

# CANADIAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

*A Journal of Theology, Scripture, and Culture*

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CANADIAN-AMERICAN  
THEOLOGICAL  
REVIEW

# CANADIAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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## Foreword

This issue of the *Canadian-American Theological Review* