thus, with respect to argument, 2 Timothy can usefully be put into conversation with Philipians; in each, Paul provides a series of personal examples, including Jesus and himself, to illustrate the point he wants his reader(s) to emulate. With respect to circumstances, similarly, 1 Timothy can most usefully be compared to 1 Corinthians; in each we see the problems caused by an urban setting, wealth, and the ambiguous social roles of women and slaves.

The most important adjustment is the critical assessment, not of the “authorship” of the Pastorals, but what we mean by “authorship” in the case of all the Pauline letters. Several aspects of recent scholarship on Paul converge (or ought to converge) to suggest a more complex model for the composition of Paul’s letters, one in which “Paul’s School” is present and active in his correspondence during his lifetime.²⁰ Paul’s “authorship” should be seen as a form of “authorizing” compositions that in all likelihood involved the efforts of his fellow-workers as well as himself.²¹ When all of these factors are taken into account, it is possible to make perfectly good sense of these particular letters as authentically Pauline, that is, as written under Paul’s authorization during his ministry.

Having stated the inevitability of dealing with the issue of authenticity in the case of these letters, and having stated my own position on that question, I need to assert as well the importance of bracketing that issue if we are to read these letters freshly and learn anything new from them. Here, I return to my earlier point concerning the importance of dealing with each letter individually in terms of its self-presentation. Theories of authorship are of little help when we seek to engage the logic of a specific passage in these or any other letters ascribed to Paul. If we seek historical information, for example, we realize that the two options are less distant than might be supposed. The “historical” Paul, after all, did not report the facts as they were but constructed a rhetorical situation from his own perspective—there is, inevitably, some “fictive” element in all of Paul’s letters. Similarly, a pseudepigrapher’s fictive literary construction may have had a basis not only in contemporary but also in earlier experience.

²⁰ The hypothesis concerning a “Pauline School” operating after Paul’s death is based entirely on the supposition of pseudepigraphical compositions, with the diversity of the compositions remaining puzzling and their social context entirely speculative. In contrast, there are multiple reasons for thinking of a school present with Paul throughout his ministry: the social practices of teaching among philosophers (see R. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul’s Ministry: Tent making and Apostleship* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980]); the complex character of Paul’s compositions—using community traditions, dictation, and co-sponsorship; and, the literary residue (in diatribe and midrash) of processes that are fundamentally scholastic in character.

²¹ An apt analogy is the production of a presidential state of the union address. The president may indicate a set of themes he wants developed, and his staff proceeds to draft them; over the course of time, there is give and take between the executive and his staff, with each proposing wording or examples, and with the president, perhaps even at the last minute, adding his own phrasing. However the complex the process, when the president addresses the joint houses of congress, it is his speech; he has “authorized” it from beginning to end, even if many minds and hands have contributed to its shaping.

Similarly, if we seek understanding of a letter's rhetorical character or religious convictions, theories of authorship seem even less pertinent. They can, in fact, block a close reading of the actual text because we assume we know already what the text is doing. Rather than beginning from the perspective of authorship and date, then, the reading of specific passages should start as much as possible with the self-presentation of the Greek text, and only secondarily reflect on the implications of its argument for the issue of historical placement. This is the procedure I follow in my reading of 1 Timothy 1:1–20.

Preliminary Observations

Some aspects of this introductory passage are clear and require little comment. The personal and filial language Paul addresses to Timothy,²² the identification of the would-be teachers,²³ and the recollection both of Paul's and Timothy's call to ministry,²⁴ make this passage an appropriate introduction to the specific *mandata* that Paul begins to enumerate in 2:1,²⁵ Paul and Timothy are together called to a noble battle (καλήν στρατείαν, 1:18) for the faith that joins them to each other (γνησίῳ τέκνῳ ἐν πίστει, 1:2) in the shared hope (τῆς ἐλπίδος ἡμῶν, 1:1) who is Christ Jesus. After the greeting, the passage is neatly framed on one side by Paul's exhortation that Timothy should command (παραγγείλῃς) certain people not to advance other teaching (1:3) and on the other side by Paul's imposition of the commandment (παραγγεῖλιαν παρατίθεμαι) on Timothy that he engage in battle (1:18). These personal exhortations stand in contrast to the community instructions that Paul begins to elaborate in 2:1–3:13, and serve to authorize Timothy as Paul's delegate to the Ephesian church.

The image of battle (στρατείαν, 1:18) is appropriate, for Paul constructs the rhetorical situation in terms of a stark contrast—indeed a contest—between those certain people (τινές, 1:3, 7, 19) who “teach other”

²² Timothy is addressed as “genuine child” (γνησίως τεκνος) in 1:2 and in the vocative as “child Timothy” (τέκνον Τιμόθεε) in 1:18. Paul speaks to him directly, using the second-person personal pronoun (σε, σοι) in 1:3 and 1:18.

²³ The author characterizes the behavior of “some” (τινές) to avoid in 1:4–7 and 1:19, and provides the names of Hymenaios and Alexander in 1:20.

²⁴ Paul speaks of being placed in service in 1:12 and of Timothy being commissioned by prophetic utterances in 1:18.

²⁵ For the understanding of 1 Timothy as a *mandata principis* letter, see Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* 137–142.

(ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν, 1:3),²⁶ among whom are Hymenaios and Alexander (1:20), on one side, and “the healthy teaching according to the good news” (ὕγιαινούση διδασκαλία κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, 1:10–11), to which both Paul (1:12) and his delegate Timothy (1:18) have been committed.

The description of the opposition bears marks of the stereotypical slander found in fights among ancient philosophers. Little specific can be learned from the charge that they are devoted to myths and endless genealogies (1:4) that give rise to speculations (1:4), or that they are foolish in speech (1:6), or that they are ignorant, knowing neither the things they are saying or upon which they insist (1:6–7). Such charges, like those found later in the letter, are standard items in antiquity’s catalogues of polemic.²⁷

That Paul uses stereotypical slander in the manner of other ancient philosophers is no surprise.²⁸ There are, however, some aspects of the description of the opposition that suggest a specific profile. Paul does not suggest that these are people outside the community, for example, who are “from the circumcision party” (see Titus 1:10) or who are “sneaking into households” (2 Tim 3:6); rather, they appear to be completely within the range of Paul’s and his delegate’s authority: Timothy can “command” them (1:3) and Paul can excommunicate them (1:20).²⁹ Similarly, the charge of ignorance gains some specificity from three further aspects of Paul’s depiction. The first is that they have intellectual ambition: they seek or want to be “teachers of law” (θέλοντες εἶναι νομοδιδάσκαλοι, 1:7). The second is that they have “missed the mark” (ἀστοχήσαντες) concerning essential things and have “turned aside” (ἐξετράπησαν) to foolishness (1:6), have “spurned” (ἀπωσάμενοι) the essentials and have “suffered shipwreck” (ἐναυάγησαν, 1:19). The third is that Paul has handed them over to Satan precisely so that they might be “instructed” (παιδευθῶσιν, 1:20).

²⁶ The use of ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν in 1:3 and 6:3 provided Schleiermacher (90–91) with his point of entry for the questioning of the diction throughout 1 Timothy, since he could find no attestation of the term as early as Paul, and it was attested in patristic literature after Paul. Anticipating other selective displays of evidence, he does not mention Paul’s fondness generally for ἐτερο- constructions (see 1 Cor 14:21; 2 Cor 6:14; 11:4; Gal 1:6).

²⁷ See R.J. Karris, “The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973) 549–564; L.T. Johnson, “2 Timothy and the Polemic against False Teachers: A Reexamination,” *Journal of Religious Studies* 6–7 (1978–79) 1–26, and (more broadly), “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1989) 419–441.

²⁸ As in Rom 15:17–19; 2 Cor 10:13–15; Phil 3:19; Gal 6:13; 1 Thess 1:3–6.

²⁹ I am assuming here that the “handing over to Satan” for instructional purposes is more like I Cor 5:5 than not.

The opposition, in short, is long on ambition but short on talent, and because they fail to understand the basic truth, fall away from it themselves. They miss, Paul says, the τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας (1:5), which we might translate as the “point” or the “goal” of the commandment.

This point of the commandment, Paul says, is not the knowledge of extraneous realities (“myths and genealogies”) or the imposition of a heteronomous norm (“law”), but the cultivation of moral dispositions internal to humans. In 1:5 he speaks of this τέλος as “love from a pure heart and a good conscience, and sincere faith,” and in 1:19 speaks of engaging the noble battle with “faith and a good conscience.” The occurrence of “faith” (πίστις) in each statement to characterize the response of Paul and his delegate does not surprise, since, as we have seen, he has called Timothy his genuine child ἐν πίστει (1:2) and speaks of the mercy shown him by Christ as an example “for those coming to have faith in him” (τῶν μελλόντων πιστεῦειν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ, 1:16).

Indeed, in 1:5 Paul opposes a preoccupation with myths and genealogies that give rise to speculations with the οἰκονομία θεοῦ ἐν πίστει. Both the text and translation of this sentence are difficult and disputed.³⁰ I take the phrase οἰκονομία θεοῦ as the preferred reading, and translate it as “God’s way of ordering [or, disposing] things” (note the echo of ἐπιταγήν θεοῦ in 1:1). The phrase ἐν πίστει, in turn, can modify either the character of God’s dispensation—it is all about faith—or the character of the human response—it is to be received in faith—or even both. But that Paul here sets “faith” (with its internal dispositions) over against the pretenders’ understanding of “law” (as a heteronomous norm) is made clear by his conclusion in 1:19 that the spurning of faith and good conscience by some has meant suffering shipwreck περὶ τὴν πίστιν. Two interrelated contrasts, therefore, dominate the passage, that between God’s dispensation and human ambition, and that between internal disposition and external norm.

The Exegetical Challenge

The relative clarity of these contrasts throws into greater relief the difficulty presented by the two elements that form the heart of the passage,

³⁰ See my discussion of the passage in “Oikonomia theou: The Theological Voice of 1 Timothy from the Perspective of Pauline Authorship,” and “Response to Margaret Mitchell,” in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 21/2 (1999) 87–104, 140–144.

namely Paul's "clarifying" statement concerning the law in 1:8–11, and his description of his conversion and call in 1:12–17. Each section poses severe problems. In the first, what does Paul mean by calling the law good, *ἐάν τις αὐτῷ νομίμως χρήται* (1:8)?³¹ For that matter, what does he have in mind by "the law" (*ὁ νόμος*)?³² What is the precise significance of the wordplay *κεῖται/ἀντίκειται* in 1:9–10?³³ Why is the vice-list of 1:9–10 personal,³⁴ and why are the characterizations so extreme? Why does the conclusion to the list shift from wicked persons to impersonal vice (*τι ἕτερον*) opposed to the healthy teaching according to the good news (1:10–11)?³⁵

In the second section, why does Paul speak of himself not only as a persecutor but also as *βλάσφημον* and *ὑβριστήν*³⁶ and why does he connect his former *ἀγνοῶν* with *ἀπιστία* in his explanation for God's mercy toward him (1:13)?³⁷ Why does he speak of the *charis* God showed him as an "empowerment" (1:12),³⁸ and as an outpouring of the "faith and love

³¹ *καλός* ὁ νόμος echoes Romans 7:16, *σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καλός*, while the adverb *νομίμως* finds a parallel in 2 Tim 2:5. The verb *χράσθαι* occurs also in 1 Cor 7:21, 31; 9:12, 15; 2 Cor 1:17; 3:12; 13:10 as well as 1 Tim 5:23, with much the same meaning of "put to use" in each instance; apart from Acts 27:3, 17, the verb is restricted in the NT to Paul.

³² Note that the adjective *Ἰουδαϊκός* is not used here or with reference to "myths and genealogies" in 1:4, in contrast to the *Ἰουδαίκοις μύθοις* in Tit 1:14. That νόμος here means at least the commandments in Torah is an inference drawn from two things: the ability to discern the frame of the Decalogue beneath 1:9–10, and Paul's usage elsewhere.

³³ That the word-play is deliberate is supported by the play on νόμος / νομίμως in the same sentence; precisely the fact that the paired terms are rhetorically matched, however, cautions the reader against excessive precision in their translation, particularly when trying to draw conclusions concerning the status of the law for believers generally. Here the application of the terms is made more complex by the disparity of the two phrases in the dative case, τῷ δικαίῳ (1:9) and τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ in 1:10: in my Anchor Bible translation, I have "is not laid down for a righteous person" and "opposed to the healthy teaching."

³⁴ The list of vices in Col 3:8, Eph 5:3–4, Gal 5:19–21, and 1 Tim 6:4 are all impersonal. The list in 1 Cor 6:9–10 is personal, and that in Rom 1:29–31 is mixed, beginning impersonally and shifting to the personal.

³⁵ Contrast the οἵτινες in Rom 1:32 to the *καὶ εἴ τι ἕτερον* in 1 Tim 1:10.

³⁶ Although Paul elsewhere singles out his persecution of the church as a salient of his former life, he uses the verb *διώκειν* (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6) rather than the noun *διώκτης*. Paul nowhere else designates himself as a *βλάσφημος*, although he associates the term with opponents (2 Tim 3:2), and the noun *ὑβριστής* elsewhere occurs in the NT only in the vice-list of Rom 1:30.

³⁷ Paul uses the noun *ἀπιστία* in Romans as "faithlessness," roughly equivalent to "disobedience" (see Rom 3:3; 4:20; 11:20, 23); similarly, the verb *ἀγνοεῖν* also occurs in Romans in connection with (failure to) convert: "not knowing that the mercy (*χρηστός*) of God drives you to repentance" (2:4) and with reference to Paul's fellow Jews, "not knowing the righteousness that comes from God."

³⁸ In 2 Tim 2:1, Paul tells his delegate to "Be strengthened by the gift that is in Jesus Christ," (compare Eph 6:10) and in 4:17 declares that "the Lord stood by me and empow-

that are in Christ Jesus” (1:14)?³⁹ Why does he include (as a “faithful saying”) a statement about Jesus’ coming into the world to save sinners,⁴⁰ and speak of God’s gift to him as an example for those coming to have faith (1:15–16)? And why is this entire section framed as a thanksgiving to Jesus that concludes with a doxology to God (1:17)?

I cannot hope to answer all these questions in a single essay, but I do want to suggest that progress can be made by placing this entire central part of the first chapter within the framework of dyadic contrast that Paul establishes on either side of it, and then by reading these two sections in light of each other. The approach is as old as Augustine: facing difficult passages, move from the more to the less certain.⁴¹ The premise, however, is that the author is not clumsily laying slabs of tradition side by side, but is actually working out an argument. In this case, the argument proceeds by the juxtaposition of the clarification concerning law, and Paul’s account of his conversion.

The explicit link between the two is found in 1:11–12. The vice-list concludes with the summary, “anything else that opposes the healthy teaching according to the glorious good news (εὐαγγέλιον τῆς δόξης) from (or of) the blessed God, *with which I have been entrusted* (ὁ ἐπιστεύθην ἐγώ), and the thanksgiving is for the empowerment of Paul by Christ for he has considered me faithful by *putting me into service* (ὅτι πιστόν με ἠγήσατο θέμενος εἰς διακονίαν).”⁴² The better knowledge concerning the law—note the “we know” and “since we know” in 1:8–19—is therefore one given by Paul’s present perspective concerning “a righteous one” (δίκαιος, 1:9), which he has because of his experience of empowerment, and the outpouring of grace from the Lord (1:14).

Recognizing this, we can observe as well three further links between the sections. First, Paul characterizes his former life as one of “ignorance” (ἄγνοῶν, 1:13), just as the opponents are said to be “without knowledge” (1:7). This further supports the suggestion that Paul’s knowledge concerning

ered me.” In Phil 4:13 Paul states, I am able to do all things ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντι με, which may account for the textual variant in 1 Tim 1:12).

³⁹ The secondary attributive construction found in 1 Tim 1:14; 3:13; 2 Tim 1:1; 2:1, 10 and 3:15 have the effect of suggesting a quality that belongs to Christ, a personal characteristic that can be communicated to others.

⁴⁰ The saying echoes Luke 5:32 and 19:10, but finds expression elsewhere in Paul as well: “Christ shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

⁴¹ *De Doctrina Christiana* II, 9.

⁴² Note that while Paul from his side had ἀπιστία (1:13), Christ Jesus “considered [him] faithful (πιστόν 1:12).”

law is one given by his present experience rather than his former life; he now understands that of which he was formerly ignorant. Second, Paul connects this former ignorance to his “faithlessness” (ἀπιστία), forming a further connection between his earlier life and the present condition of the opponents, who fall away from faith (1:6, 19). Third, Paul’s characterization of himself in his earlier life is particularly harsh. To his activity as a persecutor (διώκτης), Paul attaches the traits of being a “blasphemer” (βλάσφημος) and “an insolent person” (ὕβριστής). The harshness of these terms, especially the last,⁴³ matches the exaggerated terms used in the vice-list, and it is striking that at the end of this opening passage, Paul says of his opponents that he has handed them over to the Satan so that they might be instructed “not to blaspheme” (μὴ βλασφημεῖν). It is difficult to avoid the impression that Paul is deliberately identifying himself in his former life with those who, in their faithlessness and ignorance, now wish to be teachers of law.

This deliberate linking helps account, in turn, for three further features of the vice-list. First, Paul lists “persons with vices” rather than abstract vice-designations (“lawless people,” ἄνομοι, rather than “lawlessness,” ἀνομία), because the issue raised by the opponents who wish to be teachers of law is how to be a “righteous person” within the community. It is for this reason that Paul puts the argument on the level of persons and their character. Second, Paul’s list of unrighteous persons focuses entirely on religious and moral qualities rather than ritual obligations. The suggestion that the Ten Commandments serves as a loose organizing principle for this vice-list has merit.⁴⁴ Third, throughout the list, Paul chooses words that express extremely negative moral dispositions or characters: they do not simply commit the act of killing, they are “people who kill mothers” (μητραλώας) and “people who kill fathers (πατρολώας);” they do not commit adultery, they are “people who fornicate (πόρνοι) and are sexually perverted (ἀρσενοκοίταις);” they not only steal, they are “people who sell into slavery (ἀνδραποδισταίς).” These dramatic examples match the extravagant characterization of Paul in his former life as a persecutor,

⁴³ Although ὕβρις has a wide range of usage, N.R.E. Fisher argues that the element of a shamelessness that willingly dishonors others—gods or humans—dominates (see *HYBRIS: a Study of the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* [Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1992]). In the vice-list of Rom 1:30, Paul places the ὕβριστάς between the θεοστυγείς (God-haters) and the ὑπερηφάνους (arrogant). The combination of ὕβριστής and ὑπερήφανος is found also in Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1390B, and Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 5.55.6.

⁴⁴ See the analysis in Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 168–172.

blasphemer, and violent man. Paul was, in short, much as the people he lists in his faithlessness, ignorance, violence, and blasphemy.

In light of his own (and, he assumes, Timothy's) experience, Paul can declare of the law "this thing" (τούτο), namely that it is not laid down (κεῖται) for the righteous person, but rather for those who act in a way contrary (ἀντίκειται) to the healthy teaching of the good news from God. What he means, I think, is that the law can identify wicked behavior, but the law cannot generate positive righteous dispositions, and, by implication, if the righteous dispositions are in place, then the law can add nothing to them. The essential moral transformation has already been accomplished, not by the keeping of law but by God's gift.

The point of Paul's thanksgiving, in turn, is to assert that, in his case, remarkably, God worked such a moral transformation as an example of what God through Christ offers all sinners. Note that God accomplishes this, not through a verbal revelation, but through the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus dominates Paul's thanksgiving. Paul states the faithful saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (ἀμαρτωλοὺς σῶσαι)" (1:15). Jesus' existence was directed to rescuing humans from their condition of alienation from God and their alienating behavior. He came for the sort of people identified in 1:9–10, and like Paul, who says, "I am the first among them!"

Jesus' salvific will reached Paul, to be sure, through the power of the resurrection. That Jesus now shares God's power is clear from the greeting, where Paul connects his apostolic authority to "God our savior and Christ Jesus our hope," and sends Timothy grace, mercy, and peace "from God Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1:1–2), as well as from the use of "our Lord" in 1:14. It is because Christ Jesus shares God's rule over the ages (1:17) that his power can reach across any time or place to transform humans in their dispositions and behavior. So Paul gives thanks to Christ Jesus who "has empowered me" (ἐνδυναμώσαντι με, 1:12) in three ways: Jesus "reckoned" (ἡγήσατο) Paul faithful (πιστὸν) by putting him in his service; he "poured out abundantly" (ὑπερπελόνασεν) his grace; and, he showed Paul mercy (ἡλεήθην, 1:13, 16). Most remarkable, the gift of the Lord to Paul consisted in the very human dispositions found in Jesus himself: "the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (μετὰ πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 1:15). Precisely the internal moral dispositions that Paul identifies as "the goal of the commandment" (1:5, 19) are activated within him through Christ's gift.

The mercy that Jesus showed toward Paul was itself a form of proof of what God could do. It was a "demonstration" (ἐνδείχεται) in the first of

sinners of Christ's *ἅπασαν μακροθυμίαν* ("all encompassing patience," or "all possible forbearance"),⁴⁵ so that Paul stands as an example (*ὑποτύπωσιν*) both of the sinner Christ came to save, and as the one brought "to believe in him onto eternal life" (1:16). Paul's coming to faith and apostleship was through the *οἰκονομία θεοῦ* (1:5): it was an expression of Christ's faith in him (see *ἐπιστεύθη* in 1:11 and *πιστόν με ἠγγήσατο* in 1:12), generated faith and love within him (1:14) and called for a continuing response of faith and thanksgiving (*ἐν πίστει*, 1:5). In light of this powerful personal experience of transformation—shared in some degree, Paul intimates, by Timothy (1:18)—a return to a legal norm for behavior would amount to a rejection of the experience itself, and becoming shipwrecked with respect to faith (1:19). It would mean, in fact, a rejection of the power of God to save through Christ, a return to the attitude Paul formerly had as persecutor and arrogant man, who was also a blasphemer. Not by accident, then, is the handing over of the pretend-teachers to Satan intended to "instruct them not to blaspheme" (*ἵνα παιδευθῶσιν μὴ βλασφημεῖν*, 1:20).

Further Connections

I have tried to provide a fresh reading of 1 Timothy 1:1–20 that takes seriously its rhetorical crafting and its religious argument, which retain their integrity, I submit, whether we consider the letter to have been written by Paul or by a successor. I have tried to identify the heart of the author's argument in a double contrast between, on one hand, the work of God and human ambition, and, on the other hand, a manner of life guided by conscience and one guided by law. I have suggested that the very difficult heart of the argument in 1:8–17 becomes clearer when read in light of this double contrast, and when Paul's statements about the law and his own conversion are seen as interconnected.

If this approach makes good sense of the opening of First Timothy, four questions arise. First, does this contrast between the experience of the living God and human ambition pervade the rest of 1 Timothy, so that 1:1–20 may be regarded not only as an authorization of Paul's delegate but also as the announcement of the composition's main point? Second, is the focus on character and moral transformation through the gift of Christ, in contrast to human effort, an important or even central preoccupation of

⁴⁵ For *μακροθυμία* as God's disposition, see Rom 2:4 and 9:22.

the other letters to Paul's delegates? Third, to what degree can we consider this theme, if it is demonstrated to be so pervasively present in the Pastorals, also a preoccupation of Paul's other letters, especially in places where Paul also discusses the law? Fourth and finally, is it possible to ask whether Paul's other major statement with respect to his calling in Galatians 1:10–24 has a paradigmatic function within the argument of that letter, as the thanksgiving in 1 Timothy 1:12–17 clearly has? In this essay, only the most preliminary and sketchy response can be provided for each of these questions.

1. The contrast between external prescriptions and internal dispositions continues throughout 1 Timothy. In the discussion of bishops (supervisors) and deacons (helpers), the focus is entirely on moral qualities rather than administrative or ritual functions (see 3:2–4, 8–9, 11). Much of the letter is taken up with specific *mandata* concerning worship, leadership, wealth, and community support for widows, but in the sections of the composition that continue the contrast between Paul's delegate Timothy and the opponents, the same distinction observed in 1:1–20 holds.

In the sections of the letter that provide direct advice to Paul's delegate, the positive exhortation of Timothy has as its foil the negative characterization of his opposition, in much the same terms as in 1:1–20. Thus, in 4:2–3, they are said to have their conscience seared, and they seek to forbid the eating of certain foods and the practice of marriage. However strange it might seem for teachers of Jewish law to forbid marriage,⁴⁶ the more important point is that they are advocating an external set of observances. Timothy, however, is trained in godliness as he responds to the living God (4:7, 10), sets an example in his speech and conduct of the internal dispositions of love and faith and purity (4:11–12), in accord with the gift that was given him through prophetic utterance (4:14).

Similarly, at the end of the letter, Timothy's healthy teaching in godliness (6:3) is called a good fight for the faith (6:12)—echoing 1:8—that demands of him such internal dispositions as righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness (6:11). Against him stand those

⁴⁶ The combination of elements is found—so far as we know—only among practitioners of Merkabah mysticism; they did not forbid marriage, but did combine observance of law, temporary sexual abstinence, and fasting as preparation the heavenly ascent. See F.O. Francis, "Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2:18," *Studia Theologica* 16 (1963) 109–134. The caution, "so far as we know," however, must be taken seriously. Scholars must avoid the conceit that identifies reality with the information that they happen to possess.

who focus on controversy and disputes, “from which come envy and strife and reviling speech, evil suspicions” (6:4). Their constant wranglings are the manifestations of “corrupted minds” (6:5) that have been “defrauded from the truth.” Insistence on a heteronomous norm, we see once again, not only fails to transform humans through moral virtue, it exacerbates their vice. The conclusion of the composition forms a perfect *inclusio* with 1:1–20: the opposition’s profane chatterings and contradictions reflect only their “so-called knowledge” (τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως), and show that they have “missed the mark concerning faith” (περὶ τὴν πίστιν ἡστόχησαν, see 1:19, περὶ τὴν πίστιν ἐναυάγησαν). In sum, the contrast between internal disposition in response to God and external norm as expression of human ambition carries through 1 Timothy, showing that, as in other Pauline compositions, the opening lines set the agenda for the whole.⁴⁷

2. Can the same be said for 2 Timothy and Titus? Is the contrast between the work of God that effects internal transformation and the futility of the law to effect such change a feature of these letters as well? It is, though much more in Titus than in 2 Timothy. In Titus, the opposition is, as in 1 Timothy, preoccupied with debates and genealogies and “legal battles” (or: battles over the law, μάχας νομικὰς, 3:9), but are here explicitly identified as being ἐκ τῆς περιτομῆς (1:10), involved with “Jewish myths” and “human commandments” (1:14). These commandments, in turn, concern distinctions between what is clean and unclean (1:15). Paul associates them with the ἀπίστοις (1:15) and ἀπειθεῖς (1:16), as people who claim knowledge of God but deny them with their deeds (1:16). In contrast, Titus states forcefully that it is the gift (χάρις) of the savior God that has provided them with instruction (παιδεύοντα) in how to live with transformed moral character as “a people that [Jesus] has purified as his own people zealous for good deeds” (2:11–14). Again, Paul asserts that it was God’s mercy (ἔλεος) that has saved them, so that “being made righteous by that gift (χάρις) we might become heirs in the hope of eternal life” (3:5–7) rather than “out of works in righteousness that we ourselves performed” (3:5). In Titus, the Jewish character of the oppositions is heightened, and the power of grace to transform humans into moral dispositions desired by God is clearly affirmed.

⁴⁷ See P. Schubert, *The Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgiving* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939), and P.T. O’Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (NovTSup 49; Leiden: Brill, 1977).

In 2 Timothy, there is an equally strong emphasis on Timothy's moral character, which has as its foil the negative moral portrayal of the opposition, but the matter is not cast in terms of a contrast between heteronomous norm and divine empowerment. Paul emphatically asserts that Timothy is empowered by grace (2:1) and that he has been given by God "a spirit not of cowardice but power and love and of self-control" (1:7). The composition focuses precisely on these moral dispositions that Timothy is to display as Paul's delegate. But although some things said about the opponents are similar to the charges made in 1 Timothy and Titus—they are filled with every sort of vice (3:1–6), dispute over words (2:14, 23), are corrupted in mind and unproven in faith (3:8), and turn aside to myths (4:4)—nowhere does Paul suggest that they advance a program involving the observance of law; rather, they are accused only of claiming that the resurrection has already occurred (2:18).

The difference in pattern confirms the judgment that 1 Timothy and Titus should be considered as *mandata principis* letters that address genuine pastoral problems facing Paul's delegates arising from claims made about law-observance, and that 2 Timothy is best read as a personal paraenetic/protreptic letter exhorting the delegate to a way of life consonant with his vocation.

3. To ask whether the contrast between internal moral dispositions and external norm is a characteristic of other Pauline letters is to ask a large question, whose tentative and cautious answer here must be a partial "yes." In at least four of the compositions that all agree come from Paul (Romans, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and Galatians), and in two that are disputed (Colossians and Ephesians), the contrast appears with greater or lesser emphasis. Since part of my interest in regenerating conversation about the authenticity of the Pastorals is restoring them to the larger Pauline conversation, and setting them individually into more useful comparisons across the Pauline corpus, I will briefly state here how I see this contrast at work in the four undisputed letters I have named.⁴⁸

In Romans 7–8, Paul states the contrast in powerful terms. Even though he acknowledges that the law is good (Rom 7:16), holy (7:12), and spiritual (7:14), and the commandment is holy and righteous and good (7:12), he

⁴⁸ That Paul exhorts the Corinthians in his first letter to them to live by the Spirit that comes from God and to measure their behavior according to the "mind of Christ" (2:16) and exhibit transformed moral dispositions (6:9–11) is patent, but in that letter, the contrast is not drawn between such interior qualities and heteronomous norms.

states that it is powerless to actually change him. But what the law cannot do, the spirit of life that comes from Christ can do, change humans in their moral dispositions so that they can walk according to the spirit and not according to the flesh (8:1–11). The imperative that flows from this spirit-empowerment—“grace” (5:2)—is the transformation of the mind so that it can discern “the will of God, the good thing, and the pleasing and perfect thing” (12:1–2); those who have been so empowered have “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and can therefore “walk decently” rather than in vice (13:13–14).

In 2 Cor 3–4, Paul again establishes a strong contrast between “the letter that kills” and “the spirit that gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). In this argument, the stress is placed not so much on the inadequacy of the law—it had its own “glory” (3:7–9)—as on its being eclipsed by the power of life given by the “spirit of the living God” (3:3), with the contrast focused specifically on the external nature of the law (“written on stone tablets”) and the internal character of the spirit’s imprinting (“written on tablets of fleshly hearts”). Here Paul makes the bold statement that the spirit (who is the Lord) transforms them from glory to glory into the image of the one on whom they gaze (3:17–18). The issue for Paul in this letter is less that the Corinthians will be seduced by an external measure for morality, than that they will fail to demonstrate their transformed character in action.⁴⁹

The contrast between law and grace in Philippians 3 has still a different emphasis. Here, Paul elaborates the “confidence in the flesh” he enjoyed in his former life because of his heritage and observance; he was, he declared, “according to righteousness found in the law, blameless” (Phil 3:6). But he regards all of this as nothing compared to “the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,” for in that relationship, he has found “not a righteousness on the basis of law, but through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that comes from God, based on faith” (3:9). Paul cites his own turn from law to faith as the last in a series of examples he presents to the consideration of the Philippians as “looking to other’s interests more than one’s own” (2:4): the kenotic Christ (2:5–11), the delegate Timothy—whose proven character they know (2:19–24), and the self-giving Epaphroditus (2:25–30). All these display the moral qualities that are found also in Christ and are available to them because of the “fellowship of the Spirit” (2:1–2).

⁴⁹ With T.D. Stegman, S.J., *The Character of Jesus: The Linch-Pin to Paul’s Argument in 2 Corinthians* (Analecta Biblica 158; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2005), I read ἐγρηψα in 1:9 as epistolary: Paul is writing to test the character of the Corinthians’ obedient faith: see especially 13:5.

Galatians bears a remarkable resemblance to 1 Timothy with respect to the contrast between those advocating observance of law as a measure of righteousness and Paul's insistence on those who live in the Spirit also walking according to the Spirit (Gal 5:25). As in 1 Timothy, Galatians speaks of actual individuals (τινές) who are upsetting the communities (1:7) because they "want to be under law" (οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, 4:21) and are "bewitching" Gentile believers (3:1) into seeking circumcision (5:3–12). As in 1 Timothy, Paul suggests that the "child of the slave girl" (meaning those who are "according to the flesh" rather than "according to the spirit" be cast out of the community (4:30). And as in 1 Timothy, Paul establishes a sharp contrast between the "works of the flesh" associated with a life without the power of the spirit, which cause strife and conflict in the community, and those deep moral dispositions that he calls "the fruit of the Spirit," which include love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control—exactly the sort of virtue list that characterizes 1 Timothy (Gal 5:19–23). Paul declares, "against such [dispositions] as these there is no law" (5:23) a statement that strikingly resembles 1 Timothy 1:9, "law is not laid down for a righteous person."

4. The character and function of Paul's conversion account in Galatians 1:11–16 is remarkably similar to that of his account in 1 Timothy 1:12–17. In both, the contrast is drawn between Paul's former life and his call. In both, his persecution of the church is noted. In both, his conversion is cast in terms of a call or appointment to preach the good news. In both the change is ascribed to grace or gift (χάρις). In 1 Timothy it consists of an empowerment by "Christ Jesus our Lord" with "the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 1:12, 14), and in Galatians it is the "revelation of [God's] son in [or to] me." There are, to be sure, differences as well. In Galatians, Paul elaborates that aspect of his former life that was dedicated to the keeping of the law, whereas in 1 Timothy Paul emphasizes his former faithlessness, ignorance, and arrogance as a blasphemer. Galatians focuses on Paul's mission to preach the good news, whereas 1 Timothy focuses on the demonstration of God's forbearance. Galatians 1:15 contains an allusion to a prophetic call ("called from the mother's womb") that 1 Timothy lacks (see Isa 49:1 and Jer 1:5). Apart from the specific diction found in each account, however, it must be granted that they are more alike than different.

Even more impressive is the way in which Paul's account of his call/commissioning/ conversion in both letters serves an *exemplary* function. I have already indicated how this works in 1 Timothy: Paul is an exam-

ple not only of how God shows patience with sinners but above all how God's grace can transform them. Within the context of 1 Timothy 1, Paul's empowerment from God changes him from an arrogant, blaspheming and persecuting human being filled with faithlessness and ignorance to one put in God's service, gifted by the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

In Galatians, the lesson to be drawn is slightly different: Paul's entire opening narrative serves as a model for his Galatian readers who are in danger of being seduced by the proponents of law: Paul was once like them—and he persecuted the church! But once Paul was commissioned by God as an apostle, he did not look back, did not give in, and claimed the authority given him by the experience of Christ in him. The point is that his readers also should not now, having been lavishly gifted by the Holy Spirit (3:1–5), go back precisely to the place Paul formerly occupied, measuring righteousness by the law. As in 1 Timothy, Paul identifies the supposed “advance” represented by the opponents as a “reversal” to a condition that he formerly shared, and from which he was himself an opponent of the living God.

Conclusions

In this essay I have tried to show how 1 Timothy 1:1–20 establishes a contrast between the experience of God and human ambition, expressed on one side by internal moral dispositions and on the other side by disputes centering on observance of law. When the clarification concerning the law and the vice list of 1:9–11 is read in connection with Paul's account of his conversion in 1:12–17, the two sides are shown in the person of Paul himself. In his former life he was under the law, yet he was a violent persecutor; now he is an example of God's power to fill a sinner with faith and love. His personal recital therefore bears his argument within itself. I have further tried to show that the conflict between heteronomous norm and transformation of character runs through both the other letters to Paul's delegates and a substantial portion of his undisputed correspondence, most strikingly in Galatians. Finally, I have suggested that the account of Paul's call in Galatians and of his commissioning in 1 Timothy not only have much substantively in common, but they serve similar exemplary functions. It is my hope that these simple observations will at least serve to show that putting the respective letters to Paul's delegates into sustained conversation with his other writings is neither frivolous nor without point.

PART FOUR

OTHER NT COMPOSITIONS

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE SCRIPTURAL WORLD OF HEBREWS

The contemporary experience of pluralism has enabled us to speak about “worlds.” Such language acknowledges that humans do not simply live in the world such as it is, but rather inhabit multiple social worlds that they themselves construct. We have grown accustomed to thinking of such human worlds as complex configurations of social structures and symbols. The patterns of social interaction and the symbols that express and support such patterns mutually influence each other. And we appreciate that the social construction of reality is inherently fragile, requiring reinforcement by repeated practices that make the conventional seem increasingly inevitable and natural. By using the language of “symbolic world,” we also, paradoxically, reveal both ourselves and our own construction of the world as one consisting of multiple and competing discourses.

What does it mean to enter into the symbolic world of a New Testament composition like Hebrews? Two scholarly answers to this question distinguish two approaches to scripture.

The historical-critical paradigm, which has dominated New Testament scholarship since the Enlightenment, has been the first answer. Asking about the “world of Hebrews” means investigating the social and symbolic world that produced this composition. Such investigations can be carried out at three levels of sophistication. The first and most obvious is the attempt to determine the historical location of a composition through its author, audience, time and place, or literary relationships. This approach has not been terribly helpful in the case of Hebrews. Since there are no external controls and every reconstruction of circumstance must be based solely on internal evidence, each hypothesis can be refuted by one that is equally plausible. We can assert that the author was a Christian fluent in the best Greek found among first-generation writers, and we can assume that his audience could grasp its rhythms and diction. Beyond that, we can deduce that the hearers were in danger of apostasy because of their suffering. However, the turns of phrase and theme that resemble first Paul and then John only serve to emphasize how little these traces of similarity help us locate the writing more specifically within the early Christian movement.

Second, the historical approach can also inquire more fully into the intellectual world out of which the composition appears to emerge. In the case of Hebrews, such investigation points to the complex interpenetrations of Jewish and Hellenistic culture. Hebrews holds a Platonic worldview—broadly defined, a perception of phenomenal things (“things seen”) as less real and less worthy than their noumenal archetypes (“things unseen”). The most spectacular representation of Platonism is found in the composition’s exposition of the specifically Jewish sacrificial system. It is also possible to find pointers in the composition to distinctive aspects of Judaism in the Hellenistic world: Philo, to be sure, but also Qumran and those Pharisaic interpreters we later recognize as the Rabbis.

Finally, and most satisfyingly, the historical approach can place Hebrews within the rhetorical conventions of antiquity, recognizing the “epistle” as more of a speech than a letter and coming to understand its many individual tropes (including its inventive inversion of the categories of honor and shame; see 12:2). Such an approach also highlights impressive invention and arrangement—its argument proper—in which exposition and exhortation alternate in an ascending spiral that ends in a powerful final plea (13:12–16).

The impressive body of scholarship devoted to each of these three levels of inquiry has contributed much that is useful to present-day readers. The more we know about the world out of which Hebrews came, the better able we are to understand its meaning within that world. We recover something of the text’s “otherness” that prohibits the easy assumption that its language and perceptions are necessarily the same as ours. Ultimately, however, such knowledge serves us best as an explanation rather than interpretation. Knowledge of the world that produced Hebrews is not yet knowledge of the world of Hebrews. Literary compositions, after all, do not simply report on the world that produces them; they also produce a world.

A second way of thinking about the symbolic world of Hebrews, then, is in terms of the world that it creates. Here, we hear the language of Hebrews not as an effect that can lead us back to certain causes, but rather as a cause that can give rise to certain effects. If our question is how Hebrews imagines a certain kind of world, then we must allow our imaginations to be engaged, not by this or that part of the text, but by the composition as a whole. By no means does such imaginative engagement eschew the rich insights given by the historical-critical approach. I repeat, the more we know about the world that produced Hebrews, the better we can interpret Hebrews. But we cannot rest content with such explanatory analysis. To be in a position to interpret is not yet to interpret, or at least not fully.

An adequate interpretation of Hebrews as scripture requires a critical engagement with its world, not simply with respect to meaning but also with respect to truth. We all recognize the inadequacy of a reading that lacks a critical dimension and simply assumes that the world of Hebrews is the same as the world of the readers. Such reading is distorted and alienating because it does not recognize the otherness of the text—which means in fact that neither the world of the text nor the world of the readers has been honestly engaged. Fewer of us recognize the inadequacy of an approach that distances the text through historical explanation, and that leaves us simply with what the text meant in its first context (the world that produced it), without engaging the question whether that meaning has anything to do with the truth about our world. Interpretation of scripture demands that we engage critically the world imagined by the texts of scripture. This means not only entering imaginatively into that world, and learning from it, but also critically assessing the distance between that world and the one that we now imagine.

This essay seeks to engage the world constructed by Hebrews through a single aspect of the composition, namely its own engagement with the world constructed by scripture. It offers something of an example of how such engagement, done more thoroughly and insightfully, to be sure, might be carried out.

World-Construction through Citation and Allusion

Regardless of the historical identity of the author of Hebrews, the composition reveals an extraordinarily comprehensive and thorough reader of the Greek translation of Torah known as the Septuagint (LXX), whose liberal use of citation and allusion suggests a confidence that the composition's readers share some degree of that competence. Apart from the double appeal to Hebrew etymology in 7:2—an appeal that does not by itself require any actual knowledge of Hebrew—the composition is resolutely and thoroughly grounded in the LXX, so much so that the argument relies on the specific choices of diction made by the LXX translators. Yet the author also shows remarkable freedom with respect to the text of scripture, adding in 10:17 “and their iniquities” (καὶ τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτῶν) to his citation from Jer 31:34 (LXX 38:34), and inserting into the citation of Haggai 2:6 the words “not only” (οὐ μόνον) and “but” (ἀλλὰ), in order to make the passage better suit the argument (Heb 12:26).

Hebrews's explicit citations from scripture are rich and wide-ranging. In thirteen chapters, Hebrews has some forty-one explicit citations from

the Septuagint: fourteen from the Law (Genesis 6, Exodus 2, Deuteronomy 6), one from the historical books (1 Samuel/1 Chronicles), seven from the prophets (Isaiah 3, Jeremiah 2, Habakkuk 1, Haggai 1), and nineteen from the writings (only one from Proverbs, but eighteen from the Psalms). Although many of these citations are brief, Hebrews is unusually fond of quoting fairly extensive passages: four lines (7:1–2; 10:37–38; 12:5–6), five lines (1:7–8; 10:16–17), six lines (10:5–7), ten lines (3:7–11) or even twenty lines (8:8–12) in length.

The way in which Hebrews introduces these citations is distinctive among New Testament writings for its variety and non-literary character. Nowhere does the author introduce quotations that we recognize as biblical, as “scripture,” that is, as writing (γραφή). Hebrews uses the common New Testament expression “it stands written” (ἔγγραπται)¹ only within the citation from Ps 40:8 in 10:7. Consistent with the opening description of God as “speaking (λαλήσας) of old to our fathers of old in the prophets” (1:1), the composition’s considerable repertoire of introductory expressions is entirely *oral*. With God as the understood subject, Hebrews introduces citations with expressions such as “He said” (1:5), “He says” (1:6; 2:12; 8:8; 10:15), “by saying” (3:15), “He has said” (4:3), “the One who said” (5:5), “He has promised” (12:26), and “He swore by saying” (6:13–14). With Christ (see 9:28) as the implied subject, Hebrews introduces the long citation in 10:5–7 with “therefore, as he came into the world, he says.” Similarly, the Son, who is not ashamed to call humans brothers, is the implied speaker of the three texts from Ps 21:23, Isa 8:17 and Isa 8:18 in Heb 2:12–13. In 3:7, Hebrews introduces a citation with “the Holy Spirit says,” and in 10:15 with “The Holy Spirit testifies to us.” More periphrastically, Hebrews introduces the citation from Ps 8:5–7 in 2:5 with, “somewhere, someone has testified by saying,” and in 7:17, “it is testified concerning him.”

What are the implications of this manner of citation? To some extent, we can recognize the appropriateness of this oral rendering of scripture in a discourse that is so steadfastly oral in its own rhetoric (see, e.g. 2:1; 5:11; 6:9; 8:1). But something more than style is at work. The prologue says, we remember, that God spoke through the prophets of old (1:1). Who are the prophets? Although Hebrews mentions the law (10:1), the Law of Moses (10:28), and its commandments (7:5, 16, 18; 9:9), it does not do so with reference to any citation. Similarly, it speaks in passing of “David, Samuel, and the prophets” as those who gave prodigal witness to faith (11:32).

¹ See, e.g., Matt 2:5; Mark 1:2; Luke 2:23; Acts 1:20; Rom 3:4; 1 Cor 1:19; Gal 3:10; 1 Pet 1:16.

With reference to a citation of scripture, however, we find only David mentioned by name (4:7). But by constantly citing the LXX, and by introducing such citations with verbs of speaking, Hebrews in effect treats texts as words from “the prophets” through whom God spoke in the past. And because many of the verbs of introduction are in the present tense, the reader learns that God’s speech through these prophetic words is not only past but also present. The Holy Spirit bears witness through the text “to us” (10:15). Hebrews happily exploits the biblical chronology that places David long after Joshua with the intention of asserting the continuing pertinence of the words: “Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (4:7). Scripture, in other words, is not simply a collection of ancient texts that can throw light on the present through analogy; it is the voice of the living God who speaks through the text directly and urgently to people in the present. The word of God is therefore living and active (4:12). God’s word addresses hearers today as much as hearers in the past: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear his voice’ ” (3:7).

The use of scripture in Hebrews goes well beyond its direct citations. In some places, the diction of the composition is a virtual tissue of allusions to the LXX. Such intertextual connections further serve to construct a scriptural symbolic world. The power of such allusion and echo is possibly even stronger than that of direct citation, precisely because scripture’s language is not bracketed off as something “other” but is appropriated as the author’s own language without explanation or apology. And if author and reader (or speaker and hearer) all understand the diction of scripture and catch every subtle textual allusion, then surely they dwell within the same scriptural world. Two examples suffice to make this point. Readers of Hebrews might be surprised to learn that in all of chapter nine there is only one direct citation from the LXX (Exod 24:8 in Heb 9:20). The chapter reads as if it is almost entirely scriptural. But the effect comes from allusion rather than from quotation. In the extended contrast between worship of the first tent and worship inaugurated by Christ’s resurrection, we can detect more than nineteen separate allusions to Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

An even more impressive use of allusion characterizes the great encomium to faith in ch. 11. There are two direct citations from the LXX, one from Gen 21:12 (Heb 11:18), and one from Gen 47:31 (v. 21). But between vv. 3–31, we may detect at least twenty-eight separate allusions to Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua. As the intensity of the encomium increases, so does the density of scriptural allusion. In vv. 32–38, we count some thirty-two allusions to Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Daniel, 2 Maccabees,

2 Chronicles, and even (possibly) the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*. The roll call summons a great “cloud of witnesses” to cheer on those who must now run the race in the path of the pioneer and perfecter of faith, Jesus (12:1–3). But it also draws hearers into a world constructed by scripture. The image of the race is drawn from the Greek culture of competitive games. But because of this marvelous intertwining of textual allusion, the hearers know that this race is one of pilgrimage begun by Abraham as he looked for a lasting city (11:13–16), a pilgrimage that will lead them to “mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22).

Construction through Interpretation

Hebrews is equally flexible in the ways it makes use of and interprets scripture. Most straightforward is the simple ascription of scriptural texts to the Messiah Jesus, as in the series of passages deployed at the opening of the composition that distinguish the Son (1:2) from the angels: Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 in 1:5; Deut 32:43 in 1:6; Ps 44:7 in 1:8; Ps 101:26–28 in 1:10; Ps 109:1 in 1:13; Ps 8:5–7 in 2:6–8. The concatenation of passages resembles a “Messianic Florilegium” such as we find at Qumran, except that it functions as part of a rhetorical *synkrisis* that serves to assert the superiority of the Son to the angels. The way God speaks now through the Son supersedes the way God communicated through those “ministering spirits” (1:14). Such direct application of Old Testament passages to Jesus is common in the New Testament writings, and is based on the assumption that the person of whom the ancient texts spoke is the future Messiah. Hebrews makes this assumption explicit in 10:5–7.

Therefore when he [the Christ, see 9:28] came into the world, he said, “sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I come. In the head of the book it stands written concerning me to do your will O God’ ” (LXX Ps 40:7–9).

In this remarkable citation, Hebrews construes the “I” speaking within the Psalm about doing the will of God to be Jesus the Messiah. Further, the author ascribes the speaking of this verse to Jesus as he entered into the world, making it in effect Jesus’ own scriptural epigraph for his human existence: he came to do the will of God.

A more complex sort of interpretation is found in 7:1–10. Here, Hebrews displays a dazzling combination of exegesis and rhetorical moves, without deviating from the same conviction underlying the earlier and simpler

applications of scriptural texts to Jesus. Hebrews had already introduced the figure of Melchizedek in 5:6. After stating that the Messiah did not become a priest through self-glorification, but through the designation of the one who said to him, “you are my son, today I have begotten you”—the same direct citation from Ps 2:7 that was used in Heb 1:5 to assert the superiority of the Son to the angels. Here, the author adds another citation from LXX Ps 109, not from the first verse (as in 1:13) but from the fourth verse, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (LXX Ps 109:4). Jesus is, therefore, both the Son of God and priest, who through his obedient suffering became the cause of salvation to those who obey him (5:9). He is, indeed, more than just another priest: “He has been designated by God as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (5:10).

Although the exhortation to fidelity in Heb 6:1–20 may appear as a detour, it actually leads the reader directly (if implicitly) to the discussion of Melchizedek in 7:1–10. Notice that the exhortation is grounded in the fact that God’s promises are secured by an oath. The oath sworn by God to Abraham in Gen 22:17 is explicitly cited in Heb 1:15. But that was Abraham. What about the readers who pay their allegiance to Christ? Hebrews declares that

when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us (6:17–18).

One unchangeable thing is Jesus’ entrance into God’s presence through the curtain (10:20). The second unchangeable thing would seem to be God’s oath. But where is that oath stated with respect to Jesus? It is stated in the part of LXX Psalm 109:4 that Hebrews did not explicitly cite in Heb 5:6–9: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Here Hebrews allows an unspoken part of the Scripture to underlie and organize an argument that points to Jesus, “a forerunner on our behalf [who] has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:20). By this deft use of scripture, Hebrews has now established an intrinsic connection between Jesus as Son of God and the eternal Priesthood associated with Melchizedek, and has set up a contrast between the promise and oath sworn to Abraham and his descendants, on the one hand, and the oath sworn to Melchizedek, on the other. The rhetorical *synkrisis* that begins

with “for this Melchizedek” in 7:1–10 is therefore the natural next step in the argument.

Hebrews begins the comparison with a direct citation of LXX Gen 14:17–20, which recounts Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek after the patriarch’s victory over the kings. Melchizedek blesses Abraham, and Abraham gives him a tenth of all his booty (7:1–2). This is the only other text in all of scripture that speaks of Melchizedek. By drawing on it, Hebrews—whether consciously or not—employs the midrashic principle known as *gezerah shewa*. When two biblical verses contain the same words or phrases, inferences can be drawn from them by means of comparison. In this case, the interpretive practice is more powerful because the two texts that refer to the ancient king-priest are each so isolated and strange. Lacking any other context, they invite the reader to understand both in light of each other. Hebrews uses the Genesis passage to draw out the implications of God’s declaring the Lord “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 109:4).

Hebrews secures the connection between “King Jesus” (who is enthroned forever at the Father’s right hand [Ps 109:1]) and Melchizedek in two ways. First, the name and description of Melchizedek are interpreted allegorically on the basis of Hebrew etymology in a manner familiar to us from Philo of Alexandria but found also among Rabbinic interpreters. The “interpretation” of his name as “king of righteousness” (βασιλεὺς δικαιοσύνης) would be intelligible only to those readers of Hebrews who had at least a smattering of Hebrew sufficient to parse מֶלְכִּי־צֶדֶק and מֶלְכִּי־צֶדֶק. Yet Hebrews also uses δικαιοσύνη throughout the letter in a manner to suggest that the “king of righteousness” must be Jesus. Speaking of the Son sitting on the throne in 1:9, Hebrews applies to Jesus the line of LXX Psalm 44, “The staff of righteousness (εὐθύτητος) is the staff of your kingdom; you have loved righteousness (δικαιοσύνην) and hated lawlessness.” And speaking of the discipline that God accords believers as “sons,” Hebrews says that “discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (καρπὸν εἰρηνικὸν . . . δικαιοσύνης) to those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:11). Note the combination of “righteousness” and “peaceful.” The second etymology exploited by Hebrews in 7:2 is the designation of Melchizedek as “King of Salem, that is, King of peace” (βασιλεὺς εἰρήνης). In addition to 12:11, which explicitly combines righteousness and peace, Hebrews exhorts hearers to pursue peace with everyone (12:14) and ends the discourse with a prayer that invokes “the God of peace” (13:20). The etymological exploitation of Gen 14:17–20, in short, is purposeful rather than playful.

The second link to Jesus is established by the remark that Melchizedek is “without father, without mother, without genealogy.” Hebrews here assumes the principle that is enunciated by later Jewish interpreters, *non in tora non in mundo*: If scripture does not mention something, it does not exist in the real world either. If Melchizedek enters the story with no account of his ancestry, then it may be inferred that he had no ancestry and, further, that he was outside ordinary humanity. Since scripture reports only this single moment of his existence, Melchizedek, thus, “had neither beginning of days nor end of life” (7:3). He is eternal. It is for this reason that the psalm can speak of his order of priesthood as enduring forever, and Melchizedek can be likened to the Son of God (7:3), who, having entered into God’s own life, “remains a priest forever” (6:20).

Hebrews then builds on a careful analysis of the Genesis narrative itself, with particular attention to the exchange between Abraham and Melchizedek. The king blessed Abraham, and the patriarch, in turn, gave the king a tenth of his possessions (7:1–2). The gestures reveal the status of the two actors. The fact that Melchizedek blessed Abraham indicates that the king was of higher status than the patriarch, “for it is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior” (7:7). The fact that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek demonstrates that the patriarch himself recognized the king as superior. The link between that ancient exchange and the present is accomplished through another widespread scriptural conviction, namely that the deeds of ancestors affect their descendants. Hebrews suggests that “Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him” (7:10). It only remains to remind readers that the Messiah Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi but from the tribe of Judah, which was never priestly (7:14), and that the Messiah Jesus is “a priest not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life” (7:16). To close the comparison: the royal priesthood of Jesus is superior to that of the Levitical priesthood. In this lengthy passage, we observe an intense dialectic between scripture and experience, standing in a mutually interpretive relationship. Genesis and the psalm together provide a frame of meaning for understanding Jesus as messianic king and priest. But if Jesus were not experienced as the resurrected one, “sitting on the right hand of the majesty on high” and “sustaining all things with his powerful word” (Heb 1:3), then the frame provided by scripture would remain empty.

The comparison between Melchizedek and Abraham, and between the priesthood of Jesus and the Levitical priesthood, serves the larger argument

concerning the superiority of God's speech through his Son "in the end of these days" (Heb 1:1). Another lengthy interpretation of scripture in 3:7–4:13 serves to support the comparison between Joshua and Jesus, but even more, the comparison between the ancient people in the wilderness and the people of God addressed by Hebrews in the present.

The author prepares for this interpretive section by asserting the superiority of Jesus to Moses. Both Moses and Jesus were faithful to God. But Moses was faithful as a servant within God's house, and Jesus as a Son over the house (3:1–6). The point the author wants to make, however, is that "we are [God's] house if we hold firm the confidence and the boast that belong to hope" (3:6). The scriptural interpretation to follow serves to establish Hebrews's audience as the people of God and the ones addressed by scripture's voice. The author begins with a lengthy explicit citation from LXX Ps 95:7–11. The citation is introduced by "Therefore (διό) just as the Holy Spirit says." The premise that "we are [God's] house"—that is, God's people—will be supported by the words of scripture, but so will the implication that this people must respond in obedience as the former people did not.

We recognize at once the similarity between this passage and 1 Cor 10:1–13 where Paul compares the wilderness generation ("your fathers") and the Corinthian congregation. There also the narratives of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Numbers are assumed, but only one line from LXX Exod 32:6 is cited (1 Cor 10:7). The rebelliousness of the ancient generation and its punishment are singled out (1 Cor 10:7–10). There also the behavior and fate of the people in the wilderness stand as a warning to Paul's readers (1 Cor 10:11–14). The function of scripture is to instruct, and Paul says that those events happened to them as examples, "but they were written for the purpose of our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11; cf. "the last of these days" in Heb 1:1). Both comparisons also assume certain premises that are not entirely clear, premises that likely derive from a tradition of reading these texts within Judaism. The most startling example in 1 Corinthians is Paul's statement that the people of the wilderness drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, with the additional comment "and the rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4).

In Heb 3:7–4:13, there are likewise background assumptions that are not explicitly stated. One is the typological relationship between the Ἰησοῦς (Joshua) who led the people into Canaan and the Ἰησοῦς (Jesus) who has gone ahead as the people's scout into the heavens (see 4:8, 14; 6:20). Another is the disproportion between the material "rest" (κατάπαυσις) offered the people by the territory of Canaan and the rest (κατάπαυσις)

associated with God's own life (3:11 and 4:4). A third is the exemplary character of the narratives in Numbers 14 and Joshua 22, which speak of some people who rebelled and died in the wilderness, and some who entered into the promised land. A more complicated reading of Torah is taking place here than in 1 Corinthians 10. It is not simply that the disobedient and rebellious did not enter into the promised rest—with the obvious lesson being that the present generation should be obedient. It is also that the rest into which Joshua led the people was only a pale foreshadowing of “my rest” that God speaks of in Psalm 95.

We recognize here a move similar to that in the *synkrisis* between Jesus' priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek and the Levitical priesthood. There is an unbridgeable gap between the cult carried out by mortal humans who sprinkle the blood of animals in a material tent and the sacrifice offered by the Son of God with his own blood as he enters into the presence of God. Here is the same insistence that the material land cannot be “God's rest” promised to the people. While it may be natural for us to read such assertions as evidence of Platonism—and such an interpretation is not without merit—we must also acknowledge that this Platonism is by no means imposed violently on scripture. The contrast between the “lesser and greater” here is based less on a philosophical metaphysics and epistemology than on one's religious experience of Jesus as the “Son of God” who has shared utterly in the human condition yet through his resurrection and exaltation has entered fully into God's life. Platonism was so easily adopted by Christian writers, in contrast to the competing schemes offered by the Stoa and Lycaeanum, because the Christian experience and the subsequent Christian reading of scripture in light of that experience accorded so well with the Platonic contrast between the phenomenal and the noumenal.

Thus, when the Holy Spirit speaks through Psalm 95 that “they did not enter into my rest,” the careful reader must conclude both that the Holy Spirit is correct concerning the generation of old—Canaan is *not* “God's rest”—and must inquire further into what God's rest might be. The psalm verse, after all, creates a contradiction in scripture that must be resolved, for LXX Josh 1:13 and 23:1 declare that the Lord had given a rest to the people by means of their entry into the land. Help is provided by a third text that serves to resolve the apparent contradiction, namely LXX Gen 2:2, which states that God rested (*κατέπαυσεν*) from all his works on the seventh day. The people's entry into the land was a rest for them but it was not an entry into “God's rest.” Psalm 95 therefore extends a rest for God's people that Joshua could not enter but Jesus already has, namely,

God's own rest on the seventh day of creation: "Therefore, a Sabbath rest (σαββατισμὸς) remains for God's people" (Heb 4:9).

Two further features of Psalm 95 appeal to the author of Hebrews. The first is God swearing an oath: "As in my anger I swore (ῥωμοσα), 'They shall not enter into my rest'" (4:3). This clearly creates a link to LXX Ps 109:4: "The Lord has sworn (ῥωμοσεν) and will not repent: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 7:21). As Hebrews says in 6:17, God swears an oath when intending to show the unchangeable character of God's purpose. The oath in Psalm 95 therefore closes off God's rest from the ancient generation and opens the possibility of the promise remaining open for others. This brings us to the importance of the other key line in the psalm citation, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts," which is quoted explicitly three times (Heb 3:7b–8; 3:15; 4:7). God set aside a "today" in the words of David long after the events in the wilderness (4:5–7). Another people than that of old must therefore be addressed by the words. The voice of God speaking in the psalm is always contemporary. God is the "living God" (10:32), and as such, is not constrained by time. God's "today" is "every day as long as it can be called today" (3:13). Therefore, the text speaks not only (or even properly) about the generation of the past, but especially to this present generation, which stands "at the end of these days" (1:1). The author exhorts his hearers to a sense of urgency (σπουδάσωμεν) in "entering that rest" (4:11). And it is scarcely accidental that this exhortation has as its warrant: "the word of God (λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) is living and active" (4:12).

Through its multiple citations from the Greek text of scripture, and its mode of introducing those citations that treat scripture as a living and spoken word, through its intricate interpretations of scripture in light of a contemporary experience, Hebrews constructs a world for its hearers that is entirely and profoundly scriptural. The weaving together of ancient writings into startling new patterns, and the many allusions and echoes, serve to make even the diction of this letter scriptural. Hebrews therefore successfully imagines the world that scripture itself imagines. As a result, scripture is a world in which Hebrews and its hearers can dwell.

The World Disclosed by Scripture

The world constructed by scripture and inhabited by the readers of Hebrews is one that reveals God. God creates all things by a word: "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God,

so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" (11:3). Moreover, God "sustains all things by his powerful word" (1:2). Because the word of God is living and active, "no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account" (4:12–13). And although scripture says that God rested from all his works on the seventh day (4:4), the story told by scripture, as well as its prophetic voices, testifies to God's continuing presence and power within creation. Angels are God's fiery servants (1:7), spirits sent as ministers for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation (1:14). Although humans are created lower than the angels, God cares for them and will crown them with glory and honor (2:6–8).

Scripture also reveals the world as one in which the creator God enters into personal relation with humans. God can be approached by faith, and those who seek God are rewarded (11:6). The long recital of faith's heroes in ch. 11 shows God as a constant partner in their lives. God approves the sacrifice of Abel (v. 4) and is pleased with Enoch, taking him up from the earth (v. 5). God warns Noah (v. 7), calls Abraham (v. 8), gives to Abraham and Sarah the power to have heirs (v. 11), tests Abraham and gives back Isaac by resurrection (vv. 17–20), and prepares a city for his descendants (v. 16). And it is God who commends them all (vv. 4, 39). God's choice to form uneven partnership with humans is revealed by scripture through the making of covenant, both a first one (9:15–22) and the promise of a new one (8:8–13). Scripture makes clear as well that God judges the people (10:30–31).

Above all, scripture reveals God as one who speaks to humans "in many and various ways by the prophets" (11). I have suggested that, for Hebrews, the prophets through whom God "long ago spoke to our ancestors" included the voices of scripture itself. But for Hebrews, as we have seen, God's speaking is not simply a voice to the past. Scripture speaks most properly about the Messiah who has "come into the world" (1:6; 10:5) and speaks to this generation living in the "today" of Psalm 95 (4:7) and the "days that are coming" of Jeremiah (8:8). Scripture is needed in order to perceive Jesus the Messiah as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. But without the experience of Jesus as the Messiah who dies violently and then enters into God's life, scripture could not be properly or profoundly understood.

By dwelling in a world constructed by scripture and perceiving scripture itself as a chorus of voices through which God speaks, Hebrews can assert with equal if not greater emphasis that God speaks also outside scripture. Scripture is not the only source of God's voice. Scripture itself

points to the God who speaks in and through the world. It is Abel's *faith* that keeps speaking even though he is dead (11:4); it is his *blood* that speaks (12:24). Most of all, God speaks "to us in the last of these days" through Jesus Christ, God's Son (1:2). By this simple turn, Hebrews makes the life, death, resurrection, and priestly enthronement of Jesus a form of speech, a word spoken by God. Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant through his "sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (12:24). This word is brought into the world of the readers by the testimony of God in their lives, a testimony that takes the form not of speech but of the Holy Spirit's powerful presence. Hebrews asks how, if those who neglected the message declared through angels (δι' ἀγγέλων λαληθεῖς) were punished, his readers might escape now if they

neglect so great a salvation. It was declared at first through the Lord (λαλεῖσθαι διὰ τοῦ κυρίου) and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will (2:3-4).

The present experience of transforming power among the readers of Hebrews is here understood as the continued speaking of God to the people. And this present voice demands response: "See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven" (12:25)?

When Hebrews speaks of "the word of God" (λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow . . . able to judge the droughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12), it clearly speaks not only of scripture but of God, "before whom no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to his eyes" (4:13). As the "word of God" speaks powerfully through scripture and through the Son, it also testifies powerfully through the work of the Spirit among them. Does it not also make sense, then, to see the "word of exhortation" (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως) (13:22) as itself standing in continuity with God's constant speaking to the people? And if this is so, perhaps the best way to translate the difficult phrase occurring at the end of 4:13 (πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος) is not, as some recent translations take it, "to whom we must render an account" (NAB, NRSV) or; "to whom we must give account" (NIV), but closer to the RSV's "with whom we have to do," understanding it even more precisely as "the one with whom our speech is concerned."

Challenge to Contemporary Christian Readers

Getting some sense of the scriptural world of Hebrews—how it imagines the world imagined by scripture, and how it enables readers to live within that world—poses at least three hard and interrelated questions to contemporary Christian readers. The first and most penetrating is whether *our* world is a biblical world in any sense? That we no longer “imagine the world that the scripture imagines” in the fashion of earlier generations is obvious. For us, the symbols of scripture are no longer those of a familiar and living city whose ways are so deeply known by us that we need not make them explicit. Scripture is much more like a buried city that we need to excavate by means of archaeology. But the question asks more than if scripture’s language or symbols are our own. It asks whether we any longer see the world as one created by God, sustained by God’s word, addressed by God through angelic and prophetic messengers. Do we any longer perceive the world as mystery, as having a depth of being that lies within and beneath that which is observable, measurable, calculable? Such a sense of mystery and magic at the heart of reality is not a function of the author’s Platonism. It is a function of perceiving the world as scripture perceives it. If we no longer live in a world that at least in that measure is enchanted, can we do more than explain Hebrews as a quaint expression of antique views? Can we understand Hebrews? Can we, as we assume its first readers did, even live within its world?

The second question is whether scripture is for us simply a record of the past—even a past that may be of particular significance for us—or whether it continues to speak to us as God’s word that places a demand on our lives and begins by placing our lives in question. For Hebrews, the word of God is living and active, and one of the ways God continues to speak is through the prophetic voices of scripture. Are they prophetic for us? It is difficult to combine convictions concerning the prophetic nature of the texts and the methods of the historian. The historian’s business, after all, is to keep the past in the past. I am far from questioning the value of the historical study of scripture, not least for helping us recognize the otherness of the text. But have we gone so far in placing scripture in its original context that we force any hearing of it in the present context to struggle through complex hermeneutical minefields? Has our expertise in uncovering the ways in which Hebrews’s use of Psalm 95 fits within the midrashic practices of Judaism deflected our hearing from the very

point of that use, which is to stress God's call to us every day as long as it remains "today"?

The third question is whether, with Hebrews, we see the living word of God active not only in scripture but also outside it. The most important way scripture can break into our world and invite us into its world is by being read and reread in light of God's transforming work in human lives. Hebrews, like all of scripture, seeks to turn our attention less to itself as revelatory than to the bodies of men and women in and through which God's Holy Spirit constantly surprises us with new and powerful witness. The cloud of witnesses is not complete when scripture's roll has been called. Many continue to run the race, following the pioneer and perfecter of faith. And the lives of those who are shaped by obedient faith in the manner of Jesus can also reveal the resurrected one in the present. Hebrews closely combines two statements in its final hortatory chapter, thereby making the statements mutually informing. In 13:7, the readers are exhorted, "Remember your leaders, those *who spoke the word of God* to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." And then: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8). It is when we connect the texts of scripture to the work of God in our lives and the lives of those around us that we truly enter into the world imagined by Hebrews, a world that, by the way we read and the way we imagine and the way we act becomes also our own. We affirm this as the true world. I spoke of the three questions as interrelated. The answers to all three, I suggest, are also interrelated. Our capacity to hear and see God's work in our world—in the stories of real women and men—is the way in which the world again becomes as scripture imagines it, as enchanted, as revealing mystery at its heart. And reading scripture in light of such perception is again to read it as more than a historical record, as, indeed, prophetic.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

HEBREWS 10:32–39 AND THE AGONY OF THE TRANSLATOR

When I was a very young man indeed, perhaps 15 years old, I was enchanted by Ronald Knox's translation of the Vulgate.¹ Knox may have been working in a version rather than the original Hebrew and Greek, and he may not always have shown the greatest piety toward his source text, but he sure could write. I can still recall the majestic Anglo-Saxon alliteration in his rendering of 1 Samuel 17:50: "Thus David slew the Philistine; with sling and stone he smote and slew him." Small wonder that I eventually found my way also to Knox's *Trials of a Translator*, in which he recounted some of the tribulations of his craft, one that at that time I had no thought of cultivating.²

I still can't claim to be a translator of Knox's formidable ability, even though I have managed to turn into some form of English a not insubstantial portion of the Greek New Testament: Luke and Acts, James, Paul's First and Second Letters to Timothy.³ These translations were all done as the basis for commentaries on them. And as I struggled, *sans* committee and *sans* theory—with *nada* of Nida in my portfolio—I have grown more rather than less respectful of those whose entire endeavor is to translate the Sacred Word into words intelligible to the contemporary reader in every part of the globe, and keenly aware how helpful a committee would be in discussing alternative renderings and bearing shared responsibility for the final and inevitably inadequate result.

The translator's trials have afflicted me most powerfully, however, over the past two years, as I have labored over a commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews for the Westminster/John Knox series, *The New Testament Library*. Rarely in my scholarly life—one not lacking in humiliations—

¹ *The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals, Authorized by the Hierarchy of England and Wales and the Hierarchy of Scotland*, translated by R.A. Knox (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950).

² R.A. Knox, *Trials of a Translator* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1949).

³ See L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; CoUegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991); *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992); *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995); *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

have I felt so consistently and depressingly incompetent as in my efforts to “English Hebrews”—to use another of Knox’s phrases.⁴ No need to elaborate on the reasons for regarding myself as incompetent; these are as obvious to me as they are to others. But Hebrews has a way of exposing the nerve-endings of even its best interpreters, much in the manner that it says God’s living word lays bare human necks to the all-seeing God (4:12–13). No need to expound at length all the challenges that Hebrews puts to the translator, but I can quickly state two interconnected factors that are obvious to us all and are assumed in this essay.

The first is the self-consciously rhetorical character of the composition: at the level of style, its diction, grammar, and syntax all reveal a more elevated form of Koine than one meets elsewhere in the New Testament; at the level of invention, its choice of *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos* arguments is impressive and sustained;⁵ and at the level of arrangement, it impresses by its powerful alternation of exposition and exhortation, by its subtle manner of introducing and interweaving themes, and by its powerful movement toward resolution.⁶ The second is the strange way in which Hebrews is at once so isolated in terms of the conditions of its composition—we remain uncertain about its author, readers, date, and destination—and at the same time so intricately connected to the wider cultures of Hellenism and Judaism as well as the symbolic world of the nascent Christian movement.

To illustrate the ways that Hebrews tests the translator, I have chosen in this essay to consider a single passage, Hebrews 10:32–39. The passage serves within the overall argument as something of a transition, appearing immediately after the solemn warning against apostasy in 10:26–31 and immediately before the roll-call of the heroes of faith in 11:1–40. The passage itself falls rather neatly into two parts as well, with the first lines recalling to the hearers their earlier days of endurance, and the last lines declaring the need for continuing in their endurance in order to obtain the promise.

⁴ R.A. Knox, *On Englishing the Bible* (London: Bums and Oates, 1949).

⁵ The fullest display of these elements and the most consistent reading of the composition according to the standard rhetorical arrangement is found in C.R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), especially pages 87–92.

⁶ Although I think that Hebrews is better considered as deliberative rather than epideictic discourse, I agree with Harold Attridge that the most important rhetorical aspect of Hebrews is to be found in its invention rather than in its arrangement; see *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

In my comments, I will touch on specific points of grammar and syntax, but will focus particularly on the way in which intratextual and intertextual connections cause problems for the translator that defy easy solution.⁷ As a warning against high expectations, I should note immediately that my own translation of Hebrews does not really solve any of these problems, either. But here it is:

10:32 But remember the earlier days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a great contest of sufferings. 33 You were both publicly shamed by revilings and afflictions, and you became partners of those who lived that way. 34 For you even shared the suffering of prisoners and you accepted the seizure of your property with joy, since you knew that you yourselves had a better and permanent possession. 35 So don't lose your confidence. It has a great reward. 36 For you need to have endurance, so that, by having done God's will, you might receive the promise. 37 Now, "yet a little while—he who comes will arrive and he will not delay, and my righteous one will live from faith," and, "if he draws back, my soul will not be pleased with him." 38 But we do not draw back—to our destruction. Rather, we have faith—to the securing of our life.

The Significance of a Participle

I begin with the problem created by the participle φωτισθέντες in 10:32. As a predicative participle it functions adverbially to define the circumstances attendant on the main verb ὑπεμείνατε ("you endured"). The aorist indicates time prior to the main verb, the passive voice an action received by the hearers rather than done by them. The verb from which the participle is formed, φωτίζω ("to illumine, enlighten") appears earlier in the composition in the same participial form, among other expressions that clearly allude to the hearers' initial experience of entry into the community (6:4), so that we may legitimately take the circumstance to be their experience of conversion or baptism (see also Eph 5:8–14). So far, so good.

But now, two questions arise. Should the participle be translated more strictly as "having been illumined, enlightened," or more broadly as "having been converted/baptized" or even, "having entered the community?" In favor of the narrower rendering is the fact that the author has, immediately before this, spoken of their earlier condition as "having received the recognition of the truth" (10:26). Thus, the translation, "having been enlightened" makes good contextual sense. On the other side, the point

⁷ I use these terms as described by V.K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1996).

here does not seem so much to be the hearers' state of cognition or awareness as it does their initiation into the community. This dilemma, in turn, points to a more serious issue concerning the translation of the participle, namely its relation to the main clause. Is the link only temporal—this happened and then that happened—or does the author want to indicate another sort of connection between circumstance and action? The circumstantial participle, we know, can express a number of such relations, ranging from concession to cause to purpose. Here, it could well express a causal relationship. It is precisely *because* they had been enlightened, that is, entered the community, that they were exposed to dangers. Their suffering is a consequence of their commitment rather than simply a circumstance that followed their commitment.

The Merging of Metaphors

The same sentence contains another challenge, this time connected to a second and more pervasive metaphor than enlightenment. The author states that they have endured a πολλήν ἀθλησιν . . . παθημάτων. The phrase poses two difficulties. The first is that no English term adequately captures the meaning of the Greek ἀθλησις. With other translators, I have rendered it as “contest,” but in contemporary culture, that could refer to anything from a lottery or poker game to a quiz show. The noun “competition” would come closer to the Greek, but might mislead by suggesting rivalry among the readers or between readers and outsiders. The real difficulty is that this single word suggests one of the most important metaphors in the composition, namely THE LIFE OF FAITH = OLYMPIC GAMES.⁸ The metaphor is itself complex in structure, because in Greek culture, athletic games—and the training for such games—had already served as metaphor for moral education. Actually, this is a metaphoric field in which tenor and vehicle merge, since the Gymnasium was the locus both for bodily training (carried out through exercise) and mental and moral education (carried out through the reading of poets and philosophers). Hebrews reintroduces the metaphor in 12:1–4, at the climax of his roll-call

⁸ For background to the metaphor, see V.C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (NovTSup 16; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), especially 1–75; for the application specifically to Hebrews, see N.C. Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (SNTSMS 98; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

of faith, when he invites his readers to strip themselves of every encumbrance and “look to Jesus,” the pioneer and perfecter of faith, as one who runs ahead of them in a great race which is viewed by a great cloud of witnesses. And he elaborates the metaphor in 12:5–13, when he reminds his hearers that they “are enduring for the sake of an education” when they receive instruction/ discipline from God as father. It is impossible for any English term—or any combination of terms—to capture either the metaphorical weight or the intratextual allusions of ἄθλισις.

Translation of the phrase is made even harder, however, by the genitive παθημάτων (literally, “of sufferings”). The genitive serves to characterize the contest or struggle. It was not simply accompanied by sufferings (μετὰ παθημάτων) but actually consisted in sufferings. The contest had to do with how they could deal with the sufferings that came upon them as a result of their confession of Christ, and their “enduring” (ὑπεμείνατε) marks their success in the contest. They did not fall away or leave the game. They stayed the course. But there is a deeper resonance to this phrase that is impossible to capture by translation, namely the role the author has assigned to suffering in the process of education in genuine sonship. This theme is struck first in 5:7–9, when the author declares that although Jesus was a son he learned obedience from the things he suffered. As all commentators recognize, the phrase ἔμαθεν ἀφ’ ὧν ἔπαθεν echoes the proverbial Greek expression μάθειν πάθειν, “to learn is to suffer,” which, once again, finds its home in the context of the educational world of the Hellenistic gymnasium. Jesus was to be perfected through the suffering that was obedient faith and endurance (2:10).⁹

Hebrews clearly does not mean only Jesus’ passion and death, but the entire progression of his human existence, from the moment he came into the world crying “I have come to do your will O God” (10:7), to the moment when, crying out with tears, he was heard because of his piety (5:7). The author understands Jesus’ human obedience as an education in sonship, and he understands the discipleship of his hearers in exactly the same way. His exhortation to them to advance from childhood to maturity in 5:11–14 is therefore couched in terms of educational progress, as is his final exhortation in 12:5–13. The translator who is sensitive to these overlapping

⁹ See C.H. Talbert, *Learning through Suffering: The Educational Value of Suffering in the New Testament and its Milieu* (Zaccheus Studies; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 1–23, 58–74; J. Coste, “Notion Grecque et Notion Biblique de la ‘Souffrance Educatrice,’” *Recherches de science religieuse* 43 (1955) 481–523.

metaphorical fields and to their intratextual connections, can only sigh in frustration at the phrase *πολλὴν ἀθλήσιν . . . παθημάτων*, and at the difficulty of finding a rendition better than “great contest of sufferings.”

The Sharing of Shame

The passage presents still another set of translation difficulties as it begins to spell out the nature of the sufferings the hearers of this discourse endured in their earlier days, first in a more general (verse 33) and then more specific terms (verse 34). The overall sense of 10:33 is clear enough: the hearers’ great contest of sufferings has involved on one side (*τοῦτο μὲν*) things that have been done to them, and on the other side (*τοῦτο δὲ*) their association with others. What is difficult to communicate through translation are the cultural nuances of shame and fellowship, nuances that would have been obvious to the first hearers of this discourse, but which are not at all obvious to contemporary readers. One of the great advances in our knowledge of antiquity generally has been the recovery of the cultural importance of honor and shame in the ancient Mediterranean world,¹⁰ and one of the great advances in the interpretation of Hebrews has been the recognition of how pervasively and powerfully it uses this register of language.¹¹ Understanding the importance of the present passage for setting up the final hortatory section of the discourse, in turn, is enhanced by recognizing the presence of honor-shame language within it. In 12:1–2, the hearers are told to run the race that lay before them with endurance (*δι’ ὑπομονῆς*), as they “look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith,” who, for the sake of the joy that lay before him, endured a cross (*ὑπέμεινεν σταυρόν*), “despising [its] shame” (*αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας*). That exhortation gains specific meaning as the climax of the roll-call of the heroes of faith in 11:1–40 and even more from the recognition that the hearers are themselves enduring shame because of their commitment to a messiah who died shamefully but is now “crowned with glory and honor” at the right hand of God (2:7–9; 12:2).

So, in describing the contest of sufferings they had earlier endured, the author chooses to use the participle *θεατριζόμενοι* in 10:33, a New Testa-

¹⁰ For its pertinence to all New Testament literature, see D.A. deSilva, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999).

¹¹ See D.A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 152; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

ment *hapax legomenon*. The θέατρον (“theatre”) of an ancient city was the place where dramas were performed (Herodotus, *Persian War* 6.67), and often, where the populace of the city gathered as an ἐκκλησία (see Acts 19:29, 31). It is a most public place. The (also rare) verb θεατριζῶ, logically enough, means to perform a play or put something on display in a public manner. The use of the passive voice here suggests that such display was not chosen: the hearers had been “made a spectacle” or been “put on public display.” Given the low repute of actors in the ancient honor-shame calculus, and given the involuntary character of this “being put on display,” we are justified in regarding this public exposure as a form of shaming. The closest analogy in the New Testament is Paul’s statement that he and his associates “have become a spectacle (θέατρον) to the world” (1 Cor 4:9). The author here clearly intends to evoke the image of a theatre, for he will speak in 12:1 of a “great cloud of witnesses” gathered to witness the “race” (literally, ἀγῶνα, “contest”) to be run by those who are enduring in faith. Here, however, the great contest of suffering is carried out before a public gaze that is hostile.

The two terms that describe the means of such public shaming are found frequently in the New Testament in similar settings. The verb ὀνειδίζω (“to revile or reproach”) is used frequently for the rejection of Jesus (Matt 27:44; Mark 15:32; Rom 15:3) or for the rejection of those associated with Jesus (Matt 5:11; Luke 6:22; 1 Pet 4:14). The use of the noun form ὀνειδισμός—a reproach or censure, with the nuance of shame brought on the one reproached (see Plato, *Republic* 590C)—is especially significant here, for the author will shortly speak of how Moses preferred the reviling for Christ (τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ) that he received to the wealth of Egypt (11:26), and at the end of the discourse, will summon his hearers to go out of the city, bearing his [that is, Christ’s] reproach (ὀνειδισμὸν αὐτοῦ, 13:13). The shame that they had borne with endurance in the former days, and which they are now being called to bear, is one already borne by the crucified Jesus. The term θλίψις, in turn, has a definite physical dimension. In the Septuagint, the noun is used for the hard things that come upon the people Israel (Gen 35:3; 42:21; Exod 4:31; Deut 4:29). In the New Testament, θλίψις tends to be used for the troubles experienced by those associated with the Christ (Matt 13:2; 24:9; Acts 11:19; Rom 5:3; 2 Cor 1:4). In combination, the terms “revilings” and “afflictions” suggest both verbal and physical abuse in public at the hands of others. These, the author says, they have endured.

In addition to the ridicule and pain they have themselves undergone, they made themselves partners (κοινωνοὶ) of those likewise situated.

Here we see the second set of cultural associations that the author assumes among his hearers, this time, those gathered around the Hellenistic topos on friendship (περὶ φιλίας). Ancient philosophical discussions on friendship, like that in book 8 and 9 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, emphasize the degree of intimacy and sharing among friends in all things, reflected in such proverbs as "friends are one soul" or "friends hold all things in common" or "friendship is fellowship" (φιλία κοινωνία).¹² To make oneself a "partner/fellow" in the sufferings of another is to show oneself bound by the deepest and purest form of allegiance. This is clear enough.

More difficult is deciding how to render the phrase that describes those with whom the hearers have made themselves partners, τῶν οὕτως ἀναστρέφομένων. The most obvious way to translate the middle voice of ἀναστρέφω would be "conducting oneself as in 1 Tim 3:15 and also later in this same discourse, Hebrews 13:18. The RSV and Attridge, however, take ἀναστρέφειν as a passive form, "those who were so treated." This translation refers the οὕτως ("thus") to the indignities suffered. But οὕτως can equally refer to the endurance that the hearers have shared with others. They have therefore made themselves partners to those who likewise endure various hard things. This translation has the support of an intratextual link: they have shown the same disposition to share in the endurance of sufferings as the Messiah Jesus, who joined the destiny of those who "share in flesh and blood" (2:14) and therefore also in suffering and mortality.

The resonance of the topos on friendship is pertinent in the next verse as well, when the author spells out the form of suffering in reverse sequence, touching first on the way the hearers partnered the suffering of others, then turning to their own experience of deprivation. Here the issue is how to translate the verb συμπαθέω. The prefix συν- points to the common life and experience of friendship. The verb is commonly used for the moral disposition of "having sympathy toward" another (see 4 Mace 13:23). But the contemporary meaning of "sympathy" is so weak that I have translated (with Attridge), "shared the suffering" of prisoners, a rendering that continues the theme of friendship struck by the characterization of them as "partners" (κοινωνοὶ) in the previous verse. Once more, the word-choice provokes another intratextual echo. The same disposition is ascribed to Christ: in 4:15, the high priest is himself tested in every way

¹² For essays on friendship, see J.T. Fitzgerald, ed., *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech* (NovTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

and is therefore able to sympathize with their weaknesses. In this case, the hearers have identified themselves with those being held as prisoners (δεσμίους). We are even allowed to suspect that the author was striving to suggest a form of identification that goes beyond mere “sympathy.” In 13:3, he tells his hearers to “keep in mind the prisoners as though you were fellow prisoners (literally, “bound together with,” συνδεδεμένοι), those who are being badly treated (τῶν κακουχομένων) as though you were in the same body.” This last phrase, ὡς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὄντες ἐν σώματι, is notoriously difficult, but at the very least it signifies a form of identification that is profoundly somatic in character.

Hebrews’ language in this passage, we begin to see, not only draws from the rich cultural associations attaching to games, education, shame and friendship, but does so in a manner that establishes strong intratextual links between the earlier experience of the hearers and their call to follow in the path of still earlier people of faith, above all Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. The same tendency appears in the continuation of 10:34, where the author makes explicit the form of θλιψίς that his hearers’ earlier endured, namely the forcible seizure of their property. Since ὑπάρχοντα can refer to any sort of possession (see Luke 8:3; 11:21; 12:15; 16:1; Acts 4:32), it is not clear what property they have lost, but the noun ἀρπαγή indicates that they were the victims of a violent seizure of what they owned (see Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2, 3, 14; Josephus, *Antiquities* 20, 214; *Testament of Judah* 23.3). We cannot know how such expropriation occurred, although the case of Qumran reminds us that a sect can experience as traumatic the seizure of its property by a more powerful rival (IQpHab 8.13; 12.1–15). What we do know is that the author’s language in 10:33 suggests that such a loss of property was an experience of public exposure and shame, towards which the natural response would be grief and anger.

The author’s focus, however, is not on the loss itself but on the hearer’s manner of experiencing this θλιψίς. He says that they “accepted [it] with joy.” The verb προσδέχομαι has the nuance not only of a passive “acceptance” (see Heb 11:35), but even of a “welcoming” (compare *Letter of Aristea* 257; Luke 15:2; Rom 16:2; Phil 2:29), and that nuance is made explicit with the modifying phrase “with joy” (μετὰ χαρᾶς). The term “joy” is a distinctive part of the early Christian lexicon of virtues (see e.g. Matt 25:21; Luke 1:14; John 16:20; Rom 15:13; Gal 5:22; Col 1:11; 1 Thess 2:19). I use the term “virtue” advisedly, for something more than an emotion is meant by the term; it signifies a moral disposition. Unlike happiness, for example, which depends on positive circumstances, joy is a moral disposition of contentment/receptivity even in the context of suffering (see 2 Cor 7:4;

1 Thess 1:6; James 1:2). As with other terms in this passage, this diction serves the author's hortatory purposes. In 12:11, he will note that those experiencing discipline at the hands of their father do not "consider it joy" while it is occurring, but afterward it brings about the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Even more directly, he will speak of Jesus as enduring the cross and despising its shame because of "the joy that was set before him" (12:2).

They were able to accept their loss joyfully because of a certain perception of reality. In this case, the participle *γινώσκοντες* must surely be taken as explanatory: it is "because they knew" the nature and certainty of God's promise that they had earlier been able to endure their shameful losses joyfully rather than "abandon their assemblies" as some others had done (10:25). They know, the author says, that they themselves have a better (*κρείττονα*) and permanent (*μένουσαν*) possession (*ὑπαρξιν*). In so saying, he touches on a fundamental point of his extended argument: what they hope for is not something material and transitory, but the realization of God's presence through the exaltation of Christ. Once more, the language deliberately anticipates the encomium on faith that follows immediately after this passage in 11:1–40. There, the author portrays the patriarchs as "desiring a better (*κρείττονος*) country, that is, a heavenly one" (11:16). At the same time, the author anticipates his climactic assurance to his hearers in 13:14: "we do not have a permanent city here. We are seeking a city to come."

God Speaks through Prophets

This passage shows how translation difficulties are posed not only by Hebrews' astonishing ability to weave metaphors drawn from Hellenistic culture into its rhetoric of alternating exposition and exhortation, but also by its distinctive use of intertexture drawn from Scripture. That the composition both dwells within and constructs a "scriptural world" is obvious to any reader;¹³ the degree to which its argument relies upon a subtle and sophisticated rereading of Scripture has been one of Hebrews' abiding fascinations for scholars.¹⁴

¹³ See L.T. Johnson, "The Scriptural World of Hebrews," *Interpretation* 57 (2003) 237–250.

¹⁴ See G.H. Guthrie, "Hebrews' Use of the Old Testament: Recent Trends in Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 1.2 (2003) 271–294, and F. Schroeger, *Der Verfasser des*

The warning delivered to his hearers against apostasy in 10:26–31 concluded with an appropriately harsh citation from Deuteronomy 32:35, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” and a mixed citation from Deuteronomy 32:36 and Psalm 135:14, “The Lord will judge his people,” with the author adding as a coda one of his most famous and frightening lines, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31). This complex citation is introduced in a manner typical of this composition, not as a written text, but as a spoken word from God, “we know the one who said” (10:30). For the author of Hebrews, God is constantly speaking to humans; in the past God spoke through the prophets, and in these last times, God has spoken through his Son (1:1). But if it is God who speaks through the words written in Scripture, then the words of Scripture are not dead texts significant only for the past, but living voices speaking powerfully to the present. Nowhere is this conviction more impressively displayed than in the author’s insistence that the words of LXX Psalm 94:7–11 continue to be addressed to his own generation: “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (4:7).

The more positive exhortation in Heb 10:32–39 also closes with a Scriptural citation to which the author appends a concluding coda. The citation is prepared for by the author’s plea to the hearers not to throw away the confidence (*παρρησία*) with which they have been gifted (see 3:6; 4:6; 10:19), because this is a confidence or boldness—*παρρησία* itself has a complex significance in this composition¹⁵—that has a “great reward” (*μεγάλην μισθαποδοσίαν*). The language again has intratextual implications: in 11:6, the author will state that those who approach God must believe that He exists and that he is a “rewarder (*μισθαποδότης*) of those who seek him,” and in 11:26, Moses is said to endure suffering because he “looked to the reward (*μισθαποδοσία*).” The phrase “great reward” corresponds to the “great contest” that they endured in their earlier days.

The next verse seems at first simply to repeat the same point, but there is a subtle difference. Their confidence has a great reward, but only if they hold on to it the way they did in the past. They need to continue to “endure” (*ὑπομένω*). This will be the powerful lesson driven home time

Hebraerbriefes als Schriftausleger (Biblische Untersuchungen 4; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1968).

¹⁵ In general, see S.B. Marrow, “Parrhēsia and the New Testament,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 431–446, and in particular, see A.C. Mitchell, “Holding on to Confidence: PARRHESIA in Hebrews,” in *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech*, ed. J.T. Fitzgerald (NovTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 1996): 203–226.

after time in the next chapter: all of the heroes of Israel's past held on to their faith, and the supreme exemplar of faith did as well: Jesus endured the cross (12:2–3). The verse also spells out more fully the significance of this endurance. It is an articulation of the faith that wins a reward. Once more, Jesus is the example. He entered the world proclaiming in the words of Psalm 39, "I have come to do your will O God" (10:7), and it is by that will that they have been sanctified (10:10). Now, the hearers are told that it is by "doing God's will" (τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ποιήσαντες) that they will be able to receive the reward that is the promise (ἐπαγγελία) made available to them through the death and exaltation of Jesus (for the promise, see 4:1; 6:12, 15, 17; 7:6; 8:6; 9:15). Again, the language anticipates the next section, for all the heroes of the past endured for the sake of the promise (11:9, 13, 17, 33), even though they did not receive it (11:39) because they were not to be perfected apart from those whom our author addresses (11:40).

The concluding (mixed) citation in 10:37–38 is meant to elaborate and secure the statements of verses 35–36, as the inferential γάρ ("for") in verse 37 indicates.¹⁶ Strikingly, the citation has no formal introduction at all. With the addition of γάρ in verse 37 and καί in verse 38, the author has seamlessly made the words of Scripture his own words. No better evidence could be found for his conviction that the prophets speak directly to his own time. The citation proper is introduced by an allusion to LXX Isaiah 26:20, "yet a little while." I have placed a dash between these words and the rest of the citation to preserve the anacolouthic character of the quotation. The words from Isaiah heighten the eschatological urgency that is characteristic of this composition (see 10:25, 30).¹⁷

The main body of the citation is from Habakkuk 2:3–4, a passage favored by other Jewish writers of the first century. The sectarians at Qumran devoted a pesher-style commentary to the Hebrew text of the prophet that included an interpretation of this verse (1QpHab 7.14–8.1), and Paul twice quotes the same passage in a more abbreviated form in his arguments concerning the righteousness that comes to humans through the faith of Jesus (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). The citation in Hebrews depends entirely on the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic Text.¹⁸ The original

¹⁶ Despite its absence from P13, 104, and a Vulgate MS, the presence of *gar* is otherwise overwhelmingly supported.

¹⁷ The classic essay is the one by C.K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, ed. W.D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 363–393.

¹⁸ For full discussion, see R. Gheorghita, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3–4 in Heb 10:37–38*

Hebrew contained a vision concerning God's judgment, delivered to the prophet who had taken his stand on the watchtower: "it will surely come, it will not delay" (RSV). Hebrews makes the present Greek participle ἐρχόμενος—already present in the LXX—both personal and specific, by adding the definite article, thus forming ὁ ἐρχόμενος, "the one who is coming." As a result, the passage appears to speak of a judgment to be carried out by the Messiah (for "the coming one" with reference to Jesus, compare Matt 3:21; Luke 7:19; John 1:9; 3:31; 6:14), a judgment that the author has already stated that Jesus would come to perform (see 9:28).

The remainder of the passage in Hebrew reads, "Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous one shall live by his faith" (RSV). The Septuagint, followed by our author, translates the first clause as, "if he draws back, my soul will not be pleased with him." Our composition also reverses the sequence of the clauses, so that the statement concerning the righteous one and faith precedes rather than follows the statement concerning the one who draws back (ὑποστειλῆται). As a result, the prophet's words do not stand for two classes of people on whom judgment will fall, but for two ways of responding to God's visitation, the way of the apostate and the way of the faithful.

Finally, both the LXX and our discourse employ the personal pronoun "my" rather than the personal pronoun "his" found in the Masoretic Text. In some manuscripts of the Septuagint, indeed, the personal pronoun "my" modifies the noun "faith," making this statement, "the righteous one will live out of my faith," with the "my" in this instance referring to God. Our author, however, agrees with those manuscripts of the LXX in which "my" refers to the righteous one, making this statement: "my righteous one (δικαίος) will live out of faith (ἐκ πίστεως)." The programmatic character of this citation is obvious. This is the first of three occurrences of "righteous" in the composition, in 11:4, we shall learn that it was because of his faith that Abel was testified to (by God) as righteous (δικαίος). And in 12:23, the hearers are told that they are approaching the city of the living God—and to the spirits of righteous ones (δικαίοι) who have been made perfect. As for faith (πίστις), it will immediately be given a descriptive definition (11:1), and become the metronomic introduction to every hero of Israel's past whose praises the author proclaims: all of them lived "in faith."

(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 160; Tübingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2003), especially 148–224.

The final sentence in this passage provides a final challenge to the translator—as though one more challenge were still needed—because, like all gnomic utterances, it is extremely compressed in its manner of expression. The sentence begins, “but we are not” (οὐκ ἐσμὲν), followed by two genitives: “of drawing back” (ὑποστολήης) and “of faith” (πίστεως). Each of these is followed in turn by prepositional phrases that form final clauses: εἰς ἀπώλειαν and εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς. The last of these phrases is especially ambiguous. Does ψυχῆ mean “soul” or “life” (see Heb 4:12; 6:19; 12:3; 13:17)? And should the noun περιποίησις have its possible sense of “hold as a possession” (see Eph 1:14; 1 Pet 2:9; 1 Tim 3:13; Acts 20:28)? The most striking parallel is Luke 17:33, “Whoever seeks to possess/secure (περιποιήσασθαι) his life/soul (ψυχῆ) will lose it (ἀπολέσει αὐτήν).” Certainly, the nuance of “gain as a possession” would be appropriate in the context, for it opposes this acquisition of their (true) lives or souls to the expropriation of their material property.

Rendering the sentence as a whole clearly demands some decisions. Mine were to change the genitival phrases to verbal phrases: “we do not draw back” and “we have faith.” Then I use dashes to help indicate the result clauses. Thus, “But we do not draw back—to our destruction. Rather, we have faith—to the securing of our life.” That the consequence of “drawing back,” that is apostasy, is destruction has been the burden of the author’s exhortation in the preceding passage (10:26–30). That an enduring faith leads to the saving of life or the securing of the soul, will be demonstrated by the roll-call of the heroes of Israel’s story that follows immediately.

The Impossible but Necessary Task

I do not draw any grand conclusion from these observations on a single passage in Hebrews, but I do draw some comfort. I have emphasized the frustration and struggle (ἀγωνία) inherent in translating a composition as stylistically sophisticated and rhetorically complex as Hebrews. It is certainly true that adequacy in translation is, in such a case, an ever-receding goal. But I should close with the acknowledgment—understood if not always acknowledged by all who labor at this impossible task—that the search for a more adequate translation, one that comes to grips with the complex webs of intratexture and intertexture drawn from Mediterranean culture and the symbolic world of Scripture, is both necessary (for the life of the church requires a living word in every age) and joyful (for the rich-

ness of the scriptural word enlivens even as it challenges). The translation of Hebrews that I am now endeavoring to complete will, in all likelihood, be the last effort of this sort I will make. Even as I suffer the pains that it has inflicted, I am grateful for the chance to have received the education it enables.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

READING WISDOM WISELY¹

It is it pleasure as well as an honor to present this lecture in honor of the late Father Roland Edmund Murphy. With Raymond Brown and Joseph Fitzmyer, Father Murphy will forever be associated with the landmark publication of the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* in 1968. That single volume announced to the scholarly world that American Catholic biblical scholars not only could play in the field that Protestant scholars had considered their own, but could play very well indeed. Those of us in the church who may be tempted to take for granted the freedom of inquiry and the gifts of critical historiography need constantly to remind ourselves that we enjoy benefits won by others. If we are to carry on their tradition of critical loyalty, then we must be sure to cultivate not only critical skills but also loyal characters.

And that brings us to wisdom, the study of which was Father Murphy's special gift and joy. Over his long career, he never ceased celebrating the voice of wisdom within Scripture. He combined a full appreciation for the gains in knowledge achieved by the historical-critical method with an openness to the longer history of interpretation within the church. It is in this connection that I feel some kinship with Father Murphy—expressed as well in a series of exchanged articles and short notes over the past fifteen years—as I have sought to interpret the New Testament composition everyone recognizes as a wisdom writing, the letter of James, and have increasingly over the past several years, tried to engage the patristic and medieval readings of the New Testament as a way of expanding the understanding of legitimate and responsible interpretation for a biblical scholarship that is of, for, and by the church. With Father Murphy, I have tried to ask whether *scientia* alone is adequate for interpretation, and to ask what it might mean if we thought of biblical interpretation in terms of *sapientia* as well.

The point of engaging patristic and medieval interpreters is not to imitate their methods but to appreciate their sensibilities, above all their

¹ The text of this article was originally presented as the first Roland K. Murphy Memorial Lecture at Catholic University of America, April 14, 2003.

appreciation that Scripture is to be read in the church for the purpose of transformation. Biblical interpretation in the fullest sense—and interpretation in the fullest sense is the business of the church, for whom these writings are not interesting literary artifacts from antiquity but the living word of God—is not merely a matter of translation or of information or of explanation. It is a matter of transformation of the readers. If this is the proper goal of interpretation, then the posture of the reader must be revealed as explicitly as the tendencies of the text. The critical question is not the one we put to the text but the one that the text puts to us.

Where Scripture most directly puts the reader to the test is in its wisdom literature. Narrative is always about the past. It enables the reader to maintain distance, while testing the narrative for its accuracy in depicting the extra-textual world of the past, or for its capacity to create exemplars for imitation. Epistolary literature invites the reader to peruse someone else's mail from long ago and far away. The reader is not immediately addressed, but can choose to discover matters of significance in what was written to communities of the past. With some work, the readers of narratives and letters can seek to imagine the world that scripture imagines, can place themselves in the position of those first addressed by that literature. But even this can be carried out as an aesthetic exercise, avoiding the challenge posed to the reader and the reader's world here and now.

Wisdom literature, in contrast, especially those forms of wisdom that are aphoristic or proverbial, reaches beyond its historical situation and addresses directly every life-situation. It demands being heard in a different manner than narrative and discourse. It challenges the reader to ask whether what is being said is true, nor with reference to a past world but with reference to the reader's own world, indeed in the reader's own existence. Wisdom literature, in short, demands being read wisely. Wisdom requires the reader not only to seek knowledge about the text, but by using the text, to seek wisdom in living.

Because of its ability to challenge a reader to test the truth of the text against the truth of the reader's actual life, the Bible's wisdom literature may provide our best and most direct route toward recovering a reading of Scripture that is itself sapiential and directed to the transformation of readers in the present. As we learn how to engage this form of writing, we might in the process also better learn how to engage the narrative and discourse material of the Bible for transformation.

In this essay, I offer the Letter of James as an example of a New Testament composition that demands wise readers if it is to be read wisely. Using James 4:4 and 3:1–2, I will show the limits of reading through *scientia* alone

and suggest how a reading through *sapientia* might proceed. James 4:4 reads this way: “You adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.” And 3:1–2 reads, “Let not many of you, my brothers, become teachers, since you know that we will receive a more severe judgment. For we all fail in many ways. If someone does not fail in speech, this person is perfect, powerful enough to guide the whole body as well.”

What Knowledge Gives

Let *scientia* not be despised. In particular, we should be grateful for the knowledge concerning the compositions of the Bible generated by scholars over the last two hundred years working within the historical-critical paradigm. I do not think *scientia* is sufficient for scholarship within the life of the church, but it is necessary. It is necessary above all because it serves to preserve the otherness of the biblical text. Without such otherness, the voice of interpreters can drown that of the biblical witness. The ancient text can be made to say what tradition wishes it to say. When that happens, the prophetic power of Scripture is diminished. Insofar as the study of history helps keep the text other than us, it remains an essential dimension of all good biblical scholarship.

With respect to the Letter of James as a whole, we can note and celebrate the truly significant advances in knowledge concerning this composition that have been made possible by the growth in scholars’ knowledge especially over the past fifty years because of a fresh study of ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures.

Study of James’ language places it as a correct and sometimes even ambitious Koine. On one side, its diction is that of the Septuagint, locating it in the realm of Hellenistic Jewish literature. On the other side, its use of rhetorical tropes and paranomasia makes it highly unlikely that it was translated from Aramaic or Hebrew. This conclusion is confirmed by analysis of James’ literary form. Martin Dibelius’ identification of James as paraenesis still has much to recommend it: James’ moral exhortation is traditional in character and is sometimes aphoristic; James also makes use of the traditional paraenetic devices of mirror, memory, and moral examples. But Dibelius’ insistence that all paraenesis is literarily disjointed has substantially been modified by more research into Greco-Roman moral literature. James H. Ropes had already seen how the essays in James

contained features of the Greco-Roman diatribe. And the relation of the apparently disconnected aphorisms of chapter one—organized most obviously by word-linkage—can now be seen as having the function of an epitome: the themes that are announced by way of proverb in chapter one are all developed by way of essay in chapters two through five. Considering James as a whole in the context of Greco-Roman moral discourse, it appears most like the form of deliberative rhetoric called *protreptic*. In a *protreptic* discourse, the reader is urged to carry out in practice the ideals of profession, and James certainly does that. For James, the language of faith and works is precisely what Greco-Roman moralists understood as profession and practice.

Yet one would scarcely confuse James with the *protreptic* discourses of Epictetus or Dio Chrysostom. Comparative study also reveals how deeply James' language and perceptions are steeped in the symbolic world of Torah—in his case, the symbolic world of the Septuagint. He speaks positively about the law—it is perfect, it gives freedom. He encourages gazing into it to learn and imitate the models it provided of the obedience of faith in Abraham and Rahab, the endurance of faith in Job, and the prayer of faith in Elijah. He quotes from the Decalogue and from the prophet Isaiah and from Proverbs. He not only quotes Leviticus 19:18 as the royal law, but interweaves allusions to Leviticus 19:11–18 throughout his exhortation. His cadences of rebuke and exhortation owe more than a little to those of Isaiah and Amos. Finally, James shares the sense of an ending and the cosmological dualism of Jewish apocalyptic literature. Much like Paul, then, James appears as a moralist working within the framework of Judaism, writing in Greek and using the Septuagint, yet even more obviously than Paul, at home in Palestinian rather than Diasporic patterns of interpretation. James has, for example, not a trace of allegory, but engages in a sort of halachic midrash on Leviticus 19.

Better historical study also enables us to abandon the suggestion that James was originally a Jewish composition that has only lightly been baptized by the addition of the name Jesus Christ in 1:1 and 2:1. Connections between the language of James and that of other first century Christian compositions are multiple and complex. Despite never mentioning the death and resurrection of Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, James shares thickly in the distinctive Christian argot: he combines promise and inheritance and kingdom and the poor in the same breath, he associates the title κύριος with δόξα and ὄνομα, he stresses the responses of faith and love, he speaks of the imminent expectation of the παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου, he uses the fictive

kinship language so characteristic of early writings from the messianic movement. And if James does not allude to the death and resurrection of Jesus, in no other writing of the New Testament apart from the Gospels are the sayings of Jesus more powerfully and pervasively present. At least four undoubted sayings of Jesus can be discerned within James' composition. Additional allusions to and echoes of Jesus' words are resonate through the composition. It is not as if James were quoting Jesus as an outside authority. It is rather as if James, as a member of his movement, shared in Jesus' own speech.

Historical analysis of the overlapping contexts of Greco-Roman moral discourse, the symbolic world of Torah, and the early Jesus movement, would seem to locate James among the earliest writings of the New Testament, possibly even contemporary with Paul. Like Paul, James is a Greco-Roman moralist working within the symbolic framework of the Jewish Scripture in the form of the Septuagint. Like Paul, James regards Jesus as Lord. Like Paul, James uses the common form of the letter for his moral exhortation.

Unlike Paul, however, who wrote to communities that he founded, or were within his mission field, or from whom he needed assistance, and whose letters take up issues within those communities or within his ministry, so that we learn as much about Paul's perceptions of those communities as we do about Paul himself, James wrote only once, and then to a general readership, the twelve tribes of the diaspora, and the examples he uses, while vivid, are general rather than local.

The classical historical critical paradigm, whose main business, after all, was constructing a history within which the various early Christian writings could best be understood, has had an exceptionally difficult time with the letter of James. Since the time of F.C. Baur in the early 19th century, New Testament scholars have argued—usually past each other—concerning the precise historical placement of James. Is it a letter written from Jerusalem by James the Brother of the Lord to Jewish Christians in the diaspora before the year 62? Or is it a later pseudonymous composition representing an early-catholic correction of an excessive paulinism from as late as the year 150? Until the middle of the 20th century, there were as many scholars in favor of an early dating as of a late one. Since the middle of the 20th century, more scholars hold for a later dating. This is not because of more and better data, or even better argument, but because of the weight of convention once established. Scholarship also is socially constructed. Once the late dating was accepted by a sufficient

number of prestigious commentaries and histories, the case was effectively closed—except for those stubborn few who continued to read the evidence independently.

The recent excitement over the ossuary inscription referring to James the brother of Jesus has added new fuel to an already significant amount of attention being paid in recent years to James of Jerusalem—and with that attention, a new willingness by some scholars to reconsider its early dating and authenticity. But there are more substantial reasons to think of James as a very early Christian witness. The first set of reasons is negative. All of the usual criteria used to determine that a New Testament writing is late or pseudonymous are simply lacking in the case of James: it has no fictional elaboration of the author's identity, no rationalization for the delay of the *parousia*, no doctrinal development, no understanding of tradition as deposit, no attacks on doctrinal deviance, no sign of institutional development, no accommodation to the household.

The second set of reasons derives from a literary/thematic comparison of James to all the extant wisdom literature from antiquity. In contrast to the dominant stream of wisdom writings extending from Ancient Egypt to the Sentences of Sextus, James is concerned entirely with morals rather than manners, addresses an intentional community rather than an individual, is egalitarian rather than authoritarian, is communitarian rather than individualistic. James is therefore a form of wisdom that is counter-cultural. It is best located in the early years of a sectarian movement rather than in the period of its adjustment to the dominant culture. These two sets of reasons, together with an increased awareness of James' intense use of the words of Jesus, and its equally intense eschatological expectation, lead to the conclusion that James is best understood as a wisdom writing from the earliest years of the Christian movement and quite possibly composed by the brother of Jesus.

Scientia gives abundantly as well when we turn to the study of specific parts of James. Rhetorical analysis, for example, locates James 4:4—the verse that begins “you adulteresses!”—at the climax of an indictment that begins in 3:13 and runs to 4:6, which is followed in turn by a series of short injunctions in 4:7–10. The entire section of the letter beginning in 3:13 with “Who among you is wise and understanding? By his good manner or life let him demonstrate his deeds in wisdom's meekness,” and ending in 4:10 with “Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you,” therefore, is not a loose assemblage of separate sayings (as Dibelius thought) but a coherent call to conversion. And when the language of this section is examined, three things quickly become apparent. The first is that the

diction in the call to conversion in 4:7–10 responds to terms of indictment in 3:13–4:6. The second is that there is a reverse movement of elevation and lowering. Those who raise themselves God lowers and those who lower themselves God raises. The third, and most fascinating, is that the elements of the indictment gain internal coherence when read in connection with the Greco-Roman moral topos *περὶ φθόνου* (“On Envy”).

Knowledge of the Hellenistic philosophical discussion of this must ignoble vice (a saying attributed to Socrates calls it the “ulcer of the soul” [*Strobaeus* III, 38, 48]) enables us to connect the repetition of the phrases, “bitter jealousy,” “selfish ambition,” and “envy” in this passage to its emphasis on social disorder, vile practices, wars and battles, and even murder. The logic of envy itself in Greek philosophy links all these together. Envy says Aristotle, is that sorrow I experience because someone has something I do not (*Rhetoric* 1387B). Envy is based on the premise that having is being. The more I have the more I am. And in a world of finite resources, the more you have the less I am. In contrast to the noble *ζήλος* that seeks emulation of excellence, the ignoble *ζήλος* that is envy (*φθόνος*) seeks to drag the other down to my own level. Envy therefore fuels the sort of competition that expresses itself in arrogance (*ὑπερηφάνια*). It creates disorder within communities, it is the cause of wars and battles. It is the source of murder: *φθόνος φόνος* ran a Greek proverb, “envy is murder” (see Plato, *Laws* 870C–D; also Rom. 1:29). James has placed this topos, as had the author of the *Testament of Simeon* (titled in Greek, *Περὶ φθόνου*), within a dualistic cosmology and anthropology: the source of envy is “earthly, unspiritual, devilish.” Turning from this vice will therefore also mean “resisting the devil and turning to God.”

Knowledge of the Hellenistic topos on envy extends to further insights: the first is rendering the notoriously difficult 4:5: “Or do you suppose the Scripture speaks in vain? Does the spirit he made to dwell in us crave enviously (*πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ*)?” We know that this rendering is correct—in contrast to the standard, “He yearns jealously over the spirit which he made to dwell in us” (RSV)—because in ancient literature the quality of *φθόνος* could never be ascribed to God. The second insight is that the theme of envy/arrogance continues in the three examples James provides following his call to conversion: the judgment of others (4:11–12), the heedless pursuit of profit (4:13–17), and the oppression of the poor by the rich (5:1–6).

Scientia has given us much: it has enabled us to hear James in its own voice as ancient moral and religious literature. It has helped us grasp as a single coherent passage what otherwise might be regarded as disjointed

statements, if has given us a sufficient understanding of the moral philosophy of antiquity to catch the theme being worked by James. We now understand that James is calling his readers from one form of wisdom to another. Each form of wisdom expresses itself in action. The wisdom from below is that of an envy that seeks supremacy through competition and elimination. Envy's upward aggression is expressed as arrogance. It is a self-assertion that will be resisted by God. The wisdom from above, in contrast, seeks justice and peace. It is the lowliness that will be lifted up by God.

Scientia likewise enables us to grasp more fully the point of 4:4 by placing it within three overlapping contexts. The harsh apostrophe, "you adulteresses," we now understand, must be understood within the symbolic world or Torah. It does not suggest actual adultery among the readers—as some ancient scribes thought and generously altered to "adulterers and adulteresses"—but must be read within the prophetic equation of the covenant between God and humans with the human covenant of marriage, with humans always playing the female role. The readers are charged with infidelity not to their spouses but to God. Thus, the exhortations in 4:7–10 resonate with the imagery of prophetic calls to conversion from idolatry: "Cleanse your hands you sinners! And purify your hearts, you double-minded! Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you."

Similarly, *scientia* alerts us to the significance of friendship language in Greco-Roman moral philosophy. Friendship is not acquaintance or loose association. It is the most intimate of relationships. A friend is another self; friends are one soul; friends hold all things in common. Friendship means the sharing of all things, spiritual and material. To be a friend of someone, therefore, is to view the world in precisely the same way as one's friend. In 4:4, therefore, "to be friends with" does not mean to have affection for someone, it means defining oneself in the same terms as one's friend. Greco-Roman moral philosophy also reminds us that we can't be friends with everyone. Friends are not given, they are chosen. Even more significant, in ancient moral philosophy, friendship was regarded as the opposite of envy. If envy drove one to competition and elimination on the understanding that to have more was to be more, friendship tended toward the sharing of all possessions, with no one calling anything one's own.

Scientia, finally, enables us to understand the most difficult part of 4:4, the way in which "God" and "world" stand in opposition. How is it that one cannot be a friend of both? We can understand this when we see how

James uses the term “world” elsewhere. In 1:27, religion that is pure and undefiled before God is defined as “keeping oneself unstained from the world.” In 3:6, the tongue is described in daring synecdoche as “a world of wickedness established among our members. It pollutes the entire body. Even as it is enflamed from Gehenna, it sets aflame the cycle of life.” Most tellingly, in 2:5 “the poor in the world” are said to be “rich in faith,” so that “world” and “faith” are set as opposite measures of worth. Throughout James, in other words, “the world” is not the neutral sphere of human endeavor and still less God’s good creation, it is rather a measure of value and a way of being, that stand opposed to God.

Placing 4:4 back in its literary context, we understand that “friendship with the world” means to agree with the measure of “the wisdom from below” which is that of envy and arrogance. To be an “adulteress” is to live by that measure even when one is covenanted to God. James addresses specifically those who are “double-minded” (4:8) who want to live by the standard of the world while professing to be friends of God. They want to be friends with everyone. But James provides no wiggle-room: he says that even “choosing to be a friend of the world is to establish oneself as an enemy of God” (4:4).

What does it mean to be a “friend of God?” It means to measure one’s life by God’s measure, with the “wisdom from above” that leads to righteousness and peace rather than envy and competition. If the logic of envy is based on a closed world of resources in which everybody competes for limited goods, the logic of the wisdom from above is that creation is open to the God who “gives to all simply and without grudging” (1:5), who is, as the father of lights with whom there is no alteration or shadow of change, the source of every good and perfect gift coming down from above (1:17), who gives, as 4:6 declares, still more gift. Living within this logic means severing the link between having and being. It means “receiving with meekness the implanted word that is able to save” (1:20). It means being willing to share possessions in the knowledge that God can always give more. It means opening one’s door to strangers as Rahab did (2:25). It means being willing even to sacrifice the gift that God has given in the faith that God can always give more gift, as did Abraham, who offered his son Isaac in obedient faith and was declared righteous and a “friend of God” (2:23).

Scientia can show us all this, and can lead us even deeper into the fabric of James’ exhortation to discover the ways in which living as friends of God means creating a community of solidarity and hospitality and healing over against the world’s measure of commodification and commerce

and competition. *Scientia* can bring us very far, indeed. It can bring us to the portals of wisdom, show us her dwelling, describe her features. But *Scientia* by itself cannot enter wisdom's dwelling without still another turning.

What Wisdom Demands

A sapiential reading of James requires of readers a turn toward their own world and their own lives. The truth of James 4:4 is measured not by its coherence within the moral discourse of antiquity but by its ability to call us in our world to account and to conversion. The fundamental question we must ask ourselves is how we are addressed by this text. Are we the double-minded? Are we in need of submitting to God so that we might be lifted up? Do we need to resist, the devil so that the devil will flee from us? Do we need to approach God in the expectation that God will approach us? Are we the adulteresses who say that we are married to the Lord God yet seek alliance with other gods of our own construction, the idols that are projections of our disordered passions? Or to put it in James' own terms, do we want to be friends with everyone? Do we want to be part of the community that measures by God's measure, while at the same time participate in the world whose measure excludes God from consideration?

This turning is not necessarily helped by *scientia*, and indeed may in some cases be hindered by *scientia*, for knowledge always wants to be the distanced observer, the dispassionate describer, the one whose knowledge also gives control, whereas the call to conversion means letting go of observer status and letting oneself be observed by the text, relinquishing the role of questioner and allowing oneself to be questioned by the text. This turn cannot be done simply by the knowing mind. It must be a turning of the discerning heart. It must come from a longing of the heart to be pure and of the mind to be single. And this itself is a lowering, a letting go of the arrogance implicit in *scientia*, and a submission to the wisdom from above that is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to persuasion, filled with mercy and good fruits, not divided, not insincere (3:17). To seek such wisdom is itself to begin to turn, to convert, to change from the one who seizes knowledge as a possession that ensures success to the one who receives the implanted word with meekness because it saves the soul (1:21).

And in this turning, *scientia* can be a help, for it can help us discern more clearly what questions we need to ask of ourselves and of our world.

The exegesis of the text and the exegesis of life are not separate and parallel tracks but are interconnected. So we are instructed by James to be aware that not every wisdom so called is truly God's wisdom, just as every human construction of the world is not one that is compatible with the word of truth by which God brought forth humans as a kind of first-fruits of all creatures (1:18). We are pointed by James to the social construction of our world and the wisdom that makes it run and by which it measures success. Is it in fact a world constructed on the basis of envy and arrogance? Does it reward those who compete for the world's limited resources? Does such rivalry engender social unrest and war and even murder? We must ask this question sharply and precisely concerning our world: is there a direct and logical connection between the slogan that the one who dies with the most toys wins, and the exploitation of the earth, by conglomerates and corporations, and the wars between nations for oil and mineral reserves, and the inner-city kid who kills a playmate because he has Nikes and I do not? Is this the logic by which our world now runs? Is it a world so constructed that the rich can with impunity withhold the wages of the laborers, or more subtly, murder through litigation in the courts?

We must turn this question, in turn, on the community that claims to live by the measure of "the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1) Does it claim the promise of Jesus that the poor in the world are the heirs of the kingdom, or does it practice discrimination between rich and poor even within the community's life of worship (2:1-6)? Does it dismiss the starving with religious jargon rather than food and clothing (2:14-16)? Does it open its doors to the dangerous strangers as did Rahab the prostitute as an embodiment of living faith, or does it make the sanctuary a refuge only for the well-dressed and well-mannered? Do the church's elders answer the call of the weak and the marginal by gathering in the solidarity of prayer and healing (5:13-18), or does it cultivate only the strong and find itself embarrassed by the weak and the poor and the stupid? Does the church practice the mutual confession of sins and mutual correction (5:19-20), or does it encourage within the community of faith precisely the entrepreneurial and competitive spirit that drives the world outside the community, so that we judge our neighbor secretly and slander him secretly in arrogance (4:11-12), rather than practice the difficult truth telling of confession and correction, which require humility and vulnerability?

As the text of James 4:4 addresses us in the plural, we are required to ask of ourselves communally about our communal participation in ("friendship with") the world as constructed in opposition to God's ever-renewed creation. We must ask how we as a church are constantly co-opted and

corrupted by our efforts to be friends with everyone, by our desire to live by two measures at once, by our willingness to profess faith in God and yet fail to express that faith in consistent practice, by our desire to be all too much at home in the world of consumer-choice, commodification, and competition, even as we publicly and ritually espouse the good news to the poor and the royal law of love (2:5–8).

But if we are to read sapientially, we must also take James as addressed to the hearts of each one of us, for each of us participates in the construction of the world and in the construction of *ekklesia* by our convictions and commitments and consistent practice. If we are to read James wisely, we must, as Kierkegaard, a great lover of this letter, said, read it as “a mirror for self-examination.” The truth is not simply about the world out there or even the church out there, it is about our own personal friendships, and our own double-mindedness.

It is at this point that we can usefully turn to our second passage, James 3:1–2: “Not many of you brothers, should become teachers, since you know that we will receive a more severe judgment. For we all fail in many ways. If someone does not fail in speech, this person is perfect, powerful enough to guide the whole body as well.”

Scientia provides five points worth noting. First, together with the mention of elders in 5:14, this is the only clue given by the letter to the possible authority structure of the *ekklesia*. Second, as in 5:14, leadership is mentioned not with reference to authority and power, but with reference to service and standing under judgment. Third, the passage warns (in the second person plural) others against taking on the role of teacher, and then (in the first person plural) associates the author with the judgment that is leveled against the ones playing that role—the only time in the letter that James reveals anything about himself beyond being a slave of God and Jesus Christ (1:1). Fourth, this statement introduces the discussion of the dangers of the tongue that extends from 3:2–12: the dangers of speech, we are to understand, are all the more real for the teacher. Fifth, the discussion of the dangers of the tongue leads directly to the call to conversion in 3:13–4:10 with which we began our present discussion: there is a natural link between the διδάσκαλοι in 3:1 and the σοφὸς καὶ ἐπιστήμων (“wise and understanding”) in 3:13. We are justified, then, in applying to the teacher not only the dangers that are inherent in speech but also the temptation to live by the standards of the world rather than of God.

Finally, we can note that James’ discussion of speech is also one that fits completely within the framework of Greco-Roman moral discourse. When he tells his readers in 1:19 to be “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow

to anger,” he echoes philosophical values that judge silence wiser than speech, and that connects incontinence in speech to the emotional incontinence of rage. When in 1:26 he declares self-deceived the one who thinks of himself as religious “without bridling the tongue,” he says nothing that would not be applauded by the sages of the stoa as well as those of the *pirque aboth*. And for sages from across the cultural spectrum, it was above all the διδάσκαλος, the teacher of others, who must reveal virtue in speech as well as the perfection of speech in practice.

It is the position of authority that makes the role of the teacher so dangerous. Teachers in particular are vulnerable to failures in speech, not only because their profession demands that they speak more than others (sometimes even for payment), but they must do so publicly, and often before a captive audience. The role of teacher provides occasion for virtually every form of evil speech: arrogance and domination over students, anger and pettiness shown toward inattention or contradiction, slander and mean-spiritedness directed toward absent and sometimes imaginary opponents, flattery of students for the sake of applause and self-gratification. Such failures are the more grievous when the teacher is looked to as a model of virtue, as one in whom what is professed is also practiced. This is why in antiquity the despisers of the moralists attacked in particular the contrast between their public show of virtue and their private vice: the role of the teacher enables one to profess loudly enough and to posture imposingly enough to distract from the deep inconsistencies in one’s own character.

The turn to a sapiential reading of this passage begins, I think, with just this sort of careful reflection on what is implicit in the role of the teacher and the practice of speech by the teacher in any age. But it reaches its real point when we each allow this text to probe our own profession and practice as teachers, as though we actually stood under this greater judgment. Do we, do I, “so speak and so act, as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty,” (2:13), which is the royal law enunciated by Jesus as well as James, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (2:8)?

Are there any teachers in the church to whom this applies more directly than to those of us who are teachers of Scripture or who seek to become teachers of Scripture? Must we not turn this text to self-examination as well?

As with the passage concerning friendship with the world and friendship with God, we can begin by asking about the logic of scholarship and teaching within the present-day academy: to what extent does it operate on the basis of envy and arrogance? How are scholarly practices in the

academy shaped by competition rather than collaboration, to what extent are publications exercises in arrogance rather than edification? And how do our own aspirations, professions, and practices, contribute to the shaping of that world? We can ask also about the degree to which, in the academy, *scientia* is what counts rather than *sapientia*. Even more pertinently, we can inquire into the ways in which the reading of the Bible within the church might be co-opted or corrupted by the practices of the academy rather than by a scholarship that is proper to its own life.

But just as in the case of friendship with the world true conversion is not simply a matter of the mind but also of the heart and of the body, so also with respect to our role as teachers within and for the church. We all need to consider and to decide and to act on three aspects of biblical interpretation. The first is philosophical: what is our construal of biblical interpretation: is it primarily about *scientia*, or is its proper telos *sapientia*? Is it about knowledge of the past or transformation in the present? The second question is political: what are we doing in our own social setting to establish the conditions of participation, of reward, of empowerment, that enables a scholarship that is open to wisdom as well as knowledge? This is as specific as practices of hiring, tenure, and promotion. It involves the admission of students and the shaping of dissertations. Our choices construct a world. We are complicit in the present state of affairs, and changing the present state of affairs is not only an intellectual, it is also a political process. This is the case within the church as well as in the academy. Finally, we need to think through our pedagogy both as philosophy and as policies. How do our ways of teaching Scripture empower readers who can build the church as a community that is bound by friendship with God, and how do our ways of teaching disable readers? The politics that we teachers control most directly is the politics of the classroom, of the syllabus, of the seminar. Are we, in these places of power, friends of God, or friends of the world? We must choose, and choose wisely.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

GOD EVER NEW, EVER THE SAME

A consideration of ὁ θεός (God) in the letters of James and 1 Peter, two of the so-called catholic or general epistles within the New Testament canon, must start from a candid recognition of how the indirect and partial character of the evidence frustrates any attempt at an adequate account. In light of the difficulties they present, it is the more pleasing that the witness of these compositions nevertheless turns out to be so complex and fascinating. This essay begins with a discussion of the critical questions presented by the letters, then seeks in turn to hear the distinctive voice of James and Peter, and concludes with a brief reflection on the implications of their witness.

Preliminary Questions

How is the evidence indirect? We remember first the fact that both compositions are letters. They are general letters, to be sure, written not to single communities but to readers across a geographical area. Letters of any sort, however, represent part of a conversation between the implied sender and the implied readers. We are the indirect over-hearers of this conversation. As has been stated often, present-day readers are in the position of those reading other peoples' mail. Even if the ancient composition is a letter in form only (as some moral essays were), use of this genre also implies that a subject is being treated in part, as fits the occasion for writing, rather than as a whole and in systematic fashion. Language about God is indirect in another way: the rhetoric of these letters is proreptic rather than didactic; rather than seeking to present an ordered teaching about God, it seeks to move readers to a renewed commitment to their profession of faith in God. Discourse about God serves to shape the attitudes and actions of the first readers. When these letters speak of God, furthermore, they do so in the diction of prayer and exhortation, rather than in that of philosophy; we find in these letters first-order religious language, rather than the second-order reflection on such language that characterizes theology. The language of these letters gives rise to theology but does not derive from theology. When James and Peter speak of

God, they speak out of the religious experiences and convictions that join them to their readers and form the shared context of their conversation. Access to that conversation is therefore also limited to the degree that the contemporary reader does or does not share those same experiences and convictions.

If the rhetorical character of the compositions sets limits to our expectations, so does their lack of context. Unlike some of Paul's letters, this correspondence does not yield specific information concerning the readers that might assist us in assessing the language used. Both letters are written to a readership larger than a single community and tell us next to nothing about the actual situation of the readers. We are able to conclude with a fair amount of certainty that 1 Peter was written to Gentile converts who were experiencing some degree of social ostracism, and that James was (in all likelihood) written to Jewish believers who likewise were facing various trials and testings. Beyond that, we are not able to go with any degree of confidence. Nor do we have other writings from these ascribed authors to fill out the evidence in these two letters. No other letter is attributed to James in the New Testament. If the author of 1 Peter is different from the author of 2 Peter, and if the words attributed to Peter by the Acts of the Apostles come from Luke rather than Peter—and I take both these protases to be correct—then 1 Peter also must be taken on its own.

But what of the obvious literary resemblances between the two writings? They are, after all, both general epistles. First Peter is sent to the "exiles of the Dispersion" (1 Pet 1:1) just as James addresses "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (Jas 1:1). Such designations evoke the symbolic world of Torah, and each composition makes heavy use of scriptural diction, citation, and allusion. First Peter 1:24 has a verbatim citation from Isa 40:6–8 in the LXX translation ("All flesh is like grass"), and the same passage is paraphrased by Jas 1:10–11 with reference to the passing away of the rich. Both Jas 5:20 and 1 Pet 4:8 cite Prov 10:12 ("love covers a multitude of sins"). Both letters quote Prov 3:34 ("God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble") in strikingly similar fashion (see Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). The letters share other points of theme and diction. First Peter 1:6–7 instructs readers to rejoice if they should experience "various trials" (ποικίλοις πειρασμοῖς) so that the "genuineness of your faith" (τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως) might be found "more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire," a sequence that is remarkably similar to Jas 1:2–3. Likewise the language of Jas 1:18 concerning the word of truth that gives birth resembles 1 Pet 1:23, which says that the readers have been "born anew . . . through the living and enduring word of God." Similarly,

1 Pet 2:1–2 has the same transition, from putting off (*ἀποθέμενοι*) negative qualities to receiving a saving word, as does Jas 1:21.

Such similarities, if taken in isolation, might seem to support theories of literary dependence. Closer analysis, however, reveals that each of these writings has as many points of resemblance to the letters of Paul as they do to each other. The rhetorical climax in Jas 1:2–4 resembles that in Rom 5:3–4 more than it does 1 Pet 1:6–7, and James’s use of the example of Abraham (Jas 2:21–24) is much closer to Paul (Rom 4; Gal 3) than it is to 1 Peter’s reference to Sarah and Abraham (1 Pet 3:6). Similarly, 1 Peter’s catena of Scripture passages in 2:4–10 is very close to Paul in Rom 9:25–33, with no parallel to James, and its language about the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ (2:24; 3:18–22) has multiple parallels in Paul (Rom 6:2; Phil 2:10–11; Col 2:15) and none in James. The elements that 1 Peter and James do share, furthermore, are turned to distinctive use in the respective compositions. First Peter has domestic, ecclesial, and, above all, christological interests that are not shared by James. Note that the passage concerning the testing of faith is given by Peter a specifically christological turn lacking in James: “to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet 1:7). The living and enduring word of God is identified as “the good news that was announced to you” (1 Pet 1:25), and the admonition, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time” (5:6), which so palpably resonates Jas 4:10, is used by 1 Peter to exhort younger people to submit to the older within the community (1 Pet 5:5).

No evidence compels the conclusion that James and 1 Peter were pseudonymous in composition and (as a result) composed significantly later than the extant letters of Paul. The same scarcity of data that limits our ability to place these compositions in the circumstances of first-generation Christianity also resists their inclusion within some developmental scheme that demands their being read as second-century productions. Nothing is lost and much is gained if we imagine them as voices contemporary to Paul, parts of the rich and complex conversation that the experience of Jesus as risen Lord generated among his followers as they sought to grasp not only what had happened to them but also the nature of the one at work in their transforming experience. Perhaps reading them this way can help us grasp how that *κοινωνία* of faith and mission to which Paul attests was expressed by the “right hand of fellowship” among himself, Peter, and James, a fellowship that at once recognized the diversity of ministries among them as well as the one God enabling those ministries (Gal 2:9–10), and was also expressed in a similar way by of diverse literary

expressions pointing to the experience of a single God who was at once always new and always the same.

The Witness of the Letter of James

It might be argued that James is the most thoroughly *theological*—as opposed to *christological*—writing in the New Testament. Apart from the greeting (1:1), the name of Jesus appears only once (2:1). James tells no stories about Jesus and bears no trace of those elements of the *kerygma* (the death and resurrection of Jesus, the sending of the Holy Spirit) that are so well attested elsewhere in the canon. The *pneuma* that God makes dwell in humans (Jas 4:5) is probably not the Holy Spirit, though it might be stretched to mean that. The opinion that James is only a lightly baptized Jewish composition, however, is shown to be wrong when one looks more closely. Not only does James have many points of resemblance to other Christian literature, its diction makes sense only within the messianic movement associated with Jesus. His epithets make clear that for James, Jesus is Messiah (Χριστός, 1:1; 2:1) and the *kyrios* (1:1; 2:1) to whom he owes particular allegiance as slave (δοῦλος, 1:1). Calling Jesus *kyrios* and associating his “name” (2:7) with “glory” (δόξα) suggests also that James acknowledges Jesus as the powerful risen one. Indeed, James’s use of the title *kyrios* is richly ambiguous. It probably refers to God as the Yahweh (= LXX *kyrios*) of Scripture (see Isa 40:3; Ps 117:1) in passages such as 1:7; 3:9; 4:10, 15; 5:4, 11; and possibly 5:10. But it may also apply to Jesus as the risen one in 5:7, 8, 14, 15. Particularly impressive is James’s use of the expression παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου in 5:8; in the New Testament, it is virtually a technical term for the return of Jesus (see 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13), whereas it is never used of Yahweh in the Old Testament.

James makes especially strong use of Jesus’ teaching. He speaks of “the faith of Jesus Christ” (2:1) as the measure for the faith of the readers, and the most striking parallels are those between statements in James and sayings of Jesus found in the Synoptic tradition (see Jas 2:5 and Luke 6:20; Jas 2:13 and Matt 5:7; Jas 4:8 and Matt 5:8; Jas 3:18 and Matt 5:9; Jas 1:5 and Matt 7:7; Jas 4:11–12/5:9 and Matt 7:1; Jas 5:12 and Matt 5:34). Such statements from Jesus occur in close conjunction with James’s thematic use of Leviticus 19 throughout the letter (Lev 19:12 = Jas 5:12; Lev 19:13 = Jas 5:4; Lev 19:15 = Jas 2:1; Lev 19:16 = Jas 4:11; Lev 19:17b = Jas 5:20). The two sets of teaching come together in 2:8, when James cites as the “royal law” the commandment of love of neighbor, which derives from Lev 19:18

and is confirmed by Jesus in Mark 12:31; Matt 22:39; Luke 10:27. The faith expressed through the sayings of the Messiah Jesus is in deep continuity with the revelation of God in Torah.

In contrast to the relatively little explicit attention paid to Jesus, James has a rich set of statements concerning God. The term θεός occurs fifteen times (1:1, 5, 13, 20, 27; 2:5, 19, 23 (2); 3:9; 4:4(2), 6, 7, 8). James places the term “Father” (πατήρ) in apposition to θεός in 1:17, 27, and 3:9. Notably, he never calls God “Father of Jesus Christ.” In addition to θεός, at least some of James’s references to “Lord” (κύριος) refer to God rather than to Jesus (see 1:7; 3:9; 4:10, 15; 5:4, 11). In 108 verses, then, James mentions God some twenty-four times. This is properly designated a theocentric composition.

James’s language about God appears largely in the form of warrants and premises for his moral exhortation. The thoroughly hortatory character of this writing can be discerned directly from its grammar. In 108 verses, there are some fifty-nine imperatives (forty-six in the second person, thirteen in the third person)! But by no means are these random or disconnected. James attaches to his imperatives a variety of explanatory clauses, either by way of participles (1:3, 14, 22; 2:9, 25; 3:1), or γάρ (“for”) clauses (1:6, 7, 11, 13, 20, 24; 2:11, 13, 26; 3:2, 16; 4:14) or ὅτι (“because”) clauses (see 1:12, 23; 2:10; 3:1; 4:3; 5:8, 11). Statements about God occur in these clauses as support and motivation for James’s moral instruction. To grasp the significance of James’s language about God, therefore, the very grammar of the composition demands that we place it in the context of his moral exhortation.

When James is compared to other ancient wisdom literature, its distinctiveness quickly becomes apparent. First, James deals exclusively with morals rather than with manners; second, he addresses an intentional community rather than a household; third, he is egalitarian rather than hierarchical; fourth, James is communitarian rather than individualistic. This is not a writing that represents a ruling elite or a scribal tradition within a stable, traditional culture. Instead, James stands over against the dominant culture with an emphasis on group solidarity and moral rigor as opposed to conformity to societal norms. James has a sectarian ethic that is defined as much by what it opposes as by what it affirms, and is marked by considerable eschatological urgency: Judgment is coming soon (5:9), when the wicked will be punished (5:1–6) and the righteous rewarded (1:12).

The social location suggested by James is that of a sectarian movement that identifies itself with the poor and opposes the wealthy. This opposition

is expressed and supported by the dualistic character of James's moral exhortation and theological perspective. The contrast between the rich and the poor (1:9–11; 2:1–6) is articulated in moral terms as a contrast between the “innocent/righteous” (δικαιός, 5:6) and the oppressor (2:6), between the arrogant and the lowly (4:6). Other moral contrasts are between truth (1:18) and error (1:16), war (4:1–2) and peace (3:17–18), meekness (1:21) and anger (1:20), justice (1:20; 3:18) and anger (1:20), envious craving (3:16; 4:1–3) and generous self-giving (1:17; 4:6). Likewise, James places in opposition the hearer of the word and the doer of the word (1:22, 25), the one who forgets and the one who remembers (1:25), the perfect (or mature) and the lacking (or unstable, 1:4, 6–11). So also he distinguishes between wisdom (1:5; 3:13) and foolishness (1:26), filthiness (1:21, 27) and purity (1:27; 4:8), blessing and curse (3:9), saving and destroying (4:12), death and life (1:16), the indwelling spirit (4:5) and that which is earthbound and unspiritual (3:15).

These moral contrasts are placed by James within a religious framework that is equally dualistic and expressed by spatial imagery of “above and below” and of “raising and lowering.” He speaks of a wisdom from above (1:5, 17). This wisdom demands of humans a submission or lowering/humbling, to which God responds with a lifting up/exalting of the meek person (4:7–10). To this James opposes a wisdom from below, which he calls “earthly, unspiritual, devilish” (3:15), and which is sponsored by the devil (4:7). This wisdom from below causes people to elevate themselves through boasting and arrogance (3:14; 4:6). And just as God raises the lowly (4:10), so God resists the arrogant (4:6). James's religious dualism is most explicitly expressed in the verse that can be taken as the thematic heart of the letter: “Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (4:4). This short—and in many respects shocking—syllogism points to the organizing logic of James's symbolism. We see that the terms for God (θεός) and world (κόσμος) are opposed as the objects of human allegiance and commitment (friendship). James's readers are assumed to know of the irreconcilable character of this opposition, and that allegiance to one or the other is a matter of free choice rather than destiny (“whoever wishes to be a friend of the world . . .”).

We gain further insight into the contrast when we see that in each of the three other times James uses the term κόσμος, he consistently opposes it to θεός. In 3:6, the tongue is described as a “world of iniquity” among the body's members that leads one to bless God and curse one created in God's image (3:9). In 2:5, the “poor in the world” are said to

be “rich in faith.” These passages show us that “the world” for James is a system of meaning or measurement: those who in the value system of the world are poor are also, in the value system of faith, rich. Finally, in 1:27, James defines a religion that is “pure and undefiled before God, the Father” as one that remains “unstained by the world.” These are the measures between which humans can choose to live (which is what ancients meant by “being friends with”). The world’s measure is clearly delineated by James as one that sees life as a closed system in which humans are in competition for being and worth. Its logic is that of envy, which seeks to win by eliminating the competition (4:1–3), whether through the banal assumption that gaining a profit can also secure a tomorrow (4:13–16) or through the arrogant assertion of raw power over the helpless, leading to their death (5:1–6). James presents Abraham as the example of the one who lives as the “friend of God,” because his faith enabled him to perceive reality as God did and act accordingly. By the measure of the world, Abraham should have regarded Isaac as his possession, his guarantee of securing the blessing promised by God. But Abraham saw reality as one shaped by the giver of every good and perfect gift (1:17) and was willing to give back Isaac as gift to the one who lifts up the lowly and to the humble “gives a greater gift” (or “grace” in the NRSV, 4:6).

What makes James truly distinctive among sectarian writings is that he turns his moral critique inward. He does not condemn the world so much as hold in contempt those in the assembly who want both to profess faith in God and to live by the measure of the world. These he calls “double-minded” (1:8; 4:8), and the goal of his exhortation is to make them single-minded once more, to realize that it is impossible to be friends with everyone. The incompatibility of friendship with God and the world is suggested also by James’s use of the prophetic image of the adulteress (in the Greek) in 4:4. The prophets so called Israel when it abandoned its covenant with the Lord (see Hos 3:1; Ezek 16:38; Isa 57:3; Jer 3:9). James therefore challenges his readers to that simplicity which consists in genuine faith in God expressed by wholehearted love toward the neighbor.

Who then is this God toward whom the human heart should be turned? James contains an unusually rich set of statements. Like all Jews—and like his colleague Paul (see Rom 3:30)—James takes it as axiomatic that God is one (2:19). But he mocks the so-called faith that consists in such a bare assertion of monotheism. This one God makes the demons shudder (2:19). God, in other words, is the powerful Lord of Israel. James reaches deeply into the symbolic world of Torah when he names God “Lord of hosts” (5:4). Some of James’s statements move in the direction of a negative theology,

asserting what God is not: With God there is no change or shadow of alteration (1:17), God neither tempts anyone nor is tempted by evil (1:13), God's righteousness is not worked through human anger (1:20). These negative ascriptions do not result from a philosophical position but from the religious conviction concerning the infinite moral distance between humans and God. God's changelessness in 1:17 does not describe a state of being but rather a moral consistency which is the opposite of that of fickle, two-minded humans. God "works" justice, but not through human anger (1:20). And God's goodness cannot be mixed with moral ambiguity or mischief (1:13). James does not deny the role of superhuman forces in influencing freedom: The wisdom from below is "devilish" (3:15), and the devil is to be resisted (4:7), but humans remain responsible for their evil desires and deeds. They cannot claim, "I am being tempted by God" (1:13) as a way of evading that responsibility.

James's positive statements assert God's powerful presence to creation and, above all, to humanity. Thus, God is not only "light" but is the "Father of lights" (1:17), an expression that points to God as the source of all being. James 3:7 alludes to Gen 1:26–28 and God's creation of all things. James 3:9 is the New Testament's only explicit assertion—outside of christological statements—that humans are created in the image of God. Perhaps James's most powerful and paradoxical statement of God's creative power is 1:18: "The Father of lights" here gives birth to humans as "a kind of first fruits of his creatures," and does so by his "own purpose" and "the word of truth." The statement is capable of almost endless meaning. We note first the striking image of a father "birthing": The verb ἀποκυέω can be rendered no other way, especially since it deliberately opposes the "giving birth to death" by human desire in 1:15. Second, we see that humans are to function within God's creation as representatives, the "first fruits" who stand for the entire harvest. Third, we observe how God's deliberate purpose in creating humans stands opposed to the "desire" by which humans run amok (1:14–16). Fourth, we can ponder the ambiguity of "the word of truth." To what does James refer? As commentators have seen from the start, the word of truth might mean the word by which God creates the world anew at every moment (Gen 1:26–30); or, it might mean the word of Torah by which God revealed the divine will to humans (LXX Ps 118:43); or, it could refer to the word of the gospel (2 Cor 6:7; Col 1:5). The impossibility of deciding exclusively for one or the other of these options is precisely the most important point about James's theological perspective: The God who is now at work among them is the same as has always been at work, the one God revealed through creation, through covenant, through gospel.

The same rich ambiguity attends James's statements concerning the perfect law of liberty (2:8–11) through which God has revealed God's will for humans and on the basis of which humans will be judged (2:12–4:12). James states powerfully, "There is one lawgiver [νομοθέτης] and judge [κριτής] who is able to save [σῶσαι] and destroy [ἀπολέσαι]" (4:12). The divine origin and authority of the law could scarcely be stated more clearly. But what does James mean by this *nomos*? The term certainly encompasses Torah as narrative, wisdom, and prophecy, as shown by James's citations from each of those sections of the Old Testament, and by his invitation to gaze into the perfect law (1:22–25) in order to see the exemplars for authentic human response to God in the figures of Abraham and Rahab, who display the works of faith (2:21–26), Job, who displays the endurance of faith (5:11), and Elijah, who shows the prayer of faith (5:17). And it includes the moral commandments of the Decalogue and Leviticus 19 (see above and Jas 2:11). The "royal law," however, is that of love for neighbor (2:8), and as we have seen, that law is stated both in Torah (Lev 19:18) and by the Lord Jesus.

God does not leave humans with only a verbal norm. The word of truth is also an "implanted word" able to save souls (1:21), and God has made a "spirit" (πνεῦμα) contrary to the envious one of the devil to dwell in humans (4:5). God remains always in control of human affairs (4:15) and declares as righteous and as friends those whose faith in him is expressed in action (2:23). In all this activity among humans, God reveals a nature that is merciful and compassionate; indeed, these terms define God (5:11). Thus, God promises the crown of life to those who love him (1:12; 2:5); has chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (2:5); regards true religion as including the visitation of orphans and widows in their distress (1:27), even as God also hears the cries of the oppressed (5:4), raises up the sick (5:15), answers the prayers of those who ask in faith (1:5–6; 5:16) rather than wickedly (4:3), and forgives the sins of those who confess them (5:15). This is a God who approaches those who approach him (4:8), who lifts up the lowly (4:10), and enters into friendship with humans (2:23; 4:4). But this is also a God who opposes the proud and arrogant who exalt themselves by their oppression of others (4:6; 5:6).

Most distinctive is James's understanding of God as gift giver. The letter makes the point explicitly three times. In 4:6, James derives from the text of Prov 3:34: "God opposes the proud but gives grace (χάρις = favor/gift) to the humble." In contrast to those who seek to gain by taking away, God gains by gifting: "But he gives all the more grace." That this is not an accidental conclusion is shown by James's very first characterization of

God in 1:5, where he affirms that God “gives to all generously (ἀπλῶς) and ungrudgingly (ὀνειδίζοντος).” Finally, there is the programmatic statement in 1:17, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Taken together, the propositions assert that God’s giving is universal, abundant, without envy, and constant. To have faith in this God, therefore, is to see the world as an open system, in contrast to the zero-sum game imagined by envy: The creating and revealing and saving God drenches the world constantly with gifts.

Because God is in active relationship with creation rather than isolated from it, human existence can be described in terms of a story with both God and humans as characters. The story has a past, defined in terms of the gifts God has already given: creating humans in God’s image, revealing God’s will in the law and the prophets and in the “faith of Jesus Christ,” implanting in humans the “word of truth,” the “wisdom from above,” and “the spirit.” The story also has a future, which consists of God’s response to human behavior in the world in the *parousia* of the Lord: God will reward the innocent and merciful and persevering, who have spoken and acted according to the “royal law of liberty.” In contrast, God will punish the wicked oppressors who blaspheme the noble name associated with God’s people. James’s world, in other words, is not only open spatially, but also temporally.

Critical to an appreciation of James’s theological language is seeing how his theological propositions stand as warrants and premises for his moral exhortation. James does not contain a series of statements about God that simply stand juxtaposed to moral commands. The two kinds of statements are intricately related. Moral exhortation is always grounded in James’s understanding of the human relationship to God. Precisely this makes his affirmation of the constant, universal, ungrudging, and abundant gift-giving by God so central, for it is this understanding of reality that enables James to advocate a life of intra-communitarian concern and solidarity rather than one of competitive envy.

The Witness of 1 Peter

If analysis of James’s language about God demands its being placed in relation to that letter’s moral instruction, such instruction in 1 Peter must likewise be seen in relation to this letter’s statements about Jesus Christ. In this composition, Christology is central. Reading James, we are struck

by the continuity and consistency in what God does and who God is. In 1 Peter, the note of newness is everywhere sounded, and that newness is directly connected to the pivotal role of Jesus. Several examples can illustrate the point.

We have seen that Jas 1:18 speaks of God “giving birth” to humans through a word of truth. But in 1 Pet 1:3 we read that by his great mercy God has “given us a new birth (*ἀναγεννήσας*) into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” It is not a birth but a rebirth, and it is accomplished through the resurrection of Jesus. This rebirth extends also to the reshaping of the symbols of Torah. Peter takes over the notion of “inheritance” (*κληρονομία*) as the reality hoped for, and redefines it in light of the resurrection as something “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:4).

A second example: In Jas 5:10, the prophets are mentioned as examples of suffering and patience, but in 1 Pet 1:10–11 the prophets appear as those who “prophesied of the grace that was to be yours [making] careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory.” The significance of prophecy is predictive, and the spirit at work in the prophets of old is, we note, the *πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ* (“the Spirit of Christ”). In 1 Peter, moreover, it is not the suffering of the prophets that serves as an example to the readers, but the suffering of Christ (2:21).

A third example: James 1:10–11 echoes Isa 40:6–7 to make a point about the transitory character of wealth. Just as the flower fades, “It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.” In 1 Pet 1:23–25, the use of Isa 40:6–9 is quite different. Peter extends the citation to include the words, “but the word of the Lord endures forever” (Isa 40:9), and identifies it with the gospel: “That word is the good news that was announced to you” (1 Pet 1:25). The point of the citation and identification, furthermore, is once more the newness of their experience of God: “You have been born anew (*ἀναγεγεννημένοι*), not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23).

The complexity of 1 Peter’s language about God is signaled from the start by the letter’s greeting. Peter identifies himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1), that is, as one commissioned by the Messiah Jesus. By itself, this could refer to Peter’s designation as an apostle during Jesus’ ministry. But in the identification of the readers, Peter continues, “who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be

obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood" (1 Pet 1:2). Here, God the Father, Spirit, and Jesus Christ are both linked and distinguished. Jesus' blood can be sprinkled on the readers—clearly not literally but symbolically, as a sign of the effect of his death. They are sanctified by the Spirit (whose?). These relations are made more complex by 1:3, where Peter blesses "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God is not only "Father" in the senses derived from Torah, that is, as creator or as the begetter of the people Israel. In a very specific sense this God is "Father" of Jesus the Messiah. Taking this designation seriously means at the very least to see everything attributed to Jesus as derived ultimately from "God" as well, since the Son is minimally the agent of the Father and maximally a different sort of presence of the Father. To speak about "God" in 1 Peter therefore demands speaking as well about Jesus Christ and about the Spirit. Although the language needed to clarify these relations is still three centuries away, it is obvious how 1 Peter both enables and demands that sort of ontological analysis. Precisely because the relations between Father, Son, and Spirit remain here implicit and unexamined, statements about all three are pertinent to our perception of God. For the purposes of this essay, then, a brief consideration of 1 Peter's pneumatology and Christology is not a distraction but rather a recognition of this composition's distinctive way of speaking about *ὁ θεός*.

What Peter says about spirit has its own ambiguities. Note, for example, the way the letter speaks about the death and resurrection of Jesus: He was "put to death in the flesh (*σάρκι*), but made alive in the spirit (*πνεύματι*)" (3:18). The NRSV catches some of the ambiguity by placing a definite article ("the spirit") where the Greek has none, but then also leaving "spirit" uncapitalized. What does the text say? Is it that Christ was made alive with respect to his spirit? Or is it that he was made alive through the Spirit (of God)? The choice is not made easier by the following phrase: "in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison" (3:19). The "in which" refers to the spirit, and the most obvious way to read this would be: "being brought back to life as Spirit, he went in that state to proclaim to the imprisoned spirits." This reading is supported by 4:6: "For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does." In these passages, language about *pneuma* denotes a mode of existence that is not exclusive to God. When, however, Peter speaks of the readers being "sanctified by (or 'in,' *ἐν*) the Spirit" (1:2), the logic moves in the other direction. The phrase could as easily be translated "in a spirit of sanctification," without the capital letter

and the definite article. In this case, however, the NRSV properly nudges us toward seeing this spirit as the “Holy Spirit,” because sanctification is exclusively a prerogative of God.

Three final mentions of the spirit move us even closer to the activity of God and to the distinctive way in which Peter points to continuity within the new experience of God among his Gentile readers. Peter uses the explicit title “Holy Spirit” in 1:12 with reference to the gospel: “It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!” The conviction that the preaching of the gospel was accompanied by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit is scarcely unique to Peter (see Acts 10:44; Rom 15:19; Gal 3:2; 1 Thess 1:5; Heb 2:4). But this statement is immediately preceded by another concerning the prophets, who “prophesied of the grace that was to be yours [making] careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory” (1 Pet 1:10–11). Once more, the NRSV translation makes a choice where there are several options. The Greek could be rendered, “the messianic spirit.” By capitalizing “spirit” and giving it a definite article, the NRSV provides a very strong reading—in my estimation, correctly. Peter intends his readers to understand that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the prophets of old is now at work in the gospel. But even more: that Holy Spirit was from the beginning connected to the Messiah, who is now understood to be Jesus. The distance between old and new is collapsed even as it is stated. Such foreshortening helps us understand the otherwise startling way in which Peter applies the epithets of the historical Israel directly and without more ado to his Gentile readers in 2:9–10. They are indeed the ones who had not been shown mercy but were now being shown mercy (by God). But if the “Spirit of Christ” had been at work in all prophecy, then in one sense these Gentile believers had been in view all along in the words of the prophets. Finally, Peter asserts that if his readers suffer “for the name of Christ,” they will be blessed and the Spirit of God (τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα) will rest upon them” (4:14).

The Christ has in fact, according to Peter, been “destined (or ‘foreknown,’ προεγνωσμένου) before the foundation of the world, but was revealed (that is, ‘made known,’ φανερωθέντος) at the end of the ages for your sake” (1:20). These passive voices indicate that the one knowing and the one revealing is God. And as God is the source of the Christ, so is God the goal of the

Messiah's work. Peter continues, "Through him you have come to trust in God" (1:21). Like Paul, Peter focuses primarily on the basic elements of the *kerygma*: the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, his resurrection and exaltation, and his future appearance. Thus, Peter's readers have been purified by the blood of Jesus Christ (1:2) and have been purchased in ransom by his precious blood (1:19). Jesus suffered in the flesh (4:1), suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring them to God (3:18). Jesus not only suffered for them (2:21), but did so in a manner that left them an example of how they might suffer (2:21–23), not because of wrongdoing, but in the name of Christ (4:14). Jesus was also resurrected from the dead (1:3, 21), made alive in the Spirit (3:18, 21) and is exalted at the right hand of God with angels subject to him (3:22). He will appear again (1:7, 13).

Even in the present, however, Jesus is the object of love and faith: "Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy" (1:8). Jesus not only brings them to God (3:18), but it is through him also that spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God are offered in the assembly (2:4). Depending on how we understand "you have tasted that the Lord is good" (2:3)—does *kyrios* here refer to Christ or to ὁ θεός?—Peter may also be suggesting that they can approach the risen Jesus: "Come to him, a living stone" (2:4).

The intensity of their personal relationship with the risen Jesus, not to mention Peter's sense of Jesus' present status, is revealed not only in expressions such as "love him" and "believe in him" but also in the imperative: "in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord" (3:15 NRSV), or "sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts." The fact that a textual variant has θεός ("God") rather than χριστός ("Christ") as the object of this sanctification only makes the point more emphatically: In 1 Peter, just such a close relation between the two is implied. Christ Jesus now shares the eternal glory of God (5:10). It does not surprise us, therefore, to hear Peter say in 4:11, after listing all the things that God is doing for them, "so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). To him [i.e., Jesus Christ] belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen."

The answer to the question of how 1 Peter speaks about God must include all of the above. But statements about Christ and the Spirit by no means exhaust the subject. Like James, Peter has a range of remarkable explicit statements about ὁ θεός, so many, in fact, that more than a mere (and partial) catalogue of them is not possible in the present essay. We can organize these statements into titles or epithets, actions, ascribed

qualities, and attitudes/ actions directed toward God. These are drawn both from Peter's direct statements and from the implications of the Scriptures he cites.

Peter calls God "Father" in the greeting (1:2), and we have seen how this title is given one specification in 1:3 when God is called "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." But that title for God is available to others besides Jesus. First Peter 1:17 has, "if you invoke as Father . . .," indicating that this was a way in which all Christians could designate God. Peter also uses the epithet "the God of all grace" in 5:10, "the shepherd and guardian of [their] souls" in 2:25, and "the chief shepherd" in 5:4. Each of these epithets, as we shall see, corresponds to God's actions.

Everything Peter says about δ θεός points to a power that later language would identify as proper to a person (*πρόσωπον*). This composition has no negative theology, no criticism of its first-order language of ascription that would provide a cautionary hedge around anthropomorphism. But attention paid to the sort of personal qualities and actions attributed to δ θεός makes it clear that this is a "person" far beyond any capacity known by humans. God is first the one who knows. Peter speaks of God's "fore-knowledge" twice, with reference to the status of his readers as the elect sojourners of the Diaspora (1:1) and to the destiny of Christ (1:20). From his citation of Ps 34:13–17, we learn that God sees the righteous and hears their prayers (3:12). It is a function of God's knowledge that he can be designated as judge. In 1:17, Peter says that God judges people according to their deeds *ἀπροσωπολήπτως* ("impartially"). By attributing "no respect for persons" to God rather than to humans, Peter again resembles Paul (see Rom 2:11) more than James (see Jas 2:1, 9). In 2:23, Peter states that in his suffering Jesus made no threat in return, but "entrusted himself to the one who judges justly (*δικαίως*)." And in 4:5, he asserts that those who continue to live riotously (that is, in the way his readers used to before their conversion) "will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead." The claim that God knows from before the creation of the world (1:20), sees the works of humans without discrimination, and judges both dead and living, is to state that δ θεός is transcendent, that is, so far beyond the created order as to be intimately present to all things. It is in this connection that Peter's language about *pneuma* is pertinent (see the discussion above).

God also wills. First Peter speaks of God's will in connection with the ordering of reality to which humans should conform in attitude and behavior. It is God's will that they live in accord with God's desires (4:2), that they silence their critics by doing good (2:15), that they suffer for

doing good rather than doing evil (3:17; 4:19), that pastors shepherd their flock willingly (5:2). God's desires are expressed in action. God creates the world (1:20) and actively intervenes in creation through words (1:25; 4:11) that are alive and enduring (1:23). Scripture speaks some of these words and teaches how God acts to do his will, as in "laying in Zion a stone" (2:6; Isa 8:14), or turning his face against those who do evil (3:13; Ps 34:16), or waiting patiently during the days of Noah (3:20; Gen 6:11–22), or opposing the proud even as he gives grace to the lowly (5:5; Prov 3:34). Peter emphasizes the *call* of God, who has summoned (καλέσαστος) the Gentiles "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9), who has called them for the very purpose of receiving a blessing (3:9) and to be holy as he is holy (1:15), who has, finally, called them to his eternal glory in Christ (5:10). Those whom God has so called are his elect or chosen ones (1:2; 2:4). It is to them above all that God announces the good news (1:25; 4:17).

God's actions for those whom he has chosen—his people (2:10), his flock (5:2), his servants (2:16), his house (4:17)—are not verbal only. In one of the composition's most striking statements, Peter says, "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you" (5:7). God's care for humans is expressed through a variety of gifts ("graces"). God gives them credit for suffering innocently (2:20), and God gives grace to the humble (5:5). Peter correctly summarizes by speaking of "the God of all grace" in 5:10 and testifying to "the true grace of God" (5:12). God's favor is shown in that mercy (2:10) by which they have been given a share in an inheritance and blessing (1:4; 3:9) that goes beyond that of the land, wealth, or posterity, a blessing that consists in life (4:6), expressed first through the resurrection of Jesus (1:3, 21) and then through the rebirth or regeneration of God's chosen ones (1:3, 23), now through the protection God shows them (1:5). All this is God's way of saving their lives (or souls, 1:9–10) and leading them to God's own glory that is shared by Christ (1:21; 4:11; 5:10). In the present, God "will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish" them (5:10).

In all of these actions, the qualities of God are revealed: God's great mercy (1:3), power (1:5), holiness (1:16), life (1:23), sweetness (2:3), light (2:9), justice (2:23), patience (3:20), grace (4:10), and strength (4:11). Those who have been brought to God by Christ (3:18), therefore, respond by declaring God blessed (1:3), submitting to his mighty hand (5:6), fearing him (2:17), praying to him (3:21), directing their faith toward him (1:21) as well as their hope (3:5), and seeking in every way to glorify God (2:12; 4:11, 16).

Conclusion

In the middle of the second century, the question of God became critical for Christians. In the face of the challenge posed by various forms of Gnosticism, it was necessary to articulate more clearly the rich, evocative, but also deeply ambiguous language of the New Testament concerning ὁ θεός. Above all, the church had to decide how radical the new experience of God through Jesus Christ really was. Was its experience so new that Jesus could only be truly perceived as the manifestation of a god totally other than the creator god? Such was the claim of Marcion. And if the claim was that the experience of Jesus was somehow continuous with the revelation of God in Torah, then how was it new? Was not the logical corollary of continuity a form of Christianity in which God's activity in Jesus was collapsed entirely to the precedents of Torah? Such seems to have been the position of the Ebionites. The challenge to orthodoxy was to recognize both continuity and discontinuity while avoiding these extreme expressions of each.

What do we learn through Jesus about the identity and nature of God? To answer this question, the Gnostics wanted to read only Paul—and only according to the key to Paul provided by their convictions. The Ebionites wanted to read anything but Paul. Neither James nor 1 Peter by themselves provide a direct or adequate answer to the question. But they suggest that Paul's statements should be read within the context of the entire canon, and when so read, do not appear idiosyncratic. Together with other canonical witnesses, they offer invaluable testimony to two central convictions out of which any true statement about ὁ θεός must be based. God is ever new, says Peter, even while being the same. Yes, says James, and God is always the same even while ever new.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

JOHN AND THOMAS IN CONTEXT

The connection between canon-formation and community identity is clearer in the case of Christianity than in some other religious traditions,¹ because the selection of certain books involved as well the explicit rejection of other books and of other teachings as heretical. Although the core of the Christian collection had gathered organically through a process of exchange and use,² the crisis posed by Gnosticism demanded a more explicit selection. Whatever the antecedents of this complex religious sensibility,³ we meet its Christian version in the second century, and the sources are filled with the noise of battle.

Claims about proper teaching, authoritative books, and a visible succession of reliable teachers, point to a deeper and more fundamental conflict concerning the true nature of the Christian religion. Teachers such as Valentinus and Ptolemy saw Jesus primarily as a revealer of transformative knowledge to secretly designated teachers, and locate this *gnosis* in books other than those commonly read in public worship. Although certainty is not possible on this point, they appeared to claim as well that such revealed knowledge was not merely supplementary to the exoteric tradition but rather supplanted it. The esoteric tradition was the original Christianity that had been obscured by the “apostolic men” and their organizational, sacramental, and all-too-accessible Catholicism.⁴ On the other side, Tertullian and Irenaeus claimed that the original Christianity was the public one: Jesus’ teachings to the apostles were handed on by their episcopal successors. Not an esoteric code but a public profession of faith provided the key to the scriptures. Not secret books but the

¹ See W.H. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J.Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence: Towards a Redescription of Canon,” in *Imagining Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 36–52.

² See L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, second revised edition with Todd Penner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 595–619.

³ For the range of options, see U. Bianchi, ed., *Le Origini della Gnosticismo* (Studies in the History of Religions, Supplement to Numen 12; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967).

⁴ The polemical edge is found especially in *The Gospel of Philip* 1–6, 17, 21 *The Gospel of Mary* 10, and *The Testimony of Truth*.

apostolic writings shape authentic Christian identity. Real Christianity, furthermore, was not a small and separate band of *illuminati* but an *ecclesia mixta*, an assembly of sinners and righteous, wise and stupid, perfect and fallible, all together.⁵

My summary is dazzlingly oversimplified. Gnosticism, we have come to understand, was less “one thing” than a bewildering variety of things.⁶ The Nag-Hammadi Library discovered in 1945⁷ shows us—almost for the first time—what Gnostics had to say for themselves,⁸ and we begin to appreciate how tidy Irenaeus had made things. Because, as an heir to the Greek philosophical tradition, he thought in terms of schools (σχολαί) with doctrines, he transmuted his opponents into such neat categories as well.⁹ The collection of codices discovered in Egypt revealed how sprawling, unwieldy, and various were the writings that could be grouped together within leather bindings. So disparate are the manifestations of this ancient dualistic tendency that some have argued for dispensing with the term “Gnosticism” altogether.¹⁰

For that matter, pressure toward canonization was applied not only by the expansionist tendencies, but also by the canonical contraction pro-

⁵ The classic argument, which also provides the strategy for all subsequent ecclesial self-definition, is laid out by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* 1, 10 and III, 1–5.

⁶ For a classic exposition of Gnosticism as a unified yet diverse phenomenon in the history of religions, see K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, translation edited by R. McL. Wilson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987); for a recent discussion of the role Gnosticism played in the canonization process, see P. Perkins, “Gnosticism and the Christian Bible,” in *The Canon Debate*, edited by L.M. McDonald and J.A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002) 355–371.

⁷ For an account of the discovery, see J.M. Robinson, “The Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (1979) 206–224. I will be using the translations of the compositions found in J.M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1977), hereafter *NHLE*; see also B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1987).

⁸ The Coptic manuscript of the Gnostic composition *Pistis Sophia* came to the British Museum after the death of its owner in 1774, and was published in 1851. Together with the apocryphal acts of the apostles and Ptolemy’s *Letter to Flora*, it was the only primary source available to the great historian Adolf Harnack when he wrote his *History of Dogma* in 1886–1889 [translated from the 3rd German edition by N. Buchanan (New York: Dover Publications, 1961)], and, dependent completely on patristic literature, characterized Gnosticism as “the acute hellenization of Christianity.”

⁹ Note the way in which Irenaeus approaches the “schools” (σχολαί) through their founders and successors, characteristic doctrines, and moral corollaries (*Against Heresies* I, 11–31) in much the same way that Diogenes Laertius will lay out the various “schools” (σχολαί) of Greek philosophy, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.

¹⁰ M. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

posed by Marcion,¹¹ and the supplanting of the fourfold Gospel by Tatian's *Diatesseron*.¹² It is nevertheless fair to say that both tendencies were sponsored by a profound dualism that sought salvation of the spirit apart from or beyond the realm of the body, whether individual or corporate.¹³ And while ecclesiastical power struggles may have played some role,¹⁴ the very nature of the Christian religion was seriously in negotiation: the heresiologists saw themselves as defending the "truth of the gospel" against distortion,¹⁵ while their opponents undoubtedly viewed their version of Christianity as "the Gospel of Truth."¹⁶

One benefit of the Nag-Hammadi discoveries has been the liberation of historians from all-encompassing explanations. The past decades have seen the patient sorting through of the diversity of writings found in that collection, together with a willingness to allow the diversity to stand on its own terms and to challenge our assumed codes of interpretation. Scholarship has progressed by regression to the reexamination of little things, leaving grand theories for a later day.¹⁷ But such regression is also a delight, for it allows our imaginations room to play. In such a spirit of playfulness, I want in this essay to engage in a thought experiment, and ask a "what if" question. What if the *Gospel of Thomas* from the Nag Hammadi collection had in fact been accepted into the New Testament canon? How would it have been read and understood? How would the rest of the canon be affected? What difference would its inclusion have made for the

¹¹ The best source for Marcion is Tertullian, who discusses him in *de Praescriptione* 7:3; 30, 1–2; 41–43; *De Came Christi* 1–8; *De Resurrectione* 2,4, 14 and 54; *De Anima* 21, and throughout *Adversus Marcionem Libri Quinti*. For a recent discussion of the role Marcion may have played in canon-formation, see J. Barton, "Marcion Revisited," in *The Canon Debate*, 341–354.

¹² For the position that Irenaeus' categorizing of Tatian as a Valentinian (*Against Heresies* I, 28, 1) is erroneous, see now E.J. Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian* (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹³ For a survey of the varieties of dualism in second century Christianity, see P.R. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Given the Gnostic sensibility, it is difficult to imagine how it could have mustered a significant challenge at institutional level, but the character of Valentinianism in particular threatened the institution through its subtle reinterpretation.

¹⁵ Paul uses the phrase ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου in Gal 2:5 and 2:14.

¹⁶ In *Against Heresies* III, 11,9, Irenaeus refers to a "comparatively recent writing" produced by the Valentinians called "The Gospel of Truth," which are the first words of the theological reflection now designated with that title in the Nag Hammadi collection (I, 3 and XII, 2).

¹⁷ See, e.g., B. Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, two volumes (Studies in the History of Religions, Supplements to Numen 41; Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1980).

shaping of readers' identity? In the present essay, I cannot engage all of these questions, but can only work my way toward them in a preliminary fashion.

I do not intend to argue that the *GT* should have been excluded or included, nor am I explicitly asking why it was excluded, although my conclusions touch on that question. Rather, I want to test the effect of canonical placement on a specific writing, asking how placement among other readings might affect reading. The most obvious objection to the exercise is obvious: we cannot know how ancient readers would have been affected, even if they went through the compositions precisely in the order of their present arrangement. All that we are able to say is how we, as present-day readers find our reading of the text to be affected by its placement in a selection of other compositions.¹⁸ The exercise I propose is artificial, but it does enable us to pose a serious question: how might anthologization control polyvalence in texts?

I begin with two premises concerning the New Testament itself. The first is the irreducible literary and thematic diversity of the writings included in the canon. When I speak about implied points of consonance among them, I agree that these occur within a framework of diversity and, on some points, disagreement.¹⁹ The second is that the New Testament does not provide its own interpretation. It is not perspicuous. If it were, the battle over its meaning would not have been so fierce or lengthy. As Elaine Pagels' studies of the Gnostic interpreters of John and Paul have shown, the texts of the New Testament can be read within quite distinct interpretive codes.²⁰ Our accustomed reading appears "obvious" to us only because what Irenaeus calls the *regula fidei* of orthodox confession has been so deeply ingrained in us.

Nevertheless, I argue in this essay, the orthodox *regula fidei* is not by any means arbitrary. It does correspond to the strongest signals provided by the compositions themselves and by the way in which the compositions fit together in the collection. I make this case by carrying out the same

¹⁸ In this regard, we are like theologians who read a Gospel in the context of the Bible as a whole rather than in the imagined context of its original audience, or students of Shakespeare who consider one of his plays as textual compositions within the complete works, rather than as dramas performed before an Elizabethan audience.

¹⁹ See L.T. Johnson, "Koinonia: Diversity and Unity in Early Christianity," *Theology Digest* 46/4 (1999) 303–313.

²⁰ E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973).

exercise on the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Thomas, asking about the space between that which is “different” and that which is “deviant.”

Elaine Pagels’ Comparison of John and Thomas

In a recent book, Elaine Pagels also carries out a comparison between the Fourth Gospel (*FG*) and the *Gospel of Thomas* (*GT*), apparently led by a supposition similar to my own: “For if Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been joined to the Gospel of Thomas instead of the Gospel of John, for example, or had *both* John and Thomas been included in the New Testament canon, Christians probably would have read the first three gospels quite differently.”²¹ In fact, however, her project is different from my own in a number of ways.

She clearly has a personal stake in rendering the *GT* as attractively as possible, for her analysis is preceded by what can only be called a personal narrative of Gnostic discovery. As a teen-ager she belonged to an evangelical group that gave her a feeling of inclusion—a group that loved the Gospel of John. She did not appreciate then the “disturbing undercurrents” of that Gospel (and evangelical Christianity) that led to judging and excluding others.²² Then, she learned Greek and read ancient literature, and saw there a “different religious sensibility.”²³ This discovery of a wider world of spirituality led her “to look for the ‘real Christianity’—believing, as Christians traditionally have, that I might find it by immersing myself in the earliest Christian sources.”²⁴ Her personal quest was rewarded by the discovery of Gnostic texts at Harvard that showed diversity within ancient Christianity “that later, ‘official’ versions of Christian history had suppressed so effectively that only now, in the Harvard graduate school, did we hear about them.” More than that, she was “surprised to find in some of them unexpected spiritual power,” naming specifically a passage from the *GT*.²⁵ The upshot of her study is that she “began to understand the political concerns that shaped the early Christian movement.”²⁶

²¹ E. Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 38 (emphasis original).

²² *Ibid.*, 30–31.

²³ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁶ Here she touches on the theme that she developed in *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

Any number of observations might be made about this narrative, but three elements in particular stand out. First, Pagels has effectively equated John with evangelical Christianity and evangelical Christianity with exclusionary tendencies. As a master of the soft argument of suggestion, she knows that a further inference follows: canonical Christianity also is all about exclusion rather than inclusion. Second, she suggests that “real Christianity” is to be found in the “earliest sources,” once more suggesting that these are not the writings found in the canon. Third, she neatly suggests a connection between the ancient “suppression” of writings with “unexpected spiritual power” with her earlier experience of an exclusionary form of “canonical” Christianity centered in the Gospel of John. Before any analysis at all, in short, she has made John stand for exclusion and Thomas stand for inclusion.

The perspective established by her preliminary narrative continues through several premises that are, once more, not explicitly stated, but instead suggested. The first is that the *FG* and the *GT* are roughly contemporaneous.²⁷ In fact, “Thomas Christians” are prior to “Johannine Christians,” because—and here is the second premise—the *FG* is written expressly against those “Thomas Christians,” so their positions were known to the author of the Fourth Gospel.²⁸ Indeed, John 20 is an indirect attack on them through the negative portrayal of “Doubting Thomas.”²⁹ The final premise is that the *FG* controls the reading of the other canonical Gospels, specifically with respect to belief in the divinity of Jesus, which, again by suggestion, is the key to the tendency toward the exclusion of other spiritualities.³⁰

²⁷ Pagels does not engage in a close analysis of the layers of *GT*. Her notes suggest that she accepts the early dating of at least the material parallel to Q—referring to S. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Wisdom Tradition* (New York, 1963), S.J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, CA, 1993), and R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London: Routledge, 1997)—although it is by no means clear that, even if one accepts that the materials paralleling the Synoptics are as early as the hypothetical Q, the materials that give *GT* its distinctive character are as early as the Gospel of John. In any case, the entire practice of determining redactional layers must be closely scrutinized because of the tendency toward circularity; see C.M. Tuckett, “Q and Thomas: Evidence of a Primitive ‘Wisdom Gospel’? A Response to H. Koester,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 67 (1991) 346–360.

²⁸ Pagels, 34; she suggests, indeed, that the author of John may have met some of these “Thomas Christians” in person (58).

²⁹ Pagels, 58. She refers to G.R. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

³⁰ Pagels, 38: “. . . most Christians came to read these earlier gospels through John’s lens, and thus find in all of them evidence of John’s conviction that Jesus was ‘Lord and God.’”

Building on these premises, Pagels first compares John to the Synoptics on two points only: the sequence and meaning of the temple incident, and the claim to divinity. The focus on these two points of contrast tends to minimize the many other points that John and the Synoptics have in common. Second, Pagels compares John to Thomas also on two points: she claims that they are alike in focusing on creation rather than the end-time, and in having Jesus reveal privately to his followers.³¹ Third, she makes the major point of difference between John and Thomas the same as the one between John and the Synoptics: John thinks God can be approached only through Jesus, whereas Thomas thinks that each person can find the divine within. The effect of this is to suggest (again) that John is exclusively responsible for the divinity of Christ within the New Testament,³² and for the tendency toward exclusion in Christianity.

A More Adequate Comparison

Pagels' treatment of John and Thomas is less a serious engagement with the two compositions than a slapdash and highly selective characterization. A more adequate analysis needs to include at least five elements. The first is to compare *GT* and *FG* with the one thing they both certainly have in common, namely the Synoptic tradition.³³ The second is to discuss

³¹ Pagels distorts the evidence on this point. She states that "John and Thomas give similar accounts of what Jesus taught privately. Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who say that Jesus warned of the coming "end of time," both John and Thomas say that he directed his disciples instead toward the beginning of time—to the creation account of Genesis 1—and identify Jesus with the divine light that came into being 'in the beginning' (40). But John makes clear what Jesus' private revelation to the disciples was (John 13–17), and it is not in the least connected to the prologue of the Gospel that declares Jesus to be the light coming into the world (John 1:1–3). She confuses, deliberately or not, the evangelist's perspective on Jesus with the content of Jesus' private revelation to the disciples.

³² On pp. 44–45, she acknowledges the high Christology of Phil 2, and rejects the notion of an evolution from a lower to higher Christology within early Christianity, but her failure to deal with the New Testament language as a whole (Hebrews, etc), and her systematic downplaying of elements suggesting Jesus' divinity in the Synoptics, have the effect of isolating John as the NT writing that makes Jesus' divinity most explicit. For a better accounting of the data, see L. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

³³ In contrast to Pagels, I find more convincing the scholarship that sees in the *GT* signs of dependence on the Synoptic tradition as such rather than on a form of the sayings tradition prior to the Synoptics; see, for example, R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Mowbray, 1960), B. Gaertner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* trans. E. Sharpe (London: Collins, 1961), F.M. Strickert, *The Pronouncement Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptics* (University of Iowa PhD Dissertation, 1988), J.-E. Menard, *Das*

each one's distinctive material in relation to what they share. The third is to consider the compositional or redactional controls in each composition that might direct the reader toward one mode of construal or another. The fourth is to examine the kinds of controls for reading provided by anthological placement. The fifth is to ask how each writing might have been read if it had been placed within the other collection.

The Gospel of John

I propose that Pagels has it exactly backward. The other Gospels are not dominated by John. Rather, the New Testament is dominated by the Synoptic Gospels and Paul, and in more than a purely quantitative way. Together, they provide the interpretive grid for the understanding of other writings. Scholars have long recognized how the second volume of Luke-Acts places Paul in the context of the larger mission and tends to domesticate his more radical tendencies.³⁴ Less frequently noted is the way that Acts also connects Paul to the story of Jesus recounted in Luke's Gospel. Acts not only continues the story told by the Gospel, it also recapitulates that story through the speeches of Peter and Paul, which rehearse the story of Jesus in accord with the basic synoptic pattern.³⁵

The connection between Paul and the synoptic story of Jesus is not, however, due entirely to Acts; recent study of the narrative substructure of Pauline theology has shown the importance of the story of Jesus in Paul's

Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen (BZNW 29; Berlin: A. Toepfmann, 1964). A particularly discerning analysis is provided by J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* 3 volumes (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001) 1:123–139. This case is heightened by the fact that other Nag-Hammadi writings show clear knowledge and use of the canonical writings; see C.M. Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition*, ed. J. Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986).

³⁴ Thus, for F.C. Baur, the portrait of Paul in Acts represented the harmonizing tendencies of "early Catholicism" and made Paul appear in partnership with Peter rather than opposed to him; see *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ; His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teaching* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003 [1873]) 1–14; Baur considered Acts to have distorted the historical Paul in the same way that John distorted the historical Jesus. Ward Gasque notes, "The Book of Acts, according to Baur, stands in the same relationship to the epistles of Paul as the Gospel of John stands to the Synoptics," in *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 40.

³⁵ For the argument concerning Acts, see L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1991) and *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); for literature on the speeches of Acts, see L.T. Johnson, *Septuagintal Midrash in the Speeches of Acts* (Pere Marquette Lecture 33; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002).

letters.³⁶ By means of allusion and application, Paul repeatedly points his readers to a narrative pattern concerning Jesus that provides the content for his cryptic phrases, *νοῦς Χριστοῦ* (1 Cor 2:16) and *νόμος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (Gal 6:2): the faith of the human Jesus has become exemplar both for the obedience of his followers toward God and for their mutual dispositions of love.³⁷

The simple juxtaposition of verses can illustrate the deep narrative consonance between Paul and the synoptic tradition. Paul tells the Galatians, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ (*νόμος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* = ‘Pattern of the Messiah’).” Jesus tells his disciples in Mark, “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). For Paul, the most critical part of Jesus’ story is its ending, Jesus’ obedient death on the cross (see especially Phil 2:6–11), which Paul understands as the “obedience of [Jesus’] faith” (Rom 3:21–26; 5:12–21).³⁸ In the Synoptics, likewise, the passion and death of Jesus dominates the account of healings and teachings: Jesus is above all the suffering Son of Man. In Paul, the pattern of Christian existence replicates Christ’s self-emptying by looking to the interests of others (Phil 2:1–5). In the Synoptics, the path of discipleship consists of following in the way of suffering first traversed by Jesus (Mark 8:34–37). The connections are most obvious between Paul and Mark,³⁹ but although Matthew and Luke work variations on the pattern, and to some extent obscure it by the addition of other material, it remains for them the basic framework

³⁶ The fundamental insight here was offered by the friend and colleague to whom this essay is dedicated, Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 56; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983). I have expressed my admiration for this contribution in a forward to the second edition (Grand Rapids: Oerdmans, 2002).

³⁷ Hays’ insights have borne fruit in subsequent contributions to an understanding of Paul’s theology; see especially K. Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God’s Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2002) and T.D. Stegman, *The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin to Paul’s Argument in 2 Corinthians* (Analecta Biblica 158; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2005).

³⁸ L.T. Johnson, “Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982) 391–401; I develop this thesis further in *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

³⁹ The point here is not that there is a literary dependence of Mark on Paul, but rather a deep consonance in their respective perceptions of the character of Jesus; for the technical discussion of “affinities with Pauline teaching,” see V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to Mark*, second edition (London: MacMillan, 1966) 125–129. For the argument concerning the convergence of NT witnesses on the question of Jesus’ human character and the nature of discipleship, see L.T. Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

for telling the story of Jesus. And it is against this massive narrative background that we must consider what is different in the Fourth Gospel.

How John is Different

It was surely not be accident that John was the Gospel most admired by Gnostic teachers. The first full-scale commentary on John, indeed, seems to have been that of Heracleon, a disciple of Valentinus.⁴⁰ In ways both interesting and important, John appears among the earliest Gospels as an alternative to the Synoptics, not only in the obvious points of divergence concerning the length and location of Jesus' ministry, but also in the overall depiction of Jesus and his disciples, a depiction that would make the *FG* more appealing than the other canonical gospels to a Gnostic sensibility.⁴¹

In the *FG*, Jesus is above all the revealer.⁴² His self-referential monologues both reveal and establish the distance between himself ("the Man from above") and his opponents ("those from below"). He can be designated simply as "the Word," and Käsemann gets at least part of the truth when he terms John's Christology a "naive docetism."⁴³ Jesus reveals as father one whom the world does not know (1:10). The world, indeed, is a place of darkness that can neither overcome the light nor grasp it (1:5).⁴⁴ As there is an absolute distance between Jesus and the world, defined by place of origin, so is there also between Jesus' followers and the world: the world hates them as it hated him (John 15:18–21).⁴⁵

There is a different sense of time in John's Gospel: temporal distinctions seem to collapse into the figure of Jesus. The ancient scriptures speak of

⁴⁰ We are able to reconstruct substantial portions of Heracleon's commentary because of the generous citation (and refutation) of it in Origen's, *Commentary on John*.

⁴¹ John's Gospel does not have a direct literary connection to the Synoptic Gospels, but is in touch with a substantial amount of the traditions used by the Synoptics. For a review of the data, see Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament* 528–532.

⁴² See especially R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, translated by G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971 [1964]), and his *Theology of the New Testament*, translated K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1955) 2:49–69.

⁴³ The phrase was used by E. Käsemann in his 1966 Shaffer Lectures at Yale University, published as *The Testament of Jesus according to John 17*, translated G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 26.

⁴⁴ For the (perhaps intentional) ambiguity in *καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν*, see R.E. Brown *The Gospel according to John*, two volumes (Anchor Bible 29; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966) 1:7–8.

⁴⁵ The classic study is W.A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972) 44–72.

him (5:39), Abraham sees his day (8:56), and Isaiah beheld his glory (12:41). The struggles of his followers are anticipated by the conflicts experienced by Jesus (9:22; 12:42). And there is little future eschatology. Judgment is now, in response to the presence of Jesus (3:19–21) and in the continuation of his presence through the spirit among his disciples (16:8–15).

The disciples in John are those who have received the light that comes from God. They have “seen his glory” and on that basis can be called, simply, “children of God” (1:12–13). After the dramatic close of his public ministry, Jesus draws his disciples to himself and delivers to them the secret, non-ironic revelation of who he is, where he has come from, and where he is going (13:1–17, 26), that he made available to the public only through veiled signs and ironic disputation.⁴⁶ As for John’s understanding of “church,” it would seem ideally fitted to the anti-hierarchical impulses of many Gnostics. Jesus’ followers are simply “friends,” equally joined to the vine (15:1–27). The indwelling of Father and Son is shared by all who are “not of the world” (17:16–21). The *FG* has no trace of public institution or visible authority structure.

Finally, the *FG* singles out among the disciples a shadowy figure designated as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” who offers intriguing possibilities for Gnostic interpretation. He is the one who leans on Jesus’ breast at the supper to receive intimate knowledge (13:23). He witnesses the mysterious outpouring of blood and water (18:26–37). He outruns Peter to the empty tomb and was the first to believe (20:1–10). And throughout, he remains anonymous! He is the ideal source for a tradition of secret teaching beside the hierarchical structure of the visible church.

So obvious are these elements of the *FG* that in the early third century the Roman presbyter Gaius reputedly rejected John’s Gospel and the Book of Revelation because he considered them to be the work of the Gnostic teacher Cerinthus.⁴⁷ Precisely the possibility of understanding John within a Gnostic framework, furthermore, may even have divided Johannine Christians. The Johannine letters place particular stress on the coming of Christ in the flesh and his expiatory death, arguably in response to a possible reading of the Johannine tradition.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Pagels is right to emphasize the distinctive character of Jesus’ private revelations in John, but she mischaracterizes the content when she suggests (again!) that Jesus revealed teachings about the beginning; Pagels, 40. For a more adequate account, see F.F. Segovia, *The Farewell of the Word: The Johannine Call to Abide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁴⁷ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II, 26, 6.

⁴⁸ See the argument of R.E. Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

Compositional Controls

The elements that make John so markedly different are held in control both by internal composition and canonical placement, which I consider in turn. By compositional controls, I mean other elements within the Gospel itself that serve to mitigate the tendency toward the Gnostic that I have identified.

1. The “naïve docetism” of the *FG* is countered by explicit affirmations of Jesus’ humanity. The Word *does* “become flesh,” after all (1:14), and John stresses the fleshly character of Jesus’ existence: his fatigue (4:6), indecision (7:1–10), and human anguish (11:33–35; 12:27). In this Gospel, Jesus’ interactions with other humans are real, complex, and perilous (6:60–71; 8:12–59). In the end, he truly dies, with his side pierced by a lance, and his blood spilled (19:34–37). John did not really need to provide explicit resurrection accounts, for throughout the narrative, Jesus is “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), yet, if anything, his accounts are even more palpable than the Synoptics: linens and kerchiefs are left in the tomb (20:6–7), a woman clings to his robe (20:17), a finger is placed in his side (20:27), and fish are fried on the seashore (21:9). Jesus is the true bread “come down from heaven,” but his flesh is also to be “munched” (τρώγων) by believers (6:58).
2. As I have suggested, John’s emphasis is on a realized eschatology: Jesus is also judge in his earthly manifestation (5:22). But the *FG* also contains clear affirmations of traditional, future eschatology as well. The two strands appear together in the fifth chapter. In 5:25, Jesus declares, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live,” but then also in 5:28, “Do not marvel at this: for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”
3. In the same way, statements that could be taken to indicate a cosmological enmity between God and the world, or Jesus and the world, or the disciples and the world, are mitigated by statements such as this: “God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (3:16–17). And although this Gospel undoubtedly positions Jesus and his followers against “the Jews,” it also

asserts continuity between the world of Torah and the revelation made through Jesus (1:16–18).

4. The *FG* also affirms the world through the use of a realistic narrative for communicating its understanding of Jesus. Narrative by its very nature implicitly affirms the value of bodies and of time. John's narrative, moreover, is unmistakably grounded in the realities of first-century Palestinian life.⁴⁹ And although the Gospel betrays no interest in the institutional aspects of the church, it is surely connected to the sacramental life of believers, with no suggestion that the visible forms of water and bread and light are unworthy to bear divine significance.⁵⁰
5. Finally, the possibility of making the beloved disciple the source for secret revelations derived from the bosom of Jesus is dramatically undercut by the "second ending" of the gospel in John 21.⁵¹ The epilogue weaves together the futures of Peter and John. John will not live until Jesus' return as the community had expected (21:21–23), and Peter will experience martyrdom (21:18–19). But it also clearly assigns authority to Peter rather than John: "Do you love me more than these?" "Lord You know that I love you." "Then feed my sheep" (21:15–18). Peter is not only restored to discipleship, he is established as leader of the church. He is also the model for discipleship: Peter wants to *know*, but he is told simply, "you follow me" (21:22). In short, John's Gospel contains a tension between an outlook that could easily be read as Gnostic, and an outlook that more obviously conforms to the dominant Synoptic/Pauline pattern. If we also attend to John's placement in the New Testament canon, we see how elements that might seem secondary when the Gospel is read in isolation are given greater controlling authority.

Canonical Controls

In the majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts, John's Gospel is placed after Matthew, Mark and Luke, immediately preceding the Acts of the Apostles. The sequence is not universal, as we learn from our only sources for such information, early canonical lists, and manuscripts

⁴⁹ See Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, xlii–xliii.

⁵⁰ See B. Vawter, "The Johannine Sacramentary," *Theological Studies* 17 (1956) 151–166; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, cxi–civ.

⁵¹ Scholars today are virtually unanimous in regarding John 21 as a later addition to the Gospel; for a contrary (and as always, refreshingly independent) view that also captures the point of the epilogue, see P.S. Minear, "The Original Functions of John 21," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983) 85–98.

containing most of the New Testament collection,⁵² but the position after the Synoptics and before Acts is the normal position in the largest number even of the earliest witnesses.⁵³ The sequence is broken when Acts is located differently, as it is in a number of lists and at least two important manuscripts.⁵⁴ For the purposes of this thought experiment, I will take the sequence that eventually becomes universal as available to many, perhaps even most, readers from the 4th century on.⁵⁵

The effect of such placement is to homologize the *FG* even more to the Synoptic-Pauline pattern. John's version follows a threefold repetition of the Synoptic story, so that the pattern of ministry/death/resurrection is already firmly imprinted in the readers' minds, and therefore all the more easily discerned within John's multiple variations. The way that John alters synoptic traditions therefore seems less impressive than the fact that he reinforces the Synoptic pattern.

The location of John between Luke and Acts also provides the reader with a narrative rather than a transformative/revelational code. Notice the way readers' identification of the figure of John is affected. In the Synoptics, John appears as one of the sons of Zebedee, part of an inner group (Peter, James, John) who are privy to Jesus' most intimate moments.⁵⁶ In Luke, the Gospel immediately preceding the *FG*, there is a mention of John lacking in Matthew and Mark: when Jesus sends two disciples to

⁵² For the data, I am using the lists provided by L.M. McDonald and J.A. Sanders, editors, in *The Canon Debate*, 591–597, and C.R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*, 2 volume edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) 2: 871–881; I have profited from Professor Holladay's guidance in this matter.

⁵³ Acts appears after the four Gospels in the canonical lists of Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazienzen, the African Canons, Amphilochius, Rufinus, Gelasius, Junilius, Cassiodorus, the Syrian Catalogue and the Synods of Laodicea and Carthage. Among codices, it appears after the Gospels in Vaticanus (but before James rather than Paul) and Alexandrinus. Among translations, it takes the same position in the *Peshitta* and the *Vulgate*.

⁵⁴ Acts appears at the end of the canonical list in the Apostolic Canons as it does also in Codex Claromontanus, which is also distinctive in having the "apostolic Gospels" Matthew and John precede Luke and Mark. Acts is found after Paul's letters in the Cheltenham Canon, Epiphanius, and Codex Sinaiticus. In the lists of Jerome, Augustine, Innocent and Isidore, Acts comes after James and before Revelation, and in Eucherius is listed after Hebrews before James. Perhaps the oddest sequence is found in the Muratorian Canon, in which Acts follows both John's Gospel and the Letters of John.

⁵⁵ Even when the precise sequence is not found, to be sure, the presence of Acts in the list serves to move John toward the Synoptic/Pauline narrative pattern, though in a less impressive fashion.

⁵⁶ See Mark 1:19, 29; 3:17; 5:37; 9:2, 38; 10:35,41; 13:3; 14:33.

prepare the last supper, only Luke identifies the two as Peter and John (Luke 22:8).

Readers progressing from Luke to the *FG* would therefore instinctively identify the beloved disciple (first named at that last supper, John 13:23) as John the son of Zebedee. And the pairing with Peter, as we have seen, is firmly fixed by John's epilogue (see 21:2): both are witnesses and believers, both beloved of and lovers of Jesus. But John is second to Peter in authority.

When readers turn to the *next* canonical writing, the Acts of the Apostles, which picks up the Gospel story after the resurrection, they find Peter and John first in the list of apostles who are waiting for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13). Throughout the first 8 chapters of Acts, furthermore, John is constantly associated with Peter. They are the only apostles named as leaders of the Jerusalem community (Acts 3:1, 3, 4, 11; 4:13, 19; 8:14, 17). But John is an entirely silent partner. It is Peter who speaks, decrees, strikes dead, and rebukes, with John as his silent partner. In Acts, John is mentioned only once more, at the death of his brother James (Acts 12:2).

What John's epilogue suggests, then, the narrative of Acts confirms: John is associated with and subordinate to Peter. Despite the remarkable differences found in the Gospel of John, it is firmly rooted in the same narrative framework shared by the Synoptic Gospels. What Acts did to domesticate the dangerous Paul by placing him in the larger context of apostolic Christianity, it did also for John, helping to reduce its dangerous potential for deviance to an interesting degree of difference.⁵⁷

The Gospel of Thomas

The *Gospel of Thomas* is perfect for this experiment in canonical criticism for three reasons. First, even more obviously than the *FG*, it makes use of a considerable amount of Synoptic discourse material, arguably in a form earlier than that found in the Synoptics—the comparison to the hypothetical Q is a natural one.⁵⁸ Second, the *GT* like the Gospel of John contains a mixture of tendencies that enable the composition to be read

⁵⁷ In *The Canonical Function of Acts: A Comparative Analysis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 41–78, David E. Smith shows how Irenaeus used the narrative of Acts to establish the narrative (historical) context for his argument concerning apostolic succession and the unity of primitive belief.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., J.S. Kloppenborg, et al., *The Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1990); S.J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1993), and R. Valantasis *The Gospel of Thomas*.

with different emphases; scholars debate whether and in what sense the *GT* should be considered a “Gnostic” writing.⁵⁹ Third, again like John, the *GT* is placed within something like a canonical collection, or at least an anthology. In the Nag Hammadi Library, it is found in Codex II, preceded by the *Apocryphon of John* and followed by the *Gospel of Philip*.⁶⁰

The Gospel of Thomas opens in this fashion, “These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.”⁶¹ The remainder of the composition consists of 114 sayings of Jesus, regularly introduced by “Jesus said.” Occasional entries begin with “they said,” with Jesus responding to statements or queries made by one or another disciple, among whom are named Peter, Matthew and Thomas (#13), Mary (#21) and Salome (#61).⁶² A handful of sayings have the bare elements of a *chreia*, in that they are introduced by the briefest of biographical settings: some babies nursing (#22), a Samaritan carrying a lamb (#60), a person asking Jesus to divide an inheritance (#72), a woman crying from the crowd (#79), Jesus shown a gold coin (#100). Otherwise the *GT* is a set of discrete sayings. Not even these miniature *chreiai* establish any sort of narrative character, for they appear atomistically among other discrete sayings.

In contrast both to John and the Synoptics, Jesus neither performs mighty deeds nor undergoes suffering and death. It is difficult to say, therefore, whether the sayings of the “living Jesus” are meant to come from his resurrection state or during his ministry—or even whether it would matter. In this composition, Jesus appears as pure revealer. In contrast to both John and the Synoptic Gospels, furthermore, *GT* lacks any citations from Torah. Biblical figures, in fact, appear only allusively: Adam is mentioned

⁵⁹ See the discussions respectively in B. Gaertner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas*, and R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*.

⁶⁰ It has even been suggested that the sequence of compositions in Nag Hammadi Codex II (where the *GT* is placed) represents something of a “counter canon” that imitates features of the New Testament; see M. Williams, “Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Library as ‘Collection (s)’ in the History of ‘Gnosticism (s)’,” in *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification: Actes du colloque tenue à Québec du 15–19 Septembre 1993* (Bibliothèque copte de nag Hammadi, section ‘Études’ 3; Quebec: Les presses de l’Université de Laval, 1995) 17–28. I am not making so strong a claim.

⁶¹ I am using the translation of the *GT* in the *Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Small variations are found in the translation provided by Elaine Pagels as an appendix to *Beyond Belief*, 227–242, based in turn on M. Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

⁶² James the Just has no voice, but is identified as the one to whom disciples should turn as a leader after Jesus leaves (#12); for James elsewhere in the Nag Hammadi collection, see *The First Apocalypse of James* in NHLE 242–248; *The Second Apocalypse of James* in NHLE 249–255; and *The Apocryphon of James* in NHLE 29–36.

twice (#46 and #85), while John the Baptist (#46) and James the Just (#12) are mentioned once. There is a single reference to “the Jews” (#43), of “the Scribes and Pharisees” (#39), the “Pharisees” (#102), of “the prophets of Israel” (#52), “the Sabbath” (#27), and “circumcision” (#53). If we add “the Samaritan carrying a lamb on his way to Judaea” (#60), and we have everything the *GT* contains concerning the symbolic world of Judaism.

Because of the lack of narrative or contextual framework, and because of the way the sayings appear as discrete utterances, it is difficult to find either thematic or formal unity within the Gospel of Thomas. The understanding of any single saying seems to depend on knowledge of the overall interpretive code. Although this code was surely available to the composition’s ancient readers, it is not to us. We must draw our best guesses from the clues provided by the juxtaposition of sayings, by the dissonances among traditional and redactional elements, and by the *GT*’s placement within the anthology.

GT and Synoptic Material

Some 31 of the *GT*’s 114 sayings strikingly resemble ones found in the Synoptics, supporting the notion that this composition has roots in a primitive Gospel tradition. Ten of these sayings take the form of parables,⁶³ and the rest are chreia/aphorisms.⁶⁴ The principle used for choosing the particular sayings is not entirely clear, but the motif of division and selection is certainly strong: Jesus came to cast fire (#10), cause division and not peace (#16). He is a prophet rejected in his own country (#31), and has no place to lay his head (#86). He is also the pearl of great price (#76) and the treasure of the field (#90), who invites followers to “come to me” (#90). To do this, a person must hate mother and father, and—in a note otherwise absent—“take up his cross in my way” (#55).

Even these hauntingly familiar sayings, however, have some distinctive twists in the *GT*. We may be startled to discover that at the end of the parable of the great banquet, which otherwise forms a neat parallel to Luke 14:16–24, Jesus says, “Businessmen and merchants shall not enter the places of my father” (#64). For the most part, however, these discrete sayings not only resemble those found in the Synoptics, they could easily slip back into the narrative framework provided by the Synoptics and make perfectly good sense there.

⁶³ *GT* #9, 20, 57, 63, 64, 65, 76, 96, 107, 109.

⁶⁴ *GT* #6, 10, 16, 26, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 39, 45, 54, 55, 72, 79, 86, 95, 99, 100, 101.

Other sayings in the *GT* are clearly related to the Synoptic tradition, but show significant signs of redactional reworking. Some of the longer sayings, for example, appear to be conflation. Their elements appear in the Synoptics, and even a reader sympathetic to the *GT* would think that they make more sense in the Synoptic narratives. In sayings such as *GT* #91 and #92, in fact, both Synoptic and Johannine material seems to have been conflated into a single (and not altogether intelligible) statement. Likewise, sayings with a Synoptic basis are given a distinctive addition: in response to a question about tribute to Caesar, Jesus says, “Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine” (#100; compare Matt. 22:21/Mark 12:17/Luke 20:25).

Similarly, the statement, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,” is familiar from Matthew 6:3, where it is used with reference to almsgiving. In *GT* #62, however, the saying forms the conclusion to quite another sort of statement: “It is to those who are worthy of my mysteries that I tell my mysteries. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” In Matthew 10:34–36 and Luke 12:49–53, Jesus declares that he has come to bring division on the earth and that households would be divided because of him, “three against two and two against three, the father against the son and the son against the father.” But in *GT* #16, the saying concludes, “and they shall stand solitary.”

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the distinctive twist the *GT* gives to Synoptic material is found in #71–72. It is helpful to begin with the Synoptic parallel. In Luke 12:13, while Jesus is on his fateful journey to Jerusalem, “one of the multitude said to him, ‘Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.’” And Jesus responds, “Man, who has made me a judge or divider over you?” Then he says, “Take heed and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:13–15). It is at this point that Luke has Jesus tell the parable of the rich fool (12:16–21): the man was so rich he needed to build extra silos, and he was a fool because he identified his life with those possessions. In Luke this is a moral tale that illustrates Jesus’ saying about covetousness, as the conclusion neatly states: “So is he who lays up treasures for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).⁶⁵

The redaction in the *GT* is drastic. First, Thomas separates the parable of the rich fool entirely from its Synoptic framing. The parable itself has

⁶⁵ For full discussion of the Lukan parable in context, see L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 197–202.

the same form as in Luke, but concludes with the declaration, "Let him who has ears to hear, hear" (#63). This is followed immediately by the parable of the great banquet, which, as noted above, ends with the statement that businessmen and merchants would not enter the places of the father (#64). There follows in the *GT* a third parable, that of the wicked husbandmen, who kill the heir of the vineyard (#65), again with the portentous ending, "Let him who has ears to hear, hear." The *GT* in this section appears to present a series of oblique, coded messages against worldly wealth and involvement.

Then what has happened to Luke's introduction? It is found in *GT* #72, completely severed from the parable. It reads:

A man said to him: "tell my brothers to divide my father's possessions with me." He said to him, "O man, who has made me a divider? He turned to his disciples and said to them, "I am not a divider, am I?"

In Luke's version, the response is ethical: "Beware of avarice." In the *GT*, the saying concerns Jesus' identity: "I am not a divider, am I?" While the precise significance of this remains uncertain, other sayings in the *GT* may provide a partial code for its solving. In *GT* #61, Jesus says to Salome: "I am he who exists from the undivided. I was given some of the things of my father." Salome responds, "I am your disciple." Jesus then says to her, "Therefore I say, if he is undivided, he will be filled with light, but if he is divided, he will be filled with darkness."

My review of the contents of the *GT* up to this point may lead one to think that it is much closer to the Synoptics than John's Gospel is. That case could, perhaps, be made with respect to the materials I have cited to this point. It is when we turn to the sayings unique to the *GT* that its sharp differences become more apparent.

How the GT is Different

Among the sayings unique to the *GT* are some that remain simply ambiguous, particularly if they are read in isolation. I noted above that *GT* #55 contains the Synoptic version of "hating father and mother." In *GT* #101, however, the saying is repeated with an intriguing variation. In this instance there is not mention of taking up the cross as Jesus did or of being worthy of his father. Instead, we find this:

Whoever does not hate his father and mother as I do cannot become a disciple to me. And whoever does not love his father and mother as I do cannot become a disciple to me. But my true mother gave me life.

Connected to this saying must also be the short aphorism of *GT* #105: “He who knows the father and mother will be called the Son of a Harlot.” But who are the “father and mother” in this set of sayings? Surely, not the biological parents of the disciples. Another example is *GT* #104, which has a superficial resemblance to the controversy story about fasting in Matt. 9:4–6/Mark 2:8–11/Luke 5:22–24, but in which everything is reworked:

They said to Jesus, “Come let us pray and let us fast.” Jesus said, “What is the sin that I have committed, or wherein I have been defeated? But when the bridegroom leaves the bridal chamber, then let them fast and pray.”

There are certainly echoes here of the tradition concerning fasting and the bridegroom in Matt. 9:15/Mark 2:19/Luke 5:34, but that tradition contains no mention of a “bridal chamber.” If we had only the saying in the *GT*, we could not know what is meant by “leaving the bridal chamber,” although we note that there is a pertinent statement in *GT* #75: “Men are standing at the door, but it is the solitary who will enter the bridal chamber.”

Even odder—from the perspective of one coming from the Synoptic tradition—is the parable in *GT* #91. It is found only in this composition, and defies interpretation:

The kingdom of the father is like a certain woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking on the road, still some distance from home, the handle of the jar broke and the meal emptied out behind her on the road. She did not realize it; she had noticed no accident. When she reached her house, she set the jar down and found it empty.

Because it has no narrative context, the parable at first read seems prosaic in the extreme: what can be meant by broken jars and emptiness, and how does it explicate the kingdom? Nothing within the *GT*—and certainly nothing in the canonical Gospel tradition—offers anything approaching a code for construal.

There are finally the elements in the *GT* that are obviously Gnostic, or at the very least, intensely ascetical, in orientation. Not only are there as many sayings of this sort in the *Gospel of Thomas* as there are of the Synoptic variety, but they dominate the *GT* because of their placement and because they thematically control the other strands. The strangeness and ambiguity in most of the other statements are provided their thematic context by these distinctive sayings. In response to a question as to how they as children might enter the kingdom, for example, Jesus responds:

When you make the two one and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male be not

male nor the female female; and when you fashion eyes in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness, then will you enter the kingdom (*GT* #22).

Again, in *GT* #49–50, we find:

Blessed are the solitary and the elect, for you will find the kingdom. For you are from it and to it you will return. If they say to you, 'Where did you come from?' say to them, 'We come from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established itself and became manifest through their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say, 'We are its children, and we are the elect of the living father.' If they ask you, 'What is the sign of the father in you?' say to them, 'It is movement and repose.'

Such sayings cohere with the following aphorisms and provide them with a context. After speaking of divisions in households, as we saw, *GT* #16 concludes, "and they shall stand solitary." In *GT* #23, Jesus says, "I shall choose you, one out of a thousand, and two out of a thousand, and they shall stand as a single one." And *GT* #42 in its entirety reads: "Become passers-by."

Likewise, this series of sayings: "Whoever has come to understand the world has found only a corpse, and whoever has found a corpse is superior to the world" (*GT* #56), which connects to the conclusion of saying #60: "you, too, look for a place for yourselves within Repose, lest you become a corpse and be eaten," and saying #80, "He who has found the world has found the body, but he who has found the body is superior to the world," and saying #87, "Jesus said, 'Wretched is the body that is dependent on a body, and wretched is the soul that is dependent on these two,'" and saying #110, "Whoever finds the world and becomes rich, let him renounce the world," and saying #112, "Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul; woe to the soul that depends on the flesh."

Finally, very much along the same lines are these two statements, which cohere perfectly with the ones just cited:

Jesus said, "The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the Living One will not see death." Does not Jesus say, "Whoever finds himself is superior to the world?" (*GT* #111).

And,

Jesus said, "It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the All come forth, and unto me did All extend. Split a piece of wood and I am there. Lift up the stone and you will find me there" (*GT* #77).

Such sayings point readers to a distinctive Gnostic sensibility, combining hostility to the material world, the claim to origins in the light, the coincidence of opposites, the secret revelation, removal from society, the identity of revealer and revelation, of teacher and disciple:

Jesus said to his disciples, "Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like." Simon Peter said to him, "You are like a righteous angel." Matthew said to him, "You are like a wise philosopher." Thomas said to him, "Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom you are like." Jesus said, "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out" (*GT* #13).

As in John's Gospel, then, the Gospel of Thomas contains an ambiguous combination of materials and perspectives. In John, the narrative that ends in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, pulls the ambiguities toward the clarity of the Synoptic pattern, and serves to highlight those elements in the Gospel that counter its more transformative tendencies. In the *GT*, the opposite is true. There is no suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The literary form of discrete *logia* reinforces the image of Jesus as pure revealer. And the elements that are shared with the Synoptics are consistently redacted in the direction of dominant Gnosticizing code found in the sayings unique to Thomas.

Canonical Controls on the GT

In the case of John, it is abundantly clear that placement among the Synoptics and especially Acts tends to moderate what might be deviant in John and make it appear as an interesting difference. Does the placement of the *GT* in Codex II of the Nag Hammadi Library serve to reinforce or soften its Gnostic tendencies? The evidence is overwhelming that canonical placement in this case serves to make the *GT* more rather than less different from the Synoptic tradition.

The document immediately preceding the *GT* is the *Apocryphon of John*,⁶⁶ which contains secret revelations of Jesus to John, the son of Zebedee, and which provides one of the most elaborate expositions of Gnostic myth in the Nag Hammadi Library.⁶⁷ Jesus discourses on the origin of the world and the way to escape from it. If we want to know why the *GT* speaks of

⁶⁶ The composition actually occurs in three places: a short recension (III, 1) and two copies of a long recension (II, 1; IV, 1). The multiple versions suggest the importance of the composition for its readers.

⁶⁷ It is the version in 11,1 that immediately precedes the *GT*; see *NHLE* 98–116.

the world as a corpse, the *Apocryphon of John* offers the reader some clues. The process of cosmogony begins with the error of Sophia (the female acting without the consent of the Male) who begets the creator god Yal-tabaoth (9–12). Adam inhabits “the tomb of the newly formed body with which the robbers had clothed the man” (20).

The composition that immediately follows the *GT* is *The Gospel of Philip* (in II, 3).⁶⁸ Like the *GT*, the Gospel of Philip consists in discourse rather than in narrative. It presents a series of theological and ethical observations, not as coming from Jesus, but from an authoritative teacher. Many of the statements remain obscure to us, since we do not possess the complete code for their interpretation. My point is simply that some of these obscurities are clearly and directly connected to elements that we also found obscure in the *GT*. The notion that the world is a corpse, for example, is confirmed by *The Gospel of Philip* 92 and 99. More impressive is the way in which *The Gospel of Philip* provides an interpretive context for the two references to a “bridal chamber” in the *GT* (#75 and #104). The bridal chamber, it turns out, is one of the most dominant themes of *The Gospel of Philip*.⁶⁹ We read, for example:

A horse sires a horse, a man begets a man, a god brings forth a god. Compare the bridegroom and the bride. Their children are conceived in the bridal chamber. No Jew was ever born to Greek parents as long as the world has existed. And as a Christian people we ourselves do not descend from the Jews. There was another people, and these blessed ones are referred to as ‘the chosen people of the living god’ and ‘the son of man’ and ‘the seed of the son of man.’ In the world it is called ‘this true people.’ Where they are, there are the sons of the bridal chamber (*GP* 75.25–76.5).

Placement between the *Apocryphon of John* and *The Gospel of Philip* serves to strengthen precisely those elements that make the *GT* less like the Synoptic Gospels and more like the other Nag-Hammadi literature. On either side of *The Apocryphon of John* and *The Gospel of Philip*, furthermore, are writings of an even more thoroughgoing Gnostic outlook: The *Apocryphon* is preceded by *The Tripartite Tractate* (I, 5),⁷⁰ and Philip is followed by *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (II, 4).⁷¹ The elements in the *GT* that resemble the Synoptic Gospels are virtually smothered by an overwhelming context of Gnosticism. If we reach even further into the Nag Hammadi

⁶⁸ See *NHLE* 131–151.

⁶⁹ See *Gospel of Philip* #61, 68, 73, 76, 78, 82, 102, 122, 124, 126, 127.

⁷⁰ *NHLE*, 54–97.

⁷¹ *NHLE*, 152–160.

anthology, we find other clues for construing some of the cryptic sayings of the Gospel of Thomas. I noted above the strange story of the woman with the broken jar that she discovered to be empty (*GT* #97). An additional part of the code is provided by *The Gospel of Truth* 26:4–25:

When the Word came into the midst... a great disturbance took place among the jars because some had been emptied, others filled; that is, some had been supplied, some poured out, some had been purified, still others broken up. All the spaces were shaken and disturbed, because they had no order nor stability. Error was upset, not knowing what to do; it was grieved, in mourning, afflicting itself because it knew nothing. When knowledge grew near it—this is the downfall and all its emanations—error is empty, having nothing inside.

The canonical placement of the *GT* works to reinforce those elements in it that differ from the Synoptics, just as the canonical placement of the *FG* works to reinforce those elements in it that it shares with the Synoptic tradition.

Trading Places

A final playful question can be posed, though not adequately answered. What would happen if the writings were switched? How would John work if it were placed where the *GT* now resides within the Nag Hammadi collection? How would the *GT* look if it were placed in the New Testament between Luke and Acts?

John might be made to work, since it contains so much that could fit within an understanding of Jesus as revealer and of discipleship in opposition to the world. But it would be difficult. What would the reader do with the countering statements in John concerning God's love for the world, or with the authority given to Peter? Above all, what would readers do with the narrative form (with its implications concerning materiality), and with the positive interaction with Judaism and the symbolic world of Torah?

It is even more difficult to think of the *GT* as placed between Luke and Acts. To be sure, the forty day period between the resurrection and ascension would provide a fine opportunity for Jesus' secret revelations to Didymos Thomas. But although Thomas appears in the Synoptic lists of the 12 (Matt 10:30; Mark 3:18; Acts 1:13), he is a lesser figure, and is known as Didymos (the Twin) only because of John. And it is only in *that* gospel that Thomas plays any significant narrative or revelatory role.

Readers who came to the *GT* from the perspective of the Pauline/Synoptic pattern would surely recognize some of Jesus' sayings, although their form might occasionally jar. Other sayings, however, would be totally bewildering. Not only does the *GT* put more violent twists than normal on the Synoptic material, it frames the Synoptic sayings within other statements utterly incongruous with the Synoptic outlook. The image of Jesus in the *GT* would be difficult to comprehend within the present NT anthology. There is no real grounding in Judaism, there are no signs and wonders, above all, there is no passion, death, and resurrection. Every element in the Pauline/Synoptic narrative pattern—which defines Jesus in terms of what he does for others—is lost.⁷² Instead, we find a mystical identity between teacher and disciple. There is no community among Jesus' followers, or even the basis for one. There are only the individual readers who are blessed precisely because they are passers-by and solitary.

Finally, a great deal of the *GT* would remain utterly unintelligible to the reader who knew only the NT anthology, for the only clues for its interpretation are scattered through its home collection. What would the NT reader make of the empty jars and the bridal chamber, of the world as corpse, and of the Jesus who declares, "lift up a stone and you will find me there" (*GT* #77)? Nothing. It is hard enough for us, and we now at least have the portions of the Gnostic code made available in the Nag Hammadi codices.

In the case of John in the New Testament canon, and in the case of the Gospel of Thomas in the Nag Hammadi library, it appears that birds of a feather did truly flock together.

⁷² See L.T. Johnson, "Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense?" in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert Morgan*, edited by C. Rowland and C. Tuckett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 93–108.

PART FIVE

ISSUES IN CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

KOINONIA: DIVERSITY AND UNITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Three statements about Christianity are certainly true. First, Christianity is the most divided of all world religions even while professing an ideal of unity: leaving aside all earlier segmentations, there are the 11th-century schism between Catholic and Orthodox and the 16th-century Reformation that led to hundreds of Protestant Christianities. Second, each division and subdivision of Christianity bases its claims on the New Testament: “We are the correct form of Christianity because we follow the teaching of the New Testament.” Third, despite all these divisions, every Christian is easily distinguishable from every Buddhist, Muslim, Jew, or Hindu.

What are the roots of this peculiar combination of facts? How can people all claim fidelity to a single normative text like the NT while living out different and opposing versions of it? Equally puzzling, why, despite such deep divisions, are Christians still so distinctive among the world’s religions? The answer to these questions lies in Christianity’s beginnings, a fact which requires us to think as historians.¹

The topic of diversity and unity in early Christianity is scarcely new. I will begin by presenting three classic explanations of how a religion with unity as its ideal should so consistently fail to achieve that unity. Each explanation claims to be historical but is in reality what anthropologists would call an aetiological myth—that is, a reading of the past that provides normative support for an ideological position in the present. These explanations are of interest primarily for showing different understandings of historiography and its procedures. After my review of these classic positions, I will propose still another explanation, one that will try to profit from the positive contribution of each of the previous positions while avoiding some of their more obviously mythical tendencies.

¹ I leave aside psychological and moral forms of explanation (although they are pertinent) as well as the intriguing thought that a religion that begins as a sect has splintering in its soul.

In the Beginning is Unity

The Catholic myth of origins is that Christianity began in unity under St. Peter.² Diversity arose because of human sinfulness, expressed through heresy and apostasy.³ In this view, therefore, the perception of diversity is negative. Unity is the goal that can be accomplished by returning to the authority of Peter's successors.⁴

Several premises about history undergird this interpretation. First, the NT writings are the only legitimate sources for understanding early Christianity, and they are to be accepted uncritically, i.e., they are to be read as accurately reporting the facts.⁵ Second, the dating of NT writings more or less corresponds to their canonical ascriptions. Third, and perhaps most significant, history is about people and the relations among them.

Given these premises, the Catholic myth of origins is perfectly reasonable. Matthew is an eyewitness who writes the first gospel,⁶ in which Jesus bestows authority on Peter over the church (Mt 16:18–19). The other eyewitness gospel (by John) also reports Jesus telling Peter alone to “feed my sheep” (Jn 21:15–17). Peter then appears in the Acts of the Apostles at the head of the church. He rallies the community to replace the defector, Judas (Acts 1:15–26). At Pentecost he summons the crowds to repentance (Acts 2:14–36). With John as his silent companion, Peter dominates the church in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1, 13, 23). Those who do not recognize the apostles' authority he strikes dead (Acts 5:1–11). When Peter leaves Jerusalem (Acts 12:17), James takes over (Acts 15:13), establishing an orderly succession of local bishops that continues throughout time. Even Paul testifies to Peter's central importance. He lists Peter first among the witnesses

² The roots of the myth are found already in second-century writings: in contrast to the diversity of teachings found among heretics (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 35; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I 10–11; V 19–20) is the unity of the apostolic church from the beginning under Peter and Paul (1 *Clement* 42, 44; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 1 *Clement* 2). But the basic elements of the myth remain intact in the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference, 1994): Matthew's Gospel shows Peter to be the head of the church (552–553, 581, 765) within the apostolic succession (861–862, 870).

³ See 1 *Clement* 3; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I. praef.; I, 13; II, 11; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 882, 936.

⁴ For Peter as the basis for past and future unity, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 882, 936.

⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 126.

⁶ For Matthean priority, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, I. 1–2; Augustine, *On the Harmony of the Evangelists* II, 4; III, 6; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* praef. 5–7.

to the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5), and he declares that three years after his own conversion, he reported to Peter in Jerusalem (Gal 1:13).

There are, to be sure, some irritations in the first generation, such as the dispute over the feeding of widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1–6), the dispute between Paul and Barnabas over Mark (Acts 15:38–39), and the conflict between Peter and Paul over table fellowship in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14). But there are always such personality clashes between strong leaders. Peter and Paul basically worked in harmony in two different mission areas: Peter preached to the Jewish Christians and Paul to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7–9). The sign of their enduring unity was the fact that they died together as martyrs under Nero in the city of Rome.⁷

In the church of Jerusalem, moreover, the first generation enjoyed unanimity in faith, and unity was symbolized by a complete sharing of possessions (Acts 2:41–47; 4:32–37). What Peter and the other first witnesses preached, declares Paul, so did he (1 Cor 15:11). In fact, the Acts of the Apostles has Paul himself give expression to the conviction that the original period of unity would be followed by a time of division: after his death, he says, wolves would come in to deceive the sheep (Acts 20:17–35). Diversity in Christianity is therefore always due to such mischievous persons who seek to propagate “another Gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6).

The Catholic myth of origins is recognizable as almost charmingly mythic, not only in its severe selection from the evidence offered by the NT and its uncritical acceptance of the sources but above all by its patently pragmatic effect. Such a reading supports a unified and uniform Christianity under the personal authority of Peter’s successor, the Bishop of Rome.

In the Beginning is Conflict

The second myth of origins is less transparent and more complex. It unfolds in two major stages. Stage one is the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century as represented by Martin Luther. Against papal authority and Catholic legalism, Luther declared that the original form of Christianity should be the measure for the church in every age, that scripture alone could reveal that original form, and that it was the Apostle Paul’s teaching on righteousness through faith rather than the works of the law

⁷ Ignatius, *Romans 4*; *1 Clement 5*.

that perfectly expressed Christianity's essence.⁸ Paul had battled for the freedom of the gospel against the Judaizers, who sought to impose the law on the Gentiles—just as Luther in the name of Paul and the truth of the gospel was doing lonely battle for faith against Catholic legalism.⁹ By his passionate protest, Luther shifted the understanding of history in several ways. He made the quest for origins a matter of ideas and not simply people; these ideas involved conflict; and some things in the NT were more worthwhile than others.¹⁰

Stage two is the birth of the critical study of church history at the University of Tübingen in the mid-19th century, especially in the work of Ferdinand Christian Baur, whose ideal of critical historiography had as its goal the dismantling of mythic versions of Christianity through scientific history. But, in fact, F.C. Baur gave sophisticated theoretical grounding to the religious impulses of the Reformation.

Beginning with written sources, scientific history tests the received traditions through criticism. Earlier sources—those closest to the events—are always to be preferred to later ones. This means that the dating of the NT writings must become a major historical concern. To do the history of earliest Christianity, one must construct the history of the writings that are its sources!¹¹ Nor can the critical historian be content to study only the canonical writings; if history is the goal, then all ancient writings from Christianity need to be used. Baur found great utility in a collection of writings called the pseudo-Clementines. He knew that in their final form they came from the third or fourth century (and were therefore late), but he considered them to contain earlier traditions from the first century.¹² With Baur, then, we see beginning the process of excavating earlier evidence from later sources. Another way of criticizing historical sources is

⁸ See, e.g., Martin Luther. *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520).

⁹ Luther's reading of Paul and of his own circumstances merge in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1519) on Gal 2:11–13 and again in *Lectures on Galatians* (1535) on Gal 2:14–16; see also *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520).

¹⁰ These ideas are brought together succinctly in Luther's *Preface to The New Testament* (1522).

¹¹ Adolf Jülicher praised F.C. Baur in this fashion: "He has taught us to regard the books of the New Testament from a truly historical point of view as the products of and witnesses to the Christian spirit of a definite age." In *An Introduction to the New Testament*. trans. J.P. Ward (1st German edition 1894; New York: Putnam, 1904).

¹² F.C. Baur. *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, ed. E. Zeller, trans. A. Menzies (London: Williams and Norgate, 1878) 1:90. Baur adopts the views worked out by H. Kern, *Der Brief Jakobi untersucht und erklärt* (Tübingen: Fues, 1838) 56–60; see Baur, *Church History* 1:128–130, and *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, ed. H. Zeller, trans. A. Menzies (London: Williams and Norgate, 1875) 2:297–313.

by identifying their bias. Baur therefore tried to identify the theological tendency of each NT composition.¹³

History also needs a larger sense of its subject. Here the Tübingen school is the heir of both the Reformation and the philosophical movement called German Idealism, specifically in the form associated with G.W. Hegel. History, said Hegel, is about ideas. Or better, history is the development of the Idea. It is the world-spirit working itself out through time in a process Hegel termed dialectical. An original position—the thesis—is countered by its antithesis. Out of the struggle of these conflicting ideas or forces comes a synthesis. That synthesis becomes the next thesis, and so on and on all through time. In this view, history is about ideas developing through conflict.¹⁴

This was the framework within which Baur and the Tübingen school placed early Christianity.¹⁵ Like Luther, Baur found in the five authentic letters of Paul the thesis, the original and true voice of freedom in the Spirit. The confrontation between Paul and Peter in Antioch was therefore not a misunderstanding between persons so much as it was the conflict between ideologies. Peter represented the antithesis to Pauline Christianity. He and his party advocated a law-observant, “judaizing” Christianity. This was what was going on in Corinth when some were declaring “I am for Paul,” and others were saying “I am for Peter” (1 Cor 1:10). Such slogans pointed to real ideological differences and real differences in practice.¹⁶ And here is where Baur found the pseudo-Clementine literature helpful. Strands of it suggested a continuation into the late first century of a Jewish Christianity that looked to Peter and James as its sponsor and that was, at the same time, intensely hostile to Paul.¹⁷

The clash between Jewish and Gentile Christians generated the synthesis represented by the Acts of the Apostles and the Pastoral Letters,

¹³ See Baur, e.g., on the Acts of the Apostles in *Paul, the Apostle* 1:110–121; 125–126. n 1; 129.

¹⁴ See, e.g. G.W.F. Hegel. *The Philosophy of History*, trans. I. Sibree (1830–31; New York: Colonial Press, 1900) 1–102.

¹⁵ For helpful discussion, see H. Harris. *The Tübingen School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

¹⁶ See the comments by Baur quoted by W.G. Kümmel. *The New Testament. The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McL. Gilmour and H.C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1972) 127–130.

¹⁷ “The Ebionites are generally regarded as mere heretics, but their connection with the original Jewish Christianity is unmistakable. Thus, their view of the Apostle Paul is no isolated phenomenon.” *Church History* 1:90.

which show Christianity moving toward Catholicism.¹⁸ Such writings show the tendency toward Catholicism by their approval of law and sacrament and the way they downplay the conflicts reported by Paul, remaking Peter and Paul into cooperating rather than competing leaders of the first generation.¹⁹

The Tübingen version of history applies the hermeneutics of suspicion to sources: the NT writings are not necessarily written by the inscribed authors; they often represent a period other than the one they claim; they must above all be read within the frame of a certain stage of a development that proceeds literally by a kind of logic.

The Tübingen school's many critics pointed out a certain selectivity in its use of evidence and a certain circularity in its form of argument.²⁰ More important, the Tübingen school paid attention only to ideas. It paid little attention to persons, and even less to places and social institutions. None of the specific conclusions of the Tübingen school are held today, but its influence remains strong.

Is it fair to call the Tübingen picture of early Christianity mythic? I think so, for that picture provided ideological support for two supremely interested parties. First, it used history to support the claim of Protestantism that Paul's teaching on righteousness by faith was the original and therefore the authentic form of Christianity. The development of Christianity was a decline in the directions respectively of Judaism and paganism. Second, it made critical historiography itself the instrument of reformation: only history's demystification of the canonical account can uncover and recover this earliest and authentic form of Christianity.²¹ The form of Protestantism represented by critical historians was therefore the best of all forms of Christianity.

¹⁸ The most systematic expression was given to the Tübingen School's historiography by Baur's student, Albert Schweigler, *Das nachapostolische Zeitalter in den Hauptmomentum seiner Entwicklung* (Tübingen: Fues, 1846).

¹⁹ Argued most extensively by E. Zeller, *Die Apostelgeschichte nach ihrem Inhalt and Ursprung kritisch untersucht* (Stuttgart, 1854).

²⁰ The most comprehensive counter-construal was by T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (1897–99). trans. from 3rd German edition by I.M. Trout et al. 3 vols (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909), and most mordantly criticized by the brilliant G. Salmon, *A Historical Introduction to the Books of the New Testament* 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1888) esp. 11–28.

²¹ See Baur, *Paul, the Apostle*, 2.

In the Beginning is Diversity

The most influential publication on the contemporary study of Christian origins is Walter Bauer's *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Early Christianity*.²² It appeared in 1934 but had little impact until 1971, when it set the stage for the third and operative myth of Christian origins. Bauer basically continued the Tübingen project—notice that his subject is “right teaching” (orthodoxy) and “heresy,” with the clear implication that these are the options—but he added some badly needed correctives. The most significant was his attention to space as well as time. Rather than conceiving of Christianity as a Hegelian dialectic spinning through time (like a wave), he developed what might be called a “particle” approach: he studied the earliest evidence for Christianity in the various areas of the Mediterranean world. He did not actually look at the NT but at the post-NT period.

Bauer said that in many areas the first form of Christianity was not what could be called “orthodox” but what might be called heterodox or heretical. In important locations like Egypt and Syria, Christianity appears at first in forms quite different from those in, let us say, Italy and Greece. Bauer thought that such second and third century diversity also went back to the beginning. He saw “orthodoxy” as something that was created rather than assumed. It was the triumph of one form of Christianity over others. Specifically, it was the form of Christianity sponsored by Rome that, with the eventual help of imperial rule, suppressed other forms of Christianity that had equal claim to legitimacy.²³

We recognize the continuation of the Tübingen model in new form: Christianity starts with ideological conflicts that only slowly emerge into a kind of unity. The difference is the emphasis on specific places and on the role of political power rather than the laws of logic as the instrument that accomplishes this. Walter Bauer has completely reversed the Catholic myth. Instead of orthodoxy followed by heresy because of human vice, we have diversity followed by orthodoxy because of human politics.

Bauer's book also received severe criticism. It was pointed out, for example, that he sometimes made too much use of arguments from silence, that he failed to make use of the example that was most important to the Tübingen school—namely Jewish Christianity—and that he

²² *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. and trans. R.A. Kraft, G. Kmdcl. et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

²³ See *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 231–40.

vastly overestimated the power of the Roman church in the second and third centuries.²⁴ And he still focused on ideas to the virtual exclusion of persons and institutions. Most of all, the very categories of heresy and orthodoxy appeared as increasingly inappropriate. How could Christianity begin in heresy if the very concept presupposes an orthodoxy?

The reason Bauer's book became important after an initial period of neglect was the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library in Egypt in 1945.²⁵ This collection of esoteric Gnostic literature was exciting enough for the insider knowledge it provided of Gnosticism, a movement scholars had previously known mostly from the outside. But it also seemed to offer confirmation of Bauer's hypothesis that Egyptian Christianity was largely heterodox in the second and third centuries. The real excitement came, however, when scholars began to use the Nag Hammadi writings—especially the Coptic Gospel of Thomas—in the way the old Tübingen School used the pseudo-Clementine literature—that is, to suggest lines of continuity between a later movement and earlier tantalizing clues in the NT.

Some scholars thought that among its 114 sayings of Jesus, the Gospel of Thomas might contain some that were just as early if not earlier than those in the canonical gospels. This is the end of the stick that has been grasped by some questers of the historical Jesus.²⁶ But for those interested in the larger historical picture, a new way of conceiving Christian origins began to emerge. The key publication was by Harvard Professor Helmut Koester and Claremont Professor James Robinson in 1971. In *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, they used these new discoveries to reprimarize both F.C. Baur and Walter Bauer.²⁷ In order to do the history of earliest Christianity, they said, we must go outside the bounds of the canon and use all the available sources. And once this is done, one can see that from the very start there are different voices in Christianity: not only narrative

²⁴ In the 1971 edition of *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, see Appendix I, "On the Problem of Jewish Christianity" (pp. 241–85) and Appendix II, "The Reception of the Book" (pp. 286–316) by G. Strecker. See also discussion in appendix to Bauer; for another account that explicitly responds to Bauer, see A. Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

²⁵ *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J.M. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

²⁶ Especially J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991) and S.J. Patterson and J.M. Robinson. *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

²⁷ J.M. Robinson and H. Koester. *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

gospels but also sayings gospels; not only a suffering Jesus but an other-worldly revealing Jesus; not only Jesus the miracle worker but also Jesus the sage; not only Pauline Christianity—this is the key point—but other forms of Christianity from the start—for example, several kinds of Jesus movements in Palestine. The other forms of Christianity do not in the least resemble the Pauline Christianity that was later taken as normative, above all by paying no attention to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The word “trajectories” suggests separate lines of development through time in different communities whose distinct literature reveals different and even opposing ideologies. In the beginning, therefore, was radical diversity.

The Bauer-Robinson-Koester model, perfectly realized in the recent PBS presentation “From Jesus to Christ,” is the dominant one used by scholars in the field of Christian origins today.²⁸ It has generated a great deal of interest in the discovery and description of those diverse voices found in full and fragmentary literature both within and outside the NT canon, as well as the detection and definition of the diverse communities that purportedly lie behind and within those disparate writings.²⁹ There is also a rehabilitation of those alternative voices in early Christianity. Rather than being perceived as a weird development of Christianity in the mid-second century, for example, Gnosticism is seen as a stream of Christian tradition that has equal roots in the beginning and perhaps as much claim to originality as do the more conventional voices.

If the canon is not adequate for the historical description of Christianity, should it be regarded as theologically normative today? The answer given in these circles is a resounding no. The canon and creed are seen as political instruments wielded by ecclesiastics in their own self-interest to suppress other equally legitimate voices. The rise of ideology-criticism within NT scholarship has given greater edge to this perception. Feminist scholars like Elaine Pagels think that the Gnostic gospels gave a much better role to women, and they argue that it may have been precisely

²⁸ As G. MacRae states, “It is now as much a dogma of scholarship as its opposite used to be: orthodoxy is not the presupposition of the church but the result of growth and development,” in “Why the Church Rejected Gnosticism,” *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* Vol. 1: *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. E.P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 127.

²⁹ This agenda has been most vigorously pursued by B. Mack. *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993) and *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995).

episcopal misogyny that led to the inclusion of patriarchal texts in the canon rather than the supposedly more egalitarian Gnostic writings.³⁰

What is mythic about this construal? It obviously serves to deconstruct even further any normative claims for the canon and the creed. We see again that, as was already the case with F.C. Baur, critical historiography is the tool for theological challenge and revision. If the “historically original” form of Christianity is assumed to have normative force, then the historical quest for alternative voices suppressed by orthodoxy means reopening the debate concerning what is normative within Christianity. Clearly, if “in the beginning is diversity” is taken not only as historically accurate but also as normative, then it follows that Christianity today should open up the canon to all these writings (and potentially many others) or should abandon the notion of canon and creed altogether. Unity is neither the starting point nor the goal: it is the problem. Diversity is the ideal. I call this mythic because it uses an account of history to support a contemporary ideological position.

Koinonia: An Alternative Approach

In response to these classic positions I offer the sketch of a proposal concerning unity and diversity in early Christianity that seeks to be historical rather than mythical. I begin with three preliminary observations. The first is the importance of severing descriptive and normative tasks.³¹ History becomes mythic when the description of the past is expected to provide a norm for the present. History is liberated when it is allowed to do its own business of trying to figure out just what was happening in the past without being asked to isolate some ideal moment by which all other ages can measure themselves. So we can begin by recognizing that the move toward myth begins when a religion’s *origins* are taken to be defining of its *essence*. This represents a theological rather than a historiographical decision.³² The process of canonization is likewise a historical process.

³⁰ The most influential work here has been E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979); see also E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) and M.A. Tolbert, “Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* (1983): 113–126.

³¹ This is the same point I have been trying (not very effectively) to make in the historical Jesus controversy, as in my *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996).

³² For a critique (from two very different directions) on the tendency to equate origins and essence in Christian historiography, see J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago

The decision on what to do about that process and the decisions it yielded is not determined by any amount of history but by the discernment and debates and decisions of communities in the present.³³ In my proposal I am not interested in normativity so much as in good description.

A second preliminary observation is that each of the mythic models captures some dimension of history but misses others. The Catholic myth caught the importance of persons which the others have neglected; the Tübingen myth saw the importance of ideologies and of the conflict of ideas; the contemporary myth has stressed the importance of local development and of the location of ideas within communities. A more adequate account, I think, will find a way to include all these dimensions.

A third preliminary comment: although I agree that for purposes of history the canon of the NT is irrelevant, I am more conservative than many of my contemporaries on three counts: I see the writings of the NT—with the probable exception of 2 Peter—as chronologically prior to any apocryphal text; I think that although in need of critical questioning, the writings of the NT are not to be reduced simply to instruments of ideological position-taking; and on the practice of excavating earlier texts from later ones and constructing the histories of communities on the basis of dissecting layers of tradition within such excavated texts, I am a complete skeptic.

My proposal, then, is really nothing more than a sketch of four stages in early Christianity that together provide some answers to the questions with which we began.

1) In the beginning is diversity. Diversity was the natural consequence of the circumstances of Christianity's first expansion. The expansion was remarkably swift: twenty-five years after the death of Jesus there were communities across the Mediterranean from Jerusalem to Rome. The mission was carried out in adverse conditions of travel, opposition, persecution. The expansion had to accomplish five distinct transitions, not after a long period of gestation and gathering of traditions, but from the beginning: from rural to urban, from Palestinian to diaspora, from Aramaic to Greek, from Jewish culture to Greco-Roman culture, and from Jew to Gentile—location, social setting, language, culture system, demographic composition. The expansion, finally, was carried out without strong

Press, 1990) and L.T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

³³ I argue this more fully in *Scripture and Discernment: Decision-Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

central control: Jerusalem was a weak church, of symbolic value but of limited resources: preachers and founders of communities had few textual controls—no NT, little access to cumbersome Torah scrolls. In light of these circumstances, several things can be stated firmly: Christianity was necessarily and inevitably different in each place it was planted; the diversity in perception, theme and symbol in the New Testament writings is rooted in the diversity of social location, experience, and cultural context of the first Christians; the surprising thing is not that Christianity is diverse but that it has any coherence at all.³⁴

2) In the beginning is also *koinonia*. The word means fellowship, and it denotes a sharing between parties who are not identical in every respect.³⁵ It is this side of things that the conflict theories of origins tend to overlook. Not all difference is contradiction: not all disagreement spells division.

Let us grant the obvious diversity: at the start, Johannine and Pauline Christianity were quite distinct in all the ways those literatures are different. Let us also grant conflict: even in the first generation, there is plenty of evidence in Paul's letters, in the Acts of the Apostles, and in other writings for serious conflict involving personalities, struggles for power, and differences concerning the right way to think and the right way to live. But what the sources do not yield is any consistent connection among these elements. There is no unified field theory accounting for the conflicts in early Christianity. It seems, rather, more likely that the power, energy, and spontaneous character of the movement also generated enthusiastic and idiosyncratic versions of every sort at the local and regional levels.

At the same time, however, the writings also show marks of genuine fellowship that may appear less evident than the diversity that now so impresses us but which should nevertheless be taken with full seriousness. I can mention only four of these marks of fellowship.

Fellowship among persons. Here we should include not only the right hand of fellowship shared by Paul and Cephas and John and James in Jerusalem concerning the Gentile and Jewish missions (Gal 2:7–9) but also the multiple networks of names that weave their way in and out of the NT writings. Barnabas is an emissary of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:22) but is also a steadfast companion of Paul (Acts 13:2ff.; I Cor 9:6). Mark and Silvanus are companions of Paul (Acts 15:39–40), but they show up also

³⁴ For the evidence supporting these assertions, see L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

³⁵ J. Campbell. "Koinonia and its Cognates in the New Testament," *JBL* 51 (1932): 352–80.

as associates of Peter (1 Pt 5:12–13). Paul's chief delegate, Timothy, appears in Hebrews (Heb 13:23). Peter's second letter commends the letters of Paul (2 Pt 3:15–16). Jude is the brother of James (Jude 1), who is the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19). John appears at Patmos (Rev 1:9) but also at Peter's side in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1). The epilogue to John's Gospel signals an implied communication between the believers associated with John and those associated with Peter (Jn 21:15–23). Then there are the lists of those greeted and sending greetings in Paul's letters (e.g. Rom 16:3–24; 1 Cor 16:10–20; Col 4:7–17), the letters of commendation written for Onesimus (Phlm), Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2), and Demetrius (3 Jn). The movement had the coherence that came from personal acquaintance and communication.

Fellowship in writing. The exchange of compositions was an important means of expressing and creating *koinonia*. Paul wants the letter he wrote to the Laodiceans and Colossians to be exchanged and read aloud in each place (Col 4:16). Galatians is for all the churches in Phrygia (Gal 1:2), as 2 Corinthians is for the churches throughout Achaia (2 Cor 1:1). Ephesians was probably written for a circle of churches in Asia and 1 Peter certainly was (1 Pt 1:1). More than letters were exchanged. The Gospel of Mark quickly found its way to other communities. In two of these communities, Matthew and Luke used Mark in the composition of their own gospels, employing as well another written source or sources that scholars call Q. As they shared compositions, Christians came also to a deeper if still implicit *koinonia* of understanding and practice.

Fellowship in material resources. The first Christians shared with the ancient Greeks the conviction that sharing of possessions was the symbol of spiritual sharing: friends hold all things in common because they are one soul.³⁶ Luke shows such unity of spirit and possessions among believers in Jerusalem (Acts 4:41–47; 4:32–37). He also shows Paul and Barnabas bringing a collection from Antiochene believers to the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:27–30; 12:25). Paul spent a good part of his active ministry gathering a major collection of money from his Gentile churches throughout Achaia and Macedonia to deliver to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem precisely in order to symbolize the spiritual unity between Gentile and Jewish believers (1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:25–33); this effort developed, by the way, in response to one of the agreements struck between Paul and James and John and Peter when they shook hands in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10).

³⁶ For this theme in the New Testament, see L.T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

Fellowship in convictions. The conflicts that we see in the writings of the NT have to do with how certain fundamental convictions are to be understood or lived out. But in none of the writings do we find significant variation on certain key points: that God is one and is the same God who created the world and revealed Torah; that Jesus is human and that he suffered and died; that Jesus now lives with the life of God and will share in God's triumph in the future. On such few but critical points, the literature of the NT confirms what Paul declares in 1 Cor 15:11: "Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believe." Controversy arises not because these central convictions are challenged but because interpretation of them leads to differences in teaching or behavior, it is noteworthy, for example, that nowhere do we find it suggested that Jesus is not now powerfully alive as Lord—even in the apocryphal literature.

3) The challenge of the second century evoked a more explicit *koinonia*. The decisive moment of Christian self-definition occurred not in the first or fourth but in the second century. Challenges came not only from the powers of expansion, represented by the Gnostics' producing a plethora of new inspired writings and seeking to enlarge the church's scriptures but also from the powers of contraction represented by Marcion and Tatian, who sought to reduce the collection of books that had slowly and organically grown up in churches through a process of exchange. At stake in the debate over which books to read was a much more profound disagreement concerning the very nature of the reality in which human beings found themselves. Was there one God or two rival gods, one of whom created the world and the other who liberated from it? Was salvation a matter of saving one's own soul or creating a renewed people? Did only the smart get saved? Was the body good, and did it have a future, or was it evil and in need of shelving? Were sex and marriage good, or was intercourse a collusion with evil that made bearing children the perpetuation of evil materiality and human imprisonment?

In the second century, diversity truly did become deviance. Those calling themselves Christians were advancing understandings and were writing books containing understandings in fundamental opposition to the convictions expressed in the NT.³⁷ An explicit orthodoxy emerged in

³⁷ To be sure, given certain rules for reading, the NT could yield support for such positions in the manner that 2 Cor 4:4 notoriously provided warrant to Marcion's claim of a "god of this world" inimical to the God of Jesus; see Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.9.

response to these expansionist and contractionist tendencies, not as a plot of the bishops to suppress women or maintain their own authority but as a way of defining the nature of the movement they had inherited. They drew a circle around the books they had received and called it the canon. They drew a circle around the convictions they thought central to the understanding of that collection and called it the rule of faith. And they drew a circle around the teaching authority of the bishops as the network of persons who through time could transmit this *koinonia*.³⁸ In the second century, the *koinonia* of orthodoxy was one that had to be both selective and explicit, for the challenges were massive and fundamental.

4) The canon institutionalized both unity and diversity. The second century made a certain shared understanding explicit and thereby provided the basis for unity. But paradoxically, it also institutionalized a real diversity. The 27 writings of the NT are coherent and consistent only when contrasted with the more wildly divergent productions of Gnosticism. In themselves they retain all the generic, perspectival, and thematic diversity of the situations, experiences, and cultural contexts out of which they emerged. This means that Christians throughout the ages can either unify or divide on the basis of this canon. If they focus on the implicit *koinonia* of persons, compositions, resources, and fundamental convictions, they can find unity. If they focus on one set of writings or another, they end up divided. Christians who read only the Book of Revelation have little in common with those who concentrate on Paul. Christians who favor the Gospel of Mark have a different way of viewing things than do those who love Luke the most. And Christians who read only John wonder whether anyone but them is Christian. The diversity is overt and easy. The unity is implicit and takes work.

I started with three propositions: Christianity is the most divided of all religions, all Christian traditions claim to be based on the same book, and you can always tell a Christian from a Buddhist. By avoiding those readings of the past that pose as history but function as myth, we may be able to provide a more genuinely historical explanation of these odd facts. They result from the very process by which Christianity first defined itself.

³⁸ This strategy of self-definition is worked out most coherently by Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE NEW TESTAMENT'S ANTI-JEWISH SLANDER AND THE CONVENTIONS OF ANCIENT POLEMIC

The scurrilous language used about Jews in the earliest Christian writings is a hurdle neither Jew nor Christian can easily surmount. It is a source of shame (finally) to Christians, and a well-grounded source of fear to Jews. A few remarks on my approach to this delicate subject may be helpful.¹

First, I am not doing theology or making a direct contribution to Jewish-Christian relations. I do not worry about what to do with this language so much as about what the language was doing. My examination is historical and literary. Second, I do not attempt to solve any specific textual problems. I suggest instead a perspective for viewing a whole series of texts. I may appear to move too quickly over troubled terrain, but my object is to reach a high place from which to view that terrain and assess its troubled condition. Third, I am not dealing with subtle issues. I do not engage the question whether any truth claim (particularly a religious truth claim) necessarily involves hostility to other truth claims or hatred of the people who make them. I do not ask whether any Christology, for example, is intrinsically anti-Semitic,² or whether a supersessionist theology leads inevitably to the holocaust.³

¹ This article began as a lecture sponsored by the Institute for Biblical and Literary Criticism at Indiana University and is dedicated to Henry Fischel, who introduced me to the Talmud and whose pioneering work on Judaism as part of the Hellenistic world is a model.

² See R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974) esp. 246–51. Ruether's position is made thematic by A. Roy Eckhardt, *Jesus and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) e.g., 82–87. Eckhardt speaks easily of Christianity's "christological idolatries" (153).

³ Eckhardt states; "... the finding that the traditional Christian attitude to Jews and Judaism helped make the Abomination possible and *perhaps even inevitable* has become a truism of recent historical scholarship" (*Jews and Christians*, 63 [emphasis added]). Because of its "supersessionist theology," Luke-Acts has recently been targeted as the NT's most anti-Semitic writing; so J.T. Pawlikowski in a review of N. Beck's *Mature Christianity*: "Acts is by far the most anti-Jewish book in the New Testament, posing far more difficulties in the long run than the celebrated Fourth Gospel" (*CBQ* 49 [1987] 138). Something of a rhetorical nadir is reached by J.T. Sanders when he says, "... the Gentile mission therefore served to attest the truth displayed in the martyrdom of Stephen, which Paul finally and for the last time announces at the end of Acts. A *final solution of the Jewish problem* has been indicated" ("The Salvation of the Jews in Luke-Acts," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives*

My topic is simply the rhetoric of slander that is directed against Jewish opponents by Christians even when it is sometimes placed in the mouth of Jesus. A classic example is Matt 23:1–39 (par. Luke 11:37–52). Jesus attacks scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29), blind guides (23:16), white-washed tombs (23:27), serpents, brood of vipers (23:33), and children of hell (23:15). They are portrayed as vainglorious (23:5–7), posturing (23:27–28), preoccupied with trivia rather than real religion (23:23–24), concerned for outer not inner righteousness (23:25–26), the murderers of the prophets and of Jesus’ own emissaries (23:32–36). It is also Matthew who has the Jews answer Pilate at the trial of Jesus, “his blood be on us and on our children” (27:25). Luke adds that the Pharisees and lawyers “rejected God’s plan for them” (Luke 7:30) and in an apparently gratuitous aside calls the Pharisees “lovers of money” (16:14).

John’s Gospel contains a number of such passages. In disputation with those termed simply “the Jews,” for example, Jesus says, “You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth. . . . He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (John 8:44–47). John explains why Jesus was rejected: “. . . many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42–43). Johannine Christianity also contributes from the book of Revelation: “Behold I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews but are not and lie—behold I will make them come and bow before your feet and learn that I have loved you” (Rev 3:9).

Some such statements occur also in Paul. He can say, “even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God” (2 Cor 4:3). A part of Israel, he says in Romans, is, “as regards the gospel, enemies of God, for your sake” (Rom 11:28). In Philippians, he speaks of “enemies of the cross of Christ, their end is destruction, their god is the belly, they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Phil 3:18–19). He tells the Thessalonian congregation which was experiencing persecution: “You suffered the same things from your countrymen that they [the churches in Judea] did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord

Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sin. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last” (1 Thess 2:15–16).

The power of such language to shape hostile and destructive attitudes and actions toward Jews has often been realized. The proper understanding of such polemic is therefore an issue of real importance. I will suggest that the best approach is not through theology but through the exercise of historical and literary imagination. Before developing that argument, I will distinguish it from other solutions.

The first solution is censorship. Censorship is frequently based on the premise that texts should reflect our liberated self-understanding and practice. If they offend our sensibilities, they are dispensable.⁴ Either we cut them out of the canon, or we modify the translation.⁵ Censorship can apply itself not only to anti-Jewish but also to sexist, racist, and ageist texts. Censorship has obvious limitations. Not much is left over when every sensibility is assuaged, and censorship always finds itself in a baby-and-bathwater situation: texts that offend one way can build positive identity in another.⁶ The premise that sacred texts must always confirm and never challenge contemporary ideology is perhaps the most problematic aspect of this approach.⁷

A second solution argues against the historical accuracy of the polemic. This approach tends to overcompensate. Jews were not only not responsible for Jesus’ death; they were uniformly pacific.⁸ Scribes and Pharisees

⁴ The basic liberationist approach is again defined most clearly by R. Ruether in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) 19, and is extensively developed by E. Schüssler Fiorenza in *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) e.g., 30. A mildly amusing form of censorship is found in the scholarly attempt to dismiss as “interpolations” passages in Paul that offend in one way or another: e.g., 1 Thess 2:13–16 because of its anti-Jewish tone (see B.A. Pearson, “1 Thess 2:13–16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation,” *HTR* 64 [1971]: 79–94, and D. Schmidt, “1 Thess 2:13–16: Linguistic Evidence for an Interpolation,” *JBL* 102 [1983]: 269–79).

⁵ See Eckhardt, *Jews and Christians*, 66; this twofold approach is systematically pursued by N.A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985).

⁶ Unintentional testimony to the difficulties of combining the “liberation” of disparate groups on the basis of texts is given by R. Eckhardt’s *Jews and Christians*, 116–31.

⁷ See the balanced discussion by C. Osiek, “The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (ed. A. Yarbro Collins; Biblical Scholarship in North America 10; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 93–105.

⁸ There is, of course, a vast amount of scholarship devoted to the trial of Jesus and the role of Jews in his death. For representative statements, see P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*

were not really hypocritical or money-loving; they were in fact incapable of human frailty.⁹ The approach is, however, futile: How can a serious charge of hypocrisy, after all, be rebutted? Historical vindication also misses the point. Not historical evidence but rhetoric shapes the reader.

A third solution claims mistaken attribution. In naive form, Jesus was not attacking Jews as such, but bad Pharisees of the house of Shammai; the polemic does not therefore apply to contemporary Jews, descended from Pharisees of the house of Hillel.¹⁰ In sophisticated form, what appear to be anti-Judaic attacks are really attacks on Judaizing Gentiles: most of the NT polemic is turned inward rather than outward.¹¹ This refinement is

(Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961); E. Bammel, ed., *The Trial of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1970); G. Sloyan, *Jesus on Trial* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973). On the critical issue of Sanhedrin competence, see especially A.N. Sherwin White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) 24–47. The tendency to dismiss Jewish implication in the death of Jesus or the persecution of the earliest Christians (see, e.g., Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 87–89) is often bound up with taking the codification (idealization) of *m. Sanh.* as evidence for historical practice 150 years earlier (see, e.g., G. Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] 361). On this, see especially J. Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus* (trans. I. and F. McHugh; Westminster: Newman, 1959) 149–57. The issue of *legality* is at any rate a secondary one; humans often betray their own statutes and ideals. For the handling of a troublesome prophet in Jerusalem, see Josephus, *J.W.* 6.5:3 §300–309. A reasonable statement of the Jewish leadership's involvement in Jesus' death is found in E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 294–318.

⁹ A shocking amount of anti-Judaism is found in standard NT scholarship; see, e.g., the discussion by E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 23–52, 202; and especially C. Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (trans. E. Quinn; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). The natural, if unfortunate, reaction has been to accept uncritically the Pharisaic tradition's own self-portrayal and to dismiss any possibility of frailty. See, e.g., the representative statements collected by S. Van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 25–26. But the Jews of first-century Palestine and the diaspora were in fact often fanatical and violent, if even a portion of what Josephus reports is accurate; see *J.W.* 1.4.3 §89; 1.7.5 §150, 1.29.1 §571; 2.1.3 §8–13; 2.3.1 §42; 2.4.3 §65; 2.9.2 §169–70; 2.12.1 §223; 2.12.2 §229–30; 2.13.6 §264–65; 2.17.2 §408–9; 2.17.4 §417; 2.18.3 §466; 4.3.3 §135; 4.3.12 §197–207; 4.5.1 §310–18; 4.6.3 §378; 4.9.4 §509; 7.8.7 §367; 7.10.1 §409; 7.11 §437–41. Notice especially the account in *Life* (197–203) of the Pharisees associated with the Sanhedrin, who are sent to arrest or kill Josephus in Galilee.

¹⁰ See H. Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1985) 148–61.

¹¹ See J. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) esp. 112–17. A similar approach is taken by S. Freyne, “Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew’s and John’s Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus,” in J. Neusner and E.S. Frerichs, “To See Ourselves as Others See Us”: *Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity* (Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 117–43. He mentions in passing the “social matrix” of the polemic and refers to the *vituperatio* learned in rhetorical schools and “aimed at destroying the social and political *persona* of one’s adversary” (118), but focuses on the insider function of polemic (129), concluding with “hermeneutical reflections” (140) on what he terms these “documents of betrayal” (141).

both correct and important, but it does not directly help with the rhetoric, which is usually heard, especially after centuries of Christian preaching, as direct attacks on Jews.¹²

These approaches are theologically motivated and are anachronistic. They isolate “Christianity” over against “Judaism” as though each was a well-defined entity when the polemic was written. This static bifurcation matches (and in part derives from) the contemporary Jew-Christian polarity. It also obviously exacerbates the negative power of the rhetoric.

Equally anachronistic, however, is the reduction of the author of John’s Gospel to a “strong misreader and thus a strong writer” by a contemporary literary critic, whose approach to the NT is candidly self-acknowledged, “I am an enemy of the New Testament. My enmity is life long, and intensifies as I study its text more closely.”¹³ Given this animus, it is perhaps not surprising to see this evaluation: “John is evidently an anti-semite, and the Fourth Gospel is pragmatically murderous as an anti-Jewish text.”¹⁴ The critic’s approach is equally anachronistic. Historically, it assumes that at the time of writing Judaism was one thing and Christianity was something else altogether; literarily, it assumes that contemporary notions of authorship and rhetoric apply without remainder to these ancient texts.

My task is not adjudicating the anti-Jewish slander of the NT, but showing how to understand it. To do this, I will first sketch the historical and social context which generated this language. Second, I will place the polemic within the conventional rhetoric of slander in the Hellenistic world. In simple terms: Why did messianists utter such slander, and how would their slander be heard back then?

Historical Circumstances

I begin with the historical circumstances out of which the polemic was generated. The first step is to shatter the image of an imperially protected, powerful, and Jew-persecuting Christianity of the fourth and subsequent

¹² With reference to John Chrysostom, Gager notes that like Cicero, “he reflects the standard implements of rhetorical invective,” but he neither develops the point nor applies it to the NT writings (*Origins*, 120). Likewise M. Simon picks up after the period of the NT (*Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire* [trans. H. McKeating; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986] esp. 135–236).

¹³ H. Bloom, “Before Moses was, I am’: The Original and Belated Testaments,” in *The Bible* (ed. H. Bloom; Modern Critical Views; New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 292.

¹⁴ Bloom, “Before Moses was,” 304.

centuries. We must return imaginatively some three hundred years, to when the NT was written, between the years 35 and 100 of the common era. How did the messianic cult which could call itself “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) compare to other forms of Judaism?

If we remind ourselves at once of the pervasive presence, age, and authority of the “second race”—Judaism—in that Greek world, comparison to the nascent messianic cult is instructive. Next to nearly seven million Jews in the empire were certainly fewer than one hundred thousand messianists. In an era that treasured antiquity, Judaism traced a history of two thousand years; the messianists were literally born yesterday. Jews had interacted with Hellenistic culture for hundreds of years; Christians would not be noticed by a Roman writer until the early second century. The Temple in Jerusalem was, before its destruction, a wonder of the world; so were synagogues like that of Sardis. The messianists met in houses and empty lecture halls. If archaeological evidence alone counted, Christianity did not yet exist during the NT period. The messianists were not the proletariat, but even the wealthiest of them was scarcely “well-born” (1 Cor 1:26).¹⁵ In the beginning, the messianists were David to the non-messianists’ Goliath.

The first thing we would anticipate in NT rhetoric, therefore, is a compensatory leap across the very real gap in power. Abuse tends to gain in volume when it is powerless. A second predictable and unexceptional feature of the NT’s rhetoric would be its defensive quality. The symbols of Torah it had appropriated were so much more self-evidently in the control of the dominant group.

In the first generation, furthermore, the messianists were a persecuted sect. Some non-messianist Jews certainly sought to extirpate the cult. Jesus was executed. Subsequent leaders of the movement were arrested, imprisoned, stoned, killed. Whether this was all the direct work of Jews is irrelevant, because in the eyes of the messianists they were to blame.¹⁶

¹⁵ On the social status of first-generation messianists, see the summation of recent scholarship in W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 51–73; and S.K. Stowers, “Social Status, Public speaking and Private Teaching: The Circumstances of Paul’s Preaching Activity,” *NovT* 26 (1984) 59–82.

¹⁶ Even if 1 Thess 2:14–16 is an interpolation, it is early evidence for the messianists’ perception of Palestinian and diaspora persecution from Jews. Together with Paul’s statements about his own activity (Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6; 1 Cor 15:8; 1 Tim 1:12–13) and experience (2 Cor 11:23–29), and the evidence of Acts (5:17–18; 6:12–13; 7:58; 8:3; 9:1–2, 23; 12:1–2; 13:50; 14:19; 17:5; 18:12; 23:12–15), as well as that of Josephus (see n. 9 above), the simple statement of my text may be allowed to stand as historically accurate. Despite all his minimizing

The social psychology of communities seems to parallel that of individuals. The experience of child abuse leaves lasting psychic scars. The Essenes from the Dead Sea area made an early dispute over priesthood and the despoiling of their property into a dualistic ideology which opposed sons of darkness against the sons of light.¹⁷ The murder of Muhammad's son-in-law 'Ali and even more of 'Ali's son Husayn is a trauma from which the Islamic Shī'ah has never recovered.¹⁸ The primordial experience of suffering deeply influences all the NT rhetoric. Christianity, when politically ascendant, would view its now-weakened parent community with the same fear and hostility as the once-abused adult regards her now-powerless, indeed pitiful, parent.¹⁹

Even these preliminary remarks, however, tend to perpetuate the static "all Jews" and "all Christians" polarity. Historical accuracy demands the systematic dismantling of that mythic opposition.

A Diverse Messianic Movement

The messianic sect was diverse from the beginning. Jews from all over the diaspora were converted on Pentecost (Acts 2:1–41), and groups called "Hellenists" and "Hebrews" quickly developed and as quickly fell into dispute (Acts 6:1–3). The missionary character of the sect made diversity inevitable. The founding of churches from Jerusalem to Rome within a twenty-five-year period is, of course, a stunning success story. The consequences of such rapid expansion are too seldom calculated. Christianity was quite literally a new invention every place it appeared. The mission was not centrally controlled with respect either to structure or to ideology. The few attempts along these lines were not markedly successful (cf. Acts 15:6–29). Rapid adjustments had to be made as the movement shifted from a rural Palestinian mission to an urban cult of the diaspora, from

qualifications, the *fact* of such persecution is also acknowledged by D.R.A. Hare (*The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* [SNTSMS 6; Cambridge: University Press, 1967] 19–79).

¹⁷ See, e.g., 1QpHab 8:8–12; 9:4–5; 12:3–10; 4QpPs^a 1:1–10 ii 3–9; iii 10–11, together with 1QS 3:13–4:26; and L.T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 126–27; 144–45.

¹⁸ See F. Rahman, *Islam* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor, 1966) 209–13; and S.H. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) 149–54.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Gager's treatment of John Chrysostom in *Origins*, 117–20; and W.A. Meeks and R.L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (SBS 13; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978) 31–36, 85–126.

Aramaic to Greek, and to a cultural context more obviously dominated by pagan cults and philosophy than by the structures and symbols of Judaism. All these adjustments were required from the very beginning.

There was no long period of stability during which self-definition could be consolidated. The messianists made it up as they went along. For at least the first fifty years of its existence, there was no one thing that could be called “Christianity” as a standard by which to measure deviance. There was rather a loose network of assemblies on the fringe of synagogues and in lecture halls down the street, whose boundaries of self-definition were vigorously debated.

The first messianist concern was, understandably, with survival. Only energy left over from upkeep and maintenance went to the reinterpretation of symbols shared with other Jews. Rejection of the messianic claim from within the synagogue was an important stimulus for such reinterpretation of Torah. By the time the first Christian writings appear, however, even that stage is already passed. Only the residue of apologetic remains in the literary forms of testimonia and messianic midrash.²⁰

The NT writings show clearly that the need to secure identity was made more urgent because of the disagreements and disputes within the movement itself. Where did the messianists stand in the eschatological scenario? What was acceptable diversity in matters of food and sex? What were the signs of legitimate authority? Was theirs to be an egalitarian assembly with equal access to all? Or were they to be like some other cults, many-tiered with multiple initiations and stages of perfection? Elitists such as the Illuminati at Corinth, the Ascetical Mystics at Colossae, the Legalists at Ephesus, and of course the Judaizers in Galatia advanced just such perfectionist opinions. Communities threatened to split over these issues.

Because of these pressures, NT polemic is mostly turned inward against fellow members of the movement. Outsiders are addressed only indirectly. Paul’s polemic in Galatia does not concern Judaism as such but the specific claims of Gentile messianists who impose circumcision as a second initiation rite. There is no rebuttal of Jewish identity, only a defense of the specific messianist experience and conviction.²¹ No messianist in that period was in a position to adjudicate “Judaism” as such. The main reason

²⁰ On this, now see D. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

²¹ Gager clearly recognizes this (*Origins*, 129–33), although he later discusses “Paul’s argument with the Jews” (247–64).

is that “Judaism as such” did not even exist. The polemic responds not to theological systems but to community crises having to do with the integrity of the messianist movement. To ignore the *indirect* character of the NT polemic against the messianists’ fellow Jews is to distort the historical reality of the texts.

The diversity of early Christianity is embedded in its canon. One of the great contributions of historical criticism has been the dismantling of the myth of a unified Christian beginning later shattered by heresy.²² Research reveals an initially variegated movement that only in the course of the canonization of its texts became a recognizably catholic entity.

A Diverse First-Century Judaism

The myth of normative Judaism is harder to deconstruct.²³ Despite the overwhelming evidence that first-century Judaism was not homogeneous but diverse and even deeply divided, there remains the tendency to accept the founding myth of the Pharisaic tradition—a myth that says things were before the fall of the Temple as they were after, that the formation of Mishna and Talmud made nothing new but only confirmed what had been there all along.²⁴ In this mythic understanding, the five million Jews of the diaspora, who outnumbered Jews of Palestine at least two to one, were not quite “really Jewish”; the Essenes were a “deviant sect”; and the messianists were “not Jewish”—no matter how much each of these groups claimed not only to be Jewish but to represent an authentic realization of

²² “It is now as much a dogma of scholarship as its opposite used to be: orthodoxy is not the presupposition of the church but the result of a process of growth and development” (G.W. MacRae, “Why the Church Rejected Gnosticism,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*: Vol. 1, *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries* [ed. E.P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980] 127). Most influential in this respect was W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (2d ed., G. Strecker; trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins; ed. R.A. Kraft and G. Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

²³ Whatever the origin of the term “Normative Judaism,” it was given impressive credentials by the magisterial work of G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (2 vols.; New York: Schocken, 1927) e.g., 1, 59, 109.

²⁴ See the succinct statement by Moore, *Judaism*, 1, 71: “Evidently much of what we otherwise know only in the rabbinic sources of the first and second centuries after our era was custom and law in the preceding centuries.” Emblematic of the attempt to overturn this perception is the prolific writing of J. Neusner, as in *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1978), and “The History of Earlier Rabbinic Judaism: Some New Approaches,” *HR* 16 (1977) 216–36.

Israel.²⁵ These judgments beg the historical question and fly in the face of the best available evidence. So-called normative Judaism was not normative in the period of the NT. The question Who is a real Jew? was then an open question, debated fiercely and even violently by rival claimants.

Even if we agree to define Judaism in the first century as an adherence to certain central symbols such as Torah and Temple, the most cursory review of the extant literature reveals that these symbols in particular were open for debate: Which Torah? Consisting of how many books? In which translation? Interpreted from what standpoint? Which temple? Run by which priesthood?

Jews who lived in Cyrene and Alexandria were no less legitimate claimants to the title Jew because they used allegory rather than midrash and could not tell a Pharisee from a Sadducee.²⁶ Those who called themselves “the keepers” and observed the Torah of Moses and awaited a Mosaic messiah and observed Passover in the rival temple at Mount Gerizim were not disqualified from the title Israel simply because the rival Judeans denied they should have it.²⁷ The messianist claims about the way to read Torah and the proper understanding of God’s Temple represented only one more voice among many loud and clamoring ones in that period.

In fact, some of our best evidence for diversity and debate among Jews in the first century is found in the NT itself. The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles sort out scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Samaritans together with some notion of their disputations and mutual recriminations.²⁸ But

²⁵ Even so sophisticated a scholar as G. Vermes, who is capable of refined methodological statements (as in *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, 70), can in practice operate according to the narrowed norm (ibid., 74–88).

²⁶ “Hellenistic Judaism” and “diaspora Judaism” are, of course, not to be identified; I use the locations simply for purposes of illustration. See L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 41–83. For the multiple interactions of Judaism and Hellenistic culture, see M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (trans. J. Bowden; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); J. Goldstein, “Jewish Acceptance and Rejection of Hellenism,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Vol. 2, Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period* (ed. E.P. Sanders et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 64–87; H. Fischel, ed., *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1977).

²⁷ “Within the broad spectrum of Judaism they represent a conservative old fashioned element—certainly not the syncretism of which they are condemned by their Jewish neighbors” (R.J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews: The Origins of Samaritanism Reconsidered* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1975] 12). See also F. Dexinger, “Limits of Tolerance in Judaism: The Samaritan Example,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, 2, 88–114.

²⁸ The evidence of the Gospels (especially in passages such as Mark 7:1–23) is in fact essential for establishing a real line of continuity within the Pharisaic tradition. Mark combines the concerns for purity and tithing also found in m. *Dem.* 2:3 with the halachic oral

even the Gospels reflect a narrower situation after the fall of the Temple when many of the rivals had disappeared. A still more diverse mixture is reflected in the earliest Christian letters, written in the decades before the war with Rome. Did the Colossian ascetics gain their inspiration from Essenes or from Merkabah Mystics?²⁹ Were Paul's rivals in Corinth connected to a Hellenistic Jewish mission?³⁰ Were those influencing the Gentile "Judaizers" in Galatia Pharisees?³¹ And were they the same as those "from the circumcision party" operating in Crete?³² Was the intended audience for "the letter to the Hebrews" made up of Gentiles with a purely literary interest in the cult, or Alexandrian Jews, or ex-priests, or former members of the Qumran sect?³³ Or were they diaspora Jews in Jerusalem for a pilgrimage feast?³⁴ In Smyrna and Philadelphia of Asia Minor, whom did Revelation call "the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews but are not" (Rev 2:9; 3:9)? Were they non-messianists at all? Could they have been Pauline-style messianists who ate idol meat, in contrast to the more thoroughly "Judaized" author of Revelation?³⁵ We do not know the answers to these questions. How odd, if all the Jews encountered by the first Christians were not "real Jews" by the mythic reckoning. But, of course, they were real Jews with all the complex coloration of genuine historical persons, rather than the monochromatic consistency of myth.

When the NT writings were composed, neither Christianity nor Judaism had reached the point of uniformity and separation that would characterize them in later centuries. The messianists were part of a much larger debate within Judaism, a debate with many parties, concerning the right way to read Torah, the text that shaped the people.

interpretation of Torah. See J. Neusner, "The Fellowship (חבורה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth," *HTR* 53 (1960) 125–42.

²⁹ See the essays in *Conflict at Colossae* (ed. W.A. Meeks and F.O. Francis; rev. ed.; SBS 4; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975).

³⁰ See D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians: A Study of Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

³¹ For representative discussions, see J. Tyson, "Paul's Opponents in Galatia," *NovT* 10 (1968) 241–54; R. Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Community" *NTS* 17 (1970–71) 198–212; B.H. Brinsmead, *Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents* (SBLDS 65; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

³² See W. Lutgert, *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1909); C.K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 12–16; J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 10–12; C. Spicq, *Les épîtres pastorales* (EBib; 4th rev. ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1969) 1. 85–119.

³³ The options are reviewed by C. Spicq in *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (2 vols.; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1952).

³⁴ See G.W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (AB 36; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972) 255–67.

³⁵ See, e.g., C.K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," *NTS* 11 (1964–65) 138–53.

Social Setting

Clarifying the historical circumstances that produced the NTs anti-Jewish polemic is helpful, but the rhetoric itself still appears excessive and filled with dangerous power. A proper assessment requires two further qualifications. First, we must understand the social context within which such slander was at home. Second, we must appreciate the conventions of the language itself. I suggest that the slander of the NT is typical of that found among rival claimants to a philosophical tradition and is found as widely among Jews as among other Hellenists. I further suggest that the way the NT talks about Jews is just about the way all opponents talked about each other back then.

The critical adjustment is to think of first-century Judaism as a philosophy. In fact, that is what it was perceived to be, both by outsiders and by Jews themselves.³⁶ Josephus described the sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes as philosophies not only because *he* was hellenized but because *they* were (*J.W.* 2.8.2–8 §119–66; *Ant.* 18.1.2–6 §11–25). Judaism was the oldest and best of philosophies.³⁷ The social arrangements of teachers and students, the activities of reading and interpretation and memorization, the patterns of fellowship, these are uniform across the Hellenistic world.³⁸ When we talk of the house of Hillel we speak of a philosophical party. When we speak of the school of St. Matthew or the Pauline school, we mean, or ought to mean, the same thing.³⁹

The nature of philosophy in the Hellenistic period perfectly matched the character of Judaism. Philosophy had become less a matter of metaphysics than of morals. Since the classical age there had been a shift from theory to therapy. One converted to the philosophical life by leaving vice and seeking virtue, a quest for health by those morally ill. Philosophy

³⁶ See Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1. 255–61.

³⁷ See, e.g., Artapanus, Fragment 3:4, and Eupolemus, Fragment 1, in C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors: Vol. 1, Historians* (SBLTT 20; Pseudepigrapha Series 10; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

³⁸ See, e.g., B. Dombrowski, “ קוֹיִנוֹן in IQS and to *koinon*: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis,” *HTR* 59 (1966) 293–307.

³⁹ For diverse points of entry into the scholastic character of early Christianity, see E.A. Judge, “The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community,” *JRH* 1 (1960) 4–15, 125–37; R.L. Wilken, “Collegia, Philosophical Schools, and Theology,” in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum* (ed. S. Benko and J. O’Rourke; Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1971) 268–91; K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1954) esp. 20–35; R.A. Culpepper, *The Johannine School* (SBLDS 26; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975) esp. 39–214.

was a way of life embraced by many with religious fervor; salvation was at stake.⁴⁰

The general character and goals of philosophy were universally acknowledged. The best way to realize that character and reach those goals was, however, a matter of fierce disputation. The ancient schools continued to have adherents and continued to debate their respective doctrines. And since philosophers appeared in a variety of social guises (court advisers, school masters, wandering preachers), both theory and life-style were matters of frequent debate. School teachers tended to see street preachers as show-offs. Cynics saw school teachers as armchair critics removed from the genuine open-air life. Over the centuries a stereotyped polemic developed in which such disputes found conventional expression. This is the context and these are the conventions for best understanding the NT anti-Jewish slander.

The Rhetoric

We note first the rivalry between public preachers, notably that between rhetoricians and philosophers. The English word *sophist* means a fast talker whose glibness and logic are for hire. The negative connotation comes from the polemic of philosophers, who so characterized speakers making public declamations for pay in praise of a city or festival. Dio of Prusa had been just such a rhetorician before his conversion to philosophy (cf. *Oration* 13), His orations reveal some of the classic bitterness of the convert toward his former livelihood. He calls the σοφισταί “ignorant, boastful, self-deceived” (*Or.* 4.33)... “unlearned and deceiving by their words” (4.37)... “evil-spirited” (4.38)... “impious” (11.14)... “liars and deceivers” (12.12)... preaching for the sake of gain and glory and only their own benefit (32:30). They are flatterers, charlatans, and sophists (23:11)... they profit nothing (33.4–5)... they are mindless (54.1), boastful and shameless (55.7), deceiving others and themselves (70.10), demagogues (77/78.27). He can say all this though he grudgingly admits that some sophists act for good (35.9–10). In other words, the polemic has nothing to do with

⁴⁰ Still the most accessible treatment of philosophy in the empire is S. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (1907; reprint, New York: Meridian, 1956) 289–440. See also the guidance provided by W.A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), and A.J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).

specific actions, but typical ones. Any teacher of whom you disapprove can be called a sophist or charlatan (σοφιστής και γόης).

The abuse was returned. Rhetoricians were more than capable of striking back. In the second of his *Platonic Discourses*, for example, the rhetorician Aelius Aristides defends the public spiritedness of sophists, attacking in his turn those calling themselves philosophers.⁴¹ He says, “they despise others while being themselves worthy of scorn. They criticize others without examining themselves. They make a great show of virtue and never practice it” (307.6). He says they have the outward appearance of virtue but are inwardly corrupt (307.10). They are only after pleasure and wealth (307.15; 308.5). They are flatterers (308.10). In contrast to sophists (for him a good word), “they have never thought of or spoken discourses profitable to their contemporaries, never praised the brilliance of feasts, never honored the gods, never counseled cities, never consoled the afflicted, never worked for peace, never addressed exhortations to the young or those who have been banned, never observed the conventions in their language” (309.12–15). Like Dio, he issues a disclaimer: “Let no one think that I have spoken thus to defame philosophy or that I have hostile intentions. It is just the opposite; I have spoken in favor of philosophy and against those who outrage it” (310.8).

Between philosophical schools were endless debates over the relative merits of their doctrines. Outsiders sometimes found the debates ludicrous. Lucian of Samosata repeatedly lampoons the solemnity of their silliness. In his parody, *The Eunuch*, a fight between two Peripatetics for one of the traditional chairs of philosophy in Athens reveals both the belligerence and the hypocrisy of the combatants.⁴² The participants, of course, took them with utter seriousness. Not only abstract truths but their own life commitments were at stake. Sometimes their arguments were reasonable. Often they sank to the level of abuse and slander. Plutarch, priest of Apollo at Delphi, was the most urbane of ancient philosophers, encyclopedic in learning, vast in sympathy. Although he considers Jews to be the very model of superstition, for example (*Superstition* 8 [*Moralia* 169D]; *Stoic Self-Contradictions* [*Mor.* 1051E]), he shows only mild curiosity about their customs, and exhibits no real hostility toward them (*Table-Talk*

⁴¹ References in text are to paragraph and line as found in *HYPERTON TETTARON* in Aristides, ed. W. Dindorf (Leipzig, 1829).

⁴² Lucian continues a tradition established already by Aristophanes in his attack on Socrates; see *The Clouds* 275–85; 309; 311; 341–43; 359. Many of the later charges against philosophers are found in this comedy.

IV.4–VI.2 [*Mor.* 669D–672C]). What this proves is simply that *their* version of philosophy was unimportant to him. When it came to the rival schools he took seriously, the tolerant Plutarch could turn ugly. He wrote lengthy treatises against the Stoics (*Stoic Self-Contradictions* [*Mor.* 1033B–1057C] and *Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions* [*Mor.* 1058E–1086B]) and the Epicureans (e.g., *That Epicurus Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* [*Mor.* 1086C–1107C] and *Reply to Colotes in Defense of Other Philosophers* [*Mor.* 1107D–1127E]),⁴³ attacking them as he defended his own Platonic tradition. Even he can descend to personal attacks. Colotes, disciple of Epicurus, had high-handedly attacked some of Plutarch's philosophical heroes, calling them “buffoons, charlatans, assassins, prostitutes, nincompoops” (*Mor.* 1086E). Even Socrates he had called a “charlatan” (ἀλαζών), because he had said one thing and done quite another (*Mor.* 1117D). In his angry retort, Plutarch repeats the gossip that Epicureans had prostitutes in their community (*Mor.* 1129B), and the standard charge that the essence of Epicureanism is its “lack of friends, absence of activity, irreligion, sensuality and indifference” (*Mor.* 1100C). They are the ones who are “the sophists and charlatans (σοφισταί καὶ ἀλαζόνες) who in their disputes with eminent men write with such shameless arrogance” (*Mor.* 1124C).

We find the same language everywhere. The Stoic Epictetus castigates the Platonists for having their intellects deadened as well as their sense of shame (*Diss.* 1.5.9). They are filled with sophistries (1.27.2). He begins one diatribe against the Epicureans in a reasonable tone, but grows irritated and declares “your doctrines are bad; subversive of the state, destructive of the family, not even fit for women” (3.7.21). After criticizing the Epicureans for saying one thing and doing another, he adds, “You will be no better than we who bear the name of Stoics, for we too talk of one thing and do another; we talk of the noble and do the base . . .” (3.7.17; see also 1.23; 1.27.2; 1.4.1–11; 2.20; 2.23; 3.24).

Apollonius of Tyana and Euphrates were two first-century philosophers who hated and plotted against each other.⁴⁴ Their polemic became intensely personal. They tossed the terms γόης (charlatan) and μάγος (magician) back and forth, each accusing the other of operating out of the love for money and love for glory.⁴⁵ Since people who were supposed

⁴³ The references in the text are taken *passim* from these two polemical treatises, in the translation of B. Einarson and P. DeLacy, *Plutarch's Moralia*, Vol. 14 (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.13; 2.26; 6.7; 6.13; 6.28; 7.6; 7.9.

⁴⁵ See *The Letters of Apollonius of Tyana* 1, 2, 5, 8, 16, 17.

to be self-controlled and passionless were, in such fights, obviously out of control, they tended to bring philosophy itself into disrepute. They gave satirists like Lucian of Samosata more than enough ammunition for his delightful descriptions of their money-grubbing, proselytizing, and quibbling over words; their failure to live up to their professed ideals; their fuzzy-headedness; their vaingloriousness; and, above all, their hypocrisy.⁴⁶

As so often in Hellenistic rhetoric, these charges became standardized and formed a *topos*, that is, a standard treatment of a subject. Certain things are conventionally said of all opponents. Their teaching was self-contradictory, or trivial, or it led to bad morals. Their behavior could be criticized in several ways. Either they preached but did not practice (in which case they were hypocrites), or they lived as they taught and their corrupt lives showed how bad their doctrine was (like the Epicureans). Certain standard categories of vice were automatically attributed to any opponent. They were all lovers of pleasure, lovers of money, and lovers of glory.⁴⁷

The main thing such slander signified, therefore, was that someone *was* an opponent. This did not detract from its seriousness. Just because commitments were taken seriously could others so systematically be slandered. The slander was not affected by facts. A particular Platonist may be a good person, but that does not affect the way Platonists as such are to be described. The purpose of the polemic is not so much the rebuttal of the opponent as the edification of one's own school. Polemic was primarily for internal consumption.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., *A True Story* 4; *The Carousal* 6–48; *Icaromenippus* 20–21; 29–34; *Timon* 54–57; *The Fisherman* 29–38; *Double-Indictment* 6–12; *The Parasite* 43–56; *Menippus* 3–5; *The Runaways* 12–21; *Hermotimus* 11; *Dialogues of the Dead* 369–70; *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 306–8. Like Aristides, Lucian also issues a disclaimer: he attacks not philosophy itself but the “imposters (γόηται) who do much that is vile in our name” (*The Fisherman* 15).

⁴⁷ For love of pleasure (φιληδονία), see Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 1.7 and 2.29; Dio *Oration* 33:13; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.9.19–21; 2.4.1–11; 2.13.23; 2.24.38–39; Lucian *Icaromenippus* 21.30; *Timon* 84; *Philosophers for Sale* 12; *The Fisherman* 34; *The Parasite* 53; *Menippus* 5.

For love of money (φιλαργυρία), see Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 1.34; Dio *Oration* 32.9, 11; 3.51; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.9.19–20; 1.29.45–47; 2.16.3; 2.17.3; 3.24.78; 4.1.139; Lucian *The Runaways* 14; *Philosophers for Sale* 24; *The Double Indictment* 31; *Timon* 56; *Hermotimus* 9–10.

For love of glory (φιλόδοξος), see Dio *Oration* 32.10, 11, 19, 20, 24; 33.1, 9–10; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.21.3–4; 1.26.9; 2.16.11; 2.17.3; 2.21.9; 3.2.10–14; 3.12.1; 3.14.4; 3.23.10–14; 3.26.13; Lucian makes “vaingloriousness” the entire theme of his scathing *Proteus Peregrinus* (cf. 1, 4, 20, 38, 42) and attributes the vice to most philosophers (*The Fisherman* 31, 34, 46; *The Parasite* 52; *Menippus* 5; *The Runaways* 12, 19; *Dialogues of the Dead* 369, 417).

This makes more intelligible the secondary, *literary* uses of such polemic. A satirist like Lucian could take polemic that had its first social setting in actual debates and use it to lampoon the debates themselves (as in *The Eunuch*). More significantly, the polemic could also be used in protreptic discourses which encouraged the young to a life of philosophy. In these discourses such polemic is used to provide a negative counter-image to the positive ideal of the philosopher.⁴⁸ This is the way Paul uses such rhetoric in Philippians 2–3 and 2 Timothy 2–3.⁴⁹ Such a protreptic use of polemic is also found in Matthew 23. The passage is, as I noted earlier, the *locus classicus* for the NT's anti-Jewish polemic. But its literary and rhetorical functions are turned inward to Matthew's messianic readers. Matthew's attack on scribes and Pharisees is an attack on rival teachers and serves first of all to frame the positive instructions of messianist disciples (*students*, after all) in 23:8–11. It also provides a distancing transition, moving the reader from the controversies between Jesus and various Jewish leaders in 22:15–26 to Jesus' secret revelation to "his disciples" in chap. 24. The passage serves the protreptic purposes of the messianic "scribes of the kingdom" (Matt 13:51; 23:34) in the "School of St. Matthew" who do not call *their* teacher "Rabbi" but have as their one instructor (καθηγητή) the *Messiah* (Matt 23:10). Anyone familiar with the philosophical debates of Hellenism cannot miss the pertinence of the "chair of Moses" (23:2) occupied by these rival Jewish teachers, who "preach but do not practice" (23:3), who love the place of honor at feasts (23:6), and are "hypocrites" (23:13), outwardly righteous but inwardly full of iniquity (23:28).

Jewish Rhetoric

Since Judaism considered itself to be and was perceived as a form of philosophy, it is not surprising to find such polemic well attested in the Jewish literature of the first century. The conventions are most clearly present in Hellenistic Jewish writings.

⁴⁸ For example, Lucian of Samosata's dialogues *Demonax* and *Nigrinus*, Dio's *Oration* 77/78, and, most notably, Epictetus *Diss.* 3.22. The tradition continues in the essays of the emperor Julian, "To the Uneducated Cynics" (*Oration* 6) and "To the Cynic Heracleios" (*Oration* 7).

⁴⁹ On Philippians 2–3, see Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, 343–48. Failure to recognize this literary function enables various "fragment" hypotheses concerning Philippians to endure, despite their lack of value; see, e.g., B.D. Rahtjan, "The Three Letters of Paul to the Philippians," *NTS* 6 (1959–60) 167–73. On 2 Timothy 2–3, see L.T. Johnson, "II Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers: A Re-Examination," *JReS* 6/7 (1978–79) 1–26; see also R.J. Karris, "The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles," *JBL* 92 (1973) 549–64.

We are all familiar with the attacks made on diaspora Jews by hostile Gentiles. They are reported most fully by Josephus in *Against Apion*. Apion charged that Jews were seditious (2.6 §68), worshiped the head of an ass (2.7 §80), committed human sacrifice (2.8 §92–96), were atheists and misanthropes (2.14 §148). Their political enslavement was a sign of reproach (2.11 §125), their circumcision silly (2.13 §138), their sabbath ridiculous (1.22 §210). Josephus repeats the charges but not the rhetoric. We can catch a glimpse of it, however, in Apion's repeated charge that Moses was a "charlatan" (γόησις), 2.14 §145; 2.16 §161).

In rebuttal, Josephus uses the same sort of slander. He says of hostile Gentiles generally, "these frivolous and utterly senseless specimens of humanity, accustomed from the first to erroneous ideas about the gods, were incapable of imitating the solemnity of our theology... filled with envy... folly and narrow-mindedness (1.25 §225–26).⁵⁰ They are conceited (1.3 §15), and if they attack Jews, are "blasphemers" (1.11 §59). Josephus repeatedly comments on the long-standing hatred of Alexandrians toward Jews (2.3 §32; 2.6 §70). He returns it fully. He speaks of their "evil habits" (2.6 §70). He declares, "We refuse to call you... collectively men because you worship and breed with so much care animals that are hostile to humanity" (2.6 §67). *They* are the seditious ones (2.6 §69). On the ass slander, Josephus notes, "An Egyptian should be the last person to reproach us, for an ass is no worse than the cats, he-goats, and other creatures which in this country rank as gods" (2.7 §81–82). He continues the motif against Apion himself, who has "the mind of an ass and the impudence of a dog, which his countrymen are wont to worship. An outsider can make no sense of his lies" (2.7 §86). That Apion is a liar is stated over and over (2.2 §12; 2.2 §14; 2.7 §86; 2.9 §115; 2.13 §143–44). He engages in "malicious slander" (2.8 §89), which befits his "mendacious character" (2.2 §12). He is a "low charlatan to the end of his days" (2.1 §3), and "a charlatan whose life is as dissolute as his language" (2.12 §136). He is ignorant (2.2 §26; 2.11 §130), an "ignorant fool" (2.4 §37), and "stupid" (2.13 §142). Apion's mind is "blinded" (2.13 §142). In fact, everything he charges the Jews with, he and his countrymen do themselves (2.6 §71). In sum, Apion and other slanderers of the Jews are "reprobate sophists and deceivers of youth" (2.32 §236), and "crazy fools" (2.36 §254).

⁵⁰ The lively translation is by H.St.J. Thackeray, *Josephus* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). For examples of standard polemic elsewhere in *Ag. Ap.*, see 2.33 §236; 2.36 §255; 2.51 §275.

Even the relatively serene apologist Philo uses such language of Gentile opponents. In *The Embassy to Gaius* he more than reciprocates the Alexandrian hatred for Jews, calling them “the promiscuous and unstable rabble of the Alexandrians . . .” (18.120).⁵¹ He says they were “more brutal and savage than fierce wild beasts (19.131) . . . they had “shameless designs” in their “frenzy and insane fury” (20.132). He does not find this a surprise, for, he says, “Alexandrians are adepts at flattery and imposture and hypocrisy, ready enough with fawning words, but causing universal disaster with their loose and unbridled lips” (25.162). The Egyptians “are a seed bed of evil in whose souls both the venom and the temper of the native crocodiles and wasps are reproduced . . .” (26.166). In *Flaccus*, he says of Egyptians in general, “Jealousy is part of the Egyptian nature, and the citizens were bursting with envy and considered that any good luck to others was misfortune to themselves. . . . [They had an] “innate hostility toward the Jews” (5.29).⁵² Both Philo and Josephus were responding, of course, to serious attacks, but their language is thoroughly at home in the world of rhetorical hardball.

Jews in Alexandria also knew how to attack first. In *The Contemplative Life*, Philo disparages the idol worship of the Egyptians (1.8–9), calling it incurable folly, and those who practice it, blind (2.10). The *Wisdom of Solomon* was written in Alexandria sometime in the first century BCE. What attitudes toward his Egyptian neighbor might be learned by an Alexandrian Jewish reader? Those who “do not know God” are called “foolish by nature” (13:1 [RSV]). At the climax of its treatment of idolatry—the religious customs of the Jews’ neighbors—it says this:

It was not enough for them to err about the knowledge of God, but they live in great strife due to ignorance, and they call such great evils peace. For whether they kill children in their initiations, or celebrate secret mysteries, or hold revels with strange customs, they no longer keep themselves or their marriage pure, but they either treacherously kill each other or grieve one another by adultery, and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, pollution of souls, sex perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery and debauchery. For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil. For their

⁵¹ *Embassy to Gaius* (trans. F.H. Colson; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁵² *Against Flaccus* (trans. F.H. Colson; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941).

worshippers either rave in exaltation, or prophesy lies, or live unrighteously, or readily commit perjury. (14:22–28)

Jews and Christians alike are so inured to such “attacks on idolatry” that they simply do not hear the inflammatory nature of this language. In the diaspora, the language was rough both ways, and thoroughly within the conventions of Hellenistic slander.

How did Jews talk about each other when they disagreed? Josephus again gives us the most evidence. He castigates the reviewer of his book the *Jewish War*, Justus of Tiberias, as “a charlatan and a demagogue and a deceiver” (*Life* 9 §40).⁵³ Why? “He not only maligned me but failed to tell the truth about his native place” (65 §338). He was full of “knaveish tricks,” “fraudulent practice,” and “impudence” (65 §§354–356).

It is in the *Jewish War* itself that Josephus most attacks fellow Jews. His special targets are the Zealots and Sicarii, whom he considered responsible for the war against Rome and ultimately for the destruction of the Temple. Judas the Galilean is a σοφιστής (*J.W.* 2.8.1 §118). Josephus says, “every dictate of religion is ridiculed by these men who scoffed at the prophets’ oracles as impostor’s fables (4.6.3 §385); yet “their behavior brought these prophecies to fulfillment” (4.6.3 §387–88).⁵⁴ Josephus harangues the zealots in the city: “What have you done that is blessed by the lawgiver, what deed that he has cursed have you left undone? . . . In rapine and murder you vie with one another . . . the Temple has become the sink of all, and native hands have polluted those divine precincts . . .” (5.9.4 §400–402). The Sicarii are assassins whose first victim is the high priest (2.8.3 §255–58). They are “impostors and brigands” (2.8.6 §264), “slaves, the dregs of society, and the bastard scum of the nation” (5.8.5 §443–44). They are more wicked than Sodom, for producing “a generation more godless than the victims of those visitations, seeing that these men’s frenzy involved the whole people in their ruin” (5.13.6 §566). He accuses the Sicarii of “cruelty . . . avarice . . . atrocities . . . lying . . . oppression . . . evil” (7.8.1 §255–58). “They outdo each other in acts of impiety toward God and injustice to their neighbors . . . oppressing the masses . . . bent on tyranny . . . violence . . . plundering . . . lawlessness and cruelty . . . no word unspoken to

⁵³ Josephus’s *The Life* (trans. H.St.J. Thackeray; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). Other examples of polemic: John of Gischala is πονηρός και ἐπίτορκος (21 §102); Jesus of Tiberius was also a πονηρός ἄνθρωπος (27 §134). Josephus himself receives abuse because of “living in luxury” during the war (55 §284).

⁵⁴ *The Jewish War* (trans. H.St.J. Thackeray; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

insult, no deed untried to ruin" (7.8.1 §260–62). Among them were "charlatans and false prophets" (6.5.3 §288).⁵⁵

Of particular interest in light of NT statements is Josephus's view of the Temple. He calls the zealots "ironhearted men" (5.9.4 §416), who are "blinded by fate" (5.8.2 §343; 5.8.7 §572). They profane the Temple, so that it is no longer the dwelling place of God (5.1.3 §419). God turned from the sanctuary because of their deeds (2.19.6 §539). God had long ago sentenced the Temple to flames (6.4.5 §250), deciding to "condemn the city and purge the sanctuary by fire" (4.5.2 §323). God is on the side of the Romans against these rebellious Jews (5.9.3 §369; 5.9.4 §412). The destruction of the city is a punishment from God (6.2.1 §110), a vengeance from heaven for the guilt of the Zealots (2.17.10 §455).

When we turn to Palestinian Jewish material we encounter the familiar problem of sources. Apart from the Qumran scrolls, some apocalyptic writings such as *I Enoch* and 4 Ezra, and the NT itself, direct evidence from the first century is fragmentary. Materials associated with the Pharisaic tradition in particular are notoriously difficult to date. What remains, however, is enough to suggest just the sort of many-voiced and contentious polemic we have seen in the Hellenistic writings, particularly when placed in the context of Josephus's vivid narrative of a fanatically divided and fratricidal population.

There remains perhaps surprisingly little direct evidence of polemic against Samaritans by Judeans, even though the fact that "Jews have no dealing with Samaritans" (John 4:9 [RSV]) is axiomatic.⁵⁶ Josephus calls the Samaritans "ridiculously conceited of their own feebleness..." (*JW*. 3.7.32 §308). In Sirach we find the short characterization, "the stupid people living at Shechem" (50:28). In the Fourth Gospel, we find "the Jews" saying

⁵⁵ Josephus's special animus is directed at the Zealot leader John of Gischala (*J.W.* 2.21.1 §585; 5.3.1 §98–105; 7.8.1 §263–65). But as Paul in Rom 9:3 swears his allegiance to his "kinsmen by race" so also does Josephus: "I who exhort you am your countryman... I who make this promise am a Jew... never may I live to become so abject a captive as to abjure my race or to forget the traditions of my forefathers" (6.2.1 §107–8).

⁵⁶ Still less can we use the Samaritan writings with any confidence; see J. Bowman, *The Samaritan Problem* (trans. A.M. Johnson, Jr.; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975) 1–28. The *Adler Chronicle*, for example, is a nineteenth-century production; still, its polemic may reflect older traditions, as in this account of Ezra: "... he altered many things in the text of the Holy Torah out of hatred for the community of the children of Israel who are observers of the truth, that is to say, the children of Joseph the righteous, adding some things and subtracting many others... Moreover many errors were made by him in the Book of the Torah; which neither he nor his people perceived or understood" (*Samaritan Documents* [trans. and ed. J. Bowman; Pittsburgh Original Texts and Translations Series; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1977] 102–3).

to Jesus, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon” (John 8:48), as though these automatically went together!

In the Mishna, Samaritans pose problems because they overlap categories. They are not recognized fully as “Jews,” but neither can they be called “Gentiles.” The neatest characterization occurs in *m. Ned.* 3:10: Samaritans “keep sabbath” (that is, they observe Torah), but they do not “go to Jerusalem” (that is, worship in the right place). Discriminations must therefore be made concerning their trustworthiness in matters such as marriage (*m. Qidd.* 4:3), and divorce (*m. Giṭ.* 1:5). Their burial places are suspect (*m. Nid.* 7:4). They cannot be trusted to pronounce the Benediction properly (*m. Ber.* 8:8) and like ‘*am-hā-‘āreš*’ untrustworthy in ritual matters (*m. Dem.* 3:4; 5:9). They are accused of “evil deeds” because they deceptively lit the fires announcing Rosh-Hashanah (*m. Roš. Haš.* 2:2). Occasionally, hostility shows through: daughters of Samaritans are deemed unclean as menstruants from the cradle (*m. Nid.* 4:1–2). And R. Eliezer is credited with saying, “He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one who eats the flesh of swine” (*m. Šef.* 8:10).

What of the supposed animosity between the Pharisees and ‘*am-hā-‘āreš*’, the people of the land? The only contemporary evidence is from the NT, and then only if the later mishnaic term is made to equal “the sinners” of the Gospels.⁵⁷ The classic case is in John, where the Pharisees rebuke the man impressed by Jesus’ words, “have any of the authorities or Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, who do not know law, are accursed” (John 7:48–49). The Pharisees also tell the blind man healed by Jesus, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” (John 9:34). While one can certainly imagine the tension that could exist between the sages and those called by the priests in Acts 4:13 ἀγράμματοί καὶ ἰδιῶται, the contemporary evidence simply does not exist. The illiterate could not supply it, and the elite tend to save their vitriol for those who can read it! And even if the NT passages do refer to ‘*am-hā-‘āreš*’, we must classify such statements as part of the NT’s own anti-Pharisaic bias.

We are not surprised to find in the pages of the Mishna, therefore, that statements concerning ‘*am-hā-‘āreš*’ are temperate and largely concerned with the ways associates should judge their reliability in ritual matters.⁵⁸ The occasional hint of (perhaps) earlier contempt or polemic is found turned to protreptic purposes. So, at the climax to a chain of categories

⁵⁷ See, e.g., K.H. Rengstorf, ἀμαρτωλός in *TDNT*, 1, 317–35.

⁵⁸ See *m. Dem.* 2:2; 3:4; *m. Šef.* 5:9; *m. Giṭ.* 5:9; *m. Ḥag.* 2:7; *m. Ṭohar.* 4:5; 7:1–2, 4; 8:1, 3.

establishing precedence in honor, we read, “the bastard that is learned in the law precedes the priest that is ‘*am-hā-‘āreš*” (*m. Hor.* 3:9). So also in the saying of Hillel, a “brutish man dreads not sin and an ‘*am-hā-‘āreš* cannot be saintly. and the shamefast man cannot learn . . .” (*m. ‘Abot* 2:6). And, in the famous saying about the four kinds of men, “the one that says, what is mine is thine and what is thine is mine, this is the ‘*am-hā-‘āreš*” is meant to contrast with the saint who says, “what is thine is thine and what is mine is thine” (*m. ‘Abot* 5:10).

We do have the contemporary Jewish polemic from the side of “the pious” against those called “sinners” or “unrighteous,” which is often quite bitter, as in 4 Ezra, *I Enoch*, and the *Psalms of Solomon*.⁵⁹ In the broadest sense, these writings reflect a “Pharisaic” perspective. The opponents are less certain. Are those vilified in *Ps. Sol.* 4:1–20 Sadducees?⁶⁰ They are, in any case, fellow Jews, for they “live in hypocrisy in the company of the pious” (4:7).

An interesting but difficult line of inquiry would be to trace the polemic between the Pharisaic schools Beth Hillel and Beth Shammai. The Talmud retains intriguing glimpses into the fierceness and occasional violence of those disputes.⁶¹ But because that hostility was mythically resolved and

⁵⁹ See 4 Ezra 7:17–25; 1 *Enoch* 12:5; 15:9–10; 94:6–11; 95:4–7; 96:4–8; 98:7–16; 104:7–13; *Psalms of Solomon* 2:3–18; 4:1–20; 8:10–18; 14:6–10; 15:8–14.

⁶⁰ J. Jeremias takes the *Psalms of Solomon* as evidence for the bitter dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* [trans. F.H. and C.H. Cave; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969] 266). A trace of this may also be reflected in *‘Abot de Rabbi Nathan* 5. The complex camouflaging techniques of the Talmud make it difficult to identify references to the Sadducees. Many of the polemical passages naming them have textual variants with *minim* (e.g., *b. Ber.* 7a; 10a; 28b; 58a; *b. Šabb.* 88a; 152b; *b. Yoma* 40b; 57a; *b. Roš. Haš.* 17a; *b. Ketub.* 112a; *b. Sanh.* 38a; 110b; *b. Hor.* 11a). On the problems of identifying the *minim*, in turn, cf. J. Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1951) 473–570; and R.T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Ktav, 1903). Earlier polemic may be reflected in two relatively certain references to Sadducees in the Mishna. *M. Ber.* 9:5 charges them with stating that there was but one world, and *m. Nid.* says that the daughters of Sadducees are deemed like the daughters of Samaritans if they follow the way of their fathers; for the Samaritan women, see *m. Nid.* 4:1. Other places in the Talmud characterize the Sadducees as “fools” (*b. ‘Erub.* 101a; *b. Yebam.* 63b), excluded from being “disciples of Moses” (*b. Yoma* 4a), and having the status of Gentiles (*b. ‘Erub.* 68b).

⁶¹ For all its other inadequacies, H. Falk’s *Jesus the Pharisee* has the merit of pointing out the dimensions of this intra-party debate; see esp. 56–58, 89–90, 100–101, 122. Certainly some of the disagreements were vigorous enough (even if we discount the story of *y. Šabb.* 1:4 of the murder of Beth Hillel disciples (by those of Beth Shammai) to allow a follower of Shammai to be termed a “first-born of Satan (בְּכֹר שָׂטָן) by a follower of Hillel (*b. Yebam.* 16a), and lead to the excommunication of Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (*b. B. Meš.* 59a–b).

appears in the sources now mainly as plain statements of opinion, we cannot recover the actual rhetoric used.⁶²

If the Pharisees provide us too little polemic, the Essenes now provide us almost too much. Anyone who has read the Dead Sea Scrolls knows that the community that wrote them had an extreme hostility to all outsiders. The group's ideology divides the world between "the sons of light," who belong to the sect (1QS 3:13), and "sons of darkness" (1QS 1:10; 1QM 1:7). The Qumran rule of thumb is that you cannot say enough bad things about outsiders. They are "sons of the pit" (see 1QS 9:16; CD 6:15; 13:14) who derive from a spirit of falsehood and are ruled by an angel of darkness (1QS 3:19–21; 5:2, 10). Naturally, they all walk in the way of wickedness. God hates them and has a vengeance planned for them. The *Community Rule* characterizes the life-style of outsiders this way:

greed and slackness in the search of righteousness, wickedness and lies, haughtiness and pride, falseness and deceit, cruelty and abundant evil, ill-temper and much folly and brazen insolence, abominable deeds committed in a spirit of lust, and ways of lewdness in the service of uncleanness, a blaspheming tongue, blindness of eye and dullness of ear, stiffness of neck and heaviness of heart, so that a man walks in all the ways of darkness and guile. (1QS 4:9–14)⁶³

One of the rituals of the sect involved shouting curses against such "men of the lot of Satan" in this wise:

Be cursed of all your guilty wickedness! May he deliver you up to torture at the hands of all the wreakers of revenge! Be cursed without mercy because of the darkness of your deeds! Be damned in the shadowy place of everlasting fire! May God not heed you when you call upon him, nor pardon you by blotting out your sin! May he raise his angry face toward you for vengeance! May there be no peace for you in the mouths of those who hold fast to the fathers! (1QS 2:4–10)

All of this, it must be emphasized, is directed not only at the Kittim, the Gentiles, but at other Jews who do not match the Qumranites' ideas of purity, those whom the *War Scroll* calls "the ungodly of the covenant" (1QM 1:2).⁶⁴

⁶² For a typical list of opinions, see *b. Sabb.* 14b–15a. It took a Bath Qol to decide in favor of Beth Hillel, and even that was disputed (*b. Hul.* 43b). That the schools always showed love and friendship toward each other is averred by *b. Yebam.* 14b.

⁶³ For other polemical statements, see CD 1:18–2:1; 5:10–19; 8:4–8; 1QM 13:4. 11; 4QpNah i 3–4 ii 2, 5–6.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., 1QpHab 2:16; 8:8–13; 4QpPs^a 1–10 iii 12–13. The *War Scroll* calls on the sect to be prepared to spill the blood of the wicked (1QM 6:17), an impulse chillingly reflected

First-century Jews who disputed with each other used language conventional to their world. These conventions provide the appropriate context for properly assessing the polemic of the NT. If by definition sophists are hypocritical, and philosophers of all opposing schools are hypocritical, and philosophers in general are hypocritical, and Alexandrian pagans are hypocritical, and Apion is a hypocrite, are we really surprised to find scribes and Pharisees called hypocrites? If sophists are by definition blind, and Apion is blind, and Alexandrian pagans are blind, and Zealots are blind, and men of the pit are blind, should we be shocked to see scribes and Pharisees called “blind guides” by Matthew and non-messianists called “blinded by the god of the world” by Paul? If Socrates was suspect because of his “demon” and sophists are “evil-spirited” and the brothers of Joseph are driven by evil spirits, and all dwellers on earth have evil spirits and the sons of the pit are children of Belial, should we be surprised to find that Samaritans have demons, or that Jesus has a demon, or that his opponents have the devil as their father, or that when he betrays Jesus, Judas is said to have Satan enter his heart?

Conclusion

By being placed in its appropriate social and literary setting—that of polemic between ancient schools—the NT slander against Jews appears in a new light. Several conclusions are immediately warranted.

First, the polemic is more intelligible. The great problem with the historical vindication approach is that it leaves the NT’s polemic unmotivated: If Jews were so blameless, why were Christians so nasty? But our survey shows the use of this language everywhere in the fragmented Judaism of the first century. Readers today hear the NTs polemic as inappropriate only because the other voices are silent. Historical imagination can restore them.

Second, by the measure of Hellenistic conventions, and certainly by the measure of contemporary Jewish polemic, the NT’s slander against fellow Jews is remarkably mild.⁶⁵

in *The Temple Scroll* 64:1–12; see J. Maier, *The Temple Scroll* QSOTSup 34; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) 55.

⁶⁵ We would have expected an intensification of polemic because of persecution; in fact, it is not noticeably present. The NT’s harshest polemic by far is reserved for Gentiles, in which it appropriates the themes of contemporary Jewish polemic (cf., e.g., Matt 6:7, 32; Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Eph 2:11–12; 1 Thess 4:5, 13; Titus 1:12; 1 Pet 1:14, 18; 4:3–4), and

Third, the conventional nature of the polemic means that its chief rhetorical import is connotative rather than denotative. The polemic signifies simply that these are opponents and such things should be said about them. The attempt either to convict first-century Jews of hypocrisy or vindicate them from it is irrelevant as well as futile.

Fourth, recognizing that both messianist and non-messianist Jews use the rhetoric associated with Hellenistic philosophical schools helps establish the hypothesis that this is the appropriate context for analyzing their interrelationships.

Can this historical and literary analysis help the contemporary relationship of Jews and Christians? It ought to have at least this positive impact: grasping the conventional nature of the polemic can rob such language of its mythic force and therefore its capacity for mischief. Nothing relativizes plausibility structures like pluralism.⁶⁶ Knowing that all parties to a debate spoke in a certain way forces us to relativize our party's version. To take only the most hurtful example, we cannot view with the same seriousness the "curse" laid on Jews by Matthew's Gospel when we recognize that curses were common coinage in those fights, and there were not many Jews or Gentiles who did not have at least one curse to deal with.

especially deviant members of the messianist movement (e.g., 2 Cor 11.1–6, 14–21; 2 Tim 2.14–3:9; 2 Pet 2:1–22; Jude 5–19; 1 John 2:18–25; 2 John 7; Rev 2:13–29).

⁶⁶ P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor, 1969) 129–53.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

ANTI-JUDAISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The language of the New Testament has proven to be powerful in both positive and negative ways. Positively, it has generated and supported lives and communities transformed by the mind of Christ. Negatively, it has equally generated and supported hostile attitudes and oppressive actions with regard to women, homosexuals, and most of all, Jews. Christianity's long history of anti-Jewish behavior cannot be separated from the portrayal of Jews in the New Testament.¹ And no discussion of the New Testament with respect to Judaism can be isolated from the ways in which the Christian canon can continue to foster attitudes and actions dangerous to Jews.² Any treatment of the subject must pay attention both to the complexity of the issues and the enormity of the stakes in dealing with the issues precisely and honestly.

The Nature of the Issues

It is important from the first to distinguish three levels of concern, which might be called the historical, the exegetical, and the hermeneutical. The historical concerns the actual Jews of the first century as the New Testament compositions report on their attitudes and actions. The question here concerns the accuracy of the New Testament's report. Did Jews of the first century have the concerns that the New Testament claims? Can it be relied on as one of our earliest sources for formative Judaism? More

¹ For a rapid survey, see S. Grayzel, *A History of the Jews*, rev.ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968), 303–473, and T.M. Parker, *Christianity and the State in the Light of History* (London: A. and C. Black, 1955); for the roots of Christian anti-semitism, see J.G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3–34, and C.A. Evans and D.A. Hagner, eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); for the period after the New Testament, see M. Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of Relations between Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire*, translated by H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), especially 135–236; for documentary evidence of the medieval period, see J.R. Marcus, *The Jews in the Medieval World: a Source-Book: 315–1791* (New York: 1969) 3–181.

² C. Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, Trans. E. Quinn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

critically, did Jews of the first century oppose Jesus, have a role in putting him to death, and persecute early Christians?

The exegetical issue concerns the meaning of the New Testament's statements with regard to Jews. Whether or not such statements are historically accurate (much less verifiable), what is their significance within the compositions of the nascent Christian movement? How should they be understood within the rhetoric of community formation in antiquity? At this level, the goal is not determining the facts of history but interpreting the meaning of literature.

The hermeneutical issue is concerned not so much with what happened, or with the language used to describe Jews, as with what contemporary readers—both Jews and Christians—are to think about such language and how to act in light of such language.³ This issue is more complicated for Christians than Jews. For Christians, the compositions of the New Testament are not simply artifacts from antiquity. They are Sacred Scripture, bearing with them a burden of authority and claims of inerrancy that contemporary readers are required to negotiate.

While there is an obvious connection between these levels of concern, it is of the first importance that they not be confused. The New Testament compositions might be mined for historical statements without any appreciation for their rhetoric, and the rhetoric might be studied without serious attention given to the historical facts. Even more important, even if one determined that the New Testament's statements concerning Jews were historically indefensible, such a determination would not by itself solve the hermeneutical issue, for that is connected, not to the facts, but to the language of the New Testament texts. Historical determinations, to be sure, can well have an effect on those engaged in the hermeneutical enterprise, urging them to assess their canonical texts in one way rather than another.

The Complexity of the Issues

Before considering those aspects of the New Testament that can, in one fashion or another, be called "Anti-Jewish," it is important to assert the

³ For consideration of the hermeneutical dimension generally, see L.T. Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), and for the hermeneutical challenge posed by the language about Jews, see R.B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, and New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1996), 407–33.

overwhelmingly Jewish character of the New Testament compositions themselves. Whatever the New Testament has to say about “the Jews,” it does so not from a detached position, but from a place within the complex conversation that was first-century “Judaism.” The writers of these compositions proclaimed as “Messiah and Lord” a first-century Palestinian Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, who preached and worked wonders for a short period of time in Galilee and then in Judea, was crucified under the authority of the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate, and then, according to his followers, was exalted to the “right hand” of God (Ps 110:1) as “life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). To make their extraordinary claims convincing—not only to those Jews who found the crucifixion a “stumbling block” to recognizing Jesus as Messiah, and his proclamation as “Lord” offensive to monotheistic sensibilities, but also to themselves—the Christian writers engaged in a rereading and reinterpretation of Torah in light of their experience and conviction so systemic and pervasive that the New Testament can fairly be called a form of first-century Jewish literature.⁴

The “Jewish” character of the New Testament is not simply a matter of its compositions’ thoroughgoing engagement with Scripture through citation, allusion, echo, and literary mimesis, or even that its major characters are identified as Jews both by birth and by commitment. It is also a matter of first-hand knowledge of Jews and their practices both in Palestine and in the Diaspora. Paul the Apostle is our earliest datable member of the Pharisaic party. The Gospels (and Acts) remain, after Josephus, our most important source of knowledge of Jewish sects in the first century. The net effect of the astonishing archaeological discoveries of the last century, not least that at Qumran, is not the discrediting of the New Testament’s knowledge of first-century Jews, but instead the confirmation of many things that older generations of critical scholars had dismissed. Apart from the extraordinary claims made for Jesus and the earliest churches—and even these claims can be seen as less outrageous in light of the Qumran literature—the writings of the New Testament fit comfortably within the framework of Jewish life and literature of the first century.

A final preliminary comment is necessary if we are to properly assess the meaning of “Anti-Judaism” in the New Testament, namely the ambiguity of the term “Judaism” itself with reference to the period when the bulk of New Testament writings was written. I have already suggested that,

⁴ See L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 1–151.

whatever we mean by “Jewish,” the New Testament fits within it. But even the designation Ἰουδαῖος is polyvalent. It can designate a “Judean” in the narrow, geographical sense (as opposed, say, to a “Galilean”). But it can also—and at the same time—denote a “Jew” in the social/political/religious sense (as someone who claims the heritage of Abraham and is committed to the symbolic world of Torah).⁵

The term “Judaism,” in contrast, suggests a stable, clearly defined ethnic/social/religious reality that the writers of the New Testament could stand apart from (as in, “Christianity” did not equal “Judaism”), and stand over against (as in, “Christianity” was against “Judaism”). The difficulty of this way of speaking is that neither Christianity nor Judaism was such a well-defined entity in the first century. It was, rather, precisely out of the conflict and competition among rival Jewish claimants to the heritage of Israel through the first century, as well as the consequences of the catastrophic events associated with the Jewish war against Rome, that led to the eventual emergence of two discrete traditions claiming to represent the authentic Israel, one called Christianity—based on the experience of the crucified and raised Messiah Jesus, and one called (now non-anachronistically) Judaism—based on the observance of Torah according to the traditions of the Pharisees.

That point leads to the most complicating factor of all, namely the state of our sources. First, as sources for first-century Jewish life and practice, the New Testament compositions are contemporary to the writings of Philo and those produced by the sectarians at Qumran, but they predate by a small margin the writings of Josephus and some of the important apocalyptic writings (with the substantial exception of 1 Enoch), and by a large margin the compositions out of which we can construct the earliest stages of the “formative Judaism” based in Pharisaic conviction and Scribal expertise. What makes this situation embarrassing for historical reconstruction is that the New Testament and the Jewish writings contemporary to it do not speak directly to the same realities, whereas Josephus and the Rabbinic writings cover much the same material as the New Testament writings, but from the perspective of a period slightly or considerably later than that of the New Testament.

⁵ The suggestion of a purely geographical meaning in the 4th Gospel was suggested by M. Lowe, “Who Were the IOUDAIOI?” *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976) 101–30, and is discussed by J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); see also W. Gutbrod, Ἰουδαῖος, etc. in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 3: 369–91.

The consequences of this situation are real. The Gospel portrayal of the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin is sometimes declared unhistorical, for example, on the basis of the legislation found in the Mishnah's tractate Sanhedrin.⁶ Despite the oral tradition lying behind the composition of the Mishnah in 200 by Rabbi Judah the Prince, however, the Mishnah cannot serve that function, for two reasons: first, legislation written in 200 C.E. cannot be assumed to be in force in 30 C.E.; second, written legislation expresses a legal ideal, and cannot be used to preclude actual human behavior.

The second aspect of dating that complicates the discussion of "Anti-Judaism and the New Testament" is that involving the composition and subsequent canonization of the New Testament writings themselves. Let us stipulate that Jesus interacted with other Jews within Palestine between 28–30, that early communities such as those described in the Acts of the Apostles interacted with Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora between ca. 30–60, that Paul and his communities had dealings with Jews in the Diaspora between ca. 45–64, and that after the Jewish War in 70, tensions among Messianist and non-Messianist Jews intensified considerably. No New Testament writing is composed from the period of Jesus. Only the Letters of Paul, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the Letter of James can reasonably be dated between 45–64, and, as epistolary literature, can be read as reporting on contemporary experiences. Similarly, the letters found in chapters 1–3 of the Book of Revelation speak of contemporary situations in Asia Minor ca. 96. The material in these compositions would be more valuable, if we could be sure that in all cases they are actually speaking about Jews or Judaism, but in at least some of Paul's letters, the rhetoric concerns "Judaizers," or Gentile believers who seek to be circumcised and live as Torah-observant Jews.

The situation with the Gospels is more complicated. Although oral tradition and the composition of written sources like the hypothetical Q establish a genuine material link between Jesus and the Gospels, it is now universally acknowledged that the selection and shaping of those materials in the Gospels (composed between 70–90) are profoundly affected by the on-going experiences of communities. With respect to what the

⁶ See, for example, P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961); E. Bammel, ed., *The Trial of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1970); G. Sloyan, *Jesus on Trial* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973). On the critical issue of Sanhedrin competence, see especially A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) 24–47.

Gospels report concerning Jews, this means that the struggles of nascent Christian communities with “the Synagogue down the street” between 50–90 affect the selection and shaping of traditions concerning Jesus’ interaction with Jews in 28–30.⁷ Understanding this helps in the interpretation of the rhetoric concerning Jews in the Gospels, for it emerges from a context of contemporary conflict and competition. But it makes historical determinations concerning the period of Jesus more difficult. Can the importance given to the Pharisees as leaders of the people and as opponents of Jesus be taken as reliable, or should it be modified in light of the fact that the story of Jesus is being told in the context (and light of) the church’s conflict with the “Synagogue down the street?”

The consequences of canonization are even more profound and potentially distorting. By the time the informal collections of Christian writings began to become standard—by the late 2nd century C.E.—the separation between “Christianity” and “Judaism” is definitive, as Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* makes clear. And by the 4th century, when official canonical lists ratified the collection that had become standard, Judaism was widely regarded by Christians as a religion of the past, superseded by the “New Covenant,” whose claim to represent the true people of God was validated by the events of history (the conversion of the Gentiles, the destruction of the temple and the city). Christian “supersessionist” theology found its support in the compositions of the New Testament.⁸ But now, those compositions were read, not as documentation of a struggle between rival claimants to Israel’s heritage, but as the inspired and inerrant word of God. Now, for the first time, the New Testament’s statements about Jews were taken as proclamations on “Judaism” as a religion, and were taken as divinely-sanctioned truth. More than that, the narrative roles and attitudes ascribed to Jews by the Gospels were thenceforth taken as historically true.

Because such ways of reading the New Testament supported the hostile and often-enough murderous behavior of Christians toward Jews over the centuries, it is natural, particularly after the horrific events of the Holocaust, that Christian scholars and theologians in particular, moved

⁷ This is especially the case with the Gospel of Matthew: see Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, 187–211, and J.A. Overmann, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press Intl, 1996).

⁸ Classic early expressions of supersessionist theology are found in Origen’s *Against Celsus* and Tertullian’s *Against the Jews*.

by moral revulsion at such results, should seek to correct the causes.⁹ Some suggest the deconstruction of the canon and the consequent demotion of the New Testament from Sacred Scripture to classic texts.¹⁰ Some advocate the abandonment of “Christology,” since making claims about Jesus as Messiah and Lord are inevitably anti-Jewish.¹¹ Some recommend censorship, either through altering translations so that they appear less anti-Jewish, or through refusing authority to any text that seems to be anti-Jewish in character.¹² Censorship, in fact, is practiced by many Christian churches through such translations and through the shaping of lectionaries used for liturgical proclamation of Scripture. Still other scholars seek a remedy through historical correction of textual misattribution: texts that sound anti-Jewish are not directed to real Jews but to Gentile Judaizers;¹³ Jesus was not opposed by good Pharisees from the School of Hillel, but by bad Pharisees from the School of Shammai;¹⁴ no Jews were involved in the death of Jesus, but only Romans.¹⁵

While such expedients are understandable, none of them adequately address the full complexity of the issues, above all because they do not deal sufficiently with the literary and rhetorical character of the New Testament compositions themselves. The present essay, therefore, does not offer a solution, but instead proposes a way of thinking through the complex tangle presented by the innocent-sounding title, “Anti-Judaism and the New Testament.” I propose to approach the subject in three stages, considering first the question of historical and narrative roles ascribed to Jews; second, the rhetoric of vilification applied to Jews; and third, statements in the New Testament concerning the law or first covenant that could be taken as supporting supersessionism.

⁹ See, for example, the collection of essays in *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*, edited by T. Linafelt (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁰ For example, A.R. Eckhardt, *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

¹¹ For example, R.R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), esp. 246–251.

¹² See N.A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985).

¹³ Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, especially 112–117.

¹⁴ H. Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), especially 148–161. The lack of human frailty among Jewish leaders is the theme of a number of statements collected by S. Van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 25–26.

¹⁵ See G. Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), and J.D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

Historical and Narrative Roles

The distinction between the possible historical role Jews may have played with respect to Jesus and the early Christian movement, and the narrative depiction of that activity is a critical one, for the power of narrative goes considerably beyond the possible importance of the historical fact.

According to the Gospels and Acts, some Jews (especially Pharisees and Scribes) opposed Jesus during his ministry, the Jewish leadership of Jerusalem was implicated in Jesus' execution, the Jewish leadership actively persecuted the first Christian community in Jerusalem and later sought Paul's death, and, according to Acts and Paul's letters, Jews of the Diaspora persecuted Paul. The impression given by these narratives that dominate the New Testament canon is that Jewish opposition to Jesus and his followers was total, consistent, and violent. Christians traditionally have taken these accounts as fully historical. To what extent do they have a historical basis, and to what extent do they represent an exaggeration?

Although it is certain that the final and formal responsibility for Jesus' execution by crucifixion lies with the Roman Prefect, a strong historical case can be made for the involvement of some Jewish leaders in the death of Jesus.¹⁶ This is not to say that the narrative accounts concerning that involvement are in every respect accurate—there is no reason, for example, to claim a formal hearing before the Sanhedrin, when a “night court” session would have served as well—only to say that there is high probability that elements of the Sanhedrin were involved in Jesus' arrest and handing over to Pilate. The basis for regarding some such participation as basically historical is not simply the four canonical Gospels, but three other converging lines of explicit evidence.

The first support is Paul's statement in 1 Thess 2:13–16. He tells the Thesalonians, “you suffered the same things from your countrymen that they [the churches in Judea] did from the Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι), who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out...” While some scholars regard this passage as an interpolation,¹⁷ the arguments are not convincing. Even if not from Paul, furthermore, the statement is surely very early

¹⁶ In the recent debate on this point, I find more plausible the position held by R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grace: A Commentary on the Passion Narrative of the Four Gospels* 2 Volumes (New York: Doubleday, 1998), than that held by J.D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*

¹⁷ See B.A. Pearson, “1 Thess 2:13–16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971) 79–94; D. Schmidt, “1 Thess 2:13–16: Linguistic Evidence for an Interpolation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983) 269–279.

evidence for a view of Jesus' death outside the Gospel narratives. The second bit of evidence is Josephus' statement in *Antiquities of the Jews* 18, 3, 3, which, stripped of its obvious Christian interpolations, provides a brief sketch of Jesus that includes these words, "And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross..."¹⁸ The final statement is the strange passage in the *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Sanhedrin 43a, which states that Jesus was "hanged" on Passover after a (more than fair) Jewish trial determining that he should be stoned for "leading the people astray" into apostasy, and for "sorcery."¹⁹ These accounts differ dramatically in detail, to be sure, but precisely such differences (like those in the Gospels themselves) tend to support the fact on which they converge.

The persecution of early Christian communities reported in Acts, in turn, is supported by Paul's statements about his own past activity (Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6; 1 Cor 15:8; 1 Tim 1:12–13), his report of his own series of whippings and stoning "at the hands of the Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι)" (2 Cor 11:23–27), and his suggestion that he is "still being persecuted" for allowing Gentiles admittance without circumcision, and that those who advocate circumcision are seeking to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ (Gal 5:11; 6:12).²⁰

Josephus shows how the Jewish leadership could be involved in violence toward a prophet in Jerusalem (*Jewish War* 6, 300–309), and he provides a vivid account of a delegation of Pharisees associated with the Sanhedrin sent to Galilee to arrest or kill Josephus there (*Life* 107–203). That Jews of first-century Palestine and Diaspora were in fact often fanatical and violent is clear, if even a portion of what Josephus reports in *The Jewish War* is accurate (see 1, 89; 1, 150; 1, 571; 2, 8–13; 2, 42; 2, 65; 2, 169–70; 2, 223; 2, 229–30; 2, 264–65; 2, 408–9; 2, 417; 2, 466; 4, 135; 4, 197–207; 4, 310–18; 4, 378; 4, 509; 7, 367; 7, 409; 7, 437–41). Such violence and persecution is reported as well by the Sectarrians at Qumran (see IQpHab 8–12).

For the New Testament to report the involvement of some Jews in the death of Jesus or the persecution of the earliest church does not by itself constitute "Anti-Judaism." Nor is it a form of Anti-Judaism for

¹⁸ For the argument concerning the basic trustworthiness of the expurgated version, see J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* 3 Volumes (New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994, 2001), 1: 56–88.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the passage, see F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 55–57.

²⁰ Despite his many minimizing qualifications, D.R.A. Hare acknowledges the fact of such persecution, in *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (SNTSMS 6; Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 19–79.

present-day scholars to regard these statements as part of the historical record. Indeed, to suppress such facts is itself a form of disservice to historical truth. Even when that is said, however, it also remains true that determining the specific ways in which Jews were so involved remains an extraordinarily difficult aspect of studying the historical Jesus as well as nascent Christianity.

In the Gospels and Acts, however, these historical realities are expressed through realistic narratives, and it is in the narrative role assigned the Jews that we begin to approach what might be called “Anti-Judaism”—bearing in mind the cautions concerning the use of the term mentioned above.

Realistic (“history-like”) narratives are authorial constructions that contain both fact and fiction. The story may be based on a historical fact. But in order to construct narrative, fictional techniques are required. Authors choose which materials to include, and how they are put together. Most of all, authors supply transitions, authorial commentary, and the motives behind actions. In a word, the author is in charge of plot, but to an even greater extent—because it is less publicly known and therefore more malleable—characterization. With regard to the portrayal of the Jews in the Gospels and Acts, the narrative role they are assigned, and the characterization they are given, inevitably moved far beyond what could reasonably be called “historical.” Precisely the many small differences among the Gospel accounts help us recognize the degree of creativity they employed in their portrayals.

In terms of narrative role, we see that the highly probable involvement of some Jewish leaders in Jesus’ arrest and death becomes, in the Gospel story, a consistent and united Jewish opposition to Jesus from the beginning—in Matthew, extending all the way back to Jesus’ birth (Matt 2:1–12)—and culminating in a formal trial before the Sanhedrin. It is certainly possible that some Scribes (in Luke, “Lawyers”) and Pharisees debated Jesus during his ministry.²¹ But their unified and consistent presence in the Gospel narratives surely owes much to the experience of the evangelists and the “Synagogue down the street,” especially since

²¹ It even becomes probable, if Jesus’ did in fact associate with “tax-collectors and sinners” (see Luke 15:1–2), and challenged the very probable Pharisaic preoccupation—before the destruction of the Temple—with purity in fellowship (see J. Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), and A.J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988).

the matters debated by Jesus and the Pharisees so much correspond to the sort of issues dividing church and synagogue in the period before the final separation. And it is surely authorial creativity that has these Jewish leaders plot to kill him from the start of his ministry (Mark 3:6)!

The tendency to standardize “Jewish Opposition” reaches its fullest expression in the Fourth Gospel. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus confronts various groups (Herodians, Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees), whose specific objections to him correspond to what we know historically about the sects (see Mark 12:13–37//). These groups, in turn, tend to disappear in the passion account, replaced by the members of the Sanhedrin (Chief Priests, Elders, and Scribes). In John’s Gospel, the differentiation between Jewish groups is minimal: mostly there are “the Jews,” who, together with Pilate, serve to represent within the narrative the unbelieving world that prefers the darkness to the light offered through the coming of God’s son (John 9:18–22; 12:35–50). It is perhaps worth noting that Matthew and Luke each use the term Ἰουδαῖος five times, and Mark uses it six times. But in John, Ἰουδαῖος occurs some seventy-one times. In the same way, when Luke’s narrative turns to the story of the early church, the use of Ἰουδαῖος accelerates, and reaches a total in Acts of some seventy-nine occurrences (contrast the 26 uses in all of Paul’s letters). Such word-choice represents a form of identity-construction.

It is similarly an authorial decision on the part of Matthew to have all the people cry out in response to Pilate’s protestation of innocence, “his blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt 27:25). And when John attributes the Jewish Council’s decision to put Jesus to death to the fear of Rome’s coming to destroy the holy place and nation (John 11:48), or when Luke attributes the persecution of the apostles to jealousy (ζῆλος) on the part of Jews (Acts 5:17; 13:45; 17:5), we are far from sober historiography and into straightforward, if negative, character-construction.

The power of narrative is such that Christians through the ages who have found the positive character of Jesus disclosed through the Gospels and have accepted that characterization as true, have also accepted as true the construction of the character of those who have been portrayed as a unified and consistent opposition to Jesus and his message. And if Jesus represents all that is good, it follows that those who oppose him must also represent the rejection of all that is good. When such perceptions are embedded in narratives that are regarded as inspired and infallible—without any critical engagement with those convictions—the conclusion can all too easily be drawn that the character of ancient Jews,

thus portrayed, applies also to present day Jews. The topic of characterization within New Testament narratives brings us to the wider issue of the negative language employed about Jews throughout the New Testament.

Anti-Jewish Slander and Ancient Rhetoric

The New Testament contains a considerable amount of slander directed against Jewish opponents, sometimes in the mouth of Jesus.²² A classic example is Matt 23:1–39. Jesus attacks scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29), blind guides (23:16), white-washed tombs (23:27), serpents and brood of vipers (23:33), and children of hell (23:15). They are denounced as vainglorious (23:5–7), posturing in public (23:27–28), preoccupied with trivia rather than real religion (23:23–24), concerned for outer not inner righteousness (23:25–26), and as the murderers of the prophets and of Jesus' own emissaries (23:32–36). In addition to a passage parallel to Matthew's, addressed to Lawyers and Pharisees (Luke 11:37–52), Luke adds that the Pharisees had "rejected God's plan for them" (7:30), and in an apparently gratuitous aside, calls the Pharisees "lovers of money" (16:14).

John's Gospel contains a number of passages containing such characterizations. In dispute with those called simply "the Jews," for example, Jesus says, "You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth . . . He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason you do not hear them is that you are not of God" (John 8:44–47). John offers this explanation for Jesus' rejection: ". . . many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42–43). The Book of Revelation—also from Johannine Christianity—contributes this statement, placed in the mouth of the risen Jesus: "Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, those who say they are Jews, but are not and lie—behold I will make them come and bow before your feet and learn that I have loved you" (Rev 3:9).

²² A fuller treatment of this topic can be found in L.T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989) 419–441.

As for Paul, despite the positive things he says about his “kinsmen by race” (see Rom 2:17–20; 3:1–2; 9:1–5; 11:28), he can refer to those who read Moses without reference to Christ, this way: “even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God” (2 Cor 4:3). In Romans, he says that a part of Israel that has not converted to “faith in Jesus” is, “as regards the gospel, the enemies of God, for your sake” (Rom 11:28). In the same letter, he says of Jews who know but do not keep the law, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom 3:24). In Philippians, Paul refers to “the dogs, the evil-doers, who mutilate the flesh,” and later to “the enemies of the cross of Christ, their end is destruction, their god is the belly, they glory in their shame, with minds set of earthly things” (Phil 3:1–2; 18–19). Concerning the Jews who killed Jesus and the prophets and drove him out, Paul tells the Thessalonians, they “displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sin. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last” (1 Thess 2:15–16). Finally, the Letter of Titus refers to those “from the circumcision party” as teaching “for base gain what they have no right to teach,” as “giving heed to Jewish myths or commands of men who reject the truth,” and “to the corrupt and unbelieving, nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed” (Tit 1:11–16).

Here we have “characterization” on a large scale, even apart from the playing of narrative roles. Since the power of such language to shape hostile and destructive attitudes and actions toward Jews is well documented, it is the more important that we understand the origins and function of such language, in order better to assess how to think about it in contemporary circumstances. In the following section I will first sketch the historical and social context that generated such language. Then, I will place the polemical language of the New Testament against Jews (and, we remember, Judaizers) in the context of the conventional rhetoric of slander in the Hellenistic world. The question is, why did Messianists utter such slander, and how would their slander be heard back then?

1. *Historical Circumstances*

We must start by deconstructing the image of an imperially privileged, powerful, and Jew-persecuting Christianity of the fourth and subsequent

centuries, and transport ourselves imaginatively to the years 35–100 of the common era. In that period, Judaism had every advantage in terms of age, presence, and authority, especially in comparison to a fledgling messianic sect. There were some 7 million Jews in the empire, and only thousands of Messianists. In an age that honored antiquity, Jews traced a history of two thousand years, while the Christ cult was born yesterday. Jews had interacted with and influenced Hellenistic culture for hundreds of years; Christians would not even be noticed by a Roman writer until the early second century. Before its destruction, the Temple in Jerusalem was a wonder of the world; so were synagogues like that at Sardis. Messianists met in houses and lecture halls. If archaeological evidence alone counted, Christianity did not exist until the late second century.²³

The first thing we might anticipate in New Testament rhetoric, therefore, would be a compensatory leap across this very real gap in power and prestige. Abuse tends to increase in power when it is powerless. A second predictable and unexceptional feature of the New Testament's rhetoric is its defensive quality, since the symbols of Torah were so much more obviously belonged to and so much more evidently were in the control of the dominant group, rather than to the messianist upstarts. We might expect the New Testament's rhetoric also to reflect the hostility of the persecuted toward those who seek them harm; "affliction and persecution" entered early into the Christian psyche and remained there powerfully.

But even to make such "Judaism vs. Christianity" comparisons—however useful they are for adjusting our perspective and avoiding anachronism—is itself distorting and anachronistic, for in the period when the New Testament compositions were written there was not yet a stable "Christianity" nor for that matter a stable "Judaism."

2. *A Diverse Messianic Movement*

The messianic sect was diverse from the beginning.²⁴ Jews from all over the Diaspora were converted on Pentecost (Acts 2:1–41), and groups

²³ On the social status of first-generation Christians, see the standard treatment by W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). If the revisionist view of J.J. Meggitt is accepted, the social status must be lowered even further; see *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

²⁴ "It is now as much a dogma of scholarship as its opposite used to be: orthodoxy is not the presupposition of the church but the result of growth and development," G.W. MacRae, "Why the Church Rejected Gnosticism," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*:

called “Hellenists” and “Hebrews” quickly emerged and fell into dispute (Acts 6:1–3). The sect’s rapid spread across the empire was a stunning success story, but the consequences of such rapid expansion, without strong internal or external controls, was that Christianity was a new invention wherever it appeared. The few attempts at structural or ideological control were not notably successful (see Acts 15:6–29). There was no long period of stability during which self-definition could be consolidated, and for the first fifty years, there was no one realization that could be called “Christianity” as a standard by which to measure deviance. There was, rather, a loose network of assemblies on the fringe of synagogues and in lecture halls and households, whose boundaries of self-definition were vigorously debated.

The first concern of such communities was survival. Only energy left over from upkeep and maintenance could go into the reinterpretation of symbols shared with others calling themselves Jews. Rejection of the messianic claim from within the synagogue was an important stimulus for such reinterpretation of Torah. By the time the first Christian writings appear, however, even that stage is already passed. Only the residue of such apologetic remains in the literary forms of testimonia and messianic midrash. A larger concern for such communities was the threat to stability caused by disagreements and disputes from within, disputes concerning eschatology, diet, sex, authority, status, work, and the use of possessions. Were they to be, for example, an egalitarian assembly? Or, were they to be like other cults, many-tiered, with multiple initiations and stages of perfection? Elitists such as “the strong” in Corinth, the ascetical mystics of Colossae, the legalists at Ephesus, and the Judaizers in Galatia and Crete, advanced such perfectionistic options, and threatened to split communities.

In response to these pressures, the greatest amount of New Testament polemic is turned inward against fellow members of the movement.²⁵ Outsiders are addressed only indirectly. Paul’s polemic in Galatians, for example, does not concern Judaism as such, but the specific claims of Gentile messianists who seek to impose circumcision and Torah-observance on other Gentile believers. In plain fact, no New Testament writer was in a position to adjudicate “Judaism” as such. The main

Vol. 1, *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. E.P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 127.

²⁵ So, correctly, Gager, *Origins of Anti-Semitism*, 112–117.

reason is that “Judaism as such” did not yet exist, but a second reason is that “Christianity as such” did not yet exist, either.

3. *Diversity Among First-Century Jews*

The myth of normative Judaism is even harder to deconstruct.²⁶ Despite the overwhelming evidence that first century Jews were diverse and even deeply divided, there remains a tendency to accept as historical the founding myth of the Pharisaic tradition—the myth that says things were before the fall of the Temple as they were after, that the formation of Mishnah and Talmud made nothing fundamentally new but only consolidated what had been there all along.²⁷

In such a mythic understanding, the some 5 million Jews of the Diaspora were not quite “really Jewish,” although they outnumbered Jews in Palestine by two to one; the Essenes were a “deviant sect” and the messianists were “not Jewish”—even though each of these groups claimed allegiance to the symbols of Torah. But such judgments defy the best historical evidence, which makes clear that the question, “Who is a real Jew?” was an open one, fiercely and even violently disputed by rival claimants throughout the first century. Even if Judaism is defined as an adherence to the symbols of Temple and Torah, the extant literature from the period shows that these symbols in particular were a matter of debate: which Torah? Consisting in which books? In which language? Interpreted from what standpoint? Which Temple, and run by which priesthood?

A properly historical perspective recognizes that Jews in Alexandria were no less Jews because they used allegory rather than Midrash, nor that those who called themselves “the keepers” and observed Torah and awaited a prophet like Moses, were no less part of Jewish tradition because they worshipped in a rival temple at Mt Gerizim—and were not considered to be Jews by their Judean rivals. Similarly, the Essenes were no less Jews because they challenged the priesthood in Jerusalem and declared themselves to represent a “new covenant.” In such perspective, the Christian claims about the way to read Torah and the proper understanding of

²⁶ The standard scholarly construction of “normative Judaism” is G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 2 Vols. (New York: Schocken, 1927). He states, “Much of what we otherwise know only in the rabbinic sources of the first and second centuries after our era was custom and law in the preceding centuries, 1:71.

²⁷ Even so sophisticated a scholar as G. Vermes, who is capable of refined methodological statements, can in practice operate according to the narrowed norm, in *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, 74–77.

God's Temple represent only one more voice in an already contentious conversation.²⁸

Some of our best evidence for diversity and debate among Jews of the first century is found in the New Testament itself. The Gospels and Acts sort out Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Samaritans, together with some notion of the disputations and mutual recriminations.²⁹ A still more diverse mixture is found in the earliest Christian letters, written decades before the war with Rome. Did Colossian ascetics get their inspiration from Essenes, or Merkabah mystics?³⁰ Were Paul's rivals in Corinth connected to a Hellenistic Jewish mission?³¹ Were those influencing the Gentile "Judaizers" in Galatia Pharisees, and were they the same as those "from the circumcision party" in Crete?³² Was the intended audience for "The Letter to the Hebrews" made up of Gentiles with only a literary interest in Torah, or Alexandrian Jews, or ex-priests, or former members of the Qumran sect, or Diaspora Jews on pilgrimage in Jerusalem?³³ We do not, and perhaps cannot, know the answers to these questions. But how odd it would be, if all the Jews encountered by the first Christians were not "real Jews" by the mythic reckoning. But they were real Jews, with all the complex coloration of genuine historical persons, rather than the monochromatic consistency of myth. And in addition there were those Jews whose opinions never reached literary expression, but nevertheless shared in a variety of ways in the complex cultural mix.³⁴

²⁸ For a survey of the practices and beliefs of all the Palestinian groups, including the "people of the land," see E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992). For some of the complexity involving Jewish self-definition in the first and second centuries, see the essays in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, edited by E.P. Sanders, A.I. Baumgarten, A. Mendelson, Vol. 2: *Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

²⁹ Passages such as Mark 7:1–23, in fact, are essential for discerning a line of continuity within the Pharisaic tradition, since it shows the same concerns shown in *m.Demai* 2:3; see J. Neusner, "The Fellowship (*chaburah*) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth," *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (1960) 125–42.

³⁰ See the essays in *Conflict at Colossae*, edited by W.A. Meeks and F.O. Francis; rev.ed. (SBS 4; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).

³¹ As in D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians: A Study of Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

³² See B.H. Brinsmead, *Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents* (SBLDS 65; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

³³ See C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 Vols. (Ebib; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1952), and G.W. Buchanan, *To The Hebrews* (AB 36; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972) 255–267.

³⁴ See, for example, R.A. Horsley (with J.S. Hanson), *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Religious Movements at the Time of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985).

In short, when the New Testament writings were composed, neither Christianity nor Judaism had reached the point of uniformity and separation that would characterize them in subsequent centuries. The Messianists were part of a much larger debate within Judaism, a debate with many parties, concerning the right way to read Torah, the text that shaped this people.

With respect to the quest for the historical Jesus, this diversity within first-century Judaism is a fundamental problem in trying to “place” Jesus within first-century Palestine, and it must be said that researchers tend to give notional assent to the diversity while in practice isolating one strand that can be made sufficiently stable to enable something to be said about “Jesus the Jew.”³⁵

4. *The Social Setting of Rival Schools*

The polemic of the New Testament becomes more intelligible if it is placed in the social context in which such slander was at home, and if the conventions of such slander are understood. The slander in the New Testament is typical of that found among rival claimants to a philosophical tradition, and it is found as widely among Jews as among other Hellenists. The way the New Testament talks about Jews is the way all opponents talked about each other in antiquity. The language appears more shocking to contemporary readers precisely because they do not understand the context or the conventions.

The basic adjustment here is to think of first century Judaism as a philosophy. But this is, in fact, the way it was perceived, both by outsiders and Jews themselves. Josephus describes the sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes as philosophies not only because *he* was hellenized, but because *they* were (*Jewish War* 2, 119–66; *Antiquities* 18, 11–25). Accord-

³⁵ A classic example is found in the work of N.T. Wright. In *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), he carefully nodded toward diversity within Judaism, but quickly reduced his focus to Palestine and the prophetic/Pharisaic stream; then in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) develops his portrait of Jesus completely against this static—and deeply non-historical—Jewish backdrop. See L.T. Johnson, “A Historiographical Response to Wright’s Jesus,” *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. C.C. Newman (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 206–224, 315–316. The same tendency is found in a milder form in E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) and in a more acute form in G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: a Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973) and M. Borg, *Jesus a New Vision: Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987). It is less present in J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), and is missing entirely in J.P. Meier’s *A Marginal Jew*.

ing to Artapanus (*Frag.* 3.4) and Eupolemus (*Frag.* 1), Judaism was the oldest and best philosophy. Philo's entire literary production was based on the same premise. The social arrangements of teachers and students, the activities of reading and interpreting and memorizing, the patterns of fellowship, are all uniform across the Hellenistic world. When we speak of the House of Hillel, then, we speak of a philosophical party. When we speak of the School of St. Matthew, or the Pauline School, we mean, or ought to mean, the same thing.

The nature of philosophy in the Hellenistic period perfectly matched the character of Judaism. Philosophy had become less a matter of metaphysics than of morals. One converted to the philosophical life by leaving vice and seeking virtue. Philosophy was a way of life embraced by many with religious fervor; salvation was at stake. But while the general character and goals of philosophy were universally acknowledged, the best way to realize that character and reach those goals was a matter of fierce disputation.³⁶ The ancient schools of the classical period continued to win adherents and debate their respective doctrines and practices. And since philosophers appeared in a variety of social roles (court advisors, school masters, wandering preachers), both theory and life-style were matters of frequent debate. School teachers tended to see street preachers as charlatans, while Cynics saw school-teachers as armchair critics. Over the centuries, a stereotyped polemic developed in which such disputes found conventional expression. This is the context, and these are the conventions, that best explain the language about Jews in the New Testament.

5. *The Rhetoric of Vilification*

In the space available, only a taste of the actual rhetoric can be provided. We can begin with the rivalry between public speakers. Dio of Prusa had been a rhetorician before his conversion to philosophy (*Oration* 13), but castigates his former colleagues as "ignorant, boastful, self-deceived" (*Or.* 4.33)... "evil-spirited" (4.38)... "liars and deceivers" (12.12). They preach for the sake of gain and glory and only their own benefit (32.30), are flatterers, charlatans, and sophists (23.11), boastful and shameless (55.7), and demagogues (77/78. 27). He can say all these things even though he admits that some rhetoricians act for good (35.9-10). His polemic has to do not with specific actions but typical ones. Any teacher of whom you

³⁶ A classic, and highly readable, treatment of philosophy in its various social contexts is S. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (1907; reprint, New York: Meridian, 1956) 289-440.

disapprove can be a sophist or charlatan. Rhetoricians were more than able to answer. In the second of his *Platonic Discourses*, for example, Aelius Aristides defends the public spiritedness of sophists, attacking in turn those calling themselves philosophers: “they despise others while being themselves worthy of scorn. They criticize others without examining themselves. They make a great show of virtue and never practice it” (307.6). He says they have the outward form of virtue but are inwardly corrupt (307.10), they are only after pleasure and wealth (307.15). Like Dio, he issues a disclaimer: he is not against philosophy, only those who abuse it (310.8).

The disputes between philosophical schools concerning the merits of their respective doctrines often descended to attacks on character. Plutarch, priest of Apollo at Delphi, was the most urbane and learned of ancient philosophers, wide in his sympathies. Although he considers Jews to exemplify superstition, for example (*Superstition* 8) he shows only mild curiosity about their customs and shows no real hostility toward them (*Table-Talk* IV, 4–VI, 2). What this shows is simply that Jews did not matter to him. When it came to rival schools that he took seriously, the tolerant Plutarch could turn ugly. Colotes, a disciple of Epicurus, had high-handedly attacked some of Plutarch’s philosophical heroes, calling them “buffoons, charlatans, assassins, prostitutes, nincompoops” (*Reply to Colotes*, Mor. 1086E). In his angry retort, Plutarch repeats the gossip that Epicureans had prostitutes in their community (Mor. 1129B), and the standard charge that the essence of Epicureanism is its “lack of friends, absence of activity, irreligion, and indifference” (Mor. 1100C). They are “sophists and charlatans” (Mor. 1124C). We find such language everywhere. Epictetus declares to Epicureans, “your doctrines are bad, subversive of the state, destructive of the family, not fit even for women” (*Discourse* 3. 7. 21).

Such charges became standard, so that certain things were said about all opponents. Their teaching was self-contradictory, or trivial, or led to bad morals. Their behavior could be criticized in two different ways. Either they preached but did not practice (showing they were hypocrites), or they lived as they taught, and their manner of life showed the falsity of their doctrines (like the Epicureans). Certain vices were indiscriminately applied to opponents on every side: they were all lovers of pleasure, lovers of money, lovers of glory.³⁷

³⁷ For love of pleasure (φιληδία), see Epictetus, *Discourse* 1, 9, 19–21; 2, 4, 1–11; Lucian, *Timon* 84; for the love of money (φιλαργυρία), see Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.34; Dio

The purpose of such polemic is not so much the effective rebuttal of opponents as their discrediting in the eyes of one's own party. Polemic was primarily for internal consumption. This makes more intelligible the secondary, literary use of such polemic within protreptic discourses that encouraged someone to follow a certain philosophy. In these discourses, polemic is used to provide a negative counter-image to the positive ideal of the true philosopher (as in Lucian, *Demonax*; Dio, *Oration 77/78*). This is the way Paul uses such polemic in Phil 2–3 and 2 Timothy 2–3³⁸

And the same protreptic purpose is clear in Matthew 23, the classic text containing abuse against Jewish teachers. Its literary and rhetorical function is turned inward to Matthew's messianic readers.³⁹ Matthew's attack on Scribes and Pharisees is an attack on rival *teachers*, and serves to frame the positive instructions of messianic disciples (μαθηταί = students) in 23:8–11. They are to be the "Scribes of the kingdom" (Matt 13:51; 23:34) in the "School of St. Matthew," who do not call their teacher "Rabbi" but have as their one instructor (καθηγητή) the Messiah (23:10). Familiarity with the debates among Hellenistic philosophers makes instantly recognizable the reference to the "chair of Moses" (23:2) occupied by these rival Jewish teachers, who "preach but do not practice" (23:3), who love the place of honor at feasts (23:6), and who are "hypocrites" (23:13), outwardly righteous but inwardly full of iniquity (23:28).

6. Jewish Rhetoric of Vilification

Since Judaism considered itself to be and was perceived as a philosophy, it is not surprising to find the same polemical conventions in Jewish literature, most obviously in Hellenistic Jewish writings. Josephus responds to the scurrilous attacks of Apion, for example, by using such standard slander. Apion has "the mind of an ass and the impudence of a dog, which his countrymen are wont to worship" (*Apion* 2. 86), he is a liar (2. 12; 2. 86), engages in "malicious slander" (2. 89), and has a "mendacious character" (2. 12). He is a low charlatan (2. 3; 2. 136), ignorant (2. 26), a fool (2. 37), and

Chrysostom, *Oration* 32.9; 35.1; for love of glory (φιλόδοξος), see Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 32.10–11; Lucian, *Peregrinus* 20, 42.

³⁸ On 2 Timothy, see L.T. Johnson, "II Timothy and the Polemic against False Teachers: A Re-Examination," *JRS* 6/7 (1978–79) 1–26.

³⁹ See S. Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us?: Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 117–43).

stupid (2. 142). His mind is “blinded” (1. 142). He and his fellow attackers of Jews are “reprobate sophists and deceivers of youth,” and “crazy fools” (2. 236; 2. 254). Philo also can use such language about Gentile opponents. He calls Alexandrians “promiscuous and unstable rabble” (*Embassy to Gaius* 18. 120), “more brutal and savage than fierce wild beasts” (19. 131), they are “adepts at flattery and imposture and hypocrisy” (25. 162), a “seed bed of evil” (26. 166).

Jews in Alexandria also knew how to strike first. Philo disparages the idol worship of the Egyptians, calling it incurable folly, and those who practice it, blind (*Contemplative Life* 1. 8–9; 2.10). And the *Wisdom of Solomon* provides a virtual catalogue of slander against pagan Egyptians in its attack on “those who do not know God” because they are “foolish by nature” (*Wis.* 13:1): they “live in great strife due to ignorance... they kill children in their initiations... they no longer keep themselves or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously kill each other or grieve one another by adultery... theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury... sex perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery and debauchery... their worshipers either rave in exaltation, or prophesy lies, or readily commit perjury” (*Wis* 14:22–28). Both Jewish and Christians are so inured to such “attacks on idolatry” that they do not hear the inflammatory character of such language directed to one’s neighbors. In the Diaspora, the language was rough both ways, and thoroughly within the conventions of Hellenistic slander.

We must also ask how Jews spoke about each other when they disagreed. Josephus again gives us the fullest evidence. He castigates Justus of Tiberius as “a charlatan and a demagogue and a deceiver” (*Life* 9). His most sustained attacks are against the Zealots and Sicarii, whom he blames for the war with Rome and the profanation of the Temple: “What have you done that is blessed by the lawgiver, what deed that he has cursed have you left undone... in rapine and murder you vie with one another... the Temple has become the sink of all, and native hands have polluted those divine precincts” (*Jewish War* 5, 400–402). The Sicarii are “imposters and brigands” (2, 264), “slaves, the dregs of society, and the bastard scum of the nation” (5, 433–44). They are more wicked than Sodom (5, 566), for their “cruelty... avarice... atrocities,” and their “lying... oppression... evil” (7, 255–58). Among them were “charlatans and false prophets” (6, 288). Josephus says that the Zealots have profaned the Temple so that it is no longer God’s dwelling place (5, 419), so that the destruction of the Temple is a punishment from God (6, 110), a vengeance from heaven for the guilt of the Zealots (2, 455).

When we turn to Jews in Palestine, we encounter the familiar problem of sources. Apart from some apocalyptic writings, the Qumran Scrolls, and the New Testament itself, direct evidence from the first century is fragmentary, especially for the Pharisaic movement. The pieces that remain, however, are sufficient to suggest the same sort of many-voiced and contentious polemic we have seen in the Hellenistic Jewish writings, particularly when placed in the context of Josephus' vivid portrayal of divided and fratricidal population. We have hints of Judean polemic against Samaritans (Josephus, *Jewish War* 3, 308; Sirach 50:28; John 4:9; 8:48; Mishnah *ned.* 3.10; *Qidd.* 43; *Git.* 1.5; *Nid.* 74, 4:1–2; *Ber.* 88; *Dem.* 3.4, 5.9; *Sheb.* 8.10). There are a few passages regarding *am-ha-aretz* that suggest a history of polemic now turned to protreptic use (see Mishnah *Hor.* 3.9; *Abot.* 2.6, 5.10). And there is the (often quite bitter) Jewish polemic from the side of “the pious” against those called “sinners” or “unrighteous” found in texts such as *4 Ezra* 7:17–25; | *Enoch* 12:5; 15:9–10; 94:6–11; 95:4–7; 96:4–8; 104:7–13; and *Psalms of Solomon* 2:3–18; 4:1–20; 8:10–18; 14:6–10; 15:8–14).

The relative paucity of such materials from other groups is more than compensated by the sectarians at Qumran, who expressed an extreme hostility toward all outsiders, not excepting those Jews who did not agree with their interpretation of themselves as God's new covenant. The group's ideology divided the world between the “sons of light”, who belong to the sect, and “sons of darkness” who do not (1QS 1:10; 3:13; 1QM 1:7). At Qumran, it was impossible to say enough bad things about outsiders. They are “sons of the pit: (1QS 9:16; CD 6:15; 13:14), who come from the spirit of falsehood and are ruled by an angel of darkness (1QS 3:19–21; 5:2, 10). God hates them and has a vengeance planned for them. The *Community Rule* regards outsiders as having “greed and slackness in the search for righteousness, wickedness and lies, haughtiness and pride, falseness and deceit, cruelty and abundant evil, ill-temper and much folly and brazen insolence, abominable deeds committed in a spirit of lust, and ways of lewdness in the service of uncleanness, a blaspheming tongue, blindness of eye and dullness of ear, stiffness of neck and heaviness of heart, so that a man walks in all the ways of darkness and guile” (1QS 4:9–14).

One of the rituals of the sect involved shouting curses against such “men of the lot of Satan” in this manner: “Be cursed of all your guilty wickedness! May he deliver you up to torture at the hands of all the wreakers of revenge! Be cursed without mercy because of the darkness of your deeds! May God not hear when you call upon him, nor pardon you by blotting out your sin! May he raise his angry face toward you for vengeance! May there be no peace for you in the mouths of those who hold fast to the

fathers!" (1QS 2:4–10). All of this, it should be emphasized, is directed not against the Kittim, the Gentiles, but against other Jews who do not match the sectarians' ideas of purity, those whom the *War Scroll* calls "the ungodly of the covenant" (1QM 1:2).

The New Testament polemic against Jews appears in a new light when placed in the context of the conventional rhetoric used in disputes between ancient schools, and enables several conclusions. First, the New Testament's polemic appears more intelligible. The great problem with the "historical vindication" approach is that it leaves the New Testament polemic unmotivated: if Jews were so blameless, why were the Christians so nasty? But this survey shows such language used everywhere in the diverse and disputatious tradition called Judaism in the first century. Readers today hear the New Testament's polemic as inappropriate because the other voices are silent. Historical imagination can restore them.

Second, by the measure of Hellenistic conventions, and certainly by the measure of contemporary intra-Jewish polemic, the New Testament's slander against fellow Jews is remarkably mild. Indeed, the New Testament's rhetoric against Gentiles—where, in fact, it makes use of standard Jewish polemic against Gentiles—is far harsher (see Matt 6:7, 32; Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9–11; Eph 2:11–12; 1 Thess 4:5, 13; Tit 1:12; 1 Pet 1:14, 18; 4:3–4), as is the polemic used against those regarded as deviant within the messianic movement (see 2 Cor 11:1–6, 14–21; 2 Tim 2:14–3:9; 2 Pet 2:1–22; Jude 5–19; 1 John 2:18–25; 2 John 7; Rev 2:13–29).

Third, the conventional nature of the rhetoric means that its chief import is connotative rather than denotative: the polemic simply signifies that these are opponents and such things can and should be said about them. The attempt either to convict first-century Jews of hypocrisy or vindicate them from it is irrelevant as well as futile.

Fourth, grasping the historical situation and social setting within which such language was shaped helps us understand it as a function of community-identification among disputants to shared tradition. Once that context is lost, and the New Testament is taken as speaking inerrantly about the nature of Jews (or Gentiles) with such language, then real mischief can arise.

Declarations on Law, Covenant, and People

The final aspect of "Anti-Judaism and the New Testament" has to do with the various statements made by the New Testament that would seem to

support a supersessionist theology. Some of these are narrative statements that speak of the rejection of Jews because of their rejection of Jesus or the gospel. Others take the form of propositions concerning law and covenant within epistolary arguments.

An example of the first is the application of Isa 6: 9–10 (which speaks of the blindness of the people preventing their conversion) to Jewish characters. In Mark 4:12, it is made part of Jesus' speech in regard to his speaking in parables; in Matthew 13:14–15, Jesus cites the passage in full as being "fulfilled" in those who do not understand his teaching, in contrast to those insiders who do understand (13:16–17). In John 12:38–43, the passage is cited by the evangelist at the end of Jesus' public ministry in support of the position that "the Jews" loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Luke does not cite the passage in his Gospel narrative, but saves it for the end of Acts, where Paul applies the full citation to the Jewish brethren whom he was trying to persuade, and where, again, it stands in contrast to a positive statement, "Let it be known to you, then, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen" (Acts 28:25–28).

Another example is Jesus' parable of the wicked husbandmen in the Synoptic Gospels. In Mark 12:1–11, the story of the tenants who reject the owner's emissaries and then kill his son, concludes with the statement, "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others" (12:9). This statement is followed by the citation of Psalm 118:22–23 (understood in terms of the rejection of Jesus), and the authorial comment that "They perceived that he had told the parable against them" (12:12). Luke's version (Luke 20:1–18) mitigates the harsh application of the parable: the people take it as a warning and say "God forbid," but the Scribes and Chief Priests sought an opportunity to arrest him "for they perceived that he had told this parable against them." Matthew, in contrast, exacerbates the implication of the parable's conclusion by having Jesus state, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Matt 21:33–44).

Such harsh passages do not stand alone, and can be countered by other passages that express a more positive view of Jews within God's plan. In the narrative logic of Acts, for example, the restored Israel includes thousands of Jews, so that the mission of the Gentiles is seen as an extension rather than a replacement of the historical Israel (see Acts 15:15–19). And Paul's argument in Romans 9–11 hopes for this culmination of God's work

in history, “Thus all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). But although Paul answered his own question, “Has God rejected his people” (Rom 11:1) in the negative, it must be acknowledged that the statements with the opposite point predominate and their effect must seriously be considered.

In assessing such narrative statements, everything that was said in this essay earlier about historical context and narrative roles needs to be kept in mind. The Gospels are written out of a context of intense conflict and competition with rival forms of Jewish conviction. Their statements about God rejecting those who reject them have exactly the same historical motivation as the assignment to the everlasting pit of all non-sectarians by the devout at Qumran. It must be clearly recognized, however, that all such materials formed the “scriptural” basis for the powerful supersessionist theology that did come to dominate Christianity virtually up to our own day. The statements attributed to Jesus (above all those that spoke of the destruction of the Temple) were taken as divine prophecies that were fulfilled in the Jews’ loss of their Temple, city, and land under the Romans, the mass conversion of the Gentiles, and finally, the imperial recognition of Christianity as the authentic representation of “biblical religion.”

The statements made by Paul and the author of Hebrews concerning law and covenant should be regarded the same way. When “Christianity” and “Judaism” not only emerged as distinct religious systems, but also as religions with their power relationship reversed, it was easy to see statements that had been made in the midst of controversy over community self-definition as divinely revealed declarations concerning “the religion of Law.” And when Christian systematic theologians subsequently used such statements, not as situational responses, but as universal truths, it was perhaps inevitable that Christianity tended to be defined in large measure by the ways in which it was “not Jewish.” Thus Paul’s defensive opposing of “gift” and “faith” on the side of the experience of Jesus Christ, and of “works” and “law” on the side of those seeking circumcision and Torah-observance in Galatians, becomes in the hands of systematic theologians, a definition of Christianity that is all “grace” and “faith” standing against law. The procedure not only distorts the import of the statements that are thus used, but also leads to the neglect of Paul’s language that is positive concerning both works and law. Understood in its historical context, Paul’s language cannot be taken as “anti-Jewish,” but Paul’s language as taken up into certain forms of Christian theology certainly can be read as “anti-Jewish.”

Perhaps the most difficult case—because of the relatively dispassionate and detached character of its rhetoric—is presented by the Letter to the

Hebrews. Not only does it develop a consistent “lesser to greater” argument that establishes the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus to that of the levitical cult, but argues as well that Christ is the “mediator of a new and better covenant” than that of Moses, a covenant promised by the prophet Jeremiah (31:31–34) and realized in Christ (Heb 8:6–12; 9:15; 12:24). And in the process, Hebrews makes statements with an apparently absolute character concerning the law and first covenant. “If the first covenant had been faultless,” the author declares, “there would have been no occasion for another” (8:7); and, after quoting Jeremiah to the effect that God did find fault with the people under the first covenant in his promise of a new one written in human hearts, states, “In speaking of a new covenant, he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (8:13). Later, speaking of the cult under the law, he states, “He abolishes the first in order to establish the second” (10:9).

These statements are startling, to be sure, but they should be read within the context of competing claims within a Jewish conversation, rather than as a “Christian” claim to replace “Judaism.” Once more, it is important to remember that a contemporary Jewish sect at Qumran was also claiming to be a “new covenant” as well as a living temple offering spiritual sacrifices to God that were superior to those carried out by the illegitimate priesthood of the Temple in Jerusalem. And in both Paul and Hebrews, the challenge to the adequacy of the law of Moses is placed within a deep commitment to the more fundamental commitment to the covenant God made with Abraham (Gal 3:6–29; Rom 4:1–25; Heb 6:13–20; 11:1–12:3). In neither author does God choose another people to replace the Jews. For Paul, the inclusions of the Gentiles is part of God’s plan to draw all of Israel to salvation, “for the gifts and call of god are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). For Hebrews, there is not even a suggestion of anyone but the “descendants of Abraham” with whom God is concerned, or for whom the promises are intended (Heb 2:16; 6:15).

Conclusion

The language about Jews in the New Testament is difficult, above all in light of changed historical circumstances. History can no longer be regarded as testimony for the truth of Christian claims and the cancellation of Jewish rights. Indeed, if anything, history in recent years has had the opposite lesson. The Holocaust has shown the tragic results of supersessionism

carried to a demonic extreme. And in the post-Enlightenment rejection of religion, Christianity has been the preeminent target for attack. In a very real sense, Christian readers in particular are in a new position. They must reevaluate their own practice and their way of reading their sacred texts, now no longer as having a right to define other people's place in history, but as themselves trying to define an identity that does not depend on a false supersessionism.⁴⁰

This essay, then, leads to the following simple conclusions:

1. It is inappropriate and anachronistic to call the New Testament compositions "Anti-Jewish."
2. It is the case that the language of the New Testament can and has been used in an anti-Jewish fashion within Christian apologetics and theology that can virtually be defined in some cases as "Anti-Judaism."
3. The best way of liberating the New Testament from an inappropriate hermeneutics with regard to its language about Jews is through historical, social, and rhetorical analysis.
4. The task of an appropriate hermeneutics with regard to the New Testament's language concerning Jews remains a difficult challenge for Christian readers.

⁴⁰ See L.T. Johnson, "Christians and Jews: Starting Over," *Commonweal* (130:2) 15–19, and "Reading after the Holocaust: A New Testament Scholar Responds to Emil Fackenheim," in *A Shadow of Glory*, 216–231.

CHAPTER THIRTY

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Anyone turning to Christian sources for help in supporting religious rights as human rights should be prepared for some consternation. Both the normative Christian texts and the larger part of the Christian tradition offer as much reason for confusion and concern as for celebration.

Confusion is created by the realization that the normative texts of the Christian tradition do not speak in any obvious way to the question of religious rights or human rights. The Bible does not employ the sort of philosophical or legal discourse in which the language of “rights” finds a natural home.¹ As thoroughly religious literature of antiquity, furthermore, it takes for granted that all people are in some sense “religious.”² The Bible does not need to argue for a right it assumes.

These texts also fail to address our questions directly because of different assumptions about the nature of religion itself. The ancient Mediterranean world did not consider religion as one aspect of life among others. It was at once public and pervasive and enmeshed with the fundamental structures of society.³

Nor is the contemporary tendency to think of religion in terms of the personal rather than the social, in terms of private belief rather than public liturgy, shared by the writings of the Hebrew Bible which were taken over by the Christians by way of the Greek translation called the Septuagint

* Significant assistance in preparing this chapter was provided by Mary F. Foskett, Ph.D. Candidate, Graduate Division of Religion, Emory University

¹ See, e.g., M. Villey, “Les origines de la notion de droit subjectif,” *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* ser. 4, 24 (1946): 201–227; B. Tierney, “Villey, Ockham and the Origin of Individual Rights,” in J. Witte, Jr. and F.S. Alexander, eds., *The Weightier Matters of the Law: Essays on Law and Religion* (Atlanta, 1988), 1–31; G. Samuel, “Epistemology, Propaganda and Roman Law: Some Reflections on the History of the Subjective Right,” *The Journal of Legal History* 10 (1989): 161–179.

² The Epicureans’ rejection of the standard forms of religion earned them particular enmity (see Plutarch, *Reply to Colotes* 22 [Mor. 119F] and 27 [Mor. 1123A]), even though the Epicureans’ response to their founder had obvious religious dimensions (*Reply to Colotes* 17 [Mor. 117 A–B]).

³ Among many examples, see only Libanius, *Oration XXX*, 34; Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 28; Plutarch, *Reply to Colotes* 31–34 [Mor. 1125C–1127E], See also T.M. Parker, *Christianity and the State in the Light of History* (New York, 1955), 1–21.

and eventually designated the Old Testament, with deference to the collection of specifically Christian writings that were eventually canonized as the New Testament.

The Christian scriptures, in short, do not in any direct or obvious way provide support for the contemporary proposition that “it is a human right to be religious.” Another way of framing the issue of “religious rights,” of course, is in terms of the freedom to be religious differently. But if by religious rights we are speaking of tolerance for religious diversity both in thought and in expression, then an assessment of the Christian tradition should also create concern, for it has been for much of its history an agent for the suppression of religious liberty.

Anyone speaking from within the Christian tradition on this issue, as I am in this chapter, must begin with such a frank admission. Christians have been, and continue to be, the least credible of witnesses to the blessings of tolerance and the human right to religious liberty.

Christianity's Record of Religious Intolerance

There is probably no need to review the evidence demanding such a confession. Christianity's record is impressive if not admirable. Beginning as a sect of Judaism, it engaged from the start in debates with both Jewish and Gentile competitors. Its fight with other forms of Judaism involved the claim to represent the authentic form of that tradition. Its fight with all other forms of worship continued Judaism's own insistence that only one confession could be true and all others false. Early Christian apologists who claimed a share in Rome's tolerance of religious diversity⁴ did not seem to appreciate that Rome's unusual intolerance in its case was a response to its own intolerance of diversity: Christians did not merely want a place in the sun, they claimed that theirs was the only legitimate place.⁵

When Constantine granted Christianity first toleration and then privilege, it did not take long for this same intolerance to be manifested against an increasingly weakened paganism, and above all against diversity of

⁴ See the classic argument for “equal justice” in Athenagoras, *Embassy* 1–2 and Tertulian, *Apology* II, 1–20.

⁵ The point is made brilliantly by J. Simon, *La liberté de conscience*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1857), 66–67.

belief and practice within the Christian empire.⁶ Christianity willingly accepted the help of the state to establish its own claims to unique and absolute legitimacy.⁷

It is painful but necessary to remember Christianity's intolerance of the religious rights of Judaism through centuries of anti-semitism, and its use of political force to effect controlling laws, inquisitions, expulsions, and the suppression of the sacred texts by which that community lived.⁸ It is equally important to recall Christianity's intolerance of Islam, and its centuries-long effort, under the deeply ambiguous rubric of crusades, to eliminate this powerful and more tolerant rival.⁹ Nor was Christianity any kinder to diversity within: orthodoxy was indeed the imperial religion, and the only safe place to practice an unapproved form of Christianity was outside the boundaries of empire.¹⁰

Both the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox forms of Christianity have in their central traditions celebrated and defended intolerance under the simple conviction that error has no rights, and it is the prerogative of the Christian state to defend the truth by eliminating error.¹¹ The same deadly

⁶ For a sympathetic analysis of Constantine's own attempts to continue a tradition of toleration, see H. Doerries, *Constantine and Religious Liberty*, trans. R.H. Bainton (New Haven, 1960).

⁷ As early as the 340s, Firmicus Maternus addressed a treatise to Constantine's sons, *De Errore Profanorum Religionum*, calling for the emperor to destroy paganism by force. It was Theodosius I (379–395) who was the decisive figure in the establishment of the "Christian Empire." But even under him, the rhetorician Libanius could make appeal for continued toleration of the pagan cultus. See *Oration XX and XXX*). For the progression, see R.L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1989), 648–81; J. Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church* (San Francisco, 1987), 93–115; Parker, *Christianity and the State*, 43–64; and R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 200–400* (New Haven, 1984), 86–101.

⁸ For a rapid survey of events, see S. Grayzel, *A History of the Jews*, rev. ed. (New York, 1968), 303–473; for the literature concerning the roots of Christian anti-semitism, see J.G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1985), 3–34; for documentary evidence, see J.R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book: 315–1791* (New York, 1969), 3–181.

⁹ The classic study of the crusades is S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1951–54); for the temporal as well as spiritual benefits accruing to participants in the crusades, see J.A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader* (Madison, WI, 1969).

¹⁰ This truism of ecclesiastical history can be supported by any standard work, such as K. Bihlmeyer, *Church History*, rev. ed., H. Tuechle, ed., V.E. Mills, trans. (Westminster, 1968).

¹¹ See J. LeCler, "Religious Freedom: A Historical Survey," *Concilium* 18 (1966): 3–20. The most notorious instrument of coercion was the inquisition, especially in Spain. See H.C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition in Spain*, 4 vols. (New York, 1922); H. Kamen, *Inquisition and Society in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Bloomington, 1985). That

equation was carried over into Protestantism. With very few exceptions the reformers were as intolerant and sanguinary as their Catholic opponents.¹² The ideological and political battles that characterized the Reformation and post-Reformation period are a monument to Christian intolerance. The religious wars that ravaged Europe throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the missionary competition between Catholic and Protestant that went hand-in-hand with colonialism in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, the spirit of hostility that until very recently enabled Catholics and Protestants each to refer to the other as heretical, are all manifestations of the same deep intolerance of religious difference.¹³

Christianity has also, it is true, had voices that have spoken out, often passionately, often at the cost of great personal suffering, for the recognition of the religious rights of others. Any such honor roll must include the names of Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus, Balthazar Hubmaier, Caspar Schwenkfeld, Martin Bucer, Menno Simons, David Joris, Sebastian Castellio, Faustus Socinus, Jan Komensky, Hugo Grotius, Michel de l'Hospital, William Perm, John Owen, and Samuel Pufendorf.¹⁴ And these voices could cite support for their position from the New Testament: Paul's statement "there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized" (1 Corinthians 11:19), and Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24–30). Both passages served to support the inevitability of diversity within Christianity, and the necessity of waiting for God to sort it out.¹⁵

this attitude was not simply a medieval one is shown by the 1964 article by the Spanish theologian P.G. Lopez. Arguing for the absolutist imposition of Catholicism in Spain, he says, "Moreover, Spaniards discontented for religious reasons have no right to enjoy more ample religious freedom than they do enjoy. For one reason, they are non-Catholics, and therefore in error; and error, even when in good faith, has strictly-speaking no right to show itself or be professed." "La Democracia como regimen politico Cristiano," in *Razon y Fe* 134 (1946): 166, cited in J.C. Murray, "Current Theology on Religious Freedom," *Theological Studies* 10 (1949): 409–432.

¹² See Parker, *Christianity and the State*, 143–72, and H. Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (New York, 1967), 22–55.

¹³ A lively and literate exposition of this period is found in P. Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York, 1979), 267–457; for the effect of mutual Christian intolerance on thinkers seeking a more universalist understanding of religion, see the chapters on Jean Bodin (1530–1596) and Herbert of Cherburg (1583–1648) in J.S. Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven, 1987), 3–39.

¹⁴ See Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration*, passim. For a useful collection of primary sources from the Reformation period, see M. Hoffmann, *Toleranz und Reformation* (Gütersloh, 1979).

¹⁵ For the text from Paul, see Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*, 10. The parable of the wheat and the tares, with its command, "Let both grow together until the

A far more powerful antecedent was supplied, however, by Augustine's interpretation—forged out of frustration at the height of the Donatist controversy—of Luke 14:23, “compel the people to enter” (in the Vulgate, *compelle entrare*) as a warrant for religious coercion.¹⁶ And here is a strange fact: Christian pleas for toleration came most frequently from those who were among the minority and persecuted groups rather than the established traditions. It was Calvin who in 1553 had Michael Servetus put to death in Geneva, defending the principle that “kings are commanded to protect the doctrine of piety by their support,” and it was Sebastian Castellio who rebuked him with the devastating observation, “To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man. When the Genevans killed Servetus, they did not defend a doctrine, they killed a man.”¹⁷

It is also true that Christianity has over the past three centuries slowly worked itself to a principled position of religious toleration and freedom.¹⁸ It happened more quickly in the Protestant camp,¹⁹ but eventually and more systematically in Roman Catholicism, first with Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (1963), with its unequivocal statement, “Every human being has the right to honor God according to the dictates of an upright conscience, and the right to profess his religion privately and publicly,”

harvest,” was a favorite text. See R.H. Bainton, “The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the 16th Century,” *Church History* 1 (1932): 67–89. Manfred Hoffmann uses Martin Luther's successive interpretations of this parable as a way of charting the reformer's growing intolerance in the face of diversity. See M. Hoffmann, “Reformation and Toleration,” in M. Hoffmann, ed., *Martin Luther and the Modern Mind: Freedom, Conscience, Toleration, Rights* (New York, 1985), 85–124; see also M. Brecht, “Divine Right and Human Rights in Luther,” in *ibid.*, 61–84.

¹⁶ See esp. Augustine, *Letter*, 185. A review of the texts and a sympathetic contextualization is provided by F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop* (London, 1961), 78–128.

¹⁷ Sebastian Castellio, *Contra Libellum Calvini* (1612), cited in Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration*, 80.

¹⁸ For a crisp summary of Christianity's increasingly positive appropriation of democratic ideals (equality and freedom, pluralism and toleration), see J. Witte, Jr., “Christianity and Democracy: Past Contributions and Future Challenges,” *Emory International Law Review* 6 (1992): 55–69.

¹⁹ See L. Vischer, “Religious Freedom and the World Council of Churches,” *Concilium* 18 (1966): 53–63 for a review of the important stages, including the World Council declarations in Amsterdam (1948) and New Delhi (1961). An important preparation was laid by the sponsorship of research into religious liberty world-wide by M.S. Bates, *Religious Liberty: An Inquiry* (New York, 1945). Despite some inadequacies (enumerated in the reviews by EA. Ryan and J.C. Murray, *Theological Studies* 7 [1946]:146–163), the study provided a comprehensive framework for future work.

and then with the Declaration on Religious Freedom issued by the Second Vatican Council (1965).²⁰

There is, however, a second odd fact attached to this progression, which is that movement toward toleration tended to come more from the critics of traditional or biblical Christianity than its adherents. It was Enlightenment critics such as Baruch Spinoza and John Locke who gave the clearest and most formal statement of the principle that religious liberty is rooted in the rights of individual persons.²¹ And it was the philosopher Pierre Bayle who in 1686 finally and definitively challenged the exegetical accuracy and moral propriety of Augustine's interpretation of *compelle entrare*.²² Finally, it was the hard lessons learned from the disenfranchisement of religion after the age of revolution that enabled even Roman Catholicism finally to recognize that the Constantinian Era was over, and that, however grudgingly, the right to religious liberty must be recognized as a fundamental human right.²³

The Lessons of History

Two lessons emerge from this historical review. The first is that the establishment of Christianity as a state religion is bad both for others and for Christianity itself: the strain of intolerance and absolutism within this

²⁰ For the Roman Catholic progression, see L. Janssens, *Freedom of Conscience and Religious Freedom*, B. Lorenzo, C.F.X., trans. (Staten Island, 1965); P. Pavan, "The Right to Religious Freedom in the Conciliar Declaration," *Concilium* 18 (1966): 37–52; W. Kaspar, "The Theological Foundations of Human Rights," *The Jurist* 50 (1990): 148–166. For a review of Protestant and Roman Catholic statements, see M. Shupack, "The Churches and Human Rights: Catholic and Protestant Human Rights Views and Reflected in Church Statements," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 6 (1993): 127–157.

²¹ See Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) and John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), with two further letters in 1690 and 1693.

²² See Pierre Bayle (1647–1706): "To refute this absolutely [Augustine's interpretation] I rely on this principle of natural light, that any literal meaning which includes an obligation to commit crimes, is false." Pierre Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jesus-Christ: Contrains-les d'entrer*, cited in Kamen, *Rise of Toleration*, 237.

²³ It is noteworthy that John Courtney Murray, the most influential Roman Catholic theorist concerning the human right to freedom, argued not from scripture but from the moral lessons derived from the American experiment in democracy. Among his many writings, see "Current Theology: Religious Freedom," and "Freedom of Religion I: The Ethical Problem," in *Theological Studies* 6 (1945): 85–113, 229–286; "Current Theology on Religious Freedom," *Theological Studies* 10 (1949): 409–432; "The Problem of Religious Freedom," *Theological Studies* 25 (1964): 503–575; "Religious Freedom" in J.C. Murray, ed., *Freedom and Man* (New York, 1965), 131–140; "Arguments for the Human Right to Religious Freedom," in J.L. Hooper, ed., *Religious Liberty* (Louisville, 1993), 229–244.

tradition that is buffered when Christians are in the minority seems inevitably to reappear whenever Christianity exercises effective political control. The second is that such intolerance is rooted not only in human sinfulness but in the normative texts of Christianity: the Old Testament and New Testament alike give more than ample support for intolerance.

These are, we know, not only historical lessons; they are illustrated by the daily headlines. The contemporary Christians who are most fervent in their labor for the realization of the kingdom of God in America, spelled out in terms of a Christian cultural hegemony, are also the Christians who are most emphatically "biblical" in their ideology, and who find it most plausible to suggest that everything not explicitly Christian is thereby implicitly in the service of Satan: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).

The point to which I have been moving, then, is this: for Christians to join the effort to ensure the religious rights of all as specifically human rights, they need to make more than a moral commitment; they need also to engage in a difficult intellectual struggle. It is not enough for Christians to forswear the sins of the past, or even embrace the collapse of the Constantinian era, for the virus that created the fevers of fanatic intolerance and that welcomed the coercive power of the state remains dormant and potentially dangerous within the texts of the Christian tradition.²⁴

Christians are caught, I suggest, in a specifically *hermeneutical* problem from which the only relief is a specifically hermeneutical therapy. Lacking a vigorous and through-going rereading of their normative traditions, the Christian commitment to religious tolerance cannot but be superficial and ephemeral. Given another political context or another moral climate, and the virus that has been merely suppressed rather than eliminated will again infect Christian consciousness. Indeed, as already noted, it continues to do so even now among groups whose proud badge of identification is their "biblical" character. In order for Christians to make a decisive turn in another direction, they must undergo a *metanoia* that is not only a change of heart, but above all a change of mind.

The scope of such a project is clearly larger than this chapter or any number of essays, conferences, and councils. A start can be made, however, (1) by recognizing the necessity of a hermeneutical engagement;

²⁴ A. Roy Eckhardt has noted concerning anti-semitism: "The Christian world may change, or seek to change. The New Testament does not change, and there is no way to change it." See *ibid.*, *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (Bloomington, 1986), 66.

(2) by indicating the ways in which the biblical writings are host to the virus of intolerance; and (3) by pointing to a way of reading the tradition in a way that its toxic elements can be neutralized if not eliminated.

The Necessity of Hermeneutics

I propose that the writings of the New Testament inherited an already significant trace of intolerance with its appropriation of Torah, and intensified it by the absoluteness of its claims and the sharpness of its rhetoric against rival claimants to the inheritance of Torah, but that its language took on a whole new dimension and power when the writings of a sect fighting for its existence became, in turn, the canonical scripture of a world-religion, and then the charter for a Christian empire. If this is the case, then it is not enough to eschew the claim to *imperium*; it is necessary as well to engage the claims of the *canon*.

But if such is the case, if the writings of the New Testament are so fatally infected with intolerance, why not abandon them altogether? The option seems attractive, particularly, as we have observed, the most tolerant Christians have tended also to be the most latitudinarian, while the most intolerant have been the most rigidly scriptural. But it is an option that is short-sighted and ultimately doomed to failure. As in the case of other elements in the Christian writings that subsequent experience has forced us to view from a more critical perspective, the solutions offered by abandoning the texts or expurgating them simply do not work.²⁵

There are three interrelated reasons. The first is that Christianity is in essence a historical and social phenomenon whose identity is secured and renegotiated in every generation by means of this same set of texts that has remained stable since the second century. Just as for medieval Jews the burning of Torah was equivalent to destroying the community, so the abandonment of the New Testament writings would mean the end of historical Christianity. The resulting religion might be worth considering, but it could not be considered as Christian.

The second reason is that the New Testament, despite its many critics, is not *only* about sexism and anti-semitism and the suppression of sexual and religious diversity. Indeed, as millions of Christians through the ages

²⁵ See my discussion of the hermeneutical options with regard to anti-semitic language in "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989): 419–423.

have testified not only by their words but also by their lives, these texts are not even mostly about such things. They are, rather, witnesses and interpretations of the power of God to transform human life from fear into freedom and from patterns of destructive enmity into patterns of generous love and service. To abandon the texts means as well to abandon a form of existence shaped by what Paul called the νοῦς Χριστοῦ, “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16), that distinctive pattern of the Jesus Messiah whose faithful obedience to God was spelled out in the most extravagant accessibility and service to humans.

The third reason is intensely practical. If liberal Christians committed to sexual equality and religious tolerance abandon these texts as useless, they also abandon the field of Christian hermeneutics to those whose fearful and—it must be said—sometimes hate-filled apprehension of Christianity will lead them to exploit and emphasize just those elements of the tradition that have proven harmful to humans. If what Phyllis Trible has perceptively termed “texts of terror”²⁶ within the Bible are not encountered publicly and engaged intellectually by a hermeneutics that is at once faithful and critical, then they will continue to exercise their potential for harm among those who, without challenge, can claim scriptural authority for their own dark impulses.²⁷

I have used the terms “faithful” and “critical” to describe this hermeneutical engagement. It is critical insofar as it is willing to question biblical texts vigorously for their religious coherence and moral appropriateness, without special pleading. While recognizing these texts as the gift of God to the Christian community and as bearing normative authority for shaping Christian life, it also declares that God’s bestowal of the Holy Spirit is an even greater gift that calls the community to discern both its own experience and the words of the Scripture in a continuing conversation. This hermeneutics is therefore also faithful because it chooses to continue rather than to close the conversation, because it does the texts the honor of taking them seriously in what they say, and because it has faith that this

²⁶ She used the term with reference to passages that have been used to support the suppression of women. See Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, 1984).

²⁷ I discuss the analogous hermeneutical problem with regard to patriarchal structures and sexist language in the New Testament, in L.T. Johnson, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Atlanta, 1987), 62–74.

process of discernment will enable the texts to speak more authentically “according to the mind of Christ.”²⁸

The Sources of Intolerance in Christianity

In this part of the chapter I am unable to consider those social and psychological factors leading to intolerance of every sort among Christians as among other humans, although they are of obvious importance.²⁹ Instead, I deal only with the specifically religious roots of religious intolerance within Christianity as such. I see two main causes. One is rooted in the Christian experience of monotheism, the other in the polemical rhetoric forged to defend that experience. In both we can see a progression in the use of language, from its function as an expression of the truth of religious experience and conviction, to the making of absolute claims about reality as such, claims that explicitly exclude the legitimacy of other kinds of religious experience.

The Exclusive Tendencies of Monotheism

The dominant religious system of the ancient world was polytheism, which was itself fundamentally pluralistic and was capable of incorporating into itself a variety of local and particular devotions. When the world of the divine is imaged as an extended family, there is always room for new members. It was the practice of the Hellenistic and Roman empires, furthermore, to encourage the syncretic accommodation of specific religions within this larger system. An important part of Roman propaganda was its invitation to the gods of conquered territories to enjoy the benefits of worship within the *imperium*.³⁰

Within this world, the monotheism found among the Jews was distinctive. It was not like the philosophical monotheism of the philosophers

²⁸ A fuller discussion of this approach to what I call an “ecclesial hermeneutics” can be found in L.T. Johnson, *Decision-Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia, 1983), and *ibid.*, “The Authority of the New Testament in the Church: A Theological Reflection,” in C.R. Blaisdell, ed., *Conservative, Moderate, Liberal: The Biblical Theology Debate* (St. Louis, 1990), 87–99.

²⁹ On these fuller dimensions of the issue, see J. Newman, *On Religious Freedom* (Ottawa, 1991).

³⁰ According to Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 28:4, it was the practice of Roman priests to invoke the titular gods of a city under attack by Roman forces, inviting them to leave it and come over to Rome, where they would receive worship as good or better. See also Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 6:1–7:6.

who discerned behind diverse gods and goddesses a single divine power.³¹ It was rather the refinement of an ancient tribal henotheism, in which a personal deity established his power by means of warfare against other gods.³² Greek philosophical monotheism developed by extrapolating the logic of religious diversity. Jewish monotheism developed on the basis of the suppression of other religions. Only by reducing all other gods to false claimants—idols—could Yahweh alone be acclaimed as God. That Israel's Yahweh was a "jealous" God was axiomatic, for he could have "no other gods before him."³³ Yahwistic monotheism, however, had to fight a long battle within Israel against the more inclusive tendencies of the dominant polytheistic systems of Canaan,³⁴ and its weapons were those of intolerance. The exclusive allegiance demanded by Yahweh meant the destruction of all the "high places" dedicated to other gods³⁵—or even, when monotheism combined with cultic centralization, the high places dedicated to Yahweh outside of Jerusalem.³⁶ Purveyors of false religion and false prophets were to be eliminated by death.³⁷

It was this militant monotheism, hardened and purified by the experience of the exile, that was inherited by Christianity, along with the polemic against idolatry developed not only in the prophetic literature,³⁸ but especially in the Jewish apologetic literature that responded to Gentile charges of superstition and misanthropy levelled against this odd "second race" that was an increasingly visible presence in Greco-Roman culture.³⁹ Writings such as the *Wisdom of Solomon* responded to Hellenistic anti-semitism with the most scathing attacks on pagan religion, reduced to

³¹ For a classic expression of this tendency, see Dio Chrysostom, *Oration 12* ("The Olympic Discourse").

³² See F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of Israel* (Cambridge, 1973).

³³ See Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7–8; 6:14.

³⁴ See Deuteronomy 4:15–19; 7:25–26; 12:30–31; 29:16; 32:16–18; Judges 2:19. See also M. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco, 1990).

³⁵ For passages against various religious practices of the nations, see Deuteronomy 18:9–12; 23:17; 2 Kings 17:17–18. For passages against the "high places" where unapproved worship occurred, see Leviticus 26:1; 1 Kings 14:23–24; 22:53; 2 Kings 14:4; 15:35; 17:10–12.

³⁶ See Deuteronomy 12:1–14; 2 Kings 23:4–20.

³⁷ See Numbers 16:31–35; Leviticus 20:2; 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:20.

³⁸ See Isaiah 40:18–20; 41:7, 29; 44:9–20; 45:20; Jeremiah 10:1–16; Hosea 4:11–19; 13:1–3; Micah 5:10–15; Habbakuk 2:18–19.

³⁹ In the broadest sense of the term, virtually all Hellenistic Jewish literature was "apologetic," but in the narrower sense, the category includes Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Against Apion*, and Philo's *Embassy to Gaius* and *Against Flaccus*. These writings anticipated many of the elements of Christian Apologetic.

an “idolatry” responsible for every sort of private and public vice.⁴⁰ And it was the Septuagint translators of the Psalms who first made the equation exploited by early Christian apologetic: “all the gods of the nations are demons.”⁴¹

The full dimensions of monotheism’s attack on religious diversity was less apparent in Judaism than it was to be in Christianity. Despite its many converts, it remained in essence the religion of a numerically insignificant nation, and was properly regarded as the cult of a specific people.⁴² The public face of Judaism encountered by Gentiles in representatives such as Philo Judaeus, furthermore, emphasized the universalist, philosophical, and moral aspects of monotheism, rather than its exclusiveness.⁴³ Only when that form of Judaism called Christianity carried the same exclusive claims into a world-wide and astonishingly successful mission among the Gentiles, did the Greco-Roman world find it necessary to combat religious intolerance with civil intolerance and persecution.⁴⁴

If Jewish monotheism demanded of religious allegiance an “either/or” rather than a “both/and,” nascent Christianity was even more exclusive in its proclamation. Now the One God of Judaism must be confessed according to the One Lord of the Christian *kerygma*. Christians increasingly claim not only that they represent the authentic people of God, but that they exclusively represent the people of God: that the confession of Jesus as Messiah is the necessary and non-negotiable point of access to the inheritance of Israel. Christians join to Judaism’s exclusion of the nations its own exclusion of all other Jews.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Wisdom 13:1–14:28. For other examples, see Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander,” 434–36.

⁴¹ LXX Psalm 95:5. This Psalm is quoted as a proof-text for the Christian demonization of pagan cults by Origen, *Against Celsus* VII, 69. See also the statements that pagans worship demons rather than gods in Deuteronomy 32:17, Baruch 4:7, and Psalm 105:37 (LXX).

⁴² For a sketch of the Jewish situation in the diaspora, see L.T. Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1986), 67–83; for fuller treatments, see E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden, 1976), and V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, S. Appelbaum, trans. (New York, 1970).

⁴³ For a succinct treatment, see E.R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2d ed. (New York, 1963).

⁴⁴ See Simon, *La liberté de conscience*, 74: “La persécution était commence, et l’intolerance civile entrainait dans sa lutte sanglante contre l’intolerance religieuse, et du même coup contre la liberté de conscience.”

⁴⁵ Although R. Ruether’s *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1974) goes too far in suggesting that any Christology is inevitably anti-semitic (246–251), she does a brilliant job in locating Christian intolerance in its theological exclusivism.

The subsequent history of Christianity, furthermore, can notoriously be read as a history of heresy, in which this fragmenting and absolutizing instinct is carried out to its extreme and absurd conclusion. It is not enough to confess Jesus as Lord, one must confess him properly as Lord; it is insufficient to be baptized, one must be baptized at the right time or at the right end or in the right season. And to show that it is the virus of intolerance at work in this constant process of exclusion, the claims are always absolute: the truth itself is at stake, salvation is at risk! Christianity was never so intolerant and merciless as to its own heretics. The reason, of course, is that the tradition of absolute claims and exclusivism is built into the canonical tradition: the battle against a latitudinarian Christian is continuous with the battle against the priests of Baal; a power struggle between preachers is warfare between light and darkness. And tragically often, the remedies recommended by Torah are followed: false prophets are killed in defense of true religion.

I am not suggesting that monotheism is necessarily exclusivistic and intolerant, but I do argue that the form of monotheism inherited and advanced by Christianity has tended to be both. And these tendencies have been given expression by forms of rhetoric that continue to shape the consciousness of Bible-reading Christians.

The Rhetoric of Intolerance

The world into which the New Testament was born was one of rhetorical hardball, and the earliest Christians learned to play it expertly. It was a world in which philosophical schools not only debated issues but engaged in slanderous attack. Teachers from rival schools were invariably guilty of vice as well as weak ideas; indeed, their shoddy theories were demonstrated by their shabby lives. All opponents were lovers of pleasure, lovers of possessions, and lovers of glory; all of them were guilty of hypocrisy. Such charges and countercharges had a highly conventional character.⁴⁶ Slander against opponents was not taken so much as a literal description of fact as a warning against joining the opposition; its main function was to exhort insiders to a more fervent pursuit of virtue by presenting as a foil an exaggerated picture of the opponents' wickedness.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For examples, see Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander," 430–33.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., L.T. Johnson, "II Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers: A Re-Examination," *Journal of Religious Studies* 6/7 (1978–79): 1–26.

Ancient critics of the Jews used this sort of rhetoric as did the Jewish apologetic literature which responded to such attacks. Rival schools within the philosophy called Judaism attacked each other with the same sort of rhetoric. And this is the style of rhetoric that we find in the New Testament's slanders against other forms of Judaism. The New Testament's language about scribes and pharisees is misunderstood if read as historical fact, but is rightly apprehended if read as the conventional way opponents were spoken of in that world.

Given the disproportionate size, influence, antiquity, and prestige of Judaism in the first century when compared to the nascent Christian movement, and given the fact that the literature of the New Testament was produced at a time when this movement was struggling both for existence and for some claim to the heritage of Israel, the polemic of the New Testament against Jews is—when compared to other samples from the same period, and despite its offensiveness to contemporary ears—relatively mild. It is certainly no more harsh than the language used by Platonists about Epicureans, or the language used by Pharisees about Sadducees, or the language used by Essenes about all other Jews.⁴⁸ However much the unbelieving Jews may be blamed for their failure to recognize the Messiah in Jesus, they were credited with worshipping the true God. As Paul declared, “I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened” (Romans 10:2).

The problem with such language, of course, is that it was not read by subsequent Christians as the historical record of struggles for identity with Judaism, nor as language qualified by the rhetorical conventions of Hellenistic culture. Now located within canonical scriptures that were regarded as inspired by God and the very font of revelation, the New Testament's polemic against the Jews was read as stating propositional truth. The long history of Christian anti-semitism which based itself explicitly upon this language is sufficient testimony to the tragic consequences of this misreading.⁴⁹ Christian intolerance of Jews as people with a right to be Jewish according to their own choice is rationalized by the claim that Christianity has used up all the authentic Judaism available. The Jews missed their chance, and the reason they did so was because they had all

⁴⁸ Johnson, “The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander,” 434–41.

⁴⁹ Its power is shown by the way in which a secular literary critic as sophisticated as Harold Bloom cannot detach himself from it. See, e.g., Harold Bloom, “‘Before Moses was, I am’: The Original and Belated Testaments,” in H. Bloom, ed. *The Bible* (New York, 1987), 292–304.

the characteristics the New Testament rhetoric ascribes to them: blindness, hypocrisy, love of money, envy, and the rest. The Christian God may wish Jews to survive for reasons of God's own, but there is certainly no legitimacy to Judaism as a religion, and no rights of Jews to practice that religion.⁵⁰

The New Testament's language concerning Gentiles and their religious practices is even harsher. Christians had inherited from Judaism a well-developed contempt for Gentile idolatry, and like Jewish apologetics, was almost reckless in its wholesale condemnation of the majority of the Mediterranean world's population. It was axiomatic that Gentiles were "by nature" given to vice and ignorance and every sort of malice and depravity.⁵¹ And although their "philosophy" was regarded as of little help,⁵² their "religion" was considered to be the prime cause of their spiritual condition. They were lost in sin and vice precisely *because* of their worship of "dead gods." Idolatry represented not only an error in judgment, but a rebellion of the will, which led humans downward in a spiral of darkness, distortion, and destruction.⁵³ The ways of the Gentiles are ways of error, and their forms of religion are either pitiable or dangerous.⁵⁴

There are some exceptions to this view, which will be noted later, some small recognition of the possibility for Gentiles to find God. But even these concessions are made despite their religion rather than through it. The most fateful step was taken when, building on the statement of Psalm 95:5 that "all the gods of the nations are demons," the writers of the New Testament simply identified pagan religion with the realm of the demonic. The equation can be detected sporadically beneath the exorcistic turf-battles between the kingdom of God and the counter kingdom of Satan that runs through Luke-Acts.⁵⁵ Particularly in Acts, the demonic role is played by forms of Gentile religion: magic, exorcism, prophecy. The Kingdom of God moves into the empire by destroying the power of Satan, exercised

⁵⁰ That such views are not found only in the past or only among the uneducated is demonstrated by C. Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, E. Quinn, trans. (Philadelphia, 1978).

⁵¹ See Matthew 6:32; 1 Corinthians 5:1, 9; 6:10–11; 1 Thessalonians 4:5,13; Ephesians 2:1–3,11–12; Titus 1:12–13; 3:3; 1 Peter 1:14–18; 4:3–4; Revelation 17:1–18:20.

⁵² On this, see P.W. Gooch, *Partial Knowledge: Philosophical Studies in Paul* (Notre Dame, 1987).

⁵³ See 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 1 Peter 1:14–17, and the *locus classicus*, Romans 1:18–32.

⁵⁴ See Matthew 6:7; 1 Corinthians 10:14–22; 12:1–2; Acts 13:6–12; 16:16–19; 19:11–20; 23–41.

⁵⁵ For this important aspect of Luke-Acts, see S.R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, 1989).

through pagan religion!⁵⁶ Paul is thinking the same way when he declares in 1 Corinthians 10:20–23, “I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God [compare Deuteronomy 32:17]. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?”

I have called this step fateful, because it formed the basis for one of the most consistent themes in apologetic literature as Christianity moved into the wider world and sought its place there. The apologists of the second and third century were eager to place Christianity before the world as a philosophy,⁵⁷ and although they engaged in much of the detraction from other schools in the manner that was already conventional,⁵⁸ they were also sometimes willing to give credit to Gentile philosophy—while retaining the conviction that Moses was the best of philosophers and the source of the best of Greek philosophies,⁵⁹ that of Plato.⁶⁰

In contrast, the apologists waged all-out warfare against every form of Gentile religion. The only specific religious phenomenon for which I have found any positive acknowledgement was the Sybilline Oracle.⁶¹ Otherwise, the view of Gentile religion is systematically skeptical and slanderous. There is no rumor too vague or scandal too small to report against its practitioners.⁶² Idolatry is sometimes dismissed as fakery.⁶³ But when there are traditions of healing or prophecy that are impossible to dismiss, the power thus demonstrated is attributed to demons. Demons inhabited the shrines and seduced devotees. Demons worked wonders and prophesied, in order to deceive humans.⁶⁴ Demons sponsored the

⁵⁶ See Acts 5:1–11; 8:4–13; 13:4–12; 16:16–24; 19:11–20, and the discussion of them in L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, 1992).

⁵⁷ See R.L. Wilken, “Collegia, Philosophical Schools, and Theology,” in S. Benko and J. O’Rourke, eds., *The Catacombs and the Colosseum* (Valley Forge, 1971), 268–291.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 2–3, 25; *Letter to Diognetus*, 8; Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus* II, 4; III, 5–7; Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks* V, 55.

⁵⁹ See Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 31; Origen, *Against Celsus*, VII, 42–45

⁶⁰ See Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, VI, 59; Origen, *Against Celsus*, VI, 3–19; VI, 47–54.

⁶¹ Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, VIII, 66; Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus*, II, 9; II, 36; Justin Martyr, *Apology*, I, 20; Origen, *Against Celsus*, VII, 56.

⁶² See, e.g., Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, II, 13–14; II, 19; Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus*, III, 8.

⁶³ See Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, II, 13; Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 34.

⁶⁴ See Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, I, 4; I, 7; II, 35; IV, 50; Lactantius, *Epitome*, 28 (a fuller development in *Institutes* II, 14–16); Tertullian, *Apology*, XXII–XXIII; *On Spectacles*,

slanders against the Christian religion!⁶⁵ The extent of this demonizing tendency is remarkable.

The implications of this rhetoric, I submit, are both obvious and tragic. Demonizing other religions not only deprives them of any sacred or revelatory value; it also deprives them of their properly human character, and makes them essentially a manifestation of enslavement rather than of freedom. The people practicing such cults are held in thrall and require exorcism. It is unthinkable to grant “religious freedom” to those who are held captive by demonic forces. The demonization of other religions—indeed of heresies within the Christian tradition⁶⁶—makes their recognition as legitimate expressions of worship impossible.

I am suggesting that the grounds of Christian intolerance are imbedded in the canonical texts and continue to shape Christian consciousness. The tendency of Christian monotheism to absolutize religious commitment in an either/or, together with the tendency of Christian rhetoric to demonize any form of religion not explicitly (and correctly) Christian, combine in perpetuating intolerance toward religious diversity, and therefore toward the religious rights of others. It is surely not by accident that the Johannine literature, in which these tendencies converge most dramatically,⁶⁷ is the touchstone of orthodoxy for those who consider themselves to be truly “Bible Christians.”

Exorcising the Demons of Intolerance in Christianity

Identifying the virus of intolerance latent within the biblical writings will not by itself prevent its recurrence among Christians. A faithful and critical hermeneutics must also provide an antidote, a reading of the New Testament which counters its negative potential and at the same time provides a positive basis for the Christian recognition of religious rights as human rights. The appropriate beginning point for this critical and constructive effort, however, is modesty. As John Courtney Murray rightly

VIII; *To Scapula*, 2; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, XXVII, 1–8; Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 9; Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus*, I, 10; II, 8; Athenagoras, *Embassy*, 26–27; Justin Martyr, *Apology* I, 9; 56–57; Origen, *Against Celsus*, III, 3; III, 34–35; VII, 3–6; VII, 35; VII, 69; VIII, 13; VIII, 24.

⁶⁵ See Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, XXVIII; Justin Martyr, *Apology*, I, 14.

⁶⁶ Note that Justin Martyr attributes heresies to the demons. See *ibid.*, I, 58

⁶⁷ See W.A. Meeks, “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72.

notes, the attempt to ground religious liberty in the Bible is an ambiguous one: “[I]t runs the risk of presenting religious freedom as somehow a purely Christian invention, whereas every student of history knows that the idea has been developed and brought to realization also, and quite importantly, by the force of purely secular dynamisms.”⁶⁸

Indeed, the way of reading the canonical texts suggested here is in serious tension with the dominant tradition of Christian interpretation. It must be undertaken, therefore, not in a spirit of capitulation to the dominant ethos of the moment, or as a gesture of self-hatred, but rather in obedience to the guidance of God’s Spirit as it has acted in our shared history, directing us in the light of centuries of tragic practice based on one way of reading to discern whether another way of reading may not be closer to the central principles of the Christian religion and perhaps even to the deeper meaning of the texts themselves.

The discipline of such re-reading is all the more necessary for those who are simultaneously committed to liberal social practices and their Christian identity, for if they are negligent in their reading of the text, or fail to base their practice in a spirit of fidelity to the text, they will fail to move less connaturally liberal Christians to this required *metanoia*, and will abandon the field of Christian hermeneutics to those with insufficient immunity to the text’s latent virus of intolerance.

What reading of the texts, then, can be offered by way of antidote to Christianity’s history of religious intolerance? In the following paragraphs, three basic approaches are suggested. They do not offer a comprehensive program, but only the sketch of how a serious hermeneutical engagement with this issue might proceed. I will consider in turn (1) the necessity of relativizing the polemical rhetoric of the New Testament; (2) the importance of hearing voices within the canonical texts that an earlier tradition of reading tended to suppress; and (3) the possibility of appealing to the central moral convictions of the New Testament as a guide to Christian attitudes concerning the religious rights of others.

Relativizing the Rhetoric

This first step has already been demonstrated by my earlier discussion. To read the polemic of the New Testament against Jews and Gentiles in terms of its historical circumstances and in terms of ancient rhetorical

⁶⁸ Murray, “Religious Freedom,” 140.

conventions is already to relativize its power. The reason is obvious: the texts are read not as unique and direct divine revelations expressing propositional truths about reality, but as human writings generated by specific social and historical circumstances and expressing truths of experience and conviction that possess revelatory value for subsequent readers only indirectly and through the mediation of interpretation. Precisely such a reading will be resisted by many biblicist Christians, whose allegiance to a “literal meaning” as the basis for their Christian identity is absolute, and who regard any historical or literary contextualization as an attack on the authority of the text.⁶⁹

Those of us who insist that taking the texts seriously implies precisely the need for such a critical distancing, and that the authority of the texts is not diminished but enhanced by such interpretation, must recognize that at just this point, we face the absolutizing and exclusivistic tendencies I have earlier described. For such a view, it is not enough to affirm the inspiration and authority of the text, or the value of a literal rendering; each of those affirmations must also correspond with a specific interpretation of them, or be rejected as a faithless rejection of biblical authority.

The first hermeneutical battle within Christian communities on this point, in other words—as on so many other points—focuses on the legitimacy of hermeneutics itself. And the very tendencies of the tradition toward intolerance that this critical yet faithful hermeneutics wishes to relativize will show themselves most powerfully and rigidly at this first step. And with reason, for intolerance can thrive only in the world of absolutes. It recognizes that to render texts relative rather than absolute in their force is already to concede the game. Many other things will follow.

Since in this chapter I *want* other things to follow, I will spell out the first step, and then move on to the others. What does it mean to “relativize the rhetoric?” Does it mean simply to deny the truthfulness of scripture and rob it of its authority? Not at all. Rather, it means to gain clarity on the sort of truthfulness such language contains, and to locate more properly the authority of the text.

⁶⁹ See the thoughtful presentation of this approach by J.W. Cottrell, “The Nature of Biblical Authority: A Conservative Perspective,” in C.R. Blaisdell, ed., *Conservative, Moderate, Liberal: The Biblical Authority Debate* (St. Louis, 1990), 21–40.

Ancient polemic has a sort of “truthfulness” that is appropriate to its literary conventions and social context. In battles between rival groups, such polemic (always read by insiders) served to encourage positive attitudes by exaggerating the wicked characteristics of the outsiders. Insider identity could be reinforced by means of contrast to outsiders, but it could also be challenged by the suggestion that the evil traits of outsiders might also be present among insiders.⁷⁰ Such language can serve a variety of legitimate literary functions that are “true.” In Luke’s Gospel, the designation of the Pharisees as “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14) is literarily “true,” because in his narrative, those who oppose the prophet Jesus are “the rich,” and the Pharisees do reject the prophet Jesus.⁷¹ To literalize and historicize such a characterization is both to rob it of its literary truth and to commit historical falsehood, for the Pharisees, on the evidence, were no more avaricious than other humans. Such literalization also deprives the text of its capacity to speak critically to insiders as “lovers of money” who reject prophetic speech.⁷² It is possible, in a word, to deny the historical or propositional truth of ancient polemic regarding the Jews and the Gentiles without depriving the text of its more significant truthfulness, which has to do with its witness to authentic existence before God.

Defining the truth of scripture according to the literary conventions of the text seems a fairly obvious step.⁷³ But does it deprive the text of its authority? This would be the case only if scriptural authority is conceived of in simplistic terms. In fact, the authority of scripture for the life of the Christian community is part of an ongoing conversation which is always complex, most often indirect, and always mediated. To assert the authority of the scripture ought to mean that in every such conversation the words of scripture are taken with full seriousness. They cannot be taken with full seriousness unless they are considered in the light of their literary form and historical functions.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ For this function of polemical language in Matthew 23, with its vilifying of “Scribes and Pharisees,” see Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander,” 433–34.

⁷¹ See L.T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula, 1977), 109–110.

⁷² See R.J. Karris, “Rich and Poor: The Lukan Sitz-im-Leben,” in C.H. Talbert, ed., *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (Danville, 1978), 112–125.

⁷³ And taken as a necessary step in interpretation by Pius XII, *Divini Afflante Spiritu*, and the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, III.

⁷⁴ See L.T. Johnson, “Fragments of an Untidy Conversation: Theology and the Literary Diversity of the New Testament,” in S. Kraftchick, ed., *Biblical Theology: Problems and Prospects* (forthcoming).

To relativize the rhetoric of the New Testament concerning Jews and Gentiles is, I submit, both to take the truth and the authority of the scripture more seriously rather than less. The case can be made clearer by its contrary: to read the New Testament language about Jews and Gentiles of the past as though it spoke the literal truth about those who practice Judaism and other world religions today is to commit the New Testament to falsehood; to take that language literally as authorization for intolerance and persecution of Jews and other non-Christians today would be to falsify the authority of the scripture.

It is simply the case that the New Testament (like the Hebrew Scriptures) was written for a world considerably smaller than our own. Saint Paul could not have imagined the variety of ancient cultures and religious practices that might be included under the term “Gentiles,” and could never have conceived that after twenty centuries there could still be humans who had never heard the Good News that Paul thought would shortly reach all people. If these texts are to speak to our own larger, more complex, and infinitely more pluralistic world, they must undergo more than a literal translation: they must be engaged in a way that allows their best and most enduring witness to Christian life to transcend those limitations that might, in other contexts, distort that witness.

I have dwelled at length on this first step, for it is of critical importance. It involves a sort of spiritual *kenosis* on the part of Christian readers, a modesty, if you will, before the mystery with which they have been entrusted. Choosing to dwell within the world of symbols shaped by Scripture, they take its strictures as addressed to their own hearts and not to other people; they repent of their own sins and do not count those of others; they celebrate the gift given them in the Lord Jesus and do not deliberate what gifts might be given others; they think it true that Jews have missed seeing Jesus as Messiah, but do not conclude that Jews have also thereby missed God; they think it right that idolatry as they have come to understand it leads people astray, but do not suppose that Hinduism is necessarily that sort of idolatry; they understand that spiritual forces can work for evil, but they take it as reckless impiety to suggest that the worship of a neighbor is demonic—unless, of course, the neighbor invites that description!

Relativizing Theological Claims

The application of literary and historical criticism to the rhetoric of the New Testament is a first step. But it does not go far enough, for the strain

of intolerance in these texts derives not only from the language used about outsiders but also from the absolute character of its own theological claims. These resist historical relativization, and even gain greater force from their placement within the canon of scripture. The either/or character of Jewish-Christian monotheism appears even sharper when read outside the context of an ancient debate and as a uniquely inspired revelation. Approaching such language is therefore an even more delicate task, for attempts to soften that either/or can easily be regarded as a betrayal of Christian faith.

Nevertheless, the approach must be made, for the sake of full fidelity to the texts themselves, as well as for the health of the Christian confession. Two lines of reflection are suggested by the New Testament itself and can be indicated though not developed here.

The first begins with the recognition that the New Testament is not and has never claimed to be a description of objective reality, but rather a set of witnesses and interpretations of a community's faith. The very language of "confession" and "witness" indicates its intensely and irrevocably personal character. The statements made in the New Testament about God and about Jesus as Son of God, Lord, and Messiah, are statements that derive from specific and powerful human experiences of those realities. They witness to certain profound religious experiences, and they seek to interpret those experiences.⁷⁵ The "truth character" of the texts is found precisely in their subjectivity. For a religious community, this does not make them less but more valuable.

Confessional language can state truly what the community experiences and believes. Thus Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:5–6: "Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many gods and many lords—yet *for us* there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." Certainly such language makes a claim to truth about the world as such; but the phrase "for us" recognizes that this claim is inextricably rooted in the subjective religious experience and commitment of the community, and that outsiders might be able to make a similar claim about "their" lord or god. The correlation of religious experience to confession is stated starkly by 1 Corinthians 12:3: "No one

⁷⁵ For this understanding of the New Testament, see Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 1–22, 530–51.

speaking by the Spirit of God says 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."⁷⁶

What confessional language *cannot* truthfully do is deny the truth claims of other religious experiences or convictions. Once more, we return to the notion of an appropriate modesty before the mystery. The language of faith can celebrate the gift given this community. It cannot transcend itself also to be the adjudicator of other gifts given to other communities, or deny that other gifts might be given to other peoples. It is not given to humans to be both witnesses and judges.

I am suggesting that the monotheism Christianity inherited from Judaism with its strain of exclusivism and its demand for an either/or, can learn an important lesson from the more philosophical monotheism that encompassed a both/and. It could recognize the inevitable particularity and pluralism of religious expression without denying that only a single divine Person created, sustained, and governed the world. Schooled in this perception, Christians could read even the most exclusive and particularistic claims in the New Testament not as calls for intolerance, but as invitations to a more generous apprehension of God's activity among humans. Does Peter in Acts declare about Jesus, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)? Christians can assent to this wholeheartedly, for in fact this is the name by which they *are* "being saved." Does John have Jesus declare, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6)? The Christian finds no reason to question the truth of this, for to be a Christian means precisely to go to the Father through Jesus. But such language does *not* allow Christians to deny God other possibilities than the ones God has shared with them.⁷⁷

Such modesty about the absolute claims in the New Testament is more than good manners. It is demanded by intellectual honesty. It is also supported by a second line of reflection on the theological language of the

⁷⁶ Notice that this follows a polemical statement in 12:1–2 about being "carried away" by spiritual forces to idols; what is more interesting, about the text is that it recognizes a commonality in religious experience beneath the difference in specific type.

⁷⁷ Circumspection is appropriate as well in making claims concerning other traditions from the perspective of Christian faith; one can appreciate the ecumenical impulses behind attempts to incorporate the world's peoples into an "anonymous Christianity," while still recognizing its inadequacy for the question facing us. See, e.g., K. Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations*, K.H. and B. Kruger, trans. (New York, 1974), 6:390–98 and K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, eds. (Edinburgh, 1961) IV, 3, 1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, 349–367.

New Testament, which begins with the recognition that these writings also contain a number of powerful witnesses quite different from those used to support Christian intolerance. Allowing such statements to occupy a more central position is essential for changing the Christian mind concerning religious pluralism.

There are first those statements which stand in tension with the condemnation of Gentile religiosity by giving some positive recognition to the religious strivings and the moral character of the Gentile world. The most emphatic of these is found in Paul's Areopagus speech, which builds on the Athenian custom of erecting an altar to an "unknown God." Paul declares that he brings news of this God, "the one who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth he does not dwell in temples made by hands. Neither is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives life and breath and everything to everyone." But Paul does not here despise their *δαισιδαίμονια*,⁷⁸ or the ways in which humans throughout the world have sought and even found God: "From one human being he has made every nation of humans to dwell over the entire face of the earth. He has set apart designated seasons and the territories for their habitation, so that they might seek God, perhaps even sense and find him." The basis of this universal call to humans is creation itself: "Indeed he is not far from each one of us, 'For by him we live and move and are,' as even some of the poets among you have said, 'for we are also of his family'" (Acts 17:22–28). Although this speech obviously supplies the "explicit" for what they sought "implicitly," and concludes with the proclamation of Jesus, it is nevertheless remarkably positive toward the legitimacy of Gentile religious longing.⁷⁹

Of equal importance is Paul's own statement in Romans 2:1–16 concerning the status of Gentiles who have never heard the Law of God: "When Gentiles who have not the law do what the law requires, they are a law unto themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them" (2:14–15). We notice here the importance of acting according to

⁷⁸ The term used by Paul in 17:22 is polyvalent; used negatively, it can mean "superstition" (Strabo, *Geography of Greece* 16, 2, 37), but used positively, it means "religious" (Dio Chrysostom, *Oration*, 61:9). The positive meaning is here intended.

⁷⁹ For the irenic and bridge-building character of the speech, see B. Gaertner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Lund, 1955) and F.G. Downing, "Common Ground with Paganism in Luke and Josephus," *NTS* 28 (1982): 546–59.

“conscience” (συνείδησις).⁸⁰ The radical character of Paul’s statement lies in his placing both Jews and Gentiles on the same footing before God; not their religious confession but their deeds are what determine their place: “there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek” (2:9–10). And Paul concludes this startling declaration with its theological warrant, “for God shows no partiality” (2:11).⁸¹

The theological principle of God’s impartiality—that is, God’s fairness toward all creation—is found in narrative form in Acts: Peter’s invitation to visit the Gentile Cornelius leads him to perceive first that “God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean” (Acts 10:28), and then, “In truth, I am grasping that God is no respecter of persons. Rather, in every nation, the one who fears God and acts righteously is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34).⁸² This same principle of impartiality is the linch-pin of Paul’s magisterial argument concerning the “righteousness of God” in his *Letter to the Romans*,⁸³ for Paul perceived that if God were truly One (that is, the source of all reality) and were truly righteous (that is, fair), then God must make available to all humans some means of true response to God. Paul finds this in the response of faith. But, as many other recent critics have argued, Paul does not mean by faith first of all “faith in Christ,” but rather “faith in God,” which was brought to its supreme realization in Jesus’ own faith (Romans 3:21–26).⁸⁴ Because Abraham had faith in God even when still a Gentile, he was counted as righteous (Romans 4:3–10), and became “the father of us all” (Romans 4:16).

Paul alone among the New Testament writers perceived the radical implications of the Gentile mission and the principle of righteousness

⁸⁰ This passage is one of the critical scriptural supports for the notion of “natural law,” which plays a significant role in discussions concerning human rights. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II, q. 91, art. 2.

⁸¹ The term ἀπροσωπολήπτως (“impartiality”) is a New Testament neologism, deriving from the LXX translation, πρόσωπον λαβεῖν of the Hebrew עָשָׂה פָּנָיו (“to lift up a face”). The concept derives from passages like Leviticus 19:15: the just judge makes a decision based on the truth of the case and not on appearances.

⁸² Peter’s insight extends even further, to the recognition that Jewish Christians are “saved” on the same basis as the Gentiles, that is, by faith (Acts 15:11). For this whole development, see Johnson, *Decision-Making in the Church*, 59–87.

⁸³ On this, see J. Bassler, *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom* (Chico, 1981) and H. Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict: Studies of Paul’s Understanding of God in Romans* (Leiden, 1980).

⁸⁴ See L.T. Johnson, “Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus,” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 77–90.

by faith. If Gentiles can please God by following the law in their hearts apart from any “special revelation” through Torah, and if Abraham could be declared righteous by God through his obedient faith even before the Messiah, then the implications are profound: “We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is One. And he will justify the circumcised on the grounds of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith” (Romans 3:28–30). Christian theology has been slow to realize that, if taken seriously, Paul’s dictum serves to relativize Christianity’s absolute claims as well. Is God the God of the Christians only? No, for God is one. Then what follows?⁸⁵

In Romans 9–11, Paul’s midrashic argument concerning the ways in which God works dialectically through patterns of belief and unbelief among the world’s nations expresses the same theological principle: even though the mystery of God’s dealings are beyond human capacity to control or even to understand (11:33–35), the glimpses we have been given assure us that God’s project is one that concerns all humans: “God has consigned all humans to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all” (11:32).

The flat statement in 1 Timothy 2:3–4, that God “wills the salvation of all humans and that they come to the knowledge of the truth,” is therefore not entirely isolated in the New Testament. There is a strong element of universalism to counter other more exclusive claims. In them, we see the development toward a monotheism that can celebrate the particularity of God’s gift to this community in Christ the Lord, but uses that gift as the basis for positing a God sufficiently capacious in love to gift all humans in their own particularities, a God who “gives to all humans generously and without grudging” (James 1:5).

Legitimizing Religious Diversity

In the previous two sections, I have suggested ways in which tendencies in the New Testament leading to religious intolerance might be countered. Now I turn to a small group of texts which give direct support to religious liberty and diversity. The first set of statements are broadly acknowledged as Christianity’s distinctive contribution to the development of religious

⁸⁵ On this, see H. Boers, *The Justification of the Gentiles: Paul’s Letters to the Romans and Galatians* (Peabody, 1994), 221–27.

rights; the second set of statements are perhaps as important, but are not usually read in the context of the present issue.

In two of his letters, Paul explicitly takes up the question of diversity of practice within the Christian community. In 1 Corinthians 8–10, the issue involves dietary regulations: are Christians allowed to purchase meat for their meals from pagan shrines, knowing that a portion of the animal had first been used in a religious ceremony (“offered to idols”), and are Christians allowed to take part in meals located at a pagan shrine?⁸⁶ The question of diet may appear to us as trivial, but it was not for the ancient world; matters of table-fellowship were of supreme importance in symbolizing one’s spiritual allegiances. Paul’s discussion is remarkable above all for its refusal to give a comprehensive answer: proper behavior depended on the circumstances, and the discernment of the circumstances in turn was the business of the individual’s conscience (συνείδησις).⁸⁷ In 8:7–13, Paul makes a series of statements that are literally of epochal importance. The morality of eating or not eating is not located in the objective facts of the case, but in the individual person’s *perception* of those facts. It is the individual conscience which determines whether behavior is righteous or not. If I erroneously think something is wrong and do it, then I have done wrong: “But not all possess this knowledge [that idols are not real] . . . being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled” (8:7).

Paul’s making the individual conscience the basis for righteousness before God within the messianic community is consistent with his insistence that the basis for Gentile righteousness before God is the “law written in the heart,” that is, witnessed to by their conscience (Romans 2:15). It represents the fundamental shift from a heteronomous ethics to moral autonomy. And it provides the fundamental ground for religious liberty. If the determination of right and wrong is inward, it can be known only by the person’s own conscience: “who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person within” (1 Corinthians 2:11)? For Paul, of course, the inner heart of a person is known even more truly by God, which enables God to be the righteous judge unswayed by appearances and determining

⁸⁶ For the complexity of these issues in an intentional community, see G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, J.H. Schuetz, trans. and ed. (Philadelphia, 1982), 69–144, and W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, 1983), 157–161.

⁸⁷ For a close analysis of his argument, see M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Louisville, 1991), 237–257.

reward and punishment fairly by the actions judged by the persons themselves to be right or wrong, “on that day, when, according to my Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Romans 2:14).

If one’s ultimate destiny is to be determined by the discernment and dictates of one’s own conscience before God, it follows that conscience must be free. It must not be subject to external tampering or manipulation. The coercion of authority or of societal pressure may force the body to act in a certain way, but it must not force the mind to think a certain way.⁸⁸ Liberty of conscience is the fundamental basis for religious freedom.⁸⁹

At the conclusion of Romans, Paul expands the discussion of diversity in religious practice to include both diet and the observance of different days (Romans 14:1–5). Once more, he states the principle that it is the individual conscience which determines the character of an act: “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean” (14:14). It is important, therefore, for each person to have a well-formed conscience: “let every one be fully convinced in one’s own mind” (14:5). Indeed, “the one who has doubts is condemned, if that person eats, because of not acting from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (14:23). Once more, we see that the realm of conscience is a matter between the individual person and God; it is a realm where human judgment is inappropriate and unacceptable: “who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before one’s own master that this one stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand” (14:4). And again, “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God . . . so each of us shall give an account of oneself to God” (14:12).⁹⁰

Underlying Paul’s understanding of the primacy of conscience—although remarkably left unexpressed—is the conviction that humans are created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27), and are therefore of all

⁸⁸ This is precisely what is so profoundly offensive to genuine religious sensibilities about any form of “programming” or mental manipulation.

⁸⁹ Compare this remarkable statement, in 1857, by J. Simon, “Tout cela . . . est compris dans ce mot de liberté de conscience; il enferme tout à la fois le droit de penser, le droit de prier, le droit d’enseigner et le droit d’user de cette triple liberté sans souffrir aucune diminution dans sa dignité d’homme et de citoyen.” Simon, *La Liberté de Conscience*, 261.

⁹⁰ For the continuity in argument between the “theological” part of Romans and this practical discussion of community life, see Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, 334–36.

creatures possessed both of special rights and responsibilities in relationship with creation and the creator.⁹¹

It is true that Paul's statements are directed in the first place to practices within the faith community, but they can be extrapolated into the wider arena of Christian attitudes toward other religious beliefs and practices. And even within the Christian community, one wonders why these words of Paul did not have a more restraining effect on heresiologists and inquisitors. Paul's statements on the inviolable rights of the conscience did have a great impact, nevertheless, on early Christian apologists. Even when they did not directly credit Paul, the principle that religious freedom is rooted in the liberty of conscience is a repeated theme. So Lactantius (250–325) declares: “[I]t is religion alone in which Liberty has established her dwelling place. Beyond everything else, religion is a matter of free choice, nor can anyone be compelled to worship what he dislikes.”⁹² So Tertullian can state: “It is the law of mankind and the natural right of each individual to worship what he thinks is proper, nor does the religion of one man either harm or help another. But it is not proper for religion to compel men to religion, which should be accepted of one's own accord, not by force, since sacrifices also are required of a willing mind.”⁹³

In the medieval period, the comments of the *Glossa Ordinaria* on Romans 14:23 stimulated scholastic theologians to grapple with the concept of freedom of conscience in religion.⁹⁴ And in modern Christian declarations concerning the rights to religious liberty, the principle of the freedom of conscience, rooted in the understanding of humans as created in the image of God and therefore possessed of special and inalienable dignity, has played a pivotal role.⁹⁵

In dealing with specific questions of religious diversity—differences in observance with regard to days and diet—Paul established a body of principles that could be extrapolated beyond those past, local, circumstances. Another set of statements in Paul also deals with religious diversity and

⁹¹ For the literature, see J. Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen 1:26f. in Spätjudentum, in den Gnosis, und in den paulinischen Briefen* (Göttingen, 1960).

⁹² Lactantius, *Epitome*, 54; see also Tertullian, *Apology*, XXIV, 5–6; XXVIII, 1.

⁹³ Tertullian, *To Scapula*, 2; other texts which make appeal to conscience even when it flies in the face of custom or written laws, are Lactantius, *Epitome*, 55; Tertullian, *Apology*, XXVII, 1; Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 27; Justin, *Apology*, I, 2. In Origen, the appeal to conscience is connected explicitly to the notion of humans being created in the image of God; see *Against Celsus*, I, 4–5; V, 32–37.

⁹⁴ See L. Janssens, *Freedom of Conscience and Religious Freedom*, 21–53.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120–24; Murray, “Religious Freedom,” 138–39; Shupack, “The Churches and Human Rights,” 149–53.

deserves much closer attention than can be given them here. Once more, they are addressed to the local church at Corinth. This was, as we know, a church already fractious and on the verge of fragmentation, precisely because differences in opinion were hardening into mutually exclusive and intolerant parties. In the face of such refusal of diversity and willingness to divide, Paul's emphasis on the legitimacy of diversity is remarkable.⁹⁶ Of course he summons his readers to unity, but it is a unity of consciousness and commitment (1 Corinthians 10–3:4). On specific points, he regularly legitimates diversity of practice, so long as fundamental moral standards are met: he allows both marriage and virginity as legitimate forms of sexual expression (7:1–40); he can see circumstances where either participation or avoidance of idol-foods can be allowed (8:1–13); he acknowledges differences in ministerial style as legitimate (9:1–33).

Most striking, however, is Paul's explicit endorsement of the diversity of gifts and ministries within the community (12:4–31). What is impressive here is not simply the assertion that multiplicity is good and can work for the building up of the community of faith, nor even the metaphor of the messianic body, each of whose parts are essential and valuable for the life of the whole. What is most startling is that Paul roots this diversity in the life of God, the bestower of gifts: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God, who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (12:4–7). By using a three-fold designation for the cause behind a plurality of effects (Spirit, Lord, God), Paul plants the seed that will develop into the rich growth of Christian trinitarian thought. It reminds us that the Christian understanding of God as the source of all reality is, after all, not monadal but trinitarian, and that at the heart of God's own life there is both richness and diversity of expression—a unity all the more perfect because it encompasses difference. A deeper appreciation of trinitarian monotheism and of the richness of spiritual gifts such a prolifically alive God can bestow on humans, can go some way toward moderating the more exclusivist tendencies of Christianity's inherited monotheism.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ A still valuable sketch of the factors leading to the composition of 1 Corinthians is J.C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London, 1965).

⁹⁷ For the ways in which trinitarian thought can encompass a diversity of ways of speaking about God, see the important study by E. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, 1992).

Living by Christianity's Moral Standard

What is perhaps most painful in Christianity's history of religious intolerance is the way in which it has failed to live by its own moral principles. Even if Christians cannot accomplish the mental *metanoia* necessary to perceive religious diversity as legitimate, and religious freedom as a fundamental human right, they can accomplish the moral *metanoia* demanded by their own tradition. Despite all the absoluteness of its theological claims, and despite its often harsh rhetoric against outsiders—the elements, we have seen, that enable the virus of intolerance to survive—the New Testament is unequivocally clear concerning the way humans are to act toward others.

The texts we have already surveyed insist that the religious choices made by humans are a matter between them and God—and must necessarily be so, since only they and God can know the basis of those decisions. They also insist that Christians are forbidden to judge those decisions made by others, much less to condemn them. Far from allowing Christians to coerce others, the texts caution even against influencing others in the delicate matters of conscience. These same texts emphasize that the “mind of Christ” by which Christians are to live ought to impel them to lives of mutual upbuilding, that the exercise of one spiritual gift does not detract from or replace the exercise of another, and that diversity is the precondition rather than the opposite of true unity. And we do not have to search far to find moral principles that are of the most direct pertinence to the issue of religious rights. The most obvious is Jesus' commandment in Matthew 5:12: “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” It is a tribute to the power of religious intolerance that Christians who when in the minority and persecuted have asked that their freedom of conscience, their right to worship both privately and publicly, be granted, should so regularly have failed to grant that same right to others when they have been in the position to do so. But unless such behavior (every time it occurs) is recognized as a betrayal of the most fundamental moral standard of Christianity itself, then any notional assent to the principle of religious freedom is meaningless.

In its ideal, of course, Christianity seeks to adhere to a higher standard than even that of reciprocal respect for rights. Ideally, Christians see themselves summoned by Jesus to a love that transcends reciprocity: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43). Ideally, Christians know that they are

called to a standard exemplified by Jesus, who declared: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). And Christians ideally understand that the one who "loved [them] and gave himself for [them]" (Galatians 2:20) also provided a pattern of that love which requires the most painful relativizing of one's own rights so that other may thrive. That is the ideal. And living by the ideal, Christians could combine their ecstatic celebration of the gifts given them with the joyful acknowledgement of the gifts given to others, having no need to suppress difference but rather to find in it the cause of ceaseless wonder at a prodigal God.

But since in every religious tradition the ideal is scarcely to be expected as a given, Christians might make a start with the Golden Rule as a minimum moral norm for behavior toward the religious practices of others. And against the backdrop of the language of their own tradition, Christians might do well to begin with speech, mindful of the words of James on the tongue: "With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse humans, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and curse. My brothers, this ought not to be so" (James 3:9-10).

Conclusion

In this essay, I have suggested that the long history of religious intolerance among Christians suggests that a strain of intolerance is embedded in its normative texts, and that Christian affirmation of religious rights as humans rights requires in addition to a moral commitment a hermeneutical engagement with these texts. The virus of intolerance was located in the absolutizing and exclusivistic claims of the New Testament, and in its rhetoric about outsiders. I have argued that, though powerful, this strain is not so deadly as to vitiate the positive power of the New Testament. In addition to relativizing the rhetoric and the theological claims of the New Testament, therefore, primarily by paying close attention to the functions of the language expressing them, I have put forward witnesses in the New Testament that provide an opening to a more positive apprehension of religious rights of all persons. For Christianity, these are rooted in the principle that humans are created in the image of God, that the internal forum of conscience is inviolable to coercion, and that the richness of God's gifts to humans go beyond any tradition's capacity to comprehend. Finally, I appealed to the central moral principles of the Christian tradition as the most effective antidote to intolerance.

Christianity, like all religious traditions, is obligated by the exigencies of historical existence to renegotiate in every generation its normative texts in the face of an ever-changing world. The present essay has had no other ambition than to offer a way of conceiving and considering the issue of “religious rights and Christian texts” in a world ever more obviously pluralistic. The premise of the essay has been that the end of the Constantinian era was far from the worst calamity to befall Christianity and may have been its greatest blessing, for it allows this tradition that has for so long been entangled in questions of politics and culture to re-discover once more the benefits of life in the diaspora.

The possibility has been extended for a fresh start on negotiating a place among the world’s peoples and their religions. Perhaps this second time around Christians might learn from the more generous impulse glimpsed in texts from the time of its first diaspora, might be able to acknowledge more graciously the truths given to others by God,⁹⁸ and to breathe once more in rhythm with the most serene of Christian apologetic writings: “He came in gentleness and humility. He sent him as king would send a son and king. He sent him as God for the sake of men. In sending him, he acted as a savior, appealing to persuasion and not to power—for it is not like God to use compulsion. He acted as one inviting, not as one pursuing; as a lover, not as a judge. . . .”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ See, for example, the lovely testimony to the realization of religious truth among the nations—“even though they have been thought atheists”—in Justin Martyr, *Apology*, I, 4 and the acknowledgement of truths about God in the Greek poets, found in Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, VII, 64, and Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 8.

⁹⁹ *Letter to Diognetus*, 7.

PROSELYTISM AND WITNESS IN EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY

Contemporary proselytism undoubtedly draws its linguistic and conceptual antecedents from the Jewish and Christian tradition. That it can appeal to those traditions for its moral warrant is far less certain. This chapter is an exercise in sorting out that distinction and begins with some general framing comments.

The basic linguistic point is the most obvious and easiest to make. The term *proselyte* (προσήλυτος, “one who has approached”) appears for the first time in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Septuagint) to render the term גר,¹ which referred primarily to those who were sojourners and aliens in the land of Israel,² and came to be applied to those—like Rahab and Ruth—who then attached themselves to the people and adopted Jewish identity through circumcision and the observance of the commandments of Torah.³

The basic conceptual point is more difficult. To what ancient or contemporary reality or practice does the term *proselytize* refer? The term can refer to five distinct postures taken by a group toward outsiders: (1) The group (and individuals within it) is open to new members and welcomes “those who approach.” (2) The group and its representatives proclaim the group’s message and seek to convince others of its worth so that they might join the group and share in its benefits. (3) The group and its emissaries seek to turn others away from their present allegiance out of the conviction that they are in error. (4) The group and its scouts seek to rescue others from imminent danger out of the conviction that they are under evil and destructive influences. (5) The group and its agents seek to coerce membership in the group as part of a strategy of religious or cultural hegemony.

¹ See, e.g., LXX Ex 12:48; 20:10; 23:9; Lv 16:29; 17:3–15; 18:26; Nm 9:14–Dt 5:14; 24:14–21; Jos 9:1; 20:9.

² The point is not infrequently made that Israel itself had also been a “sojourner” in Egypt before coming to its own land (see Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lv 19:34; Dt 10:19).

³ For rabbinic traditions concerning Rahab as a proselyte and as a model of hospitality, see *b.Meg.* 14b–15a; *Mekilta* on Exod. par. Jith. Amal. 18:1; *Exodus Rabbah* 27:4; *Numbers Rabbah* 3:2; 8:9; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:26–27; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 5:5–30. For Ruth, see, e.g., *b.Shab.* 113 b; *b.Yeb.* 47b; *b.San.* 39b; *b. BabKam.* 38a–b; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:22–23; 3:5.

The first and last of these options seem morally clear: the first is fully benign, and the last is totally wrong.⁴ Moral ambiguity enters into the middle three options: The second seems to be not only morally defensible but also sociologically and psychologically inevitable, the natural overflow of sincere commitment and high levels of enthusiasm. The third and fourth options are increasingly problematic not so much for the methods they employ (which might be various) but for the judgment concerning outsiders on which they are based and the degree of coerciveness that might be implicit in the methods of recruitment. In the fourth option, even if one grants the validity of the “mortal danger” premise, there is still the questionable character of seeking to “rescue” those who may not in the least agree with the diagnosis.

In the first-century Mediterranean world within which Christianity arose, dramatically expanded its membership, and composed its canonical writings, the first three options are widely attested and regarded as morally unremarkable. The fourth option is unattested before Christianity and even within Christianity is hard to detect before the time of Constantine. After Constantine’s establishment of Christianity as the imperial religion, even the fifth option makes an appearance. Augustine’s interpretation of the phrase “compel them to come in” (*compelle intrare*) in Luke 14:23 as support for the forcible conversion of Donatists is perhaps the most infamous early example,⁵ although the entire sequence of book-burnings, property seizures, controlling laws, and inquisitions offers an impressive catalogue of techniques by which Christendom sought a religiously uniform society.⁶ It is the argument of the present chapter, however, that the normative New Testament writings offer no real support for such morally reprehensible actions, and, when properly assessed, provide compelling arguments against any form of proselytism that involves elements of coercion, including psychological pressure.

⁴ The last option is unacceptable not only because of its motivation (religious or cultural hegemony) but also because of the means it employs; physical or psychological coercion is such a fundamental assault on the integrity of conscience that it must be regarded as morally wrong.

⁵ Augustine, *Letter 185*; for a review of the texts and a contextualization, see F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop* (London, 1961), 78–128.

⁶ See the literature cited in Luke Timothy Johnson, “Religious Rights and Christian Texts,” in *Religious and Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Johan D. van der Vyver (The Hague/Boston/London, 1996), 66–70.

The Ancient Context

In order to evaluate early Christian practice and ideology accurately, it is important to place the first Christian writings in their symbolic world.⁷ Placing the texts in their original context does not by itself determine their meaning, but is the premise for any serious and disciplined engagement with them for the purpose of moral discernment.⁸ Without knowing something of this context, neither contemporary approbation nor contemporary rejection of them is likely to be adequately based. The task here is to establish the basic options concerning persuasion and conversion for intentional communities within the Greco-Roman world. I consider in turn: Greco-Roman religion, Hellenistic philosophy, Judaism as a philosophy, and Christianity as a philosophy.

Greco-Roman Religion

Proselytism in any form is virtually nonexistent in Greco-Roman religion. The reasons are not difficult to find. Religiosity was less private than public, less a matter of individual conviction than of social observance. It had more to do with a sharing in divine benefits than it did with attaining a future life. The polytheistic system that underlay all ancient Mediterranean cultures except the Jewish was, moreover, markedly inclusive and noncompetitive in its view of the divine power.⁹

If the divine realm is conceived as an extended family, and if the membrane separating mortals and immortals is permeable, then it is possible not only for the gods to metamorphose into humans but also for humans of outstanding virtue or valor to find a place among the gods.¹⁰ The Hellenistic project of religious syncretism merely made this religious

⁷ For "symbolic world" as encompassing social structures and dynamics as well: I as the systems of language supporting such social arrangements, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, 1999), 1–19.

⁸ For two perspectives on the way in which moral discourse engages the texts of the New Testament, see R.B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco, 1996), and Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville, Tenn., 1996).

⁹ For accessible sketches of Greek and Roman religious sensibilities, see M.P. Nilsson, *Greek Piety*, trans. H.J. Rose (New York, 1969); W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston, 1950), and R.M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York, 1969). Modern editions of the classic texts cited herein are available in the Loeb Classical Library.

¹⁰ Note the reaction of the Phrygians to Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:1–18: from their display of divine *dynamis*, the townspeople infer the presence of Zeus and Hermes. The

capaciousness more explicit by acknowledging that by whatever names the same divine power-field was engaged by all.¹¹ In the Hellenistic period we certainly find—for example, among some Stoics—ways of speaking about the divine that approach a monotheistic piety, as in Cleanthes' famous prayer to Zeus.¹² Implicit in such speech is a recognition of the unity of the divine energy. But we find no sign of a monotheism that excludes the divine character of the other gods. Zeus, if you will, is the personification of the entire divine family, rather than the only divine member among demonic pretenders.¹³

We have evidence of propaganda for various cults in the Hellenistic period, especially in connection with the new mystery cults from the East.¹⁴ Certainly, Apuleius's novel *Metamorphoses* can be regarded as a recommendation of the Isis cult,¹⁵ and Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales* as propaganda for the healing god Aescclapius.¹⁶ These advertisements for the benefits to be gained by devotion to a particular god or goddess, however, never imply that such devotion should be exclusive.¹⁷ Initiation into multiple mysteries was by no means uncommon and was regarded as a

story echoes the account of Baucis and Philemon's encounter with Zeus and Hermes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 8:611–724.

¹¹ For the complexity of the category "syncretism," see C. Colpe, "Syncretism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, 1987), 14:218–27. The basic idea of syncretism is magnificently expressed by the self-identification of Isis in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* 11:5. For an example of a pagan author equating the Jewish God with Dionysos, see Plutarch, *Table Talk* 4, 6, 2 (*Mor.* 671D–672C).

¹² See Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, 53; *Discourses* II, 23, 42.

¹³ See the meditation on Zeus in Dio Chrysostom's "Olympic Discourse," *Oration* 12:74–85.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Euripides' *Bacchae* for the cult of Dionysios, and the "Isis Aretalogy" from Cyme; the new cult established by Alexander of Abunoteichos was pilloried by Lucian in *Alexander the False Prophet*. See also D. Georgi, "Socioeconomic Reasons for the 'Divine Man' as a Propagandistic Pattern," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda of Judaism in Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (Notre Dame, Ind., 1976) 27–42.

¹⁵ The hero, Lucius, whose careless dabbling in magic has caused Fortune to change him into the form of an ass and to torture him with a series of escapades that lead him ever further into alienation, is finally granted salvation by the goddess Isis. Having been initiated into her cult, and then into that of her consort, Osiris, Lucius enjoys both the hope of immortality and worldly success (see *Metamorphoses*, 11).

¹⁶ The chronically ill (perhaps psychosomatically ill) rhetorician never wavered in his devotion to the god and endured many hardships of travel to spend time at the deity's shrine in Pergamum. Inscriptions from the fourth century B.C.E. testify to the cult of healing associated with Aescclapius at Epidaurus.

¹⁷ See M. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1994), 20–32.

mark of exceptional piety rather than of unstable conviction.¹⁸ A devotee of Serapis would not try to persuade a Jew to abandon YHWH in order to join his cult; devotion to Serapis, as to any god, was seen as an enrichment of other loyalties rather than a replacement of them.

Greco-Roman Philosophy

The situation is strikingly different in the case of Greco-Roman philosophy as it develops in the early empire.¹⁹ Philosophy took a turn from theory to therapy; its subjects were no longer the ideal city-state and the nature of knowledge, but the ways of being a good person in an alienating social environment.²⁰ Philosophy was regarded less as a set of ideas than as a way of life to which adherents committed themselves. In its patterns of organization—the formation of schools, memorization of teachings of founders, sharing of possessions, testing of recruits—philosophy revealed itself as a form of intentional community that was profoundly religious in character.²¹

Three aspects of philosophy's self-understanding as a vocation are of greatest importance for our subject. The first is the governing metaphor of medicine: vice is sickness, virtue is health, the philosophical school is a hospital, the philosophical teacher is the doctor of the soul.²² If vice is spiritual sickness, then a person who is ignorant and immoral is not merely unfortunate but in grave danger; turning to philosophy is a way of saving one's life. This leads to the second characteristic, which is the

¹⁸ Apuleius of Madura claims to have been multiply initiated into mysteries (much like his hero, Lucius), in *Apology*, 55. Libanius reports of Emperor Julian that he had engaged in countless rites (see A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* [Oxford, 1933], 115).

¹⁹ In my view, Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 33–37, gives far too little attention to the extensive evidence on the phenomenon of philosophical proselytizing.

²⁰ For a survey of the preoccupations of philosophy in this period, see A.J. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. A. Haase and H. Temporini (New York, 1992), II, 26; 1:267–333; Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J., 1994).

²¹ The religious character of Hellenistic philosophy was recognized already by Samuel Dill, who speaks of "the philosophic theologian" in his classic, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (New York, 1956 [1904], 384–440. For the organization of schools, see E.A. Judge, "The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community," *Journal of Religious History* 1 (1960): 4–15, 125–37; R.A. Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools* (Missoula, Mont., 1975), 1–260.

²² A classic text is Epictetus, *Discourses* III, 23, 27–32; see also Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 13–47, and A.J. Malherbe, "Medical Imagery in the Pastorals," in *Texts and Testaments*, ed. W.E. March (San Antonio, Tex., 1980), 19–35.

understanding of the turn to philosophy as a conversion demanding total dedication and a lifelong dedication.²³ Health is not won all at once but must be nourished within the framework of the proper treatment and teaching.²⁴ This sense of exclusive commitment to a teaching points in turn to the third characteristic, which is the competitive nature of philosophy in the early empire.²⁵ Though there was broad agreement on the basic goals of philosophy, schools differed sharply in the means to accomplish those goals. They competed for adherents and developed polemic intended to demean and diminish the teachings of other schools.²⁶ In contrast to the inclusive character of Greco-Roman religion, which saw multiple ways of gaining access to the divine power, Greco-Roman philosophy constructed exclusive and competing approaches to that form of salvation which was the virtuous life.

Judaism as Philosophy

The most immediate context for earliest Christianity was a Judaism that had, under the influence of an aggressive Hellenistic culture, come to resemble Greco-Roman philosophy in more than superficial fashion. Judaism was still, of course, a “national cult” that more properly might be called a family religion. Its ancestral law was the *ethos* of this ancient *ethnos*.²⁷ Those who entered the land were welcomed into the people when they chose to live according to its norms, but there is no indication that ancient Israel sought “converts.”²⁸ Intrinsic to its ethos, however, was the conviction that there was only one personification of the divine power. The observance of the Sabbath, the keeping of dietary and purity regulations, the practice of circumcision, the living of life according to the

²³ See the discussion of philosophic conversion in Nock, *Conversion*, 156–86. The classic example is the account of conversion in Lucian of Samosata, *Nigrinus*.

²⁴ See, e.g., Plutarch, *Progress in Virtue, Mor.* 75B–86A.

²⁵ The rivalry between philosophical schools and the ways in which competition for recruits led to philosophers betraying their own ideals was a favorite target for Lucian (see, e.g., *Carousei, Icaromenippus, The Double Indictment, Philosophers for Sale*, and above all, *The Eunuch*).

²⁶ For examples of such polemic, see R.J. Karris, “The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 549–64, and Luke Timothy Johnson, “2 Timothy and the Polemic against False Teachers—A Reexamination,” *Journal of Religious Studies* 6/7 (1978–79): 1–26.

²⁷ See S.G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law* (Cambridge, 1973).

²⁸ See J.R. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1978), 3–31; B.J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York, 1939), 13–16.

commandments, all these were in service of this one God, and a sign to the world that as this God was “Holy”—that is, different from the world—so would the people God had chosen be “Holy”—that is, different within the world (Lv 19:2). If YHWH was God, then all the gods of the nations are but idols—or, as in the Septuagint rendering, “demons.”²⁹ Already in the exilic prophets this monotheistic conviction had come into conflict with the idolatry of the captor nations, generating a tradition of polemic against the gods of the Gentiles.³⁰

The Jewish “way of life” (*halakha*), especially in the diaspora but also in Palestine, would naturally be perceived by Gentile observers as a form of philosophy: it had a coherent teaching, forms of fellowship, strict code of ethics, an altogether admirable form of wisdom. Nor is it surprising to find Josephus describe the “sects” of Judaism in Palestine as philosophical “schools,” comparable to the Stoics, Pythagoreans, and Epicureans.³¹ And writers such as Philo Judaeus not only think of life according to Torah as a philosophy but describe Moses as a philosopher from whom the Greeks learned their wisdom.³² In the diaspora, separated from those “national” social and political institutions that could be found only in Palestine (the land, the temple, the kingship), Judaism would appear even more like an intentional community, a philosophical school in competition with other forms of philosophy of the Greco-Roman world.

Given this profile, we are not surprised that Judaism in the Hellenistic period should have developed two new features pertinent to our subject. The first is the use of polemic against other traditions such as we find attested in Greco-Roman philosophical schools. Not only is such polemic found as an expression of the rivalry between the various Jewish sects, but it appears also against Greco-Roman religious traditions.³³ The ancient prophetic critique of idolatry now takes on a new urgency, as the practice of idolatry is not simply dismissed as foolish but is connected to every form of vice and societal malfeasance.³⁴ The corollary of such systematic

²⁹ The LXX of Ps 95:5 translates the Hebrew “all the gods of the nations are idols” as “all the gods of the nations are demons (δαίμονια)”; for the pagan worship of demons, see also Dt 32:17; Bar 4:7, and Ps 105:37 (LXX).

³⁰ Is 40:18–20; 41:7, 29; 44:9–20; Jer 10:1–16; Hos 4:11–19; 13:1–3; Mi 5:10–15; Hb 2:18–19.

³¹ Josephus, *Jewish War* II, 8, 2–14; *Antiquities* XVIII, 1, 4.

³² See Philo, *Life of Moses*; Josephus, *Against Apion* I, 165; II, 168; II, 281; *Letter of Arisreas* 187–293; Artapanus, *Fragment* 3.

³³ For examples, see Luke Timothy Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 419–41.

³⁴ See, e.g., Philo, *The Contemplative Life* 1:8–9, *The Embassy to Gaius* 18:120; 19:131; 20:132; 25:162; *The Wisdom of Solomon* 13:1–14:28; *Sibylline Oracles* 3:545–49; 601–7. In *Mission*

deprecation of the Gentile world is that its inhabitants are in need of “saving”; they are not only in error, they are in danger. The competitive edge found in the philosophical schools is now connected to the unique claims of monotheism: only by belonging to the School of Moses can one fully live out the way of virtue.³⁵

The second development—with the link to the first being obvious—is the practice of proselytism as an active interest in gaining converts to Judaism. The evidence is not extensive but is suggestive.³⁶ The synagogue functioned as a magnet for Gentiles, some of whom converted in the full sense by receiving circumcision and observing the laws, and some of whom were drawn into the circle of “God-Fearers” and perhaps observed some minimal obligations that enabled Jews to have table-fellowship with them.³⁷ Josephus reports one case in which circumcision was forcibly imposed.³⁸ What is most under dispute is the degree to which the evidence points to an active program of proselytizing.³⁹

and Conversion, 55–59, Goodman again dramatically underreports and under-reads the evidence.

³⁵ See Philo, *Life of Moses* 2:36, and E.R. Goodenough, “Philo’s Exposition of the Law and His *De Vita Mosis*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 26 (1933): 109–24. See also, P. Borgen, “Aristobulus and Philo,” in *Philo, John and Paul. New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity* (Atlanta, 1987), 7–16.

³⁶ Among the texts that must be taken into account for the period before 100 C.E., are 2 *Baruch* 41:4; 42:5; *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* 39; *Tobit* 1:8; 4*QFlorilegium* 1:4; 2 *Mac-cabees* 9:17; Horace, *Satires* 1, 4, 142–43; *Esther* 8:17; Epictetus, *Discourses* II, 9, 20; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:559–61; 7:45; *Antiquities* 13:257–58; 13:319; 18:81–83; 20:17–96; 20:139; 20:145; *Against Apion* 2:123; 2:210; 2:261; 2:282.

³⁷ The very existence, much less the technical nomenclature and relationship to proselytes of this group called “fearers of God,” is much debated; important texts are Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:26, 43, 50; 16; 14; 17:4, 17; 18:7; Josephus, *Antiquities* 14:116–117; *Against Apion* 2:39; 2:282–86; Juvenal, *Satires* 14:96–108. See M. Wilcox, “The ‘God-Fearers’ in Acts—A Reconsideration,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13 (1981): 102–22; T.M. Finn, “The God-Fearers Reconsidered,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 75–84.

³⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities* 13:257–258; 319.

³⁹ The standard position—that Judaism, especially in the diaspora, was actively proselytizing, is stated by J.R. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism*, 35–60, and Bamberger *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, who states confidently, “during the period of the Second Temple, there was a vigorous missionary movement in Judaism, both in the Diaspora and in Palestine. Converts were eagerly sought, and they were obtained in large numbers” (ibid., 24). A revisionist reading is offered by Goodman, who reviews the evidence and concludes: “The missionary hero in search for converts to Judaism is a phenomenon first approved by Jews well after the start of the Christian mission, not before it. There is no good reason to suppose that any Jew would have seen value in seeking proselytes in the first century with an enthusiasm like that of the Christian apostles. The origins of the proselytizing impulse within the church should be sought elsewhere” (*Mission and Conversion*, 90). The tone of the last sentences suggests the reasons why Goodman, as I suggest

The New Testament itself provides the earliest and best evidence for missionary efforts by Jews, but its evidence is obviously colored by the perspective of a rival party. In Matthew 23:15 Jesus is made to address the “scribes and Pharisees,” who, after the fall of the Temple in 70 C.E., became the other claimants to the heritage of Israel; his statement may be taken, however, as reflecting the historical situation of Matthew’s church.⁴⁰ Matthew’s gospel was written precisely in the context of conflict with this developing form of Judaism: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around the sea and the desert in order to make one proselyte, and when [he] becomes one, you make [him] twice the son of hell that you are!” The passage contains the conventional language of polemic,⁴¹ but it suggests that there was real competition for conversions between these rival versions of Judaism around 85 C.E.⁴² Far harder to evaluate is the evidence concerning the “Judaizers” in Pauline churches and their (possibly) Jewish sponsors.⁴³ Was the desire of some Gentile Christians to be circumcised and adopt the observance of Torah generated from within, or did it result from a sustained missionary activity by Jews among Gentiles in direct competition with Paul, using techniques of religious propaganda?⁴⁴

above, under-reports and under-reads the evidence. If Bamberger overstates, then Goodman understates. The reality is probably somewhere in the middle.

⁴⁰ See J.A. Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, 1990), and A.J. Saldarini, “The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict,” in D. Balch, *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Minneapolis, 1991), 38–61.

⁴¹ Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” 433–34; see also S. Freyne, “Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew’s and John’s Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, “Others,” in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and E.S. Frerichs (Chico, Calif., 1985), 117–43.

⁴² D.E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23* (Leiden, 1979). Once more, Goodman (*Mission and Conversion*, 69–72) takes a minimalist position, arguing—I think unconvincingly—that the passage envisages only a program by which Pharisees were recruiting other Pharisees.

⁴³ The issue of Gentile Christians seeking circumcision under the influence of someone’s persuasion occurs in Paul’s letters to the Galatians, Colossians, and Titus. What is sometimes taken as a polemic against Judaizers in Philippians 3 is in reality a presentation of Paul as an example of one who has given up status in view of a better reality (see W. Kurz, “The Kenotic Imitation of Paul and Christ in Phil. 2 and 3,” in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. F. Segovia [Philadelphia, 1985], 103–26). For the identity of Paul’s opponents in Galatia and Colossae, see R. Jewett, “The Agitators and the Galatian Community,” *Novum Testamentum* 10 (1968): 241–54 and W.A. Meeks and F.O. Francis, *Conflict in Colossae*, rev. ed. (Missoula, Mont., 1975).

⁴⁴ The fullest argument along these lines is made by D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians: A Study of Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 1985).

Early Christian Practice

Christianity's first rapid expansion across the Mediterranean world must be assessed within the context just described.⁴⁵ Christianity was from the start an "intentional community" rather than a national cult, since it began as a sect of Judaism.⁴⁶ Within a generation, furthermore, it had not only established communities from Palestine to Rome but had extended membership to Gentiles, among whom the movement had significantly more success than among Jews.⁴⁷ It is obvious, therefore, that *some* form of proselytism was practiced by the first Christians, for its growth is otherwise incomprehensible.⁴⁸ More difficult to determine is the exact form of proselytism and the ideology underlying it.

It is only an apparent paradox to characterize the first expansion of Christianity as haphazard but purposeful. Despite the rapidity of the movement's expansion, the sources do not suggest a particularly high level of organization.⁴⁹ The evidence of persecution and harassment from

⁴⁵ Although in need of revision on many points, these older studies remain valuable for their survey of the evidence. Adolf von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, 2 vols., trans. J. Moffatt (New York, 1908), and Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1937).

⁴⁶ By "intentional community" I mean one that draws its adherents not through birth but through choice. Baptism as a ritual of initiation continues the principle of intentionality within Christianity, even though, after the first generation, it became, like Judaism, a tradition into which one could be born. For the intentional character of the earliest *ekklesia*, see above all, W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Conn., 1983), 74–110.

⁴⁷ If we combine the (admittedly partial and biased) geographical framework provided by Luke's Acts of the Apostles with the evidence from first-generation epistolary literature (Paul, James, Peter, Hebrews), we can support both these assertions: (1) within twenty-five years there were Christian cells scattered in cities and towns through Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, Illyricum, and Italy, with possible foundations also in Cyprus and Crete; and (2) Gentiles began to join the community already in the 30s C.E. (see Acts 10–15) and by the year 70 C.E. occupied a majority position within the movement.

⁴⁸ See Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 104–8.

⁴⁹ The scene in the *Acts of Thomas* 1, which portrays all the apostles being sent to diverse regions, is obviously idealized. In fact, the precise administrative role (if any) of "the Twelve," even within the Jerusalem church, is difficult to determine (see Acts 1:15–26). Three years after his call Paul traveled to Jerusalem to consult with Cephas (Peter) but declared he saw none of the other "apostles except James the brother of the Lord" (Gal 1:18–19); at a still later date the leadership of that church seems to consist in three pillars," namely, Cephas, James, and John (Gal 2:9). In Acts 12:17 Peter is said to leave the Jerusalem church "for another place." He reappears as one of the discussants at the Jerusalem Council in 15:3–11 but is clearly subordinate to James, who speaks as leader of the community

both fellow-Jews and Gentiles from the beginning points to geographical expansion occurring at least in part as a result of necessity: being expelled from one location, Christians moved on to another.⁵⁰ Although there is evidence for some degree of consultation and cooperation among leaders,⁵¹ this does not imply a centralized control of the mission.⁵² And because the outward expansion began virtually at once, without a long period of time for stabilizing traditions, the many transitions demanded of the first adherents had to be negotiated by agents on the spot rather than according to the prescriptions of a master plan.⁵³

The purposefulness of the expansion is well expressed by the compositions that speak of a sense of “mission” or of a “call” to announce the good news of what God had done through a crucified and raised Messiah.⁵⁴ The ending of each of the canonical Gospels contains an explicit statement of mission. The longer ending of Mark has Jesus tell his followers, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16).⁵⁵ At the end of Matthew, the resurrected Jesus tells

(Acts 15:13–21). James again appears at the head of a board of elders in the Jerusalem church at the time of Paul’s final visit to the city (Acts 21:18).

⁵⁰ In addition to the narrative account in Acts (8:1–3; 9:1, 23–25; 12:1–17; 14:5 6, 19–20; 16:19–24; 17:5–9, 13–14; 18:12; 19:8–10), there is the testimony of the earliest letters concerning harassment and persecution (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14–16; 2 Thess 1:5–12; 2 Cor 11:24–27; Heb 10:32–34; 1 Pt 1:6; 3:15; 4:12), and the fact that several of Paul’s letters were written from captivity (Philemon, Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy).

⁵¹ See Rom 16:3–16; 1 Cor 3:5–4:6; 15:3–11; Gal 1:18; 2:9–10; Acts 15.

⁵² The Jerusalem church not only had what appears as an unstable leadership, but it was also impoverished, requiring gestures of support from other communities (see Acts 11:27–30; 12:25; Gal 2:10; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:25–32). Obviously, the mission lacked textual controls, since there was yet no “New Testament,” and the use of Torah (in the form of scrolls) would have been difficult in some circumstances.

⁵³ There was obviously a geographical transition as the movement spread beyond Palestine to the diaspora. There was also a sociological shift from the rural, itinerant ministry of Jesus to the urban churches we encounter in our earliest writings. Although Hellenism was well diffused in Palestine, the spread of the movement into the diaspora also implied a more profound cultural transition to a predominantly Greco-Roman world. A linguistic transition was required from the (presumably) Aramaic speech of Jesus to the Greek form in which his words appear in the Gospels. Finally, and most portentously, there was the demographical transition from a largely Jewish movement to an almost exclusively Gentile one.

⁵⁴ This sense is given its most direct expression by Paul: “When he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . .” (Gal 1:15–16).

⁵⁵ Although most scholars today think, on the basis of the best manuscript evidence, that Mark’s gospel originally ended at 16:8, the so-called “longer ending” (16:9–20) was added very early and entered the main textual tradition. As such, it has been read as scripture

his disciples: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19–20).⁵⁶ Luke-Acts contains a double commissioning. In Luke 24:46–48 Jesus tells his followers: "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." In Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."⁵⁷ In John's gospel the commission is more muted: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you . . . receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:21–22).⁵⁸ These texts, composed when the movement had been in existence already some forty to fifty years, clearly connect a sense of worldwide mission to the powerful presence and authorization of the risen Christ.

In the correspondence of the man who was, if not the key figure, at the very least a participant in the expansion of Christianity beyond its location as a Jewish sect into the Gentile world, we find the same sense of a divine commission from the resurrected Jesus (see Rom 1:1–5; 15:17; Gal 1:16; 2:8; Col 1:25–27; Eph 3:7). Paul considers himself to have been "called" to be an apostle (1 Cor 1:1), and to have been "entrusted" with the task of preaching it (1 Tim 1:11). He is "controlled by" the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14) and under the necessity of preaching (1 Cor 9:16). The sense of urgency that enables Paul to undergo persecution, hardships, and rejection (1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 11:23–29) in order to fulfill his calling is also connected to a conviction that history is moving toward its climactic end and that his

down to the present day. As its popularity among Pentecostals and "snake-handling" Christians attests, its understanding of mission has had a not insignificant impact.

⁵⁶ The passage is the subject of an enormous amount of literature. See, e.g., P. Perkins, "Christology and Mission: Matthew 28:16–20," *Listening 24* (1989): 3029; J.P. Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 94–102; O. Michel, "The Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel: A Contribution to the History of the Easter Message," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. G.N. Stanton (Edinburgh, 1995), 30–41.

⁵⁷ For Luke 24, see R.J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24* (Rome, 1978), 157–225; for Acts 1:8, see Ph.H. Menoud, "The Plan of the Acts of the Apostles," *Jesus Christ and the Faith*, trans. E.M. Paul (Pittsburgh, Penn., 1978), 121–32.

⁵⁸ See R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John, XIII–XXI* (Garden City, N.Y., 1970), 1018–45.

work is in service of God's plan.⁵⁹ The resurrection of Jesus is proleptic of a still greater and more definitive victory of God (1 Thess 1:9–10; 4:13–5:11; 1 Cor 15:51–58).

Earliest Christianity thus takes over from Judaism the outlook and behavior of a philosophical school but invests them with an even more specific focus. The call to monotheism is now articulated as faith in Jesus as Messiah (see 1 Thess 1:9–10; 1 Cor 8:8–10) with a definite eschatological edge. The resurrection is viewed as the beginning of God's cosmic victory (1 Thess 4:14; 5:9–10), but the in-between time (of whatever duration) is one in which the opponents of the church can easily be portrayed as instruments of the cosmic forces opposing God's victory.⁶⁰ The anti-idolatry polemic of Judaism therefore takes on an even sharper tone: the practices of the pagan world are not merely foolish or futile, they are sponsored by demons (1 Cor 10:20–21).⁶¹ It does not take too great a leap to connect a spiritual triumph over such forces with a more palpable conquest of pagan practices.⁶² Efforts to convert others also are affected by a sense of eschatological urgency. If God's final triumph is an expression of "wrath," in which God's enemies will be "destroyed by the breath of his mouth" (2 Thess 2:8),⁶³ then the desire to rescue or "save" as many people as possible from this future cataclysm is the more understandable; as it is put in the mouth of Peter at Pentecost, "save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40).⁶⁴

⁵⁹ See esp. J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. F. Clarke (Richmond, Va., 1959), 36–68.

⁶⁰ Note Paul's language about "Satan" (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 2:9; 1 Tim 1:20; 5:15), about the "devil" (Eph 4:27; 6:11; 1 Tim 3:6–7; 2 Tim 2:16), about "demons" (1 Cor 10:20–21; 1 Tim 4:1), about "elements of the universe" (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20), and about "powers and principalities" (Rom 8:38; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16, 18; 2:10).

⁶¹ For the way in which this identification gets carried into the anti-Gentile polemics of patristic writers, see Johnson, "Religious Rights and Christian Texts," 7980.

⁶² For the way in which this gets expressed narratively in Acts, see S.R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis, 1989), and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minn., 1992).

⁶³ The prophetic image of "God's wrath" (ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ) as the punishment of an unfaithful people in history (see LXX Is 5:25; 13:9; Jer 21:5; Ex 6:12; 21:31) gains an additional intensity in the New Testament writings (see Mt 3:7; Lk 3:7; 21:23; Rom 1:18; 2:5; 9:22; 13:4–5; Eph 2:3; 5:6; Col 3:6, 1 Thess 2:16; 5:9; Rv 6:17; 11:18–16:19; 19:15).

⁶⁴ See also Paul's statements: "How you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1:9–10); "Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Rom 5:9).

Actual proselytizing practices in earliest Christianity are not entirely accessible. Certainly open-air proclamation or preaching, which is associated already with the ministry of Jesus,⁶⁵ and which is attested also among Cynic philosophers,⁶⁶ played some role. Acts shows Peter proclaiming the gospel at Pentecost to the crowd of pilgrims (Acts 2:14–40; 3:12–26); Paul debating with passers-by in the marketplace of Athens, which led to an opportunity to proclaim in the Areopagus (17:17–31); and Apollos debating Jews in public (Acts 18:28). The local synagogue also became the site of preaching and debate over the scriptures concerning the claims of the messianists (Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14–41; 14:1–2; 17:1, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8).⁶⁷ Disturbances created in these contexts sometimes led to hearings before authorities, which provided further opportunities for proclaiming the message in the guise of defense speeches (Acts 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 7:2–53; 22:3–21; 24:1–10; 26:2–23) or to impressed jailers (Acts 16:25–34). The disturbance caused by Paul's preaching in the synagogue in Ephesus led to his having to use the lecture hall of a certain Tyrannus, which he then employed for some two years as his base of operations (Acts 19:9–10). The proclamation of Jesus led to imprisonment for some (Acts 5:18; 8:3; 12:3–5; 16:23–24; 22:24–30; 23:35; 24:27; 28:16) and death for others (Acts 7:58–60; 12:2).

Acts also shows people opening their homes to missionaries, as Peter was welcomed by the friends of Tabitha (Acts 9:36–43), which led to a sojourn in the house of Simon (Acts 9:43), and into the house of Cornelius, where the entire Gentile household received the Holy Spirit when Peter proclaimed the good news (Acts 10:24–48). Likewise, Paul was invited to the house of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15). Paul also made use of contacts with the local gentry when they were of a religious bent: his confrontation with a magician before the proconsul Sergius Paulus on Cyprus (Acts 13:6–12), his friendship with the Asiarchs in Ephesus (Acts 19:31), and his visit to the leading citizen of Malta, Publius (Acts 18:7–10). Philip likewise takes advantage of a “chance” encounter with the treasurer of the queen of

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Mt 4:16–5:1; 11:1–30; 12:46; 13:1; Lk 5:1; 6:17–19; 8:1; 11:29; 12:54; 13:22; 20:9.

⁶⁶ See Epictetus, *Discourses* III, 22, 26–49; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 13:9–23.

⁶⁷ According to Acts 13:15, the first such occasion was by invitation of the rulers of the synagogue. Paul's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah after the reading of the Law and the Prophets at first met with some welcome (13:42) but then resistance (13:45). Given that the synagogue was also *the Beth ha Midrash*, where disputations over the meaning of Torah were a regular event, Paul's behavior might be regarded as provocative but not outside the protocols of that social setting. I do not think, therefore, that, even though ultimately disruptive, his preaching and disputation in the synagogue would be itself then considered as an inappropriate means of persuasion.

Ethiopia to preach Jesus (Acts 8:26–39). Thaumaturgy plays a definite role in drawing attention to the message delivered by the Christian missionaries and providing the opportunity for conversion (Acts 3:1–4:4; 8:4–8; 9:32–35; 13:11–12; 14:8–18; 16:25–34; 19:11–20; 28:1–10).⁶⁸

Evidence from the letters of Paul for the actual process of proselytizing is sparse. They are addressed to communities already in existence and provide no account of a church's founding. His letters do, however, confirm the account of Acts in significant ways. Some sort of public proclamation or preaching, for example, is associated, at least ideally, with the community's formation (Rom 15:19–20; 1 Cor 2:1–5; 9:16; 2 Cor 2:12; Gal 3:1–5; 1 Thess 1:5–6; see also Heb 2:3; 1 Pt 1:25). The location of communities in households is also supported by Paul (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15–19; Phlm 1; Col 4:15), as is the significance of converting people of some visibility (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15–18; Rom 16:1–3, 23; Phlm 1; Phil 4:22).⁶⁹

Paul by no means downplays the role of wonderworking in the foundation of a community; in fact, he emphasizes it (1 Thess 1:5; Gal 3:5; 2 Cor 12:12; 1 Cor 2:2; 4:20; Rom 15:18–19).⁷⁰ Finally, Paul confirms that his activities led to a variety of sanctions, including imprisonment, testifying to their socially disruptive character (2 Cor 11:24–29).⁷¹

The apocryphal acts of the apostles contain important evidence concerning the spread of Christianity. Even if much of their account is legendary in character, it has value as expressing perceptions of the mission from the perspective of the second and third century.⁷² Once more, we find the apostles preaching in public as well as in domestic spaces.⁷³ Households that receive the wandering apostles are important locations for further conversions.⁷⁴ There is almost an obsession with making converts out of

⁶⁸ See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Miracles, Mission, and Apologetics: An Introduction," in Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Aspects of Religious Propaganda*, 1–26.

⁶⁹ Paul's letters provide no information concerning how he might have met such leading figures as Stephanus, Achaichus, Fortunatus and Erastus, in the Corinthian community (see 1 Cor 16:15–18; Rom 16:23). Was it through public proclamation, personal contacts, or even business dealings? For a fascinating glimpse at a more private part of Paul's teaching activity, see R. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia, 1980).

⁷⁰ See also Mk 16:17; Heb 2:4, for the role of miracles in confirming the proclamation of the message.

⁷¹ See also 1 Pt 2:20–25; Heb 10:32–34.

⁷² For translations and introductions to the apocryphal acts, see E. Haenecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., ed. W. Schneemelcher, trans. R.M. Wilson, (Philadelphia, 1964).

⁷³ *Acts of Peter* 2, 7, 8, 20; *Acts of Paul* 3:4–6; *Acts of Thomas* 38, 37.

⁷⁴ *Acts of Peter* 6, 19, 29; *Acts of Paul* 3:2, 7, 36.

high-status persons like prefects and senators and kings.⁷⁵ Wonderworking emerges even more emphatically as an instrument for getting attention and persuading, in some cases leading directly to conversion.⁷⁶ These accounts also show the apostles suffering imprisonment and death for the ways in which they had disrupted the social order.⁷⁷

The most notable disagreement in our earliest sources concerns a subject which is at the heart of the present-day concern about proselytism, namely, the degree to which witnessing to a religious conviction becomes intrusive or coercive. It is impossible to avoid the impression in the apocryphal acts that the portrayal of the various apostles steps over the line between enthusiastic sharing and psychological manipulation. This is most obvious in the cases of women whose devotion to the gospel—or to the apostle!—persuades them to abandon their intended or longtime spouse for the sake of a celibate existence as a Christian, with some of them explicitly told that this is the path they must follow.⁷⁸ Paul is accused by the outraged men in Iconium of being a sorcerer who has “corrupted all our wives.”⁷⁹

In the canonical letters of Paul to his delegates Timothy and Titus, in contrast, such tactics are ascribed to those teachers who have set themselves up in opposition to Paul’s mission. On Crete, those from the circumcision party “are upsetting entire households” with their teaching on the necessity of keeping purity regulations (Tit 1:10–16). Even more strikingly, the false teachers in 2 Timothy are said to “make their way into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:6–7).⁸⁰ Whether or not these letters are regarded as Paul’s own or as deriving from someone writing in Paul’s

⁷⁵ *Acts of John* 19; *Acts of Peter* 3, 8, 28, 34; *Acts of Paul* 3:36; *Acts of Thomas* 4–8, 17, 62, 82.

⁷⁶ *Acts of John* 23, 30–37, 47; *Acts of Peter* 9, 11, 12, 13, 25–27, 28–29; *Acts of Paul* 3:24; *Acts of Thomas* 33, 42–49, 52. See P.J. Achtemeier, “Jesus and the Disciples as Miracle Workers in the Apocryphal New Testament,” in Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Aspects of Religious Propaganda*, 149–86.

⁷⁷ *Acts of Peter* 36; *Acts of Paul* 3:17–18; 11:17; *Acts of Thomas* 105–7; 159–70.

⁷⁸ See *Acts of Thomas* 15–16, 96–101; *Acts of Peter* 33–34; *Acts of Andrew* 4–13; *Acts of Paul* 3:7–13.

⁷⁹ *Acts of Paul* 3:15.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of these passages, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul’s Delegates; 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Valley Forge, Penn., 1996).

name,⁸¹ they demonstrate an awareness within the Pauline tradition that the sort of intrusiveness and manipulation suggested by the apocryphal acts is not an acceptable form of witness. The presence of these warnings within the canonical texts provides an important basis for a critical reflection on the practice and ideology of proselytism within Christianity.

Assessing the Canonical Sources

In order to engage the discussion of the legitimacy or limits of proselytism in today's world, Christians must particularly engage the canonical writings of the New Testament that form the normative framework for debates over Christian identity and practice.⁸² The apocryphal writings may be of great value in reconstructing the past, but precisely because they are not part of the church's canon, they do not enter into discussions concerning decisions for the present. Engagement with the canonical writings, furthermore, involves weighing them in a number of ways. Placing them in their historical context in order to understand both the range of and the reasons for their statements is fundamental. But assessing the diversity and divergence among the compositions is equally important when trying to reach some sense of the witness of these writings. And all of this is still preliminary to the more difficult question of the role of that witness in decisions about present practice; exegesis is the basis rather than the essence of hermeneutics.⁸³

It is important to assert in the flattest terms, however, that the New Testament offers no support for any sort of evangelization or proselytism that would seek conversions in order to strengthen the social or political agenda of Christian churches, nor any program of activity that would employ or accept the help of the state as an agent of proselytism. Any appeal to the New Testament in support of such efforts is a distortion of its witness.

⁸¹ For the view that the Pastoral Letters are written as a conservative response to a more radical, egalitarian mission being carried out in the name of Paul, see S.L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows; The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale, Ill, 1980); D.R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Pauline Story and Legend* (Philadelphia, 1983); D.R. MacDonald, "Virgins, Widows, and Paul in Second Century Asia Minor," 1979 *SBL Seminar Papers*, ed. P.J. Achtemeier (Missoula, Mont., 1979), 1165–84; J. Bassler, "The Widow's Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim. 5:3–16," *JBL* 103 (1982): 23–41.

⁸² See Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*.

⁸³ See the more extensive discussion of these points in Johnson, "Religious Rights and Christian Texts," 71–73, 80–88.

Despite the amount of evidence concerning evangelism as carried out by leaders of the first generation, the New Testament is remarkably reticent concerning the place of such evangelization either as the mandate of the church as such or as an element in the life of the ordinary believer. Efforts to persuade others to believe are not ascribed or recommended to Christians apart from those with a commission, either from the risen Lord or by the community, to carry out such a task. In the sense of verbal proclamation with the intention of converting others, evangelism is nowhere stated as an essential dimension of Christian identity.⁸⁴ Although Peter exhorts his readers to be prepared to “make a defense (ἀπολογία) to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you,” he wants this to be done “with gentleness and reverence.” He puts greatest emphasis on living in a way that will persuade more effectively than by words: “and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good name in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Pet 3:15).

The focus of the New Testament compositions is inward, rather than outward. None of the compositions was written for the purposes of evangelization.⁸⁵ All were composed in order to persuade and transform those already part of the Christian community, in order to shape a certain character that can be expressed as “walking worthily of God” (1 Thess 2:12).⁸⁶ Such communal witness is to serve as a sign to the world of God’s work and (we assume) is to attract others to join the community by the beauty and persuasiveness of its form of life.⁸⁷

The emphasis is placed, however, not on witness as proclamation to others, but on witness as living true to God.⁸⁸ This sort of witness can

⁸⁴ See Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 92–94.

⁸⁵ The passage that at first seems most clearly to express an evangelistic intention, namely John 20:30–31, occurs in the gospel whose overall literary and thematic character argues most strongly for internal consumption (see W.A. Meeks, “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *JBL* 91 [1972]: 44–72). For a discussion of the text that shows its inherent ambiguity, see Brown, *The Gospel according to John, XIII–XXI*, 1055–61.

⁸⁶ See W.A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven, Conn., 1993), esp, 150–73; and W.T. Wilson, *The Hope of Glory: Education and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Colossians* (Leiden, 1997).

⁸⁷ This is what I take to be the distinctive outlook of 1 Peter among the canonical compositions. The contribution that 1 Peter might make to the topic of Christian witness has not yet adequately been exploited; for a sense of the composition’s tone, see W.C. van Unnik, “The Teaching of Good Works in 1 Peter,” *NTS* 1 (1954): 92–110; D.L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Chico, Calif., 1981), and J.H. Elliott, “Backward and Forward in His Steps,” in Segovia, *Discipleship in the New Testament*, 184–209.

⁸⁸ The language of “witnessing” and being a “witness” does occur, especially in Acts, in connection with the proclamation of the message to others (for “witness,” see Acts 1:8;

draw people to the community, but it can also generate the exact opposite response, as the Johannine literature attests: a prophetic community that testifies to the truth of God and resists the seduction of the world's idolatry can find itself marginalized, rejected, and persecuted.⁸⁹ The measure of the church's success is not in any case the number of its members but the character of its life.⁹⁰ If its manner of life testifies to the reality of God's reconciling work in the world, then it has fulfilled its mission. This understanding of the church's mission is everywhere implicit in Paul's letters, and it is made explicit in Ephesians, which pictures the church as a *sacramentum mundi*, the effective sign of what the world might become, a place of reconciliation between those who are at enmity.⁹¹

Most of all, the moral teaching of the New Testament—the kind of behavior it inculcates among believers—moves in the exact opposite direction from any sort of proselytizing activity that involves psychological, much less physical, coercion or pressure.⁹² There is to be mutual correction and exhortation in the community, yes, for how could there be a communal moral effort without such cooperation?⁹³ But it is always to tend toward

2:32; 3:15; 10:39; 13:31; 22:15; for “witnessing,” see 13:22; 14:3; 23:11). But even in Acts, being a witness is more complex than simply “testifying” (see 1:22; 6:3; 15:8; 16:2; 22:20). For witnessing as involving more than verbal proclamation, see, e.g., Jn 2:25; 5:32–36; 8:18; 10:25; 18:37; Rom 10:2; 2 Cor 8:3; Gal 4:15; 1 Tim 6:13; Heb 10:15; 11:39; Rev 1:9; 19:10). Note also, how, in 1 Corinthians 5:9–13, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for their preoccupation with judging those outside the community while refusing to tend to their own moral integrity.

⁸⁹ This outcome is exemplified best by the book of Revelation, which understands the church to be a community of prophets, servants, and witnesses who carry on the witness of Jesus to the claims of God (“the spirit of prophecy is the witness of Jesus” [Rev 19:10]), and as a consequence experience persecution. See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia, 1985); A. Yarbo Collins, “The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 241–56; A. Trites, “Martyrs and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” *NovT* 15 (1973): 72–80.

⁹⁰ Elsewhere I put it this way: “Only if Christians and Christian communities illustrate lives transformed according to the pattern of faithful obedience and loving service found in Jesus does their claim to live by the Spirit of Jesus have any validity. The claims of the gospel cannot be demonstrated logically. They cannot be proved historically. They can be validated only existentially by the witness of authentic Christian discipleship” (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* [San Francisco, 1996], 168).

⁹¹ See R. Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York, 1965), 77–85; L. Cerfaux, “The Revelation of the Mystery of Christ,” *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul* (New York, 1959), 402–38.

⁹² On this point, one should read R.B. Hays's chapter “Violence in Defense of Justice,” in Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 317–46, for a moral roadmap.

⁹³ For extensive reference to the practice of mutual correction in the Greco-Roman world, Judaism, and the New Testament, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (Garden City, N.Y., 1995), 27–79, esp. 337–46.

the building up of the community. And the harsh manner of the Cynic philosophers attacking the morals of others is explicitly eschewed.⁹⁴ Paul adopts the gentle manner of the nurse with his communities⁹⁵ and recommends the same gentle manner to his delegates.⁹⁶ Judgment of others, in the sense of a moral condemnation of them, is explicitly forbidden.⁹⁷ Correction even of the most grievous faults is to be undertaken delicately, and with an eye toward healing and reconciliation. The words of Paul in Galatians 6:1–5 are typical:

Brethren, if anyone is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each person will have to bear one's own load.

Even this pattern of mutual correction and edification is subject to limits. Paul's discussion of diversity in practice concerning diet and the observance of feasts in 1 Corinthians 8–10 and Romans 14 shows how seriously he takes the primacy of the individual conscience as determinant of behavior.⁹⁸ Far from allowing behavior that would impose on others standards that they are not yet ready to accept internally, Paul advocates the most delicate respect for the moral sensibilities of "the brother or sister for whom Christ died."⁹⁹

⁹⁴ For the Cynic emphasis on severity in correction, see, e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 32:11, 18; 77/78:37–45; Epictetus, *Discourses* III, 22, 26–30. For the abuses of such boldness in speech, see Julian, *Oration* 7:225; Epictetus, *Discourses* III, 22, 9; Lucian, *Timon* 7; *The Runaways* 13–16.

⁹⁵ See A.J. Malherbe, "'Gentle as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to 1 Thessalonians 2," in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis, 1989), 35–48.

⁹⁶ 2 Tim 2:20–3:9. For a discussion of this important passage in its cultural context, see Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates*, 79–91.

⁹⁷ Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37; Rom 14:3–22; Jas 4:11–12. For the moral logic of such hostile judging, see Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 291–309.

⁹⁸ For the importance of Paul's argument in the development of Christian sensitivity to issues of religious pluralism, see Johnson, "Religious Rights and Christian Texts," 89–92.

⁹⁹ Richard Hays has made a fundamental contribution to the understanding of the moral vision of the New Testament in his identification of the way in which "the story of Jesus"—understood as a character paradigm—undergirds Christian moral consciousness (see his *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 27–32; see also Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 141–66).

Conclusions

Especially in the light of the way in which that strand within the New Testament that calls for a witness to all nations has been interpreted as an effort to make conversions, if necessary by means of coercion, Christians are today required to engage the texts of their tradition with particular rigor and honesty. They can neither deny the commission of their Lord to bear witness nor relinquish the teaching of that same Lord to live in a manner worthy of God. It seems appropriate therefore to reinterpret the mandate to mission in light of the moral imperative to respect the freedom of other humans.

In particular, it is necessary to reconsider the various practices revealed in these ancient texts in the light of changing circumstances, to see whether activities that may have been understandable and even laudable in another cultural context, in a situation where Christianity was the tiniest and least powerful of minority movements—might be morally questionable in another cultural context, in which Christianity is a culturally and politically powerful agent. The ways in which Christian evangelism has been connected to programs of political and cultural hegemony in particular require the sharpest possible inquiry into the appropriateness of missionary activities. In this light the position taken by Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are of particular value in pointing out that practices disruptive of households are off limits to Christian evangelists.

The bases for the concerted missionary effort in earliest Christianity also need to be reconsidered. The mission was driven, I have suggested, by the eschatological conviction that the end of time was approaching when those who were not among God's people would be punished. In this understanding, the gathering of people into the fold by virtually any means could possibly be justified as an act of mercy. This sense of eschatological urgency built on the prior perception of Judaism that Gentiles lived in a world of moral squalor and destruction, from which only the explicit worship of the one God of Israel could save them. Salvation, therefore, meant making that commitment to "the living and true God," now in terms of the raised Messiah Jesus, before the end of the ages (1 Thess 1:9–10).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ See Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Social Dimensions of *sōtēria* in Luke-Acts and Paul," in 1993 *SBL Seminar Papers*, ed. E.H. Lovering Jr. (Atlanta, 1993), 52036.

The experiences of Christians over the past two millennia have shown what disastrous results—for the church as well as for others—have come about by missionary practice based on such premises. The growth in understanding directed by the Holy Spirit has also fundamentally revised our very understanding of those premises. It is not necessary to understand eschatology as the imminent expectation of the end-time, not necessary to view non-Christians as in immediate peril of perdition, not necessary to view salvation as dependent on an explicit confession that Jesus is Lord.¹⁰¹ A change in understanding does not mean the loss of a sense of witness or mission, but it does mean a modification of them.

It is possible to understand eschatology in terms of the church's witness to the contingency of all created things and the refusal to submit to any idolatrous claim made by creatures for themselves, a witness spelled out in a loyalty to God and a life in the world of "eschatological detachment." It is possible to view those outside the church as themselves gifted by God and responding to God in ways as yet unknown to us in lives that are not necessarily destructive but rather creative. It is possible to view salvation not as dependent on an explicit acknowledgment of Jesus' lordship but dependent rather on a faithful response to the truth as it is available in one's own circumstances. And within such an understanding, it is possible to understand the church's mission "to make disciples of all nations" in terms of making explicit for the world what God is already doing implicitly, and as inviting the world to join in a fellowship of explicit praise to God for a gift in which the world already to some degree shares.

If the church's presence in the world is to have moral probity in the context of global pluralism, then it must make the turn from a commitment to proselytism understood as the seeking of members to a commitment to witness understood as the task of providing a "light to the nations" by which they can actually see God.

¹⁰¹ It is not necessary to belabor the point that precisely the refusal to renegotiate these premises is what most characterizes that segment of Christianity whose program of cultural and political hegemony in the name of salvation has been provided fresh fuel for frenzy by the approaching millennium.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE BIBLE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST: A RESPONSE TO EMIL FACKENHEIM

Emil Fackenheim was born in Germany in 1916. He was seventeen years old when Nazi terror against Jews became overt in 1933, when it was confirmed that Jews were being sent to concentration camps. He was twenty-two years old in 1938 when he was interned at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and twenty-three years old when, with the rest of his family except one brother, he emigrated to Canada in 1939. He became a Rabbi, and received his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in 1945. Acclaimed as an interpreter of the German philosopher Hegel, he is best known for his theological works, *The Presence of God in History* (1970) and *To Mend the World* (1982). In 1987, he delivered the Sherman Lectures at Manchester University, and in 1990, published them, together with an essay he had originally composed in 1980, as the four chapters of a small book, *The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust: A Re-Reading*.¹ The book is powerful and provocative. Its simplicity of style and directness of speech give it power. Its fierce engagement with an entire intellectual (and political) history makes it provocative. From beginning to end, it is clear that this is no academic exercise but rather a passionate attempt to find a place on which to stand by a witness to the unthinkable whose vocation is to keep thinking, a highly personal effort by a leader of the people to make sense of a book that has, in the face of experience, seemed to lose its sense for the people.

Fackenheim's basic thesis is simple: the Holocaust makes (or ought to make) a fundamental difference in the reading of the Jewish Bible, certainly by Jews, but by Gentiles as well. He stands with Hegel and with Rosenzweig and Buber in his conviction that the hermeneutical task is always to bridge the gap between the past and the present. With Buber's 1926 essay, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible," he agrees that "Each generation must struggle with the Bible in its turn and come to terms with it." But Fackenheim insists that there is not only a gap between

¹ Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust: A Re-reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Hereafter cited in text by page number.

the world of the Bible and the contemporary generation, there is also an experiential gap between the world of Buber (and the entire history of interpretation preceding Buber) and the interpreters on this side of the Holocaust. The “seamlessness” of interpretation has been utterly ripped by the *novum* (new/unprecedented thing) that is the Holocaust. Jews of today must therefore confront the “naked text” of the Bible without the assistance given by the centuries of interpretation that were based on the premise that God would always intervene to save the people, and entirely from the standpoint of the two salient experiences of this Jewish generation: the “children of Job”—the death that was Auschwitz—and the resurrection that is the state of Israel.

The four chapters unfold his argument in straightforward fashion. In “The Hermeneutical Situation,” Fackenheim indicates the gap between the situation of pre-1945 interpreters (including Jews like Rosenzweig and Buber) and post-1945 interpreters. Despite the *novum* of the Holocaust, however, no Christian theologian of major stature who began work before 1945, even those whose witness against Nazism was unequivocal, such as Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich, fundamentally altered his theological position because of that experience. The closest to doing so was Bonhoeffer. More surprising, not even Buber (who lived until 1965) managed to answer the plaintive question in *The Dialogue between Heaven and Earth* (in 1952), “Dare we recommend to the survivors of Auschwitz, to the Job of the gas chambers, ‘Thank ye the Lord for he is good, for His mercy endureth forever’?” Fackenheim suggests that perhaps the time was not yet right for a truly post-Holocaust hermeneutic for the theologians of the generation of Job. It must be the task of the generation of Job’s children.

The most difficult section of Fackenheim’s argument—both textually and emotionally—is his second chapter, “Two Types of Murmurers: Rereading the Jewish Bible after Auschwitz.” Here Fackenheim reveals himself as Rabbi as well as philosopher. He takes as his starting point the texts of Exodus 15:22–24 (the complaint of the people at Marah, immediately after the Song at the Sea), and Exodus 17:1–3 (the complaint of the people at Meribah and Massah for themselves and their children). He notes that the narrator and Moses and the entire history of interpretation blame the murmurers for their lack of gratitude and confidence. But Fackenheim takes his stand with the murmurers at Meribah and Massah, because they cried out not simply in behalf of themselves but also in behalf of their children. This Holocaust generation is separated from all previous interpreters on the same basis: the survival of the children. All previous interpretation worked retrospectively from the confident premise that

“God sleeps not nor slumbers” in God’s care for Israel. The Holocaust, however, has put precisely that confidence in question. Fackenheim makes powerful use of the diaries of Chaim Kaplan and Adam Czerniakow, and his own brother’s suicide, as witnesses against the premise that God unfailingly saves the people. He concludes, “This Jewish ‘generation,’ and those to follow, are of Job’s children. As such they can no longer read the Tanakh—read their whole history—in the age-old, time-honoured, venerable, pious, retrospect” (47).

On what basis, then, can the Bible be read? In his third chapter, Fackenheim presents his bold alternative to the pious glosses of the tradition, “Sacred Scripture or Epic of a Nation: Re-Reading the Jewish Bible in Jerusalem.” This generation must begin not only with the experience of the Holocaust, but equally with the resurrection of the people (and of hope) in the state of Israel. The text of Ezekiel 36:24, “I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land,” has been fulfilled, in an act as profound and unprecedented as the Holocaust itself. The Bible should therefore now be read not as *Heilsgeschichte* (“Sacred History”), but as *Geschichte* (“History plain and simple”), by which Fackenheim means the secular history of the Jewish people as recorded in these texts. The real demythologization of the Bible has not been accomplished by philosophers, but by the Jewish people themselves, “with their collective decision to stop relying on others, human or divine, with the collective Jewish decision to take the collective Jewish secular courage in its collective hands: with the act of ending Jewish exile by ‘going up’ to the Land.” Reading from this standpoint affects *how* texts are read: Ezekiel’s vision is not eschatological but actual; the real point of Jeremiah 31 is not the renewal of the heart but saving Rachel’s children. It also affects *what* texts are central. Fackenheim prefers the secular account in II Kings 24:19–20 to the sacralized version in II Chronicles 36:11–17, 21. Most provocatively, he proposes the Book of Esther as a “canon within the canon,” the secular tale that shows the people of Israel being saved from extermination by their own efforts: “What if this once-strange book in the Jewish Bible had to be moved from the periphery to the centre, so as to provide the new principle uniting the whole? What if what once had been the repository of divine Revelation had now to become the classic repository of Jewish mythology, that is, for the Jews what the Homeric epics have all along been for the Greeks?”

Fackenheim’s fourth chapter, “The Children of Rachel, of Haman, of Job: Post-Holocaust Possibilities of a Fraternal Jewish-Christian reading of the Book Belonging to Both” (the original essay that propelled him in

this direction), pulls together the themes established in the first chapters and elaborates them further. Two points in particular deserve notice. The first is that he recognizes the claim of modernity to an “objective” and “neutral” reading of the Bible to be false. Commentaries reveal how “objective” scholars betray their faith positions in their interpretations. Fackenheim’s “fraternal reading” would seem to be largely a willingness to recognize and accept the different starting points and conclusions of Jewish and Christian readers, rather than an effort to find a common meaning. “Post-Holocaust” here becomes something very much like postmodern. The second is that despite his call for a secular reading of the Bible, Fackenheim by no means eliminates the possibility of an on-going relationship between Israel and Israel’s God: “Even so I make bold to assert that a Jewish ‘life with God’ is still possible, for it is real.” But the reader notices this important condition: “Where? In Israel, a new Mordecai for a new age in the history of Judaism, guarding the Jewish remnant, and obligated to guard it—but strong enough for the task only through the hope for help ‘from another place’ (Esther 4.14).” And in his short appendix (the transcript of a television address in Fulda, Germany, in 1988), he states again, “if, after all that has occurred, there is still Jewish faith at all, it is, I am convinced, exclusively because of the fact that after the great catastrophe there arose a Jewish state.”

In the Spring semester of 1992, a small group of scholars at Indiana University met with Professor Fackenheim to respond in a face-to-face conversation to the positions he adopts in this book. Present were Professors Michael Morgan, James Ackerman, Bernard Levinson, Alvin Rosenfeld, and Herbert Marks, all then of the faculty at Indiana University, and Professor Joseph Blenkinsopp of Notre Dame University. In the paragraphs that follow, I elaborate in somewhat greater detail the substance of the response I made to Professor Fackenheim at that time. I have retained the oral style of presentation, because my points have very much to do with the importance of personal witness as well as the limitations of any single perspective. As I apply these observations to Professor Fackenheim’s work, I make the same point with respect to myself as well.

Professor Fackenheim begins his discussion with a wry reference to his *chutzpah*—he has indeed combined astonishing intellectual ambition and passionate personal testimony within the pages of a remarkably small book. I also begin with a quite sober recognition of my own *chutzpah* in entering the same conversation within the framework of a considerably smaller essay. In contemplating this response, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the disparities between author and respondent.

Professor Fackenheim speaks of Bultmann, Tillich, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Buber as elder contemporaries. For me, they are figures in the history of ideas. More important, Professor Fackenheim lived through, suffered from, and had his entire life marked by the events of the Holocaust (which made him an emigrant to Canada) and the resurrection that is the state of Israel (which ultimately claimed him as an immigrant). In contrast, I grew up in the safe context of the midwestern and southern United States, in the sanctuaries of repose offered respectively by monastery and university. I perfectly exemplify those whom Fackenheim refers to somewhat scornfully as living “safe in seminaries” (55).

Even more, perhaps, than others living in those sanctuaries, I was an observer—often a distracted and belated one—rather than a participant in history. In contrast, Professor Fackenheim is a personal witness to the events of the Holocaust that he terms a *novum*, an experience that has torn asunder any pretense that either history or thought can be regarded as seamless. Professor Fackenheim’s passionate testimony and intellectual inquiry are located within a Judaism searching for a post-Holocaust identity that can be something more than purely secular survival, but must be at least secular survival. I am a Roman Catholic. My every conversation with Jews must be constrained by the acknowledgment of the role my tradition has played—and continues to play—in perpetuating antisemitic attitudes and actions that at least allowed the Holocaust to occur and may have been complicit in its occurrence.²

Recognizing the severe disproportion between author and reviewer at the level of personal experience and passionate witness, I want to begin by also acknowledging, at the level of personal experience and passionate witness, the truthfulness of Professor Fackenheim’s book. If I add that I regard it as a subjective truthfulness, I mean no dishonor, for in personal experience and passionate testimony, subjective truthfulness is the highest truth. But because his book is not only passionate witness but also a serious intellectual inquiry concerning the reading of the Jewish Bible not only by Jews but also by Christians after the Holocaust, it is necessary also to respond to his invitation to intellectual engagement by others passionately concerned with that subject. I offer, then, a series of questions that occur to me as I read and reread his book, and, in imitation of

² For two recent Roman Catholic attempts to deal with this reality, see Garry Wills, *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), especially pages 11–70; and James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

Fackenheim's own simplicity and candor, state them as plainly as I can. My questions have less to do with this or that point of interpretation—there are many individual interpretive observations that any reader of the Bible can appreciate—than with some aspects of the project as a whole that genuinely puzzle me.

The first concept that gives me pause is that of the *novum* itself. In what sense can we, as *historians*, speak of the Holocaust in absolute, even eschatological terms? I perfectly understand how Fackenheim can testify passionately to the unprecedented character of the Holocaust—the way in which Jews were subjected to a process that destroyed their capacity to choose, or the way in which birth as a Jew was defined as a crime in itself. As historians, however, are we not obliged to ask whether in fact this monstrosity, this *mysterium tremendum* of evil, was unprecedented qualitatively, or only quantitatively, in that technology enabled murderous intent to be exercised with unparalleled ambition and efficiency? Fackenheim's own recollection of the people's 400 years of captivity under the Pharaohs, and the use of Jewish children's blood by a Pharaoh to heal his leprosy, suggest that other horrors in this people's history might have seemed to the victims, or even to the historical observer, qualitatively of the same order as the Holocaust. Josephus's descriptions of the terror and carnage at the fall of Jerusalem in the war against Rome cause the reader to blanch at the universal and indiscriminate nature of the slaughter. Similarly, the experience of those who put themselves and their children to death at Masada rather than face Roman rule was, in subjective terms, as total and final as the experience of those killed by Nazis in the camps. What is it that enables us, as historians, to declare that such precedents do not apply?

I ask the reader to bear with me here, for I know how sensitive a subject this is. I am well aware of the way in which many Jews today bristle at any attempt to relativize the Holocaust by means of comparison to other genocides, such as those of the Armenians, or Native Americans, or Cambodians, or those killed in the Soviet Gulag. They bristle because they suspect that the purpose of the exercise is to trivialize, then to normalize, and then finally, to deny the events of the Holocaust.³ In the same way, they resent the astonishingly clumsy attempts to render the Holocaust

³ See Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York Penguin Books, 1994).

“meaningful” by Christian theological co-optation.⁴ I need to make clear that such trivialization is not my point. I am struggling, rather, with epistemology, and with the question of what kinds of claims can be made on the basis of what kinds of evidence. I want to suggest that there are different ways of knowing reality, and that each has its validity but also its limits, and that no one way of knowing has the privilege of dictating to other ways of knowing. Speaking as a participant, one can declare one’s experience unique, and speak the truth. But speaking as a historian, one cannot declare one’s own or anyone else’s experience unique, for the rules of historiography do not allow that sort of declaration.

So I want to insist on the legitimacy of regarding the Holocaust as a *novum*, an unprecedented and unparalleled event, for those who experienced it and now testify to that experience with passionate intensity. But with another part of their minds, such witnesses need to be aware that other persons, without trying to minimize much less deny the truth of that testimony, may not be able to share the same perception, simply because they have not shared in that event—and, for people of my generation and the ones following, could not have shared in that event in the same manner as those who testify to it as a *novum*. Indeed, to ask this and the following generations to act as though they had participated in the event, or bore personal responsibility for the event is to return, paradoxically, to the same sort of blood curse that Christians applied to Jews for centuries.

Here Professor Fackenheim the philosopher rather than the historian or witness may need to recognize the *aporia* between the truth of experience and the truths of history. It is an *aporia* similar to the one he cites from Lessing, between the “truths of reason,” which can be absolute, and the “truths of history,” which can never be more than relative and probable. For Professor Fackenheim and other Jews of his generation, the drawing of a line in the sand to say, “this event is ultimate” is perfectly understandable. But the tides of time will wash past that line and erase it as surely as they have every other attempt to declare a *novum* within history that absolutely transcends history. The truth that subjective experience demands that we declare as absolute and final cannot be recognized as such by others who do not share the same experience. Even with different

⁴ Fackenheim laments the foundation of a Carmelite monastery at Auschwitz (*Jewish Bible*, vii), and Carroll makes the erection of a cross at that site the key to his reading of Jewish-Christian relations in *The Sword of Constantine*.

parts of our minds, if you allow the expression, each one of us is obliged to see the same thing quite differently: with that part of our mind that knows experientially (perhaps religiously), we declare the truth that this experience is ultimate; but with that part of our mind that functions analytically (perhaps as historians), we at the same time declare that this event is as other historical events, one among others.

A second question, or set of questions, occurs as I consider the connection between Fackenheim's *novum* and his proposed hermeneutics of Tanakh, or biblical interpretation. He derives from the historical *novum* a legitimation for encountering "the naked text." From such reading, he hopes that both Jews and Christians will discover "a *novum* also in the self-understanding and the very being of the two remnants, the Jewish and the Christian." It is on this basis that he rejects, throughout the book, the "pious commentators" of the tradition, and seeks "a reading of the book as though it had never been read before." His reading of the Tanakh is not really "naked," though, for it is a reading governed precisely by the twinned events of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. Such a new experiential standpoint functions as his hermeneutical key, both for understanding texts and for the selection of certain texts as more pertinent or normative than others. The *novum* alone can justify making the Book of Esther the center of Fackenheim's post-Holocaust canon. And the reality of the state of Israel is the premise of his speaking of this new nation as "a new Mordecai for a new age in the history of Judaism, guarding the Jewish remnant." The same hermeneutical principle moves him to dismiss "sacral history" (*heilsgeschichte*), whether Jewish or Christian, in favor of "geschichte plain and simple, to which no higher—saving, divine—purpose is ascribed."

Now in many ways, Fackenheim's return to the text resembles that traditionally taken by midrash, which always sought to bring a potentially shattering contemporary event under the umbrella of meaning provided by Torah. The closest analogies to Fackenheim's proposal, in fact, are found in the generative period of the first century of the common era, before the event of the Jewish war with Rome and the destruction of the Temple left the Pharisaic tradition to gain ascendancy as the "normative" form of Judaism in the Rabbinic or Talmudic tradition. At least two Jewish groups in the first century, the sectarians at Qumran and the sectarians who gathered in the name of Jesus, followed just such interpretive procedures. Each group leaped over precedents and moved directly from an experience that they regarded as ultimate, back to the Tanakh read in the light of this central experience and conviction. In their respective sec-

tarian hermeneutics, furthermore, certain texts were perceived as central to Torah that had never previously been considered so important. Even texts (like Isaiah) that had been central to all previous readers were read in an entirely new way because of the existential insight given by the shattering events they regarded as defining their present situation. They too were caught in cognitive dissonance between what the texts had always been thought to say and what their experience of reality had taught them. They too found it necessary to start their reading *ab novo*.

I take it as a historical lesson, however, that Jews who were outside the sectarian range of experience were not willing to acknowledge that claimed *novum* as the necessary starting point for any authentic Jewish hermeneutics. No Jews except the sectarians at Qumran were willing to see the wilderness community and the Teacher of Righteousness as the key to all of Torah. No Jews except the followers of Jesus were willing to call a crucified Messiah the key to unlocking all of Scripture. In some ways, the Rabbinic revolution of the Mishnah, that centered life on the *halachic* reading of Torah, might be taken as an implicit rebuke of such claims of historical absolutizing.

What is truly novel in Fackenheim's proposal, then, is not the hermeneutical reflex, but the premises governing his return to the text "as though it had never been read before." The first-century Jews who practiced midrash to resolve the cognitive dissonance between their symbols and their experience were convinced that both their texts and their experiences came from God. The problem for their understanding was bringing them into some harmonious (if dialectical) relationship. They assumed that the Lord who created and sustained the world and had chosen this people for the Lord's own purposes had also revealed to this people the Torah. The life-giving authority of the text was not found in the accuracy of its depiction of history or in its legitimation of institutions, but in the Living God who continued to speak, even if obscurely, through each of its words. Fackenheim, in contrast, is able to assert neither of these convictions in a straightforward fashion. He does not consider the text to have a self-evident revelatory character based in divine authorship. He is not willing to consider the events either of the Holocaust or of the founding of Israel as falling under God's providential guidance of events. Even the possibility of a relationship with God is one that Fackenheim raises only cautiously and obliquely. The question inevitably arises, *why* turn to Tanakh at all? If neither the text nor the experience bears the mark of divinity, why should Jews make any attempt at a post-Holocaust reading of the Bible?

And if, as Fackenheim suggests, the Bible is now to be read not as the source of the *halakoth* by which the Jewish community is structured, still less as revelation of a *Heilsgeschichte*, but only as the record of a “*geschichte* pure and simple,” does this not really amount to a *volksgeschichte* pure and simple? Does not Tanakh become nothing more than the source of the national myth of the nation of Israel? But if that is to be the status and function of the text, what possible interest should anybody outside the State of Israel have in the Tanakh? There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the exclusive hermeneutical standpoint he will allow to Jews and his desire for a “fraternal reading” between Jews and Christians. Instead, the logic of his argument would seem to lead in the opposite direction from a shared reading of the text, and at most amount to an appeal to a mutual respect for interpretive starting points that have absolutely nothing in common except that they are absolutely different from each other. They can therefore no longer compete, but can they even converse? One might ask also whether Fackenheim’s “naked text” (which, as we have seen, is not so naked) is not simply a reflex survival mechanism rather than a serious effort to engage what Torah has always meant to this people? Can it be a hermeneutics that nourishes the Jewish people in an identity more profound than that of simply being another nation among the nations?

It is in this respect that I find Professor Fackenheim’s neglect and even dismissal of diaspora Judaism—both ancient and contemporary—to be strange. It is fair to say, I think, not only that many Christians have continued to think theologically in a seamless fashion despite the Holocaust, but that many religious Jews have continued to do so as well. The performance of midrash continues by many Jews who have not found the Holocaust, despite its profoundly evil character, to represent the fundamental rupture of all symbols or even the possibility of belief and trust in the Living God. Many of these Jews, though by no means all of them, practice their faith and their interpretation of Torah outside the State of Israel. They do not deny the Holocaust. Many of them are witnesses to its awful reality. They do not trivialize the Holocaust. But for them, the experience of the Holocaust does not have the same implications as it does for Fackenheim. There still exist communities of Jews for whom the observance of *mitzvoth* and the study of *halachic* midrash in continuity with the traditions of the elders still function to articulate faith and loyalty to the Living God of the people Israel. If this is the case, is their experience of classical, “diaspora” Judaism invalidated by the experience of the Holocaust? How seriously does Fackenheim intend his suggestion that Jewish belief in the

Living God after the Holocaust is owed exclusively to the existence of the State of Israel? It would seem that the more one insists on the *novum* of the Holocaust/State of Israel as the single legitimate hermeneutical fulcrum for reading the Jewish Bible in this generation, the more one risks dangerously narrowing the possibilities for Jewish existence in the future, and precipitously cutting off all the options for this future offered by the rich tradition of interpretation that preceded this *novum*. I suspect that Professor Fackenheim would not want to do this. His own practice of interpretation, in fact, demonstrates an intense willingness to continue engaging—albeit in a sharply dialectical fashion—all the voices preceding this generation within the tradition.

My final series of observations apply this same danger of narrow definition and closed possibilities to relations between Jews and Christians. I agree completely with Professor Fackenheim and other critics of supersessionist Christian theology—a group that includes Charlotte Klein, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Roy Eckardt, N.A. Beck, and Clark Williamson⁵—when they insist that definitions of Christianity that rely on a negative reading of Judaism (much less actual anti-semitism) are theologically unacceptable. They are unacceptable not simply because they have done harm, but because they fall short of the truth of the Good News from God. I disagree only with some of these critics concerning the degree to which such anti-Jewish definitions are essential to Christian self-understanding and therefore critical to Christian theology. To illustrate my point autobiographically: I managed to grow up within the Roman Catholic tradition, attend minor and major seminary, and live as a Benedictine Monk for almost ten years, without once encountering the sort of crypto-Marcionite understanding of Paul and the Gospels that has so dominated some forms of Christian discourse. In fact, when I first encountered the term Atonement when studying theology, I had great difficulty connecting the various theories I was hearing about for the first time to any understanding of Christian existence that I had experienced in the previous twenty-five years. I don't deny that many Christians have been shaped theologically in the manner rightly despised by the authors

⁵ See Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Rosemary Radford Ruether *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); A. Roy Eckhardt, *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); N.A. Beck, *Mature Christianity in the 21st Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Clark M. Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

I have mentioned. I only offer the observations that Christians have neither universally nor necessarily been so shaped.

Moreover, I reject the proposition that Christology is inherently antisemitic,⁶ or that the writings of the New Testament lead inevitably to the Holocaust,⁷ so that the only way Christianity can finally be purged of its antisemitism is by recasting the image of Jesus and abandoning its own canonical texts.⁸ I emphatically agree, however, that European theology in particular has *used* Christology in the manner described, and has *read* the New Testament in ways that are functionally antisemitic. The fateful equation between Catholicism and Judaism within Reformation polemics ensured that mainstream Protestant theology, and the field of New Testament studies that fundamentally was shaped by Protestant theological premises, would consistently search for an “authentic” and “original” Christianity understood as distinct both from Judaism and from the Catholicism that was viewed as a recrudescence of Jewish and Pagan elements in the previously pure revelation of the Gospel.⁹ So profoundly is New Testament scholarship over the past 200 years marked by this theological bias that the first thing required in reading much of the classical literature in this field is an ideological critique.

So I agree with Professor Fackenheim when he says that Christian theology cannot now proceed as though the Holocaust had not happened. But perhaps I mean something different even as I agree. I do not mean that Christian theology must completely reconstitute itself, using the Holocaust as a new starting point. For Christians, there can be no new starting point except that *novum* in their experience and conviction that is the resurrection of Jesus to share the life of God and become “life-giving Spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45) as the basis for a new humanity: “If anyone is in Christ,” Paul declares, “there is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). But I do mean that Christianity must take the Holocaust as God’s judgment on Christians for what was wrong (conceptually) and evil (morally) in their theology, even from the start, and that no celebration of Christian identity

⁶ Most famously stated by Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 246–251.

⁷ See Eckhardt, *Jews and Christians*, 63.

⁸ See the strategies of Eckhardt, *Jews and Christians*, and Beck, *Mature Christianity*.

⁹ For an analysis of Protestant theological presuppositions governing “histories of Christianity,” see, from quite different perspectives, J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianity and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1–35, 114–115, and L.T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis; Fortress Press, 1998), 1–37.

can any longer proceed on the basis of an odious (and ignorant) contrast to Judaism.

This requires that Christians assess and critically engage those traditions of biblical scholarship that have helped form such privileging contrasts. Significant progress has been made, for example, in the study of Paul¹⁰ and the Gospels.¹¹ Despite the many unfortunate aspects of historical Jesus research, one clear contribution made by what is sometimes called “the third quest” is the placement of Jesus squarely within the world of first-century Judaism.¹² Even more, Christians must also have the courage to critically engage the language and attitudes of the New Testament writings themselves that can perpetuate hostile perceptions and actions, both of Jews and of all those whom Christians regard as “other” and therefore as threatening.¹³ Such an effort requires a combination of loyalty and moral courage. Loyalty, for these compositions remain powerfully transformative as witnesses to the truth of the good news that is in Jesus. But also moral courage, for that good news cannot take a form that denies the humanity or leads to the harm of people who do not—for God’s own reasons—share in the experience of that good news. The easy temptation is to declare ourselves morally superior to the texts and eliminate all the passages that offend us. The difficult challenge is to humbly serve the integrity of God’s Holy Word by finding within it the principles and

¹⁰ Credit here is deservedly given to the work of E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), and K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). Less visible though no less important is the contribution of Nils A. Dahl of Yale University, through his own teaching and through the publications of students like Terrance Callan.

¹¹ Perhaps the simplest way to assess the tremendous progress in reading the Gospels within the framework of Judaism is to scan the volumes in the new Roman Catholic commentary series, *Sacra Pagina*, edited by Daniel J. Harrington: D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (1991), and F.J. Maloney, *The Gospel of John* (1998).

¹² The point is made well by Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), especially 285–328.

¹³ This is the aspect of the problem I have tried to address in my own work; see L.T. Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Rhetoric,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 419–441; “Religious Rights and Christian Texts,” in *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective*, eds. J. Witte, Jr. and J. van der Vyver (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1996), 1:65–95; “Proselytism and Witness in Earliest Christianity: An Essay on Origins,” in *Sharing the Book Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism*, eds. J. Witte, Jr. and R.C. Martin (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 145–157, 376–384.

images that enable a liberation from the language and attitudes that are morally incompatible with the Lord whom we confess.¹⁴

I also agree completely with Professor Fackenheim that the only way Jews and Christians can reach a more fraternal and less polemical reading of Torah is through coming to know each other better, not only as persons of good will, but also in terms of the basic commitments and presuppositions that we have as discrete reading communities.¹⁵ But I wonder whether Fackenheim's hermeneutical proposals, if accepted by all Jews, might actually make this more difficult. I approach this point once more from personal experience. As a New Testament scholar, I have been extraordinarily fortunate to have learned Judaism mainly from Jews rather than through New Testament scholarship. My New Testament mentors had themselves learned from Jewish scholars. I was introduced to Talmudic studies at Indiana University in 1969 by Henry Fischel, who had earlier been the teacher of Wayne A. Meeks—Meeks had also studied with Erwin R. Goodenough. Fischel was a pioneer in bridging the worlds of Talmud and Hellenistic culture.¹⁶ My paper for him on Merkabah Mysticism was a genuine initiation into a new world.¹⁷ As a doctoral student in New Testament at Yale University, I studied Midrash—the *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* and *Sifre on Deuteronomy*—with Judah Goldin.¹⁸ Preparing for his rigorous seminars meant working side by side with such future scholars in Judaica as Rueven Kimmelman (who also shared in New Testament seminars together with Alan Segal), Bruce Zuckerman, and Alan Cooper. As a faculty member at Indiana University, I have had strong Jewish colleagues not only in Hebrew Bible (Bernard Levinson and Herbert Marks), but also in Mishnah (Howard Eilberg-Schwartz), Lurianic Mysticism (Lawrence Fine), and Kabbalah/Medieval Jewish Philosophy (Hava Tirosh-Rothschild). With such teachers and colleagues over a twenty-five

¹⁴ For a serious engagement with this hermeneutical struggle with the language of the New Testament and the attitudes and actions of the Christian tradition, see Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 407–443.

¹⁵ A hopeful example is the recent volume of essays edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Henry Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy: A Study of Epicurea and Rhetorica in Early Midrashic Writings* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

¹⁷ L.T. Johnson, "Gnosticism in the Rabbinic Tradition," *Resonance* 4 (1969): 5–17.

¹⁸ See Judah Goldin, *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955); *The Song at the Sea: Being a Commentary on a Commentary in Two Parts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); *The Living Talmud: The Wisdom of the Fathers and Its Classical Commentaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

year period, I have had intense conversations within an explicitly pluralistic and comparative context, and have learned a great deal about Judaism in all its stages and manifestations, ancient, medieval, and modern. The conversations have ranged widely and sometimes in spirited fashion across the biblical texts shared and disputed by the two traditions. I doubt that I have added much to my Jewish colleagues' understanding of the New Testament, but they have surely offered me a sense of Judaism that is rarely given to a New Testament scholar.

Here is the point of the personal recital. In this long conversation, never has the Holocaust/State of Israel been presented as a *novum* that demands the shedding of all the history of "pious commentary" in order to confront the naked text "as though it had never been read before." Only once in all these years, moreover, has it ever been presented to me by a Jewish colleague—not a student of Judaica so much as a student of Jewish Holocaust literature—that such should be the case. The novelty of the suggestion that nothing more could be discussed between Christians and Jews—nothing about God, nothing about tradition, nothing about the interpretation of the Bible—without a commitment to such a proposition seemed to me so out of line with all my years of studying with Jewish colleagues that I found it incomprehensible. My last question to Professor Fackenheim, therefore, is this: if he is correct about this *novum*, and all fraternal work on the Bible must take the Holocaust and the State of Israel as its nonnegotiable starting point, then what does that say about the authenticity or non-authenticity of the conversations of which I have been a part for these many years? I would prefer that such judgments not be required, and that instead, every voice and every passionate testimony be allowed to speak within a continuous conversation into which all lovers of the Living God and all lovers of these texts find themselves irresistably drawn.

Professor Fackenheim's short book serves as an important reminder to all readers of the Bible, both Jewish and Christian, that each generation must stand responsible for the way it reads, that the experience of God (or the apparent absence of God) in each generation's experience necessarily must shape the context within which the Bible is read, that the pretense of a neutral, historical reading of the Bible that means the same to everyone is actually a way of avoiding the claims that these texts make on their readers, and that one's hermeneutical stance really matters. I am grateful to Professor Fackenheim for the forthrightness and clarity of his position, and to his implicit challenge to Christian readers to be equally clear in staking out their own way of reading the Bible passionately and "for the sake of their children."

No doubt Christian interpreters functioning as historians will continue, as will some of their Jewish counterparts, studying the Bible within the framework of the dominant historical-critical paradigm. There is no reason to scorn such efforts at historical contextualization and reconstruction, even though their usefulness for communities of faith is increasingly unclear.¹⁹

Christian scholars will also continue, together with their Jewish counterparts, to study the compositions of the Bible from the perspective of a variety of literary and social-scientific perspectives. Well and good, and with some gain to the imagination if not necessarily to the spirit. Fackenheim's real challenge to Christian readers, however, is to claim a hermeneutical place based on the experience of this generation for their tradition that he has staked for Jewish readers. If the Jewish Bible is not the Christian Bible—even though it contains many of the same writings—and if the standpoint of Christian readers is not to be that of post-Holocaust Israeli readers (for that would indeed be a form of alienation), then what is the distinctly Christian perspective that serves to address this generation and “save the children” of this generation?

Among the elements that I think must be included in an adequate response to that question are the affirmation of the *novum* that is the death and resurrection of Jesus as a *novum* that is as experientially real today as in the first century, and the conviction that for the life of the Christian community, the Jewish Bible *is* the “Old Testament,” even though, as Origen has it, it is always new because of our way of reading it through the good news. Christians must also, in other words, be willing to let go of the false objectivity of history that it has too long used as a means of asserting its superiority to the Jewish mode of reading, and must be willing to embrace the passionately subjective standpoint of religious experience as defining the life of this community of faith. Christians must be willing, together with Jews, to acknowledge (and celebrate) the partial and particular perspective of its reading. Once having done that, however, further challenges remain, in the form of earlier and perhaps unfortunate decisions that now need reexamining.

I touch on only two interrelated issues. If Christians reading *as* Christians—that is, not as historians but as those marked by faith in the resurrection of Christ—must, to be theologically consistent, engage the

¹⁹ See Jon D. Levinson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

“Hebrew Scriptures” as “Old (and always new) Testament,” then the question of the place of the Septuagint (LXX) needs further theological discussion. The LXX is the Scripture of the New Testament and for much of the tradition of Christian interpretation, which shared the conviction of the Jews of the first century that the LXX was divinely inspired. What is the *theological* rationale for preferring the Hebrew text, when that is not the text taken up by the New Testament? Even stating the question points to the deeper theological problem hidden by the historical-critical approach. If we prefer the Hebrew text because we seek the original, human, meaning of the Bible, that is historically adequate, but not necessarily theologically pertinent. Does the quest for the historical meaning operate within the implicit denial of divine inspiration, the conviction that God truly seeks to speak through human words? Or do we choose the Hebrew because we think it was divinely inspired, whereas the LXX is a “mere translation” among other ancient versions? This gives rise to two further questions. If we think the Hebrew text inspired and therefore more truly “Scripture,” why do we restrict our inquiry only to the historical dimensions of the text, and not to its prophetic dimensions? If we do not think it inspired, on what ground do we prefer it to the LXX, which the New Testament regarded as inspired? I am fully aware that this set of questions is faintly embarrassing to those who would prefer to deny or ignore the fact that Christianity does, in fact, have as distinctive and valid a hermeneutical starting point as that of Judaism, and needs to pay attention to that starting point if it is not, paradoxically, to veer either into the implicit supersessionism granted by “history” or the implicit alienation of taking the Jewish starting point as its own.

The final issue is the pertinence of the history of Christian interpretation of the Bible. It is another paradox that the “rupture” with tradition that Professor Fackenheim attributes to the Holocaust was, for Christians, self-inflicted by Christians through the hegemony of the historical-critical approach, whose premise was that the 1600 years of Christian interpretation preceding the Enlightenment contributes nothing to our understanding of the Bible.²⁰ In its claim to provide an objective, universal, uninterested, empirically verifiable reading of the Bible, the historical-critical paradigm can be seen as the perfect expression of the project of

²⁰ A point wonderfully made by the standard history of New Testament scholarship by W.G. Kummel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems*, trans. S. McL. Gilmour and H.C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), which devotes six pages (13–19) to the first 1600 years of Christian interpretation!

modernity. Professor Fackenheim's claim to an interested, partial, particular, and even local reading of the Jewish Bible reminds us that we have all, through the experiences of the past decades, been pulled out of the alienating comfort of modernity and must face the harsh but clarifying reality of diaspora. Willy-nilly, we are all postmodern, not as an intellectual fashion, but as a fact of existence. For Christians, this new situation enables a fresh appreciation of that history of interpretation of the Bible that was rejected by modernity. Postmodern Christians have, indeed, the most to learn from pre-modern Christians. We are at last free to engage Patristic and Medieval and Reformation interpreters, and learn what it meant for them to read the Bible as Scripture and as divinely inspired and as revealing one God. They might help us figure out what difference it makes to read the LXX rather than the Hebrew, or even to think in terms of figure rather than only in terms of fact. Our task is not to imitate them, for that would be another form of alienation from our own circumstances. Our task is not to go backward through false nostalgia, but to go forward enriched for having rejoined a conversation that is distinctively that of our own heritage.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

LAW IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Christianity began as a Jewish sect in the first third of the first century C.E. and in the course of less than a century became a distinct religion whose gentile members far outnumbered Jews. From the start, this religious movement associated with Jesus of Nazareth fell athwart the two great law systems of the Mediterranean world, the Roman and the Jewish, and it took some time before Christianity fully established its position with respect to either system and articulated its own version of law. This essay examines the period before the 4th century, when Christianity became the imperial religion and things fundamentally changed. It identifies some of the tensions the first Christians experienced with respect to law and the ways they resolved those tensions in Christianity's earliest literature—the canonical writings of the New Testament (written between 50–100)—and in some pertinent compositions from the second and third centuries.

The Roman and Jewish Context

The history of Roman law can be traced in a thousand-year arc from the Law of the Twelve Tablets (*Lex Duodecim Tabularum*) in 449 B.C.E. to the great compilation of jurisprudence issued between 529–534 by the Emperor Justinian (*Corpus Juris Civilis*). The composition of the New Testament roughly coincided with the period considered to be the most creative in the development of Roman jurisprudence, as the demands of world-empire forced both expansion and creativity with respect to earlier, simpler, and more formal procedures. Roman administration included a variety of ordinary magistrates (Consuls, Praetors, Quaestors, Promagistrates, Aediles, Tribunes, Censors, Governors, Prefects, Procurators) and extraordinary (Consular Tribune, Dictator), whose decisions set precedents for further decisions. In the Principate, to be sure, the decrees of the Emperor served as the principal source of empire-wide legislation. And while jurisprudence was certainly concerned with the settlement of disputes over property and of the punishment of criminals, the most compelling concern for all involved in imperial administration was the

security and prosperity of the empire itself.¹ This meant that in threatened or unsettled territories (such as the province of Syria-Palestine tended chronically to be), considerable latitude was accorded prefects such as Pontius Pilate (Prefect of Palestine under whom Jesus of Nazareth was executed) to act *extra ordinem* in the interests of peace and security.²

The Jewish system of law, traditionally ascribed to Moses but developed over a long period of Ancient Israel's history, was also in a period of creative expansion. Laws first established to regulate the commerce and cult of a nation became otiose in dramatically altered circumstances, such as the occupation of the land by a foreign power (Rome) and the loss of the Temple (in the year 70 C.E.). The twin pressures placed upon the Mediterranean world's only monotheistic and separatist population by a hegemonic Greek culture and an imperial Roman order, generated a variety of responses from Jews, all of which, in some fashion or other, involved the reaffirmation of the covenant between God and Israel by a renegotiation of the *mitzvoth* (commandments) that spelled out the demands of the covenant in concrete terms.³

All Jews recognized the requirement to observe God's laws, but their specific circumstances generated distinct ways of interpreting those commandments. Thus, Philo of Alexandria regarded the πολιτεία of Mosaic legislation as superior to that found in Greek culture, but felt free to employ the same allegorical modes of interpretation as those used by Stoic contemporaries in the search for the deeper philosophical meaning of the literal commands.⁴ Among the sectarians at Qumran, who considered only themselves to be authentic Jews, a rigorous interpretation of Torah was carried out in accord with the dualistic ideology and purity practices of the community.⁵ The Pharisees, in turn, employed the textual expertise of the scribes to adapt ancient legislation to changing circumstances through

¹ See the essays in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, edited H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) II Principal, Vols 13–15 (Recht).

² A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) 1–23.

³ E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), and *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishna: Five Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

⁴ E.R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2nd edition (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963).

⁵ F.M. Cross, *The Ancient Library at Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* 3rd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

midrash, developing an understanding of a “second Torah” consisting in oral interpretation of the written text.⁶

After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple at the climax of the Jewish war against Rome in 70 C.E., the Pharisees emerged as the dominant form of Judaism. Their convictions and practices of interpretation formed the basis of classical or Talmudic Judaism, the norm for Jewish existence in the diaspora for two millennia. The first codification of oral interpretation was the *Mishnah*, carried out by Judah ha Nasi ca. 200 C.E. Continuing legal conversation led to the massive collections of law and lore known as the *Babylonian Talmud* and the *Talmud of the Land of Israel* (between the 5th and 7th centuries C.E.).⁷

Christianity would eventually form its own system of law, but in the first stages of its development, it had deep ambivalence toward both Romans and Jewish systems, and it took time for law to claim an honored place within Christian thought and practice. In contrast both to Judaism and Islam, whose embrace of law was immediate and thorough, and whose understanding of obedience of God was completely consonant with the ordering of society, the nature of the early Christian experience made its stance toward law problematic. Throughout the history of Christianity, indeed, some continued to regard a positive perception of law as a corruption of the primitive Christian spirit.

Jesus and Law

Statements concerning the historical Jesus are necessarily tentative because our primary sources—the canonical Gospels—are documents of faith composed in light of convictions concerning Jesus as the resurrected Son of God, and this faith perspective pervades their narratives.⁸ In addition, the Gospels work with traditions that were passed on orally for some forty years before the first gospel narrative was composed, and

⁶ J. Neusner, “The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh (Jamnia) from 70 to 100,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, edited H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979) II.19.2, pages 3–42.

⁷ J. Neusner, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud: Studies in the Achievements of Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Historical and Literary-Critical Research* (Studia Post-Biblica 17; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970).

⁸ L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 2nd enlarged edition, with Todd Penner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 107–257, 525–557.

the experiences of the early believers are in some instances read back into the story of Jesus.⁹ There is insufficient evidence to support any notion that Jesus, in the manner of a Moses or Muhammad, deliberately sought to legislate for a later community; even the passages that might seem to point in this direction fall far short of a *shariah* (see Matthew, chapters 5–7, 10, 16, 18).

Some historical judgments concerning Jesus and the law systems that dominated first century Palestine are possible. We can confidently assert that Jesus did not directly engage or challenge the Roman order. The strong thesis that Jesus was a Zealot who led resistance against Rome is far-fetched,¹⁰ and the weaker thesis that his teaching program was motivated by an anti-imperial agenda has little support beyond the ambiguous saying on “Giving to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God’s” (Mark 12:13–17 and parallels).¹¹

On the other side, it is difficult to dispute that some aspect of Jesus’ behavior led to his being crucified by command of the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate under the *titulus*, “King of the Jews” (Mark 15:15–25 and parallels).¹² The tension between the gospels’ representation of Jesus’ ministry as one of religious reform and their unflinching portrayal of his death as public and political remains a historical puzzle. Perhaps the most reasonable explanation is that the threat of political instability caused by an insurrection in the city (see Luke 23:19) led Pilate to exercise the *ius gladii* decisively *extra ordinem* in order to preserve order.¹³

The canonical gospels also portray Jesus as a teacher of Torah—albeit without formal training (Mark 6:1–6)—whose interpretation of a righteousness that “exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees” (Matt 5:20) came into direct conflict with experts in Jewish legal interpretation. Precisely how much Jesus himself interpreted Torah in such fashion as to generate controversy, and how much this role was retrojected on him by early Christians struggling to define their own understanding of Torah over against the synagogue is another historical puzzle. What seems histori-

⁹ R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, Revised edition translated by J. Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

¹⁰ S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Scribner, 1967).

¹¹ J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1992).

¹² M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

¹³ Sherwin-White, 24–47.

cally clearer is that aspects of Jesus' behavior with respect to Torah observance caused offense: his breaking of the Sabbath, his neglect of purity regulations, his non-payment of temple-tax, his association with notorious flouters of Jewish piety, the "sinners and tax-collectors," his claim to a special relationship with God, and his prophetic gesture in the precincts of the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁴

Cumulatively, these charges could seriously compromise any claim made for or by him of being a messiah, and could even be construed as the signs of a false messiah, one who "led the people astray" (Luke 23:5). Faced with the growing popularity of such a charlatan, it is not inconceivable that members of the Jewish Sanhedrin could have met in rump session to condemn Jesus and stage-manage his appearance before the Roman prefect. Even the role of the Jewish leadership in the death of Jesus is understandably a sensitive subject, after centuries of Christian anti-Semitism and the horrors of the Holocaust, but a sober historical assessment allows for a combination of religious and political, Jewish and Roman legal systems in the execution of Jesus.¹⁵ What is certain is that for strict adherents of Torah, Jesus' death was one cursed by God (see Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13), the decisive "sign" that he was not God's anointed.

Christian Beginnings and Law

The first Christians' claims concerning the resurrection of Jesus and their distinctive manner of life in associations (ἐκκλησίαι) analogous to but separate from recognized forms of association in the empire and in Judaism ensured that Jesus' followers would continue to experience some of the same tensions vis-a-vis Roman and Jewish legal systems.

The conviction that a man executed as a ληστής (Mark 15:27) should not only "rise from dead" but be exalted to a share in God's power and be designated as "Lord" (κύριος) and "King" (βασιλεύς; see Rev 17:14) could not but have been perceived by imperial authorities—when the movement broke the surface of obscurity—as inherently subversive of an οἰκουμένη in which only Caesar could legitimately be designated Lord and King. The

¹⁴ J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* 3 Vols (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001).

¹⁵ On the historicity of the trial of Jesus, see P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (Berline: De Gruyter, 1961); E. Bammel, ed., *The Trial of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1970); more recent and less sober, J.D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

same confession that “Jesus is Lord” inevitably brought nascent Christianity into conflict with formative Judaism, whose monotheism was strict. Claiming that Jesus inherited the very name of Israel’s God (κύριος translates *YHWH* in the Greek translation of Torah used by all the New Testament writers) meant, in the eyes of loyal Jews, that they had made “two powers in heaven,” and were, in fact, not Jews at all but polytheists.¹⁶ The fact that the movement won far fewer adherents among Jews than among Gentiles only sharpened the perception that Christianity was not a form of Judaism but a variety of gentile idolatry.

The tension between the Jews who confessed Jesus as Messiah and those who regarded such confession as a form of blasphemy forced a separation from the synagogue sometime between the destruction of the temple (70) and the end of the first century. The Jewish “Benediction against Heretics” (*birkat ha minim*) formalized a rift that had begun decades earlier.¹⁷ A result of Christianity’s clear separation from the synagogue was that it was more clearly exposed as a novel cult with possibly subversive tendencies, no longer to be confused with the ancient *religio licita* of Judaism, whose distinctive customs and independent laws were recognized (as were other ancient national traditions) by the empire and protected them from persecution.¹⁸ A now thoroughly Gentile Christianity could no longer claim or enjoy the privilege of passing as a form of Judaism.

The writings of the New Testament provide glimpses of these tensions in the period of Christianity’s first great expansion across the Mediterranean world, especially in connection with the figure of Paul. Before encountering the risen Jesus and becoming an apostle, Paul (then Saul) was a Pharisee who, by his own admission, “persecuted the church” because of his great zeal for Torah, in all likelihood because of his conviction that a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). The Acts of the Apostles shows Paul, now converted to the messianic movement, seeking to persuade his fellow Jews in the context of Synagogue worship, but, being rebuffed by them, then turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46–47; 18:6; 28:25–28). Acts probably simplifies a genuine

¹⁶ A.F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977).

¹⁷ R. Kimelman, “*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, 3 Volumes. Volume 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman World*, edited E.P. Sanders, A.I. Baumgarten, and A. Mendelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) 226–244.

¹⁸ E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976).

historical process that is suggested also by Paul's letters and the gospels (Rom 1:16; 9:1–11:36; Matt 28:18).¹⁹

For the most part, the harassment of Christians in the first generations came from the side of Jews rather than Gentiles (see Acts 4:1–22; 5:17–40; 6:12–8:1; 9:1–2; 13:50; 21:27–31; 1 Thess 2:14–16; 2 Cor 11:23–29; Gal 6:11–12). The Acts of the Apostles does suggest the vulnerability of a cult movement within the empire, when it narrates how Paul was imprisoned by the magistrate of the Roman colony of Philippi on the charge of subversion: “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that as Romans it is not lawful for us to adopt or observe” (Acts 16:20–21). Nevertheless, Acts shows Paul using his citizenship in the city of Rome—a possible though unusual claim for a provincial Jew of the first century²⁰—to avoid local Jewish opposition and local Roman magistrates likely to be swayed by Jewish pressure; he appeals to Caesar, confident that the system of Roman law will protect him (Acts 25:11). Acts shows that it does: he arrives safely in Rome, and under house-arrest, continues his ministry unimpeded (Acts 28:16, 30–31).

The relatively positive experience of the imperial order had by many early Christians—not all, for the Book of Revelation shows intense hostility to the “whore of Babylon” that sits on the seven hills and enslaves humans (Rev 17:1–18)—is indicated by the stunningly optimistic appreciation for imperial governance expressed by Paul's letter to the Roman church (Rom 13:1–7) and Peter's first letter, addressed to Christians scattered throughout the imperial provinces of Pontus, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia (1 Pet 2:13–17). These passages see the imperial authority as benign, punishing the wicked and rewarding the virtuous, even serving as ministers of God. Such human authority, declares Paul, is from God, is indeed instituted by God (Rom 13:1–2). These pronouncements would have a long after-life in imperial and medieval Christianity as support for both royal and ecclesiastical rule.²¹ It is noteworthy as well that Paul exhorts Christians in Ephesus to pray “for everyone, for kings and all who are in high places” (1 Tim 2:1), adopting the strategy of diaspora Jews, who also offered such prayer for rulers (Philo, *Legation to Gaius* 157, 317; *Against Flaccus* 49), thus neatly avoiding the (for them, idolatrous) recognition of

¹⁹ A.F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Said the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²⁰ A.N. Sherwin-White, 144–185.

²¹ See E. Käsemann, “Principles of the Interpretation of Romans 13,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969) 196–216.

the emperor as κύριος (“Lord”) while simultaneously extending good will to the government itself.

Persecution from the side of Roman rule was at first local and sporadic. Nero blamed Christians for the fire in Rome and may have executed Peter and Paul, but this was an isolated incident (Suetonius, *Life of Nero* VI, 16, 2). A letter from the Governor of Bythnia, Pliny the Younger, to the Emperor Trajan (ca. 112) suggests that Christians were in danger if they persisted in their “stubborn superstition,” but were not treated as criminals simply for being Christian (*Letter X*, 96). From the middle of the second century to the time of Constantine, however, the profession of Christianity became more dangerous, and persecution more direct and general, reaching a climax in the great persecution of Diocletian (303), which continued until Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313).

The greater intensity of persecution was due to the greater exposure of Christians caused by their greater Gentile membership and decisive split from Judaism, the historical eclipse of Jewish power signaled by Rome’s crushing defeat of their final rebellion (135), and by the impressive Christian growth in numbers, not only among society’s marginal but increasingly among the powerful. In this light, Constantine’s conversion (of himself and the empire) to Christianity was as much a matter of shrewd politics as religious conviction.²²

Christian Engagement with Jewish Law

In Christianity’s early years, the nature of the movement, its social location, and its preoccupation with working out its distinct identity, made contacts with Roman law few and largely accidental (as in Paul’s trial; see Acts 25:1–12; Phil 1:12; 2 Tim 4:16). Roman law as such played no important or positive role in shaping Christian ethos. The exact opposite is the case with Jewish law, and for the same reasons. When Christians in the first century used the term *nomos* or *lex*, they would almost invariably be speaking of Jewish law, for it was in the immediate context of Judaism that Christians had to work out their identity, and Judaism was all about law.

Coming to grips with the law was both necessary and difficult. The first believers in Jesus, we remember, were Jews. For them, the term *Torah*, usually translated into Greek as *nomos*, meant far more than the command-

²² J. Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

ments; it included teaching, prophecy, wisdom, the stories of the Israelite people, its heroes and villains, its triumphs and failures. Law in this sense formed the symbolic world within which Jews lived and by which they perceived the world. This *Torah*, moreover, was widely thought by Jews to be inspired by God, and to be authoritative for Jewish life in every word, syllable, and letter. Unlike the laws of the Greeks and Romans that owed their existence to mere human wisdom, *Torah* revealed God's own mind concerning how the world should run.²³

In order to speak of Jesus as Messiah at all, therefore, believers had to engage *Torah*, simply because the very term "Christ" (Χριστός) or "Anointed One" meant nothing in Greco-Roman culture outside the symbolic world of *Torah*. The difficulty of engaging *Torah* is that Jesus was not the sort of Messiah that other Jewish readers of these texts would recognize. Indeed, as I have stated earlier, a strict reading of Deuteronomy 21:23, "Cursed be everyone who hangs upon a tree" could be, and apparently was, used as a text disproving messianic claims made for Jesus.

The impetus for Christian engagement with Jewish law, then, is the need to resolve the cognitive dissonance created by two opposing convictions: on one side, *Torah* reveals God's will and declares a crucified messiah to be cursed by God; on the other side, the conviction that the crucified Jesus has been raised as Lord and is the source of God's Holy Spirit. We see the struggle most vividly displayed in the letters of Paul, for he represents in himself and in extreme form, both sides of the dissonance: he was a Pharisee totally dedicated to the law who persecuted Christians as blasphemers, and he directly experienced the power of the resurrected Christ: "Have I not seen the Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1).

Paul's conviction that the good news extended to all humans led him to convert Gentiles. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul defended their freedom from the observance of Jewish law against those who, like the earlier Paul, insisted that righteousness could be adequately measured only by *Torah*, and that Gentile believers should be circumcised and observe the law. He argued that instead of trying to fit Jesus into the frame of *Torah*, Jesus must be taken as the starting point for a complete rereading of *Torah*. It is Paul's impassioned insistence that in Christ there is a "new creation" (2 Cor, Gal), and the basis for a "new humanity" (Rom 5, Col 3) based in the experience of the risen Jesus as "life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45) and "Lord" (1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11), with the consequence that

²³ See J.L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

“the letter kills but the spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6), that began an enduring bias, which found particular expression in the 16th century reformer Martin Luther, against the adequacy of any law to express the authentic Christian reality (see, for example, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*).

Paul was not alone in struggling to find a way to affirm both the heritage of Jewish law, thought to be God’s word, and the new experience of God in Jesus. Other New Testament writers, above all the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, also engaged the symbolic world of *Torah*, and from their joint efforts emerged the first and most significant resolution of the tension between faith and law. Insofar as *Torah* was considered as narrative, wisdom, or prophecy, it was universally affirmed as the necessary background for understanding the identity of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and God’s Son. But the ancient texts are background: they point to and find their fulfillment in the story of Jesus. As Paul stated succinctly, “Christ is the goal (τέλος) of the law” (Rom 10:4). Thus, the New Testament compositions are studded with texts from *Torah* that show Jesus to be the goal of the story, the embodiment of wisdom, and the fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew’s Gospel, in particular, is fond of showing how events in Jesus’ ministry “fulfilled the saying of the prophets” (e.g. Matt 1:23; 2:17).

In contrast, the normative character of law in the proper sense—God’s commandments to the people—required delicate negotiation. The most broadly accepted position among the New Testament writings is that the ritual commandments that made Jews a distinctive people (Sabbath, purity, circumcision, diet, worship) were no longer binding, but that the moral commandments (as in the Ten Commandments) retained their force. Among the moral commands, furthermore, the law of love of neighbor stated in Lev 19:18 becomes the most widely pervasive summation of the Jewish law’s intent. In the Gospels, Jesus responds to the Jewish legal experts by identifying the love of God and the love of neighbor as the commandments on which all others depend (Mark 12:29–31; Matt 22:37–39; Luke 10:25–27).

In the letters of Paul and James, Leviticus 19:18 is singled out as the law binding on Christians (James 2:7–13; Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14). The commandment of love of neighbor finds specific expression in the example of Jesus’ self-giving service to others. Paul speaks of living by “the mind of Christ,” (1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5) and even of “fulfilling the law of Christ” or, perhaps better, “the law that is Christ” (νόμος Χριστοῦ). How is this done? Paul says it is by “bearing one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2). For many Christians, “the law of love” is the perfect expression of Christian ethics and the ground

for any notion of Christian law.²⁴ The ritual commandments of *Torah*, in turn, found continuing significance only through their ability to prefigure Christian mysteries (of Christ's life, of the sacraments), the meaning of which were unlocked by the employment of allegorical interpretation.²⁵

Steps Toward Christian Law

The commandment to love the neighbor as the self, however powerful an expression of the τέλος of the Holy Spirit's activity among believers, was too broad to provide practical guidance for many of the issues faced by the earliest Christians, even when it was given specific content by the example of Jesus—an example everywhere implicit in the New Testament's letters and explicit in the gospel narratives. It was inevitable that other resources for community guidance and governance should be sought, and it is in these first attempts to secure specific principles and rules for conduct within the assembly (ἐκκλησία) that we find the first intimations of Christian law.

The occasional, sporadic, and non-systematic character of these efforts should be noted. They arose spontaneously, either through the need to address a practical problem or as the application of the memory of Jesus to their common life, and in no sense represent a legal system in the proper sense. These first steps were all addressed, moreover, to the internal life of the community. Christians were not in a position to legislate for the larger world, and, still mostly unknown to Roman authorities, would not experience their *ad hoc* arrangements as constituting a challenge the legal systems that ran the οἰκουμένη.

Perhaps the earliest expression of norms directly linked to the eschatological convictions of the first Christians (that with the resurrection of Jesus they were living in the “end-times”) are statements—designated “statements of holy law”—that promise divine retribution for certain acts. Examples are found in 1 Cor 3:17, “If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person,” and 1 Cor 14:38, “Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized.” Such statements could well have been stated

²⁴ E.g. B. Haring, *The Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity* 3 Volumes, translated by E.G. Kaiser (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1961–1966).

²⁵ See J. Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, translated by W. Hibberd (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960).

by those regarded as prophets within the community who “spoke in the name of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:1–33), but are also found placed in the mouth of the human Jesus: “Those who are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).²⁶

Some authoritative statements of Jesus are found in Paul’s letters as well as in the Gospels. Thus, Paul declares that “the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor 9:14) and says “the laborer deserves to be paid” (1 Tim 5:17), statements that are supported by the saying of Jesus in Luke 10:7, “the laborer deserves to be paid.” Similarly, in his discussion of marriage and virginity, Paul refers to a “command of the Lord” in support of the prohibition of divorce (1 Cor 7:10). The gospels, in turn, show Jesus expressing that precise prohibition during his ministry. In the earliest gospel, Jesus’ declaration occurs in a debate with the Pharisees (Mark 10:2–11). They cite the legal precedent provided by Deuteronomy 24:1–4, in which Moses allows divorce. Jesus responds by quoting another part of *Torah*, the account of creation in Genesis, pronouncing the “way it was in the beginning” when “the two become one flesh” as normative rather than the decree of Moses, attributed to “your hardness of heart.” The passage concludes with a statement that in form resembles a legal *sententia*: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11). Although placed in the context of a Jewish dispute over *halakah*, Jesus’ statement actually reflects Greco-Roman rather than Jewish practice, since either party can initiate the divorce.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ statement is removed from the context of a controversy story and stands with a number of other *sententiae*: “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.” The command is absolute, and as in Mark, appears to allow for the possibility of mutual divorce. The Gospel of Matthew has two versions of Jesus’ statement concerning divorce. The first occurs in the Sermon on the Mount as one of the antithetical statements by which Matthew shows Jesus to be revealing a “righteousness beyond that of Scribes and Pharisees”

²⁶ E. Käsemann, “Sentences of Holy Law,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969) 66–81.

(Matt 5:20): “It was also said, ‘whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the grounds of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Notable here is the thoroughly Jewish character of the statement, with its explicit rebuttal of the law in Deuteronomy 24:1–4, and its assumption that divorce is initiated only by males. The exceptive clause, “except for unchastity (*porneia*)” although open to a variety of interpretations, represents a legal amendment of the absolute prohibition found in Paul, Mark, and Luke.

The same features are present in Matthew’s second version of Jesus’ statement, found in his redaction of the Mark’s account of a controversy with Pharisees (Matt 19:3–9). This account concludes, however, with a startling declaration by Jesus concerning the superiority of being a “eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” to the condition of being married (Matt 19:10–12). Jesus’ absolute prohibition of divorce was clearly taken with utter seriousness by early Christians, so seriously that they were required to interpret it in ways that fit their less than ideal circumstances. Such is the start of legal/halachic thinking within the messianic community, with Jesus’ teachings as the precedents to be construed. Through the centuries, Christians continued to parse Jesus’ statements concerning adultery and lust, murder and anger, non-retribution, the taking of oaths (Matt 5–7), the sharing of possessions, the demands of discipleship (Luke 12–14), mutual correction and excommunication (Matt 18), not simply because Jesus said them, but because they addressed essential elements of their life within the community. Other statements of Jesus within the Gospels, such as the *logion* concerning taxes, “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Mark 12:13–17), took on additional significance—and extended application—when Christians began to engage the imperial order more directly and eventually were required to run a Christian empire.²⁷

Still other statements of Jesus were made to support political agendas that would certainly have surprised and puzzled him. Such is the case with the use of “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I shall build my church” (Matt 16:18–19) to support papal authority over a world-wide church,²⁸ and the employment of Jesus’ cryptic comment at the last supper in response

²⁷ R.J. Cassidy, *Christians and Roman Rule in the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 2001).

²⁸ J.E. Bigane, *Faith, Christ, or Peter: Matthew 16:18 in Sixteenth Century Roman Catholic Exegesis* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981).

to his disciples' statement, "Lord, look, there are two swords here," namely, "It is enough" (Luke 22:38), as support for the political arrangements between the medieval church and state.²⁹ These developments, however, belong to a time considerably later than the period that is the concern of the present essay.

In addition to the eschatological "sentences of Holy Law" and the sayings of Jesus, Paul's letters reveal other small steps in the direction of a distinctively Christian law. I have noted already how Paul draws from Greco-Roman and Jewish precedents to state an attitude toward the empire and its rulers. We find in his letters other elements drawn from moral philosophers (both Gentile and Jewish) that provide guidance to early Christian communities, such as lists of vices and virtues, the use of language associated with moral discernment (*φρόνησις*), and tables of household ethics that address appropriate domestic arrangements and attitudes. A fascinating display of such elements as well as prescriptions concerning behavior at public worship, the moral qualifications of leaders, the settling of disputes concerning leaders, and the administration of the community support of widows is found in two of Paul's letters to his delegates (First Timothy and Titus). They take the literary form of letters that had been written by kings and governors to their delegates since the start of the Hellenistic period (called *mandata principis* letters), combining elements of personal advice to the delegate with specific prescriptions for the community the delegate is sent to administer.³⁰

At the beginning of the second century, such elements continue to be deployed through letters written by leaders to communities—1 *Clement* (ca. 95) and *Letter of Polycarp* (ca. 130)—but increasingly as well in compositions that come to be called "Church Orders," the earliest of which, the *Didache* (the *Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles*) comes from Syria (ca. 90). Other examples include the *Apostolic Church Order* (Egypt, ca. 300), the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (3rd century Syria), and *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (3rd century Rome). The fullest version is the 4th century compilation of ecclesiastical law from Syria called the *Apostolic Constitutions*, whose eight books build on and expands earlier

²⁹ L.L. Field, *Liberty, Dominion, and the Two Swords: On the Origins of Western Political Theology (180–398)* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

³⁰ L.T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Anchor Bible 35 A; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

collections. By this point, it is possible to speak of a genuine “Christian Law,” the precedent for medieval canon law.

Distinctive Legal Contributions of Christianity

The most important contributions of early Christianity to later law—both religious and secular—did not derive from its own struggles to establish procedure within the community or to find a place within the context of Jewish and Greco-Roman societies. They come rather from certain basic elements of the early Christian experience that, given expression by the New Testament, continued to exercise influence wherever and whenever the New Testament was taken seriously as a norm for Christian life.

Perhaps the most powerful was the simple notion of “the church” as a society that was defined by religious choice, rather than by kinship or national identity. Not only did Christianity draw its adherents from Jew and Gentile and Scythian and Barbarian, it made those former allegiances less important than the commitment to a “commonwealth in heaven” (Phil 3:20), a *πολίτευμα* defined not in terms of worldly standards but by the paradoxical experience of a crucified and raised Messiah whose Holy Spirit was considered to be the life-force by which the community lived. The eschatological character of Christianity—its insistence on obedience to God rather than to any human institution—has never completely been lost, even when the church itself seemed most compromised by worldly standards, and this religious tradition has shown itself repeatedly capable of astonishing internal renewal. Such movements of renewal within Christianity have usually led to a less comfortable relationship for Christians within the larger society. At its best, Christianity has offered an alternative to totalitarian systems that demand complete allegiance to human rule, since Christians could claim to belong to a “City of God” that was incommensurate with any human politics.

The Pauline image of the church as “the Body of Christ” has also offered a vision of a society whose members are mutually bound together through reciprocity of gifts and whose joint care is for the health of the body as a whole rather than the success or power of individuals, whose obedience is owed to the Head who is the risen Christ, rather than to secular or ecclesiastical leaders, and within which the forms of status that in every secular society are used to separate humans through degrees of status (race, gender, social position, wealth) are relativized, serving now as opportunities to gift others rather than to establish precedence over them.

A further contribution of Christianity to future systems of Law again comes from Paul, who insisted on the integrity of the individual conscience as the ultimate determinant of moral action, to the point that even doing the “right thing” against one’s inner sense of right and wrong in equivalent to doing “the wrong thing.” This insistence on the primacy of the individual human conscience had a significant impact on the development of later legal systems, and formed the basis for the development of the notion of religious liberty as a fundamental human right.³¹

Christianity did not begin as a system of law but as a set of experiences and convictions centered in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each of these aspects of Jesus presented challenges to the dominant systems of Roman and Jewish law. In seeking to define its distinctive new identity, Christians were necessarily engaged with various aspects of Roman and (especially) Jewish law, but in its development of its own law, it depended less on precedents provided by those systems than on the experiences and convictions associated with Jesus. At the core of this religion, and its most fundamental contribution to later law, is a vision of humanity that values the conscience of each individual yet uses human diversity to build a body of Christ that is organically interconnected and whose every activity responds to an authority that is divine rather than human.

³¹ L.T. Johnson, “Religious Rights and Christian Texts,” in *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective*, Two Volumes, edited by J. Witte, Jr., and J.D. van der Vyver (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996) 65–96.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE COMPLEX WITNESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CONCERNING MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND SEXUALITY

When Christians turn to their Scripture for clear guidance or consistent teaching on sex, marriage, and the family—and if they read carefully across the entire canon—they will discover neither clarity nor consistency. Just the opposite: the writings of the New Testament present distinct and often enough conflicting views on each subject. In this essay I indicate some of this diversity, and briefly suggest some of its causes as well as its effects.

I begin with three framing comments. First, my focus is on the canonical texts of the New Testament. These are the texts accepted by all Christians as normative since the late second century.¹ I do so because of their normative status, not because they have necessarily been most influential in shaping actual Christian attitude or practice. It can be argued, indeed, that some apocryphal writings (such as the *Infancy Gospel of James*),² or even some writings repudiated by orthodox Christians (such as some of the compositions associated with Gnosticism) had as much importance in forming popular Christian perceptions as did the canonical compositions.³ Nevertheless, the writings of the New Testament are the ones Christian writers appeal to when they seek to establish their positions on these as on other matters critical to their identity.⁴

Second, The New Testament is notoriously complex. Written in the first decades of the Christian movement under conditions of stress and in response to the crises of nascent communities, these compositions reflect

¹ For the development of the Christian canon and discussion of the terms *canonical* and *apocryphal*, see L.M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, revised edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

² The distinctive flavor of the apocryphal and the canonical approaches to the topic of virginity is wonderfully conveyed by M.F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), especially pages 113–164.

³ A sense of the diversity of sexual views in the first six hundred years of the Christian tradition is given by P.R. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Reunition in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

⁴ For the place of the canonical texts in the Church's process of discernment, see L.T. Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision-Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

the diversity of setting and experience out of which they were written, and in turn are distinctive in literary form, thematic emphasis, and perspective.⁵ The process of canonization, which served as an instrument of unification against deviant tendencies in the second century,⁶ paradoxically gave institutional permanence to this primordial diversity of voices within earliest Christianity. Whereas the New Testament reliably authors a certain kind of identity, therefore, it fails to provide a simple or consistent teaching on any number of important issues.⁷

Third, Christians who read the New Testament as Scripture read it together with the Old Testament, which by no means has precisely the same views on marriage, sex, and family. Christians who read Scripture as normative have, in turn, diversely negotiated the continuities and discontinuities between the two anthologies that together make up the Christian Bible.⁸

A way into the distinctiveness and complexity of Christian teaching is through contrast to the other great monotheistic traditions. Judaism and Islam are, as religious systems, simpler and more perspicuous than Christianity. God creates, reveals his will through law, and rewards or punishes. Humans are free to either obey or disobey God's commands.⁹ Equally simple and straightforward are these traditions' views of sexuality. Both Moses and Muhammad marry, have children, live to an old age, and die naturally.¹⁰ Both Torah and Qur'an (Talmud and Shariah)

⁵ Consideration of these factors affecting the composition of the New Testament is found in L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*. Second revised edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

⁶ See R.M. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism: The Search for Authenticity in Early Christian Literature* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), and H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) 103–268.

⁷ Distinct approaches to normative discourse based on a clear recognition of the diversity of voices in the New Testament are found in Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, and R.B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: An Introduction to Contemporary New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

⁸ See J.T. Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible*, translated W.G.E. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); for a sketch of the history of interpretation, see R.M. Grant and D. Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, Second edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁹ I am obviously painting with a very crude brush for the sake of contrast. For introductory sketches of these two traditions in general, see J. Neusner, *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism*, Fourth Edition (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 1988), and K. Cragg and R.M. Speight, *The House of Islam*, Third Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988).

¹⁰ For Moses, see Exodus 2:16–22; 18:1–9; Deut 34:1–12; for Muhammad, see *Surah xxxiii.50*; W.M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) 1–13; 229–236; F. Rahman, *Islam* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1966) 1–24.

are unequivocally in favor of marriage¹¹ (while recognizing the reality of divorce),¹² view family as an unambiguous blessing from God,¹³ and approve of heterosexual activity within the bounds of marriage, while rejecting any form of sexual activity outside marriage (whether monogamous or polygamous).¹⁴ Sexual love can be celebrated within the sacred text,¹⁵ and the marriage bond between man and woman can powerfully symbolize the covenant between God and humans.¹⁶ There are, to be sure, elements of dissonance within these traditions in matters pertaining to sexuality—on this subject, how could there not be?—and there are also darker aspects of the absolute linkage between sex, marriage, and family.¹⁷ But even when these are taken into account, both Judaism and Islam appear uncomplicatedly committed to the goodness of sex, marriage, and family.

The earliest Christians were earnest readers of the Jewish Scripture in the form of the Greek translation called the Septuagint.¹⁸ It was this version of Scripture—rather than the Hebrew text read by other Jews—that formed the basis for their interpretation of Jesus as the fulfillment of

¹¹ See, e.g. Ex 22:16; Deut 21:15–17; 22:23–30; 24:5; 25:5–10; Lev 21:7, 13; Num 25:6–15, 15–18; Deut 7:3; *Surah* ii.221; ii. 235; iv.3–6; iv.22–25; v.5; xxiv. 32–33.

¹² See Deut 24:1–4; *Surah* ii. 226–232.

¹³ See Deut 7:12–16; 8:1; 11:20–25; 28:4; 30:5; Proverbs 17:6; *Surah* ii.233; iv. 11; iv.22; vi.152; xvii.31.

¹⁴ See Ex 20:17; Lev 18:6–23; Deut 6:20; 22:23–30; 27:21–23.

¹⁵ The obvious example is *The Song of Solomon*, but see also Gen 18:12; 24:67; 26:8; 29:20, 30. For the use of erotic symbolism in Jewish mysticism, see *Zohar, The Book of Splendor: Basic Readings from the Kabbalah*, edited by G.G. Scholem (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), and in Islamic mysticism, see R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1914) 101–114.

¹⁶ The connection between fidelity to covenant and marrying within the people is found in Deut 23:17–18, and is reinforced by the ideology of Proverbs and Sirach (see e.g. Prov 1:20; 2:16–19; 23:27–28; Sir 1:9, 16–20), but the symbolism of covenant as marriage/infidelity as adultery becomes standard in the prophetic literature (see e.g. Hos 1:2–3; 5; 4:10–15; Mic 1:7; Zeph 3:1–7; Mal 2:11–16; Ezek 16:1–63; 23:1–49; Isa 1:21; 50:1–2; 54:5–8; 57:2–10; 61:10–62:5; Jer 2:23–25; 3:1–23; 22:20–23).

¹⁷ If children are the sign of blessing (Gen 12:2–3; 13:15–16; 15:5; 17:2–8), then barrenness is taken to be a sign of misfortune and even punishment (Gen 15:2; 16:2; 25:21; 29:31; 30:2). If descent is traced through the male seed, then domination by males is taken for granted (see e.g. Ex 21:1–11; 22:16; Lev 19:20–21; 19:29; Num 5:11–31; 30:1–16; 36:5–9; Deut 21:11–14; 22:13–21). If Israel as unfaithful wife is to be punished by God, then the symbolism of divine wrath can legitimately be portrayed as abuse and violence toward women (see especially Ezek 16 and 23).

¹⁸ The term Septuagint actually covers a complex set of critical questions concerning the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture; see M.K.H. Peters, “Septuagint,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 5:1093–1104.

prophecy.¹⁹ The Old Testament in this Greek version was read as God-inspired and normative by the writers of the New Testament.²⁰ The teachings of the Old Testament on sex, marriage, and the family, therefore, were part of the generative matrix out of which the distinctive Christian traditions on these subjects were shaped.

But the principles that guided the selection and reshaping of the biblical teachings were quite different than those guiding the rabbinic teachers who developed the mishnaic and talmudic traditions,²¹ and arose out of the peculiar experiences and circumstances of the first Christians. Before turning to some of those factors, however, it is important to remember that Christianity did not even engage the Septuagint translation of Scripture directly, but rather engaged it from within and through the complex cultural matrix of Greco-Roman culture and Hellenistic Judaism.²²

Factors Affecting Christian Teaching and Practice

Among the popular Greco-Roman moralists, attitudes toward sex and marriage during the early empire were considerably less relaxed than they had been earlier, at least among those who took up such topics philosophically.²³ Whereas philosophers of an earlier era had thought of

¹⁹ The differences in text and in perspective are shown vividly by Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (2nd century).

²⁰ Some Jewish authors already considered the Greek translation carried out by "the Seventy" to be inspired (see Philo Judaeus, *Life of Moses* 2.37 and Aristobolus, *Fragment* 2), and this view was shared by Paul (2 Tim 3:16), Justin (*To the Greeks* 13), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* III, 21, 2), and Augustine (*Epistles* 28 and 71, *City of God* XVIII, 43).

²¹ Two differences are immediately evident in discussions of marriage: first, Christian writers tend to focus on narratives, especially those of the beginning (Genesis), whereas Jewish commentators focus almost exclusively on legal material (*halakah*); second, Christian writers tend to start from the ideal proposed by Jesus, whereas Jewish authors tend to start from real-life situations like divorce; see the entire division *Nashim* ("Women") in the *Mishnah*.

²² A solid introductory survey of this context can be found in E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). On the Greco-Roman side, still valuable is the classic work by S. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (New York: World Publishing, 1956), and on Hellenistic Judaism, see V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, translated S. Appelbaum (New York: Athenaemum, 1970) and J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

²³ Ancient novels and satires provide a corrective to the stern outlook of the Greco-Roman moralists. If Greek romances like *Chaereas and Callirhoe* provide stunning evidence for the value attached to virginity, Roman novels like Petronius's *Satyricon* and Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* are startlingly naturalistic in their approach to sex. For an appreciation of the complexity in the context of the early empire, see E. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the*

sex primarily in terms of the “care of the self” rather than in specifically moral terms,²⁴ the moral philosophers of the early empire, not unlike the emperor Augustus himself,²⁵ revealed greater anxiety concerning sexual behavior, in a broad reaction to perceived Epicurean values.²⁶ Cicero considered pleasure and vice as virtually synonymous.²⁷ Epictetus thought marriage and children a distraction for those called to be Cynics.²⁸ Musonius Rufus declared that even within marriage, sexual intercourse was excusable only for procreative purposes.²⁹

Hellenistic Jews, like the first Christians, were interpreters of the Septuagint.³⁰ They likewise had stringent views on sexuality that did not entirely accord with the main lines of teaching on sexuality in the Hebrew

Ancient World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), and C.A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁴ See M. Foucault, *The History Of Sexuality*, 3 volumes, translated by R. Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), especially volumes 2 and 3.

²⁵ For Augustus' marriage legislation, see N. Lewis and M. Reinhold (eds), *Roman Civilization: Selected Readings*, Third edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Volume One: *The Republic and the Augustan Age*, 602–607.

²⁶ The Epicurean devotion to pleasure was regularly, if unfairly, characterized in terms of vice; see e.g. Epictetus, *Discourses* I, 23, 149–151; III, 7, 19–28; Plutarch, *A Pleasant Life Impossible* 2 (*Mor.* 1086C–1087C); *Reply to Colotes* 30 (*Mor.* 1125 B–C); Cicero, *The Laws* I, xiii, 38–39.

²⁷ “It is precisely in scorning and repudiating pleasure (*voluptatem*) that virtue is most clearly discerned,” Cicero, *The Laws* I, xix, 52.

²⁸ Epictetus, *Discourse* III, 22, 62–85: “In such an order of things as in the present, which is like that of a battle field, it is a question perhaps, if the Cynic ought not to be free from distraction, wholly devoted to the service of God, not tied down by the private duties of men, nor involved in relationships which he cannot violate and still maintain his role as a good and excellent man, whereas, on the other hand, if he observes them, he will destroy the messenger, the scout, the herald of the gods that he is . . . from this point of view we do not find that marriage, under present conditions, is a matter of prime importance for the Cynic.” [Translation by W.A. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925)]. I quote the passage at length because of its obvious resemblance to Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 7:25–35.

²⁹ Musonius Rufus, *On Sexual Indulgence* (Fragment 12): “Men who are not wantons or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children, since that is lawful, but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure seeking, even in marriage . . . all intercourse with women which is without lawful character is shameful and is practiced from a lack of self-restraint.” (Translation by A.J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Handbook* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986] 153).

³⁰ For the range of Jewish literature composed in Greek and using the Septuagint as its Bible, see N. Walter, “Jewish-Greek Literature of the Greek Period,” and M. Delcor, “The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Hellenistic Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Volume Two: *The Hellenistic Age*, edited by W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 385–408 and 409–503.

Bible. Philo's ideal contemplatives, for example, were celibates.³¹ His is a distinctively Greek ideal of the philosophical life that stands in tension with Torah's perception of virginity as a misfortune or punishment.³² Some of the wisdom literature in Torah internalizes sexual desire,³³ but the connection between a demonic spirit and lust in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* goes much further in the direction of problematizing desire.³⁴ The *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* stand as exemplary of a sexual teaching within Hellenistic Judaism that is both stringent and verges on the obsessive, particularly with regard to homosexuality.³⁵

By no means, then, was there a direct connection between Torah's perspectives on sex, family and marriage and the New Testament's. Because of the influence of Greco-Roman culture and Hellenistic Judaism, the context for addressing these topics in earliest Christianity was already intensely moralistic and fraught. Four additional factors, however, are even more critical in making the New Testament's teaching on sex, marriage and the family extraordinarily complex, if not actually inconsistent.

The first is the ministry and death of Christianity's founding figure. In contrast to Moses and Muhammad, Jesus died young and violently without wife and without children. He is not a model for active sexuality, marriage

³¹ Among the Therapeutae described by Philo in *The Contemplative Life* were those who had left their families (18), while others had dedicated their whole lives to the practice of self-control for the love of wisdom (68); for all members of the community, self-control in all matters was the order of the day (32–34).

³² Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is a celibate life prescribed for the sake of wisdom. The condition of barrenness or virginity is rather a misfortune. In addition to the texts cited in footnote 17, see also Judg 11:24–40.

³³ See e.g. Sirach 9:1–9; 23:16–18; 25:2; 41:20–22: there is nothing worse than “an old fool” who commits adultery (24:2).

³⁴ *The Testament of Judah* is subtitled in Greek, *περι φιλαργυρίας και πορνείας* (“concerning love of money and fornication”). The discourse warns against drunkenness, “for the spirit of promiscuity (*πνεῦμα τῆς πορνείας*) has wine as its servant for the indulgence of the mind” (14:2). [Translation by H.C. Kee in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited J.H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983) 799.

³⁵ See *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* 175–194, especially 190–194: “Do not transgress with unlawful sex the limits set by nature. For even animals are not pleased by intercourse of male with male. And let women not imitate the sexual role of men. Do not surrender wholly to unbridled sensuality toward your wife. For eros is not a god, but a passion destructive of all” [Translation by P.W. van der Horst, *The Old Testament Apocrypha*, edited J.H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983) 58]. The Jewish attitude toward homosexuality is emphatic; see also Philo, *The Contemplative Life* 59–62, but it was shared as well by Musonius Rufus: “But of all sexual relations those involving adultery are the most unlawful, and no more tolerable are those of men with men, because it is a monstrous thing and contrary to nature” (Fragment 12). This view of things is clearly shared by Paul (Romans 1:24–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10).

or family. The short ministry preceding his death, moreover, most resembled that of a Cynic philosopher or Elijah-like prophet in its itinerancy and its demand that disciples follow the same style of life.³⁶ Jesus' teaching, moreover, is presented by the Gospels in the form of short sayings or discourses made up of such sayings.³⁷ Although some of these discourses reveal rudimentary organization according to topic, such arrangement is due to the evangelists rather than Jesus.³⁸ Jesus' teaching appears as both non-systematic and radical.

The second factor is the distinctive character of the Christian founding experience. Unlike Judaism and Islam, which formed societies based on the words and exemplary deeds of a prophet, Christianity took its origin from experiences and conviction connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus. As the event that gave rise to this religion, the resurrection represented discontinuity with the ministry of Jesus as much as continuity. Jesus was not resuscitated in order to continue his mortal life, but rather entered into a share in God's life and power, and through the Holy Spirit had given others a participation in a new creation, an "eternal life."³⁹ The resurrection as source of the divine spirit and power marks something truly different from the this-worldly perceptions of Torah concerning the divine blessing. The New Testament interprets the blessing of Abraham, notice, not in terms of many biological descendants and prosperity on the land, but in terms of "the promise that is the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰ For the

³⁶ The Gospel accounts provide no support for Jesus as a domesticated sage. For the evidence used within a Cynic framework, see J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), and as used within the framework of an Elijah prophet, see J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3 Volumes (New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994, 2001).

³⁷ The classic study of these materials in a comparative context is R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, translated by J. Marsh, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

³⁸ The outstanding example is Matthew, which organizes the sayings of Jesus according to subject: the law (5:17–48), piety (6:1–18), demands of discipleship (10:1–42), parables of the kingdom (13:1–52), relations in the church (18:1–35), polemic against opponents (23:1–39), the end-times (24:4–25:46); See L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 188–190.

³⁹ On this point, see L.T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996) 133–166, and *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1999) 3–22.

⁴⁰ In Torah, God's promise to Abraham is unequivocally in terms of land and descendants (see Gen 12:1–7; 15:5–21; 17:1–8). Yet in Galatians 3:14, Paul simply equates the promise with the Holy Spirit: Christ died a cursed death, "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Likewise Acts portrays Peter exhorting the crowds at Pentecost: "Repent

writings of the New Testament, then, fullness of life cannot come from the natural processes of human bodies but from the paradoxical experience of death and resurrection.⁴¹ At a fundamental level, the resurrection does introduce a fundamental dualism between flesh and spirit. But it is not to be understood as a split between mind and body so much as a gap between natural human capacity and divine gift.⁴²

The third factor is the intense eschatological character of the Christian movement.⁴³ In one way or another, all New Testament writings agree with Paul that, “the frame of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31), whether they think of it in temporal terms as an imminent end of things,⁴⁴ or in existential terms as the initiation of a “new creation.”⁴⁵ For none of them is “this age” a sufficient measure of reality or worth. The death and resurrection of Jesus has introduced a new age, which proleptically participates in “the age to come.”⁴⁶ Jesus is therefore not simply a new Moses, the declarer of a new law. Jesus is “the final Adam,” the “new human”

and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven; *and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord God calls to him*” (emphasis added). This is a dramatic and fundamental recasting of the entire story.

⁴¹ The New Testament associates the expression “life-giving” (ζωοποιούν) exclusively with the power of God, especially to raise from the dead; see John 5:21; Rom 4:17; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 36; Gal 3:21; 1 Pet 3:18). But it is through spirit (πνεῦμα) that God does this, so we also find: “The spirit is the life-giver” (John 6:63); “The letter kills but the spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6), and, of the resurrected Jesus, “The last Adam became life-giving Spirit (πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν)” (1 Cor 15:45).

⁴² See Rom 8:1–17; Gal 4:21–5:26; because popular perceptions of Paul often connect his teaching on sexuality to a hatred of the body (see, e.g. G.B. Shaw, “The Monstrous Imposition Upon Jesus,” in W.A. Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul* (Norton Critical Edition; New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1972) 296–302), it is important to stress that the categories of flesh and spirit in his letters are moral and religious rather than physical or psychological. See R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Translated by K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951–53) 1:232–248, 330–340; J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998) 51–78, 413–441.

⁴³ For a survey of the topic, see B. Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the Word: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992).

⁴⁴ Among the passages, see 1 Thess 4:13–5:3; 2 Thess 2:1–12; Mark 13:1–37; Matt 24:1–51; Luke 17:22–37; 21:25–36; Rev 20:1–22:21.

⁴⁵ See Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:10; Eph 2:10, 15; 4:24.

⁴⁶ The sense of participating in the “age to come” is suggested by the way in which the condition of those within the community of faith is contrasted to “this present (evil) age” (see e.g. Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor 4:4; Gal 1:4; 2 Tim 4:10), and by the frequent stress on the “now” of the Christian experience (see e.g. Rom 3:21, 26; 5:9, 11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 16:26; 2 Cor 6:2).

into whose image his followers are formed.⁴⁷ However “the eschaton” is understood, at the very least it means that the ordinary round of “marrying and giving in marriage” as well as of “buying and selling” is called into question.⁴⁸

The fourth factor is Christianity’s relative lack of sociological and cultural definition in its earliest period. This religion did not grow out of a natural kinship group or nation. Christians formed an intentional community whose boundaries needed constant negotiation over against both Judaism and the dominant Hellenistic culture. The process of Christian self-definition necessarily involved both the appropriation and rejection of elements from each culture.⁴⁹ Christians emphatically rejected Gentile idolatry,⁵⁰ and seemed to scorn Hellenistic philosophy as well,⁵¹ but nevertheless embraced a number of distinctively Greco-Roman moral values.⁵² Similarly, they rejected Jewish circumcision and ritual observance,⁵³ but held firmly to other convictions and practices grounded in the Law and Prophets.⁵⁴ The founding experience of this religion was distinctive,⁵⁵ but

⁴⁷ The Christ-Adam comparison is explicit in Rom 5:12–21 and 1 Cor 15:22–45; for the “new human,” see Eph 2:15; 4:14; Col 3:19.

⁴⁸ See 1 Cor 7:29–31: “I mean brethren, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away”; see the same combination of “marrying and giving in marriage” with “buying and selling, planting and building” in Luke 17:26–30.

⁴⁹ For essays touching on this issue after the time of the New Testament, see *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* Volume One: *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, edited by E.P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

⁵⁰ See Acts 14:8–18; 17:22–31; Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 10:14–22; Gal 4:8–11; 1 Pet 1:17–21.

⁵¹ See Matt 11:25–27; Luke 10:21–22; 1 Cor 1:20–25; Col 2:8–19.

⁵² For the pervasive use of Greco-Roman philosophical traditions in the New Testament, see A.J. Malherbe, “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament,” *ANRW*, edited by W. Haase and H. Temporini, II, 26 (Berlin: deGruyter, 1992) 1:267–333.

⁵³ Here, I anticipate the eventual outcome, anticipated by Paul’s position in Galatians. Until the early second century, to be sure, forms of Jewish Christianity continued in existence; see R.E. Brown, “Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity,” *CBQ* 45 (1983) 74–79.

⁵⁴ In the most simple-minded fashion, the phrase “the law and the prophets” refers always to the authorities within the story of Israel rather than Roman legislators or Pythian Oracles (see Matt 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; Rom 3:21), and “the writing/s” (ἡ γραφή) refers not to Plato or Aristotle, but to the Jewish Scriptures (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 4:21; John 2:22; Acts 1:16; Rom 1:2; 1 Cor 15:3; 1 Tim 5:18; James 2:8; 1 Pet 2:6; 2 Pet 1:20).

⁵⁵ For discussion of the “resurrection experience,” see Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, 95–122; and for a more complex consideration, see L.T. Johnson, *Religious*

as the community invented itself during the time when its first writings were composed, it drew eclectically if purposefully from the older and far more stable traditions that formed its environment.

In sum, given the extraordinary character of the Christian experience and claims, the perilous character of its early existence, the pluralistic character of the world within which it emerged, and the haphazard character of the production of its normative texts, we should not be surprised to find the teaching of the New Testament on each of our topics to be less than consistent. As we consider each topic in turn, we can only be impressed by the deep tensions that careful attention to all the evidence reveals.

Family

Family is of obvious importance in Israel. The children of Abraham are less a nation (ἔθνος) in the political sense than a household (οἶκος), an extended kinship system.⁵⁶ The family was no less significant in Greco-Roman culture. The household (οἶκος) was an essential component in any mapping of the social world.⁵⁷ The New Testament, in turn, contains some positive appreciation of the family.

Two of the Gospels pay positive attention to Jesus' family of origins. In Matthew, Joseph is a heroic protector who preserves the life of the infant messiah.⁵⁸ In Luke's Gospel, Mary exemplifies those who belong to Jesus' true family because they "hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 8:15).⁵⁹

Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), esp. 1–68 and 181–185.

⁵⁶ See the characteristic expressions, "children of Israel" (υἱοὶ Ἰσραηλ, Deut 1:3; 32:44; Ps. 102:7; 148:14; Isa 17:3; 45:26) and "house of Israel" (οἶκος Ἰσραηλ, 2 Sam 1:12; 2:11; Ps 97:3; 113:20; 117:2).

⁵⁷ See, e.g. Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b; Xenophon, *Oikonomikos* VI, 1–10; Plutarch, *On Brotherly Love* 3 (*Mor.* 479 B–D).

⁵⁸ Matt 1:19, 24; 2:13–15, 19–23; for the respective character of the infancy accounts in Matthew and Luke, see R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1979).

⁵⁹ Luke's Gospel comes the closest to providing a biography of Jesus, and one that emphasizes Jesus' roots in the Jewish community and a family context: he has an aunt and uncle (Lk 1:5–25) and a cousin (1:27–80), in addition to his mother Mary (2:7) and his putative father, Joseph (3:23). As a child, he lives with his parents, and even his "coming of age" adolescent experience in the temple (2:41–50) does not sever the bond of loyalty and respect: "he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (2:51). Mary his mother, who "kept all these things in her heart" (2:51), is portrayed in particularly positive terms as an obedient servant of the Lord (1:38) and as an interpreter of God's work

During his ministry, Jesus is shown as sharing the hospitality offered by households, and is even considered by some to be overly fond of the celebrations at household tables; unlike John the Baptist, Jesus does not appear as a man of the wilderness and ascetic.⁶⁰ He does not suggest that God can be found only in the desert. He does not attack the comforts of the home. Jesus is also noteworthy among ancient figures for the attention and welcome he gives to children.⁶¹ Indeed, Jesus makes the manner in which children are welcomed the measure of the reception of the rule of God that he proclaims.⁶²

Households also played an important set of roles in the earliest days of the Christian movement. The Acts of the Apostles shows the gospel being spread through the conversion of entire households.⁶³ The apocryphal Acts show the same pattern of evangelization,⁶⁴ one that appears all the more plausible when viewed sociologically: people tend to convert because of or together with loved ones.⁶⁵ The New Testament epistolary literature assumes the household as the natural location for family as well as a meeting place for the congregation.⁶⁶ Leaders of households are identified as leaders of congregations.⁶⁷ Indeed, parenting skills serve to qualify for leadership in the assembly.⁶⁸ Both Paul and Peter, moreover, make use of the standard moral instructions for members of households that had been developed among Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish

in history (1:47–55). She has “believed in the word spoken to her” (1:45) and is therefore included preeminently among those who “hear the word of God and keep it” (8:15).

⁶⁰ The contrast drawn between the life-style of John and Jesus by the Synoptic Gospels is particularly well developed by H. Boers, *Who Was Jesus?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989) 31–53.

⁶¹ See in particular the striking sequence of passages in Mark 9:14–29, 33–37, 42–48; 10:13–16, 35–45.

⁶² This is developed in L.T. Johnson, “Jesus and the Little Children,” *Priests and People* 17/3 (2003) 102–105.

⁶³ See Acts 10:24–48; 16:14–34.

⁶⁴ *Acts of Peter* 6, 19, and 29; *Acts of Paul* 3: 2, 7, 36; for discussion, see L.T. Johnson, “Proselytism and Witness in Early Christianity,” in *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism*, ed. J. Witte, Jr. and R.C. Martin (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999) 145–1257 and 376–384.

⁶⁵ See R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁶⁶ See Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 1:16; 11:22, 34; 14:35; 16:15, 19; Col 4:15; 1 Tim 5:4; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:19; Tit 1:11; Phm 2:2 John 10.

⁶⁷ See Acts 16:40; Rom 16:3–5; 1 Cor 1:11; 16:15–19; Col 4:15; 2 Tim 4:19; Phm 2; 3 John 1.

⁶⁸ In 1 Timothy, the ability to manage a household and children well stands as a criterion for leadership as a Superintendent (ἐπίσκοπος, 3:5), and Helper (διάκονος, 3:12); compare as well Titus 1:6.

philosophers,⁶⁹ exhortations that fundamentally confirm—with only slight mitigation—the patriarchal structure of the ancient household.⁷⁰

Despite these positive affirmations of family, there is a strong counter-tendency in the New Testament writings that fundamentally challenges the status of family. The first is the depiction of Jesus' ministry and teaching in the Gospels. In Mark and John, Jesus is at odds with his natural family, which does not understand or accept him.⁷¹ Jesus himself is portrayed as deracinated: he has nowhere to lay his head (Matt 8:20; Luke 9:58), but is dependent on the households of others for his rest (Luke 4:38; 5:29; 7:36; 10:38–42; 11:37; 14:1; 19:1–10). In his teaching, moreover, Jesus calls his followers to a radical renunciation of natural family: they are to leave parents, spouses, children, in order to follow him (Luke (9:57–62; 14:25–33; 18:18–30)). Jesus' followers become in effect a fictive kinship group, a new family gathered around the prophet: those who listen to him are his mother and father, sister and brother (Luke 8:15, 19–21; Mark 3:34).⁷²

The challenge to the family posed by Jesus is continued within early Christian communities. The *ἐκκλησία* was not established on the basis of

⁶⁹ Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–6:9; 1 Tim 5:1–6:2; Tit 2:2–10; 1 Peter 2:13–3:7. On the *haustafeln*, see J.E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), and D. Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 26; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

⁷⁰ In Colossians, the phrases, “as is fitting in the Lord” with respect to the submission of wives to husbands, and “for the Lord and not for your master” with respect to the submission of slaves (3:18, 23), and “for you know that you also have a master in heaven” with respect to slave-owners (4:1) can be read as weakening the hierarchical structure of the household, but may also be read as a way of providing mitigation so as to reinforce that structure. In Ephesians, the initial command to “be submissive to each other out of reverence for Christ” is noteworthy, as is the expectation that the husband will love his wife as Christ does the church (5:1; 25); likewise, slaves are to be “slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart” (6:6). But these do not in the least weaken the structure of the household, in which all authority moves downward and all submission moves upward: wives are to be submissive to their husbands in everything, “just as the church is to Christ,” (5:24) and slaves are to obey their masters “as you obey Christ” (6:5). Likewise, in Titus, the submission of wives to husbands has as its motivation, “that the word of God may not be discredited,” (2:5), and the “complete and perfect fidelity” of slaves is “so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior” (2:10).

⁷¹ Mark 3:20–35; 6:1–6; John 7:1–9. For the theme in Mark, see J.D. Crossan, “Mark and the Relatives of Jesus,” *NovT* 15 (1973) 81–113.

⁷² For a development of this theme in Mark within the context of Greco-Roman and Jewish models of family, see now K. Poetker, “*You are my Mother, my Brothers, and my Sisters*”: A Literary-Anthropological Investigation of Family in the Gospel of Mark (Emory University Dissertation, 2001).

kinship or household, but on the basis of faith.⁷³ Members were drawn from natural households to participate in this more public and heterogeneous body.⁷⁴ A distinctive feature of the Christian assembly, furthermore, was its use of fictive kinship language.⁷⁵ The founder of the community could be called its father,⁷⁶ and its members could designate each other as brother and sister.⁷⁷ Such language served to strengthen bonds between members, and to provide the sense of an alternative family to the one coextensive with the household. Since the ideal of the ἐκκλησία was egalitarian rather than hierarchical,⁷⁸ this alternative family also created inevitable tensions with the structures of the natural family, especially when the fictive family of the ἐκκλησία held its meetings in a household run along conventional lines.⁷⁹

⁷³ Thus, the frequent use of “the believers,” or “those who have faith” (οἱ πιστεύοντες) to designate members of the community (see Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14; 18:27; 21:20; Rom 1:16; 3:22; 1 Cor 1:21; Gal 2:7; Eph 1:19; 1 Thess 1:7; 2 Thess 1:10; Tit 3:8; Heb 4:3; 1 Pet 2:7; 1 John 5:13).

⁷⁴ The language of “call” (καλεῖν) that is used so often to express the divine initiative taken to bring people within the community (Rom 8:30; 9:24; 1 Cor 1:9; 7:15; Gal 1:6; 5:13; Eph 4:1; Col 3:15; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:15; 2 Pet 1:3) both echoes the “calling” of Israel (see Isa 48:1; 49:1; 54:6), and emphasizes the intentionality of membership. The heterogeneity of membership is suggested by 1 Cor 1:18–31 and 7:17–24.

⁷⁵ See W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 86–88.

⁷⁶ Paul can speak of himself as the “father” of the churches he founds (1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2:11; Phm 22), and as experiencing “labor pains” with respect to the formation of a church (Gal 4:19), and even “birthing” people through the good news (Phm 10). He can call members of communities “little children” (1 Cor 4:14; 2 Cor 6:13; 12:14; Gal 4:9; 1 Thess 2:11) and refer to his delegates as beloved or genuine “children” (see 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4).

⁷⁷ The term “brothers” (ἀδελφοί) is generally gender inclusive when used for members of the community, as it is frequently (e.g. Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 1:2; Eph 6:23; Phil 1:12; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 3:7; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 4:21; Heb 13:22; James 1:2; 1 Pet 5:12; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 3:17; 3 John 5; Rev 6:11); for “sister” (ἀδελφή), see Rom 16:1, 15; 1 Cor 7:15; 9:5; 1 Tim 5:2; Phm 2; James 2:15; 2 John 13.

⁷⁸ The most formal declaration occurs in Galatians 3:27–28, where the issue is precisely whether further initiation (circumcision) will advance some in the church (specifically males) over others: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Compare Rom 3:21–26; Gal 6:15; 1 Cor 7:19; 12:13; Eph 2:11–22; Col 3:10–11. For the context and shape of the dispute in Paul’s letters to Galatia and Colossae, see L.T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity*, 69–103.

⁷⁹ The tensions are most obvious concerning gender roles—although Paul is comfortable having female fellow-workers in the field (see Rom 16), when it comes to activities in worship that are customarily performed by males, above all teaching, he restricts the role of women (see 1 Cor 11:3–16; 14:34–36; 1 Tim 2:11–15; 5:3–16)—but occur with reference to slavery as well (see especially 1 Tim 6:1–2); for comment, see L.T. Johnson, *The First and*

Marriage

The New Testament contains the same sort of tensions with respect to marriage. Jesus appears to approve marriage (or at least weddings) by his performance of a miracle while attending a wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1–12). And he uses the traditional prophetic imagery for covenant when he speaks of himself as “the bridegroom” (νυμφίος; Mk 9:15). Jesus is, moreover, far more demanding on the matter of divorce than any Jewish or Greco-Roman teacher. In the earliest form of his saying on divorce, Jesus forbids the practice absolutely (Mk 10:2–12; Lk 16:18), and this prohibition is known, reported, and approved by Paul (1 Cor 7:10). In Matthew 5:31 and 19:3–9, we find a partially modified form of the prohibition. Divorce is allowed only on the grounds of the partner’s *πορνεία* (sexual immorality).

In the more radical form of the prohibition, Jesus identifies the Mosaic allowance of divorce (see Deut 24:1–4) as a concession to human hardness of heart. He bases his ideal (and demand) of absolute fidelity on the original state of affairs in Eden. Mark has Jesus quote the first creation account in Genesis, where God “made them male and female,” (Gen 1:27; Mk 10:6) in immediate connection with the second, “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24; Mk 10:7). Since they are one flesh, God has joined them and humans should not separate them (Mk 10:8–9). If either husband or wife divorce and marry again, they commit adultery (Mk 10:11–12); and if anyone marries a divorced person, he or she commits adultery (Lk 16:18).⁸⁰

In addition to the sayings of Jesus, the New Testament contains a not insignificant number of other statements that support marriage. The Letter to the Hebrews declares, “Let the marriage bed be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers” (Heb 13:4). First Peter uses the example of Abraham and Sarah to encourage wives to accept the authority of their husbands so that they might be won over without a word (1 Pet 3:1–2), and urges husbands to “show consideration for your wives in your lives together, paying honor

Second Letters to Timothy (Anchor Bible 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 198–211; 259–276; 288–290.

⁸⁰ For the complexities in the Synoptic texts, see D.R. Catchpole, “The Synoptic Divorce Material as a Traditio-Historical Problem,” *BJRL* 57 (1974–75) 92–127; for substantive discussion, see B. Vawter, “Divorce and the New Testament,” *CBQ* 39 (1977) 528–542.

to the woman as the weaker sex, since they are also heirs of the gracious gift of life" (3:7).

Paul is sometimes thought of as the most insistent voice against marriage in the New Testament, but the majority of the statements within the Pauline corpus are in agreement with Hebrews and First Peter. Paul tells the Thessalonians to "abstain from fornication, that each one of you know how to take a wife in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:4–5).⁸¹ In his letter to his delegate Timothy, Paul approves of community leaders who have been faithful to one wife (1 Tim 3:2, 12) and widows who have been married but to one husband (5:9). In one of the New Testament's most unequivocal statements on the subject, Paul includes marriage with food as among "all the things that God has created as good," and designates those who forbid marriage as "liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim 4:3).⁸² In the same letter, Paul wants younger widows to marry, bear children, and manage their own households" rather than remain single in ambiguous circumstances and deplete the community welfare reserves (5:14).⁸³ In his Letter to Titus, in turn, Paul requests that older women should instruct younger women to love their husbands and children, and be good managers of the household (Tit 2:4).⁸⁴

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul repeats as a commandment of the Lord that those who are married should not divorce (1 Cor 7:10), even

⁸¹ The term translated here as "wife" is *σκέυος*, which literally means "vessel," and the verse is understandably open to considerable discussion; the overall context, however, clearly supports the understanding of the verse in sexual rather than in economic terms; see E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Sacra Pagina 11; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995) 187–209, and for fuller analysis, see O.L. Yarbrough, "Not Like the Gentiles": *Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁸² The tension between the passages concerning marriage in 1 Corinthians and those in Ephesians and the Letters to his delegates is one reason for doubting that Paul himself wrote the latter. It must be said, however, that while the emphasis is certainly different—in 1 Corinthians Paul thinks virginity better in the present circumstances, whereas that option does not appear in these other letters—the principles are not; for discussion of the issue of authenticity, and of this passage, see Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* 55–90 and 238–248.

⁸³ The precise subject of 1 Tim 5:3–16 is disputed. Some regard the passage as suppressing an early form of women's ministry in favor of a patriarchal order; see e.g. J. Bassler, "The Widow's Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Timothy 5:3–16," *JBL* 103 (1984) 23–41. While acknowledging the strength of that position, and while by no means slighting Paul's basic patriarchy in matters domestic, I nevertheless think that the central issue is economic; see Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 259–276.

⁸⁴ For comment on Titus 2:4, see L.T. Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (The New Testament in Context; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996) 229–236.

if one partner does not share the faith of the other (7:12–13). If couples separate they should seek reconciliation (7:11). Marriage is a way through which the partners, and even their children, can be sanctified (7:14). Yet if an unbeliever separate from a believing man or woman, the believer is in that instance free rather than bound (7:15–16). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul's household exhortation is enriched by the special attention he gives to the relationship between husband and wife. Once more, the Genesis account is invoked (Eph 5:31), but now the marriage relationship between man and woman is configured to the relationship between Christ and the Church. Here is an explicit Christological and ecclesiological focusing of the traditional prophetic covenantal language. Just as Christ gave himself for the church, so should the husband love the wife, and as the church obeys Christ, so should the wife be subject to the husband (5:22–20). Marriage now is more than an analogy to covenant. Marriage itself is properly a *μυστήριον* ("mystery") that expresses the covenant: "This is a great mystery. I speak it with regard to Christ and the Church. But you also, each one of you, thus should love his own wife as himself, and the wife should reverence the husband" (Eph 5:32–33).⁸⁵

It would seem that the Ephesian passage represents the culmination of a positive appreciation of marriage within early Christianity. But this intense Christological symbolism for marriage can paradoxically also serve as a solvent with respect to the actual human bond. If Jesus is the bridegroom, and one's relationship with the Lord Jesus renders relative all other relationships (as Paul argues in 1 Cor 6:13–14 and 7:25–40), is not marriage then a sign or symbol that can be transcended? Would not a direct relationship with the bridegroom represent a state better than that mediated by the symbolism of the bodies of man and wife? Similarly, if the argument for marriage, and above all the indissolubility of marriage, is grounded in the *order* of creation, what happens in the order of the new creation initiated by Jesus' resurrection? What measure finally is ultimate, which creation counts the most?

Paul's own struggle on just this point are poignantly revealed in 1 Cor 11:2–16. In his discussion of the practice of women prophesying and praying in the assembly without head-covering, he tries to argue for the subordination of women based on the order of creation in Genesis.⁸⁶ But he

⁸⁵ See J.P. Sampley, *And the Two Shall Become One Flesh": A Study of Tradition in Eph. 5:27–23* (SNTSMS 16; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

⁸⁶ Notice that this is precisely the argument he makes in Rom 1:18–32; see M. Hooker, "Adam in Romans 1," *NTS* 6 (1959–60) 297–306. 1 Cor 11:3–16 is filled with interpretive prob-

is not able to do so consistently because of the new order found “in the Lord” (1 Cor 11:11–12).⁸⁷ And in 1 Corinthians 7, we see Paul finally coming down in favor of celibacy as the preferred way of life in the present circumstances, because it allows a devotion to the Lord without distraction, whereas the married are conflicted by anxiety (1 Cor 7:8, 25–38). Indeed, since the frame of this world is passing away, Paul advises that “even those who have wives be as though they had none” (1 Cor 7:29). Virgins and widows do not need to be attached to a man in order to have worth in the new order initiated by the resurrection. They are under no compulsion to marry (7:25–40).⁸⁸ Eschatology relativizes all human structures; resurrection promises life that humans cannot supply. In a controversy between Jesus and the Sadducees, Jesus declares that, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:24–38).⁸⁹

Over against Jesus’ demand that marriage be forever, the Gospels portray Jesus himself as unfettered by any human spouse; he is, rather, the “bridegroom” of his followers (Matt 9:15; 25:1; Mark 2:19–20; Luke 5:34–35; John 3:29). And when his disciples complain about the difficulty of his teaching concerning the indissolubility of marriage, Jesus holds out (as an implied higher state) the ideal of being a eunuch for the kingdom of

lems; for discussion and bibliography, see R.F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina 7; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) 392–416.

⁸⁷ It is not irrelevant that in 1 Cor 15:45, Paul speaks of the resurrected one as the “last Adam” who has become “life-giving Spirit.” The implication is that with the resurrection, a “new creation” has begun (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Paul sees how this establishes a relationship with the risen Lord that is both spiritual and somatic (see 1 Cor 6:13–15; 12:12–13), but he was not in a position to perceive how this radical change affected or didn’t affect the order of the first creation depicted in Genesis.

⁸⁸ As noted earlier, this advice appears to clash with that given in 1 Tim 5:3–16. Most scholars resolve the conflict by invoking different authors: 1 Corinthians reflects the views of the “authentic” Paul, and 1 Timothy those of an pseudonymous follower writing after Paul’s death; see e.g. R. Scroggs, “Paul and the Eschatological Woman,” *JAAAR* 40 (1972) 283–303. Since I am not convinced by arguments for inauthenticity, I prefer to resolve the conflict in terms of the advice appropriate to the respective rhetorical situations Paul thought he addressed.

⁸⁹ Compare Luke’s statement about the coming of the Son of Man in Luke 17:25–30, as well as 1 Cor 15:35–50 on the discontinuity between “flesh and blood” and the resurrection body. Luke’s next verse continues: “for neither are they still able to the, for they are like angels” (Luke 20:36). The phrase ἰσάγγελος (“equal to angels”) provides a basis for the later characterization of the celibate monastic life in witness to the resurrection as a βίος ἀγγελικός (“angelic life”).

heaven: “Let anyone accept this who can” (Matt 19:10–12).⁹⁰ Nor does Jesus support the institution of marriage when he says of would-be disciples, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). In the same way that the New Testament offers both support for and challenge to the family/household, it also provides substantial support for marriage as the part of the created order, while at the same time challenging it through the order of the new creation begun by the resurrection of Jesus.

Sexuality

The term “sexuality” is of such recent vintage that we would not expect to find what we mean by the concept in the New Testament.⁹¹ But the New Testament is remarkable among religious writings for the almost complete lack of attention to aesthetics, pleasure, or the erotic. There is no Song of Solomon among its writings. Yet, the sexual body is a matter of considerable concern, most notably in Paul’s complex discussion concerning the dangers of πορνεία in 1 Cor 5:1–6:20. In the words of Jesus and in the epistolary literature, desire and lust are regarded negatively as equivalent to actual fornication and adultery.⁹² The sexual drive appears as dangerous and destructive.⁹³ The concept of πορνεία includes a variety of sexual

⁹⁰ For discussion, see Q. Quesnell, “Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven,” *CBQ* 30 (1968) 335–358.

⁹¹ According to the 1989 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume XV, the earliest occurrence of the term in English is by Cowper in 1800, with the sense of being sexual or having sex.

⁹² Most impressive is the saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27–28). See also Paul’s language about “better to marry than burn (with passion)” in 1 Cor 7:9, and the language about ἐπιθυμία (“desire”) in Rom 1:24; 7:7–8; Gal 5:16–25; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:5; Tit 3:3; 1 Pet 1:14; 2:11; 4:2–3; 2 Pet 2:10, 18; Jude 16, 18.

⁹³ In 1 Timothy 5:3–16, the younger widows who have “grown wanton against Christ” seek to marry, and in their wandering from house to house say things they ought not to; Paul says “some have already turned away to follow Satan.” James uses powerful sexual imagery in his depiction of sin: “But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it reaches term, gives birth to death” (James 1:14–15). For a full discussion of the James passage, see L.T. Johnson, *The Letter of James* (Anchor Bible 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995) 191–205.

sins from adultery to homosexuality.⁹⁴ On this whole side of things, the New Testament is emphatically Jewish in its perceptions. Sex is to take place only in marriage, and marriage must be monogamous. Sex is not a matter of health or of recreation. It is rather regarded entirely within the framework of the moral and religious disposition of the person. Sex is serious business.

Sex is serious rather than playful because the sexual body is regarded as powerful, both negatively and positively. Both poles are seen in 1 Corinthians 6:12–7:15. Against those who seem to regard sexual intercourse as a physical act with no real implications or entanglements (“food for the belly, the belly for food,” 1 Cor 6:13), Paul insists that sexual intercourse engages personal and even cosmic powers. Negatively, therefore, sex with a prostitute does damage to the social body of the community (6:15–20). Positively, sexual intercourse between man and wife in marriage can sanctify both the partners and the children (7:14). It should, therefore, be relinquished only by mutual consent and then only for a time, in order to pray (7:3–5).

A fuller consideration of what we mean by sexuality would need to engage the New Testament writings in their own terms, and require a considerable amount of translation. But certain principles with regard to sexual behavior are discernible within these compositions. The first is that the body matters. Sex is not trivial or recreational. The sexual body is a symbol of commitment, and such commitments carry inevitable entailments with them. Human sexuality is located within the context of the resurrection body of Jesus and the “body of Christ” that is the church. Thus, virginity can be a symbol of dedication to the resurrected Lord (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor 7:34; Rev 14:4), and marriage can be a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:32–33).

⁹⁴ The term *πορνεία* is set next to “adultery” in Matt 15:19, and beside idolatry and eating strangled meat in Acts 15:20. In 1 Cor 5:1–2, Paul refers to a member of the community living with his mother as a form of *πορνεία* not named even among Gentiles. He speaks of making the members of Christ’s body the members of the prostitute’s body in 1 Cor 6:15, and opposes it to a holy marriage in 1 Thess 4:3. In Gal 5:19, Eph 5:3 and Col 3:5, *πορνεία* is linked to *ἀκαθαρσία* (“uncleanness”). It goes without saying that *πορνεία* includes homosexual activity (see Rom 1:26–27 (“degrading passions . . . unnatural . . . consumed with passion . . . shameless acts”); 1 Cor 6:9 (“fornicators, idolators, adulterers, effeminate males, those who sleep with men. . . .”); 1 Tim 1:10 (“fornicators, sexual perverts. . .)). My own view on how to think about these texts in the present time is sketched in “Disputed Questions: Debate and Discernment, Scripture and the Spirit,” in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, edited by E.F. Rogers, Jr. (Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 367–372.

Second, sex is inherently personal and relational. It is not a matter of a subject acting on an object, but a matter of the meeting of subjects. Note the importance of mutual consent in matters of sexual congress (1 Cor 7:3–5). It follows that the practice of sexuality is governed by the fundamental principle of love of neighbor (1 Cor 13:1–13), and that the distortions of sexuality are measured by the way they offend against mutuality and sanctity among persons. Third, sexuality stands within God's creative activity and must be ordered to the good of God's creation. Life comes from God alone. Sexual intercourse and childbearing are blessings because they participate in God's creation of life. But God's ability to give life is not restricted to sexual means. Jesus is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), and the Spirit gives life to the dead (Rom 8:9–11). The complexity of discernment concerning sexuality within Christianity has to do above all with the implications of the resurrection of Jesus for all thought and practice concerning the body. Human sexuality is a good but it is not an ultimate good. Like marriage and the family, it can, and sometimes must be transcended for the sake of God's rule. Like marriage and the family, sexuality may be necessary to humans but it is not sufficient for the work God seeks to accomplish.

This essay suggests that the New Testament is not consistent in its views of marriage, sex, and the family. Rather, it contains within its several compositions deep and unresolved tensions. Over the centuries between the New Testament and now, Christians who have looked to their Scripture for its guidance on matters of family, sex, and marriage have seldom if ever taken these tensions fully into account. The tendency rather has been to privilege one emphasis within the texts over another.

In various forms of Gnostic Christianity, family, marriage, and sexuality have been suppressed in favor of a commitment to spirit, to singleness, and to asexuality. It is the new creation, the resurrection life, that rules. In the extreme form, to be Christian at all means to be celibate. Sexual activity is a betrayal of the call.

In a more moderate form, Roman Catholicism arranged the tendencies in a hierarchy. For ordinary Christians, the life of the body was all that could be expected: sexual activity within marriage was legitimate, and having children was a blessing. But the more perfect life was that of virginity.

Finally, Protestant Christianity has tended to privilege the positive view of marriage, sex and family, in a more direct continuity with the Old Testament and the order of the first creation, but has for the most part lost the eschatological implications for sex, marriage, and family of the new creation initiated by the resurrection.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

MAKING CONNECTIONS: THE MATERIAL EXPRESSION OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Regarding friendship in the New Testament, this essay makes three kinds of connections. The first is the connection between the explicit and the implicit, between denotation and connotation. Although rarely discussed explicitly, friendship (φιλία) is actually a prominent theme in the canonical compositions. But to recognize its prominence, readers need to grasp the connections that ancient readers would automatically make when they heard certain words and phrases by placing the New Testament's language within the context of the ancient Greco-Roman *topos* on friendship.

The second connection is between what is said and what is done, between discourse and practice. Here, body language comes into play. The ancient ideal of friendship was not simply about sharing ideas or feelings. It involved the real sharing of life through specific practices. The New Testament shows us a range of such practices and how such *κοινωνία* was an ideal expression of friendship.

The third connection is the one that the first Christians formed among themselves on the basis of the material expression of friendship. They formed a web of associations involving shared beliefs, commitments, and practices critical to their survival as an intentional community in a hostile environment. Such associations enabled the early Christian communities to be recognized as remarkable realizations of the ancient ideal of a *πόλις* of persons that had an inner spirit of *φιλία*.

Common Conceptions of Friendship

Greco-Roman moral discourse frequently made use of rhetorical *topoi* when addressing a particular subject. The *topos* (literally, "place") is not a literary genre but a loose collection of associated thoughts clustered around a specific theme or "topic" that expressed, often in proverbs and maxims, the shared wisdom of the culture. These *topoi* could be gathered into anthologies to serve as repositories for the rhetorician, whether as

speaker or as writer. We frequently find them woven into moral treatises. The same points are made concerning a vice like envy, for example, in moral discourses ranging from Plato through the *Testament of Simeon* through Plutarch to the sermons of Basil the Great. The whole point was the commonality: they occasioned from the hearer or reader instant recognition and authority because of the shared cultural values they conveyed.

As clusters of associated thoughts, moreover, such *topoi* engendered associative thinking in the hearer or reader. The maxims and proverbs were so well-known that hearing half of one would trigger a memory of the remainder, just as in English, hearing “a stitch in time” immediately summons “saves nine.” And likewise the reverse: reading an author’s aside to “saving nine,” we would catch an allusion to the proverb concerning “a stitch in time” and recognize, further, that the topic was prudence.

This associative character of Greco-Roman moral discourse through the use of *topoi* is critical to our ability to recognize the theme of friendship in the New Testament, for if we look only at the explicit occurrence of the term, we find little evidence of its presence. The noun *φιλία* (“friendship”) occurs only in James 4:4. The verb *φιλεῖν* (“to be friends with”) tends to be used in rough equivalence with *ἀγαπᾶν*.¹ Should we then conclude that friendship was not an important aspect of early Christian self-understanding, or that Christians rejected the Greco-Roman ideal in favor of a different understanding of love? Such conclusions based on the incidence of explicit terms would be premature for two reasons. The first is the intriguing evidence that at least some Christians referred to each other as “friends.”² The second is that the presence of common conceptions about friendship shows that friendship is a pervasive theme in the New Testament even when the term itself is not used. The themes commonly associated with friendship occur so frequently that ancient readers or hearers would have understood them within that context.

It would have been odd, in fact, if the language of friendship had not been part of the earliest Christian lexicon. The *topos* on friendship (*περὶ φιλίας*) contained Greco-Roman culture’s best thought concerning humans in intentional relationships. The ideals of friendship came into play at all

¹ “To love”; see Matt 10:37; 23:6; John 5:20; 12:25; 16:27; 1 Cor 16:22; Rev 3:19; 22:15. *Φίλος* (“friend”) appears mainly in the sense of “associate” (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:6, 34; 12:4; 14:10–12; 15:6, 9, 29; 16:9; 23:12; Acts 10:24; 19:31). Only occasionally do the three terms occur in contexts that suggest the Greco-Roman understanding of friendship (Luke 11:5–8; John 15:13–19; James 2:23; 4:4).

² *Φίλος*, see Tit 3:15; Acts 27:3; John 15:14; 3 John 15.

societal levels: within the bond of the family in the natural kinship system, within an association of like-minded individuals, within the internal life of the polis, and within the harmonious relations between city-states. From Plato and Aristotle through Cicero and Seneca to Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch, we find the same conceptions and connections. Friends are one soul (μία ψυχή). The friend is another self (ὁ φίλος ἄλλος αὐτός). Friends are in harmony (ὁμόνοια) and have the same opinion (γνώμη). Friendship is fellowship (φιλία κοινωνία) and “life together” (σύμβιος). Therefore, friends are “partners” (κοινωνοί), hold all things in common (τοῖς φιλοῖς πάντα κοινά), and “are of one accord” (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό). Like brothers in a family, friends are in a relationship of equality and reciprocity (φίλοτης ισότης); a model for friendship is therefore found in the mutuality of brothers (φιλαδελφία). Cicero’s definition is classic: “Friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection” (*de amicitia* 6.20).

The ancient ideal of friendship was not simply a matter of acquaintance or even casual affection. It involved a serious and mutual commitment of mind and resources. Three aspects in particular were stressed. The first is that friendship involves unity and equality, which is often expressed in terms of reciprocity. The second is that friendship is inclusive. It is not simply a matter of sharing the same vision. It extends to the full sharing of all things, spiritual and material. Here is where body language is significant: true friendship means active participation, sharing, and help between partners. The third is that friendship involves genuine obligation. This is wonderfully expressed in Jesus’ brief example:

Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and the children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything?’ I tell you. Though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs (Luke 11:5–8).³

Friendship implies a claim: it means providing hospitality as well as sharing one’s possessions. Luke’s example demonstrates his familiarity with the commonplace understandings of friendship in Hellenistic culture. Luke is likewise aware of the political aspects of friendship when he remarks in his passion account (Luke 23:12) that, after the reciprocal sending of Jesus

³ All translations are the author’s.

back and forth between the rulers, Pilate and Herod “became friends” (ἐγένοντο φίλοι), whereas before they had been at enmity (ἐν ἔχθρῳ). Herod and Pilate did not become affectionate; instead, they entered into a political collaboration.

Once we appreciate the network of associations contained in the ancient *topos* on friendship, we have a new sensitivity to the presence of this theme in New Testament passages that never explicitly mention friendship. It would be astonishing, indeed, if a first century Mediterranean community that spoke of itself as an ἐκκλησία (“public assembly”) or συναγωγή (“gathering”) and that used fictive kinship language of “brother” (ἀδελφός) and “sister” (ἀδελφή) for members of that community would have managed altogether to avoid friendship language in its moral discourse. When we know the connections that ancient readers would instinctively and automatically make, we gain a keener sense of how to connect language about “brothers and sisters” (ἀδελφοί/ἀδελφαί), “being one spirit” (ἓν πνεῦμα), “having the same mind” (ἡ αὐτὴ γνώμη), “being of one accord” (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό), “having fellowship” (κοινωνία), “having all things in common” (πάντα κοινά), and “reciprocity” (ισότης), to the theme of friendship (φιλία).

The following discussion surveys the main places in the New Testament where friendship themes are critical to the full interpretation of the passage. More importantly, each passage demonstrates that friendship is more than merely verbal; it expresses itself in body language through various forms of sharing.

The Jerusalem Church in Acts

The Book of Acts presents the best example in its description of the first Jerusalem community. Luke observes in Acts 2:42 that the community gathered by Peter’s preaching “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Already an ancient reader would be alerted to the theme of friendship, but Luke’s expanded description makes that association unavoidable: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need” (2:44–45). In his second description of the community (4:32–37), Luke further underscores the friendship theme: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common” (4:32).

Interpreters have long observed that Luke's description of the first community is thoroughly Greek in character and echoes the language not of scripture but of the Greco-Roman philosophers. By saying that the believers were "one soul," held "all things in common" and called nothing "their own," Luke described them as friends. In particular, Luke's depiction resembles the utopian portrayals of the ideal philosophical community, such as that imagined by Plato in his *Laws* and that ascribed to the earliest followers of Pythagoras at Crotona in the *Lives of Pythagoras* by Iamblichus and Porphyry. The first believers were not simply "friendly"; they realized the ideal sharing that philosophers considered the essence of true friendship. Remarkably, they accomplished this, according to Luke, neither through a mechanical dividing up of their possessions nor through a casual accessibility to what each one owned, but through a form of sharing that was at once radical ("no one called anything he possessed as his own") and prudential ("distribution was made to each as any had need").

The story of Ananias and Sapphira that follows Luke's second description (Acts 5:1–11) clarifies several aspects of the Christian practice of sharing possessions. The first is the fundamentally voluntary character of such practice. Peter makes clear that Ananias was not required to sell his possessions or to give the proceeds to the community (5:4). This community of goods is therefore not the expression of a legislator's decree but the manifestation of a genuine unanimity of spirit. The sin of the couple was their deceit, which Peter interprets as "lying to the Holy Spirit" (5:3). They had conspired to test the Spirit of the Lord (5:9). Here is the second distinctive feature of this utopian community. Unity is based not in their "having the same opinion" but in their having been given the same Holy Spirit (2:38; 4:31). The third distinctive dimension is that sharing involved some in the community giving up what was their own in order that others might have something. We are told three times that individuals sold land or houses and gave the proceeds to the community (4:34, 37; 5:1). Fourth, the sharing of possessions expresses not only their spiritual unity with each other (their "friendship") but also their recognition of the apostles' authority, since it is "at their feet" that the possessions are laid for subsequent distribution (4:34, 37, 5:1). Finally, Luke provides a biblical nuance to his description by suggesting that this community of friends is also the "restored people" that fulfills the expectation of Torah. Thus the note that "there was not a needy person among them" (4:34) echoes the promise of Deut 15:4 that there would be no needy in the land when God's commands were perfectly obeyed.

Luke's depiction of the first community is certainly impressive, but is it too good to be true? Is it simply a rhetorically masterful melding of Jewish and Greco-Roman motifs serving the apologetic function of stating that God fulfilled in this restored people what others longed for? Does it tell us simply what Luke and his readers saw as an ideal realized momentarily in a golden moment of founding, but without real pertinence to actual communities? Or does Luke's portrayal actually contain—in idealized fashion, to be sure—a summary of a spirit of friendship expressed through the act of sharing possessions that was widespread among the earliest Christian communities?

Before seeking an answer in other compositions, we note that Acts reports two additional instances of sharing possessions, this time between communities. In the first, the believers in Antioch gathered funds “each according to his ability” for the relief of the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:29) and sent this “service” (*διακονίαν*) through the hands of Paul and Barnabas (11:30; 12:25). In the second, Paul declares before the procurator Felix that he had come to Jerusalem “to bring to my nation alms and offerings” (Acts 24:17). Luke neither uses the language of friendship in these cases nor explicitly links Paul's “alms and offerings” to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem that we know Paul raised (see below). Rather than diminishing the significance of the ideal of friendship, however, these unadorned reports enhance it, suggesting that more than a literary theme was at work. Luke's idealized portrait had a substantial and sustained practice underlying it.

Paul and the Philippian Church

Paul the apostle provides two impressive examples of the ideal of friendship expressed in the act of sharing possessions: his effort to raise funds for the church in Jerusalem from his Gentile communities (see below) and the practices of friendship revealed by his letter to the Philippians. Another example of sharing possessions within a community is Paul's discussion of the care of widows in 1 Tim 5:3–16. In that case, however, the language associated with friendship is not present.

In Philippians, Paul writes from prison to a church disturbed by envy and rivalry (1:15; 2:14; 4:2–3). Like Luke's depiction of the Jerusalem church in Acts, Paul does not explicitly use the words for friendship or friends. Yet his language throughout the letter—disguised by English translations but clear in the Greek—alludes to all the aforementioned associations with Greco-Roman moral discourse.

Paul uses forms of the term “fellowship” (κοινωνία) in 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; and 4:15. For Greek readers, “fellowship” automatically connoted “friendship” (φιλία). He employs “equal” (ἴσος) twice, once of Jesus with respect to God (2:6) and once of Timothy with respect to Paul himself (2:20). Paul also makes use of the συν-prefix more frequently here than in any other letter. The prefix means “with” or “together,” and Paul attaches it to verbs such as “struggle” (1:27; 4:3), “rejoice” (2:17, 18), “be formed” (3:10), “receive” (4:3), and even “share” (συνκοινωνεῖν, 4:14). Their actions are actions undertaken together. Paul also attaches the prefix to nouns such as “sharer” (συνκοινωνός, 1:7), “soul” (2:2), “worker” (2:25; 4:3), “soldier” (2:25), “imitator” (3:17), “form” (3:21), and “yoke” (4:3). The full effect of this constant “yoking” might be felt if each translated instance were preceded by “fellow.” If friendship in the Greek world is proverbially “life together” (συμβίος), Paul could hardly find a more effective way to communicate to the Philippians that they were to be a community of friends.

This becomes even more apparent in Paul’s introduction of the “Christ-Hymn” in Phil 2:1–4, which employs a variety of expressions that connote friendship in Hellenistic culture:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit (literally, “fellowship of spirit” [κοινωνία πνεύματος], any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind (literally, “that you think the same thing” [ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε]), having the same love (τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην), being in full accord and of one mind (literally, being “souls together,” [σύμψυχοι] and “thinking the one thing” [τὸ ἐν φρονούντες]).

Paul articulates this request in two ways. The first is to contrast such “thinking together” and “fellowship of spirit” with the attitudes considered in antiquity to be the opposite of friendship, namely those associated with the vice of envy: “not according to a contentious attitude (ἐριθεία) or conceit” (κενοδοξία, 2:3). Competition and arrogance are the attitudes that destroy genuine friendship. The second way Paul spells out the ideal of friendship is to advocate a humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη) that considers others more than the self (2:3) and looks to “the things of others” (τὰ ἐτέρων) rather than “the things of themselves” (τὰ ἑαυτῶν, 2:4). It is this way of “thinking” (φρονεῖν) that Paul says the Philippians should have “among them” as it was in Christ Jesus (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 2:5), and then elaborates that way of thinking or reckoning.⁴

⁴ See how the ἡγήσασθαι (“reckon”) of 2:6 deliberately echoes the “reckon” of 2:3 by showing the “lowliness of spirit” shown by the obedience of Jesus (2:8).

No Greek reader could have missed that Paul was talking about friendship. Moreover, no alert Greek reader would have missed that Paul's way of characterizing the ideal was distinctive, even paradoxical. First, the *κοινωνία* of the Philippians was grounded in the Holy Spirit rather than in themselves.⁵ This fellowship gives rise to like-mindedness rather than similarity in outlook establishing fellowship. Second, the recommendation of an attitude of humility would have shocked educated Greek readers. Lowly-mindedness was for slaves, not for the noble. It could be understood positively only in light of the experience of the crucified and raised Messiah Jesus. Third, the Philippians have a "fellowship in the Good News" (1:5) that "bound them together from the beginning" (4:15). They have labored together in its proclamation (2:22; 4:3) and are called to live "a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ" (1:27). Fourth, again Jesus' distinctive example manifests itself in service to others even to the point of giving up one's life. Paul offers the Philippians not only the example of Jesus (2:6–11) but also of Paul himself (2:17; 3:2–16), Timothy (2:19–24), and Epaphroditus (2:25–30). Paul concludes this series of examples: "Become fellow-imitators of me, brethren, and pay attention to those who walk according to the model you have in us" (3:17). Finally, such fellowship, because it is based in the Spirit whose work is to shape them into the form of Christ (3:20), necessarily involves suffering.⁶

Clearly, Paul's use of friendship language in Philippians is creative. His Greek-speaking readers in the Roman colony of Philippians were being led from the familiar territory of the Hellenistic ideal of life together to a new land in which the ideal of fellowship was profoundly reshaped by the experience of Christ. Yet the ideal of *κοινωνία* itself remains powerful. It continues to call for like-mindedness. It continues to counter the self-aggrandizing attitudes of envy, rivalry, and arrogance. Most of all, Paul's readers would have recognized that friendship in Christ continued to require a genuine sharing of possessions.

The concrete expression of friendship is expressed by Paul's willingness to send his trusted co-workers Timothy and Epaphroditus to the congregation and in their willingness to reciprocate with hospitality (2:19–30). But the Philippians have shown their friendship with Paul particularly through their financial support. Paul reminds them: "You Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no

⁵ Phil 1:19, 27; 2:1; 3:3; 4:23.

⁶ Phil 1:7; 12, 16, 29–30; 3:10.

church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only" (4:15). Here, the "giving and receiving" expresses perfectly the reciprocity involved in *κοινωνία*. For the Philippians, this was not merely an exchange of affection. It meant material assistance in fulfillment of the axiom, *τοῖς φίλοις πάντα κοινά* ("friends hold all things in common"). Paul continues: "Even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again."⁷ The fact that the Philippian church had thus supported Paul is attested also in Paul's aside in 2 Cor 11:9: "while I was with you [Corinthians] and was in want, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia." In effect, the Philippian church shared its possessions not only with Paul but with the Corinthian community, enabling Paul to boast to the Corinthians that he had not exercised his right to demand support for preaching the gospel (cf. Gal 6:6) but preached to them free of charge (1 Cor 9:15–18). The Philippians, moreover, continued to share their possessions with Paul as an expression of their fellowship. Paul has received from Epaphroditus the gifts they have now sent to him in prison (4:10–13), and he prays that God will likewise reward them: "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:18–19).

Paul's Collection

The time and energy (and frustration) expended by Paul in his effort to raise funds from his Gentile churches for the saints in Jerusalem reveal that the ideal of fellowship expressed through the sharing of possessions extended beyond single communities and served to bond multiple communities together. The use of friendship language in Paul's discussions of the collection is not extensive but is nevertheless significant.

So far as we know, Paul first mentions the collection in his letter to the churches that he had founded throughout the region of Galatia. That letter also contains a telling bit of evidence concerning the ideal of friendship within the life of those churches. Among his instructions at the end of the letter is the injunction that believers are to "bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (6:2). In 6:6, he declares, "Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches." Here we see the notion of reciprocity (*ισότης*) to which Paul will return when

⁷ Literally, "you sent once and twice for my need" (*δὶς εἰς τὴν χρεῖαν μοι*, 4:16).

speaking of the collection: the gift of spiritual goods (teaching) should obligate those who are taught to share material goods (possessions). Paul seems to have material possessions in mind, based not only on the logic of the *topos* but also on the language of sowing and reaping in the subsequent verses (vv. 7–9). One may read the flesh/spirit language here in terms of Paul’s earlier discussion of moral attitudes (5:13–26), but it is also possible to read it as referring to the spiritual goods of teaching and the fleshly goods of possessions. Such a reading is supported by Paul’s language in 2 Corinthians and Romans and by his conclusion here in Gal 6:10: “So, then, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” Paul may even be alluding to the collection for the saints, for he refers elsewhere to the instructions he gave concerning the collection “to the churches of Galatia,” and in his extant letters this is the only passage that would fit (1 Cor 16: 1).

Paul mentions the collection for the saints also in the context of *κοινωνία*. He notes that the Jerusalem “pillars” (James, Cephas, and John) “recognized the grace that had been given to me,” and the expression of this meeting of minds—Paul and Barnabas would go to the uncircumcised and the “pillars” to the circumcised—was that “they extended to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship” (δεξιᾶς κοινωνίας, Gal. 2:9–10). Note once more that *κοινωνία* involves being of “one mind.” That the pillars should then ask that Paul “remember the poor” (by financial support) and that Paul should declare himself “already eager to do that same thing” simply extends the common understanding of *κοινωνία*. The Gentiles should share possessions with those who have given them the spiritual goods of the good news. Though not spelled out in Galatians, it will be in other passages.

In 1 Cor 16:1–4, Paul uses no explicit friendship language with regard to the collection. His double use of *logeia* provides the name we give to his endeavor (16:1–2). He sets up the procedure to be followed but engages in no motivational rhetoric (vv. 2–4). Presumably, this is because at the time of writing he is confident of the Corinthian church’s cooperation in his effort. Certainly, the number of “friendship” themes indicated in his response to the Corinthians should have provided motivation enough: the entire letter can be read as an effort to secure their *κοινωνία* with Jesus Christ (1:9) and to keep them from becoming factious (*σχίσματα*) by encouraging them to “all say the same thing” and be “of the same mind” and “of the same opinion” (1:10).

Moreover, Paul had provided them the example of someone choosing to give up rightful gain for the sake of others (9:1–27). The language he

uses in that connection is striking. As in Gal 6:6–10, we encounter the motifs of sowing and harvesting of flesh and spirit: “If we have sown spiritual good (τὰ πνευματικὰ) among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits (ὕμῶν τὰ σαρκικὰ)” (1 Cor 9:11)? This reciprocity, Paul says, is a matter of obligation: “If others share this rightful claim upon you, do we not still more” (v. 12)? Paul declares that he relinquishes the right to financial support so that he may encounter no obstacle to saving others: “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings!”⁸ Even in this letter, then, the assumptions concerning fellowship and the sharing of possessions are the same ones associated with ancient friendship.

In 2 Cor 8–9, Paul is clearly scrambling to convince the reluctant Corinthians to take part in the collection. Their resistance is connected at least in part to Paul’s apparent slipperiness in matters financial (11:7–11; 12:16–18). Is he in danger of severe embarrassment if the Corinthians do not meet their pledge (9:1–5)? How can he carry out this great act of reconciliation among churches if he cannot reach reconciliation with his own community? In his fervent exhortation, we may detect several allusions to now familiar themes of friendship. He speaks of the “gift and the fellowship of service to the saints” (χάριν καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἀγίους, 8:4). He refers to his delegate Titus as “my partner and fellow-laborer for you” (κοινωνὸς ἐμὸς καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς συνεργός, 8:23). He again uses the language of sowing and harvesting: “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (9:6).

Paul appeals most to that aspect of friendship that involves equality or reciprocity. “Friendship is equality” (φιλότης ἰσότης) runs the proverb.⁹ But unless things are divided absolutely equal—which is virtually impossible—some imbalance remains. The real spirit of friendship therefore seeks that functional equality that is found in reciprocity, a proportional balance through an exchange of different kinds of goods, or an exchange of the same goods at different times.¹⁰ This is exactly what Paul wants the Corinthians to appreciate when he says, “I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of equality (ἐξ ἰσότητος) your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality” (ἰσότης,

⁸ ἵνα συγκαινωνὸς αὐτοῦ γένωμαι (9:23; 1:9).

⁹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 8.10; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 8.5.5.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics* 1282B; 1301–1302A.

2 Cor 8:14). Jesus offers the radical example of this sort of exchange: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (8:9). The same note of reciprocity is struck in 9:12–15.

Paul speaks of the collection once more at the end of his letter to the Romans, when he is on his way to Jerusalem “with a service for the saints” (Rom 15:25). He reports that believers in both Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to “make a certain fellowship with the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (15:26). He adds that it was also “their obligation to them” (v. 27). Why were they obliged? Because of the logic of friendship in antiquity: “for if they made fellowship with the Gentiles by means of their spiritual things, they are obliged also to be of service to them with their material things” (v. 27). He did not add, but could have, that it was a matter of reciprocity. The mandate of spiritual sharing is material sharing, for friends hold all things in common.

John’s Community of Friends

There is an intriguing, if fragmentary and allusive, use of friendship language in the Johannine literature. In the Fourth Gospel’s Farewell Discourse, Jesus refers to his follows as his friends:

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (φίλοι). You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you (John 15:13–15).

Here the dominant feature of *φιλία* is the shared outlook: the disciples do what Jesus commands, but not as servants, because they know what Jesus is about. This usage perhaps throws some light on the odd dialogue in John’s final chapter, in which the verbs *ἀγαπᾶν* and *φιλεῖν* alternate in Jesus’s questioning of Peter’s devotion (John 21:15–17). After Peter had twice answered Jesus’ question whether he “loved him” (*ἀγαπᾷς με*) with “I love you as a friend” (*φιλῶ σε*), Jesus casts the question in the same terms: “Do you love me as a friend?” (*φιλεῖς με*). Peter answers consistently, adding the key element in ancient friendship, that friends share the same outlook: “Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you as a friend” (*ὅτι φιλῶ σε*, 21:17).

In the small letter known as 3 John, from the Elder to Gaius, the leader of a house church, we find evidence that some in the Johannine church

had taken “friend” as a form of self-identification. The letter closes: “Peace be with you. The friends (οἱ φίλοι) greet you. Greet the friends (τοὺς φίλους) by name” (v. 15). This group unity is expressed materially by the mutual sharing of possessions. Delegates rely for support in their travels on no one but “the brethren” (vv. 4–7). This sharing of possessions expresses a spiritual reality as well: “We are obliged to accept such as these, so that we might become fellow-workers (συνεργοί) in the truth” (v. 8).

It is entirely consistent that the power conflict between the Elder and Diotrephes—who “loves to be in first place”—should be played out materially in terms of the extension or refusal of hospitality to the respective leaders’ delegates, for if “friends hold all things in common,” enemies can make no claim in that sharing. Thus Diotrephes refuses hospitality to the Elder’s delegates and excommunicates those who want to accept them (v. 10). We are not surprised that the Elder recommends the same practice to his loyal followers in turn: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting” (2 John 10). The explanation added by the Elder takes us to the heart of the ancient understanding of friendship as the sharing of all things, spiritual and material: “for he who greets him shares his wicked work.” Just as sharing hospitality with true friends means becoming a “fellow-worker in the truth” (3 John 8), so does sharing space with the wicked mean “sharing their wicked works” (2 John 10).

The First Letter of John does not explicitly speak of friendship. Nonetheless, it is legitimate to wonder, especially in light of 2 and 3 John, whether John’s language about fellowship (κοινωνία) might bear some trace of the commonplace understandings. Thus, if this community calls itself “the friends,” as we read in 3 John, then the opening of 1 John would have considerable evocative power: “What we have seen and heard we announce also to you, so that you might have fellowship (κοινωνία) with us. And our fellowship (κοινωνία) is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). But this fellowship has its conditions, namely, walking in the truth and in the light (v. 7). To act against the truth is to lose this fellowship (v. 10). From this, we can appreciate 3:16–18. Although it speaks of “love” (ἀγάπη) rather than “friendship” (φιλία), we recognize that the example of Jesus given in v. 16 (“In this we have come to know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another”) was articulated in John’s Gospel precisely in terms of laying down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13). And we see as well that “loving in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18) is expressed—as it always would be in friendship discourse—in terms of the sharing of material possessions:

“If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (v. 17).

Friendship with God in James

In the Letter of James, we find a final impressive example of the use of friendship language and, more significantly, the influence of Greco-Roman moral discourse about friendship. The actual occurrence of the terms is spare. In 2:23, Abraham is designated as “friend of God” (φίλος θεοῦ). In 4:4, “friendship with the world” (φίλος τοῦ κόσμου) is declared as “enmity with God” (ἐχθρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), so that anyone who even wishes to be a “friend of the world” is established as an “enemy of God.” It is precisely the cryptic character of these notices, however, that draws us into the complex cultural associations concerning friendship in antiquity.

Thus, if being friends means being of “one mind,” then the friend of the world must measure reality in the same way as the world. But in James, “world” (κόσμος) is consistently portrayed as opposed to God (1:27; 2:5; 3:6). And the prophetic indictment within which James 4:4 is placed elaborates that outlook in terms of a “wisdom from below” that is “earthly, unspiritual, devilish” (3:15) in contrast to God’s “wisdom from above,” which is “pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity” (v. 17). For James, friendship involves a deep commitment to a view of reality. One cannot, therefore, be friends with everyone because God and the world are diametrically opposed.

James goes on to expound this wisdom from below in terms of the Hellenistic *topos*, *περὶ φθόνου* (“On Envy”). Envy regards the world in terms of an equation between being and having. To be more is to have more. But if another has more than me, then I am diminished. And since the world is a place of limited resources, a closed system, all humans are in bitter competition. The logic of envy leads to battles, wars, and murder (4:1–3). Arrogance is the aggressive form of envy that seeks the assertion of the self through domination over others. What is the material expression of such “friendship with the world” in James? It is the heedless pursuit of profit (4:13–17) to be sure, but it is also the oppression of the poor through litigation (2:6) or straightforward and murderous refusal to pay the laborers in the field (5:1–6).

Turning away from this friendship with the world, readers must refuse to follow the spirit of envy and arrogance and submit themselves to God in lowly-mindedness (4:7–10). James offers Abraham as the example of

such obedient faith. Abraham was a “friend of God” (2:23) because he saw reality by God’s own measure and acted accordingly. He understood that God is the giver of all good gifts (1:17), who gives to everyone without grudging (1:5) and to the lowly “gives more gift” (4:6). When called to sacrifice the gift of his son Isaac, Abraham obeyed in confidence that the God who gave that gift could give still more. The material expression of “friendship with God,” therefore, is the open-handed sharing of possessions, not envious grasping of them. Abraham—famous in Jewish lore for his hospitality—is here linked with Rahab, who “received the messengers” as an expression of her faith (2:25).¹¹ The friend of God will not discriminate against the poor in the assembly but recognize that God has made them rich in faith (2:1–5). The friend will share possessions with the “brothers and sisters” who are in need: “If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ what does it profit?” (2:16). Similarly, the friend of God will form a community of solidarity with the sick (5:13–16) and will practice the mutual correction that is the mark of the true friend in contrast to the flatterer.¹²

Friendship and The Formation of Early Christianity

Research of recent decades has demonstrated that the New Testament’s ostensible rejection of philosophy (I Cor 1:18–25; Col 2:8) simplifies a more complex response to the pervasive moral discourse of the Hellenistic world, and that the use of insights of Greco-Roman moralists are an important (if not always conscious) aspect of early Christianity’s development. In this essay, we have seen that a grasp of the common cultural assumptions concerning friendship as they were elaborated by philosophers from Pythagoras to Plutarch enables present-day readers to make connections between ideas and practices that might otherwise seem obscure. Knowing what sort of language was proverbially associated with friendship allows us to detect that theme even when the words for friendship do not appear. And knowing that the material expression for friendship was the sharing of possessions, we are able to recognize this connection not only in Luke’s idealized portrait of the Jerusalem church in Acts but also in the actual practice of first-generation Christian communities. In Acts, Philippians,

¹¹ See *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* 7.

¹² James 5:19–20. See Plutarch, *How to Tell a Friend from a Flatterer* 5 (*Mor.* 51C).

Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and James, we can detect the connection between the ideal of friendship as *κοινωνία* and the material expression of that friendship in the actual practice of sharing possessions. The *κοινωνία* of material possessions in patterns of sharing and exchange reinforced the *κοινωνία* of common belief and the *κοινωνία* of persons in different communities that we recognize in the New Testament.

Recognizing these connections, in turn, enables present-day readers to appreciate a possibly critical dimension of Christianity's development from separate congregations to a coherent and organic "church" within a remarkably short timespan. Patterns of sharing material possessions within communities, and especially patterns of exchange of possessions among communities, undoubtedly reinforced the sense that all these congregations belonged to the same "brotherhood." But since the ideals of friendship stood in a continuum with those of the political order, such practices of sharing and exchange also identified Christians to themselves and to others not only as the most successful of all ancient experiments in friendship but increasingly as a city of God, a *πόλις θεοῦ* (Heb 12:22) that could make a credible and even transforming contribution to the whole world.

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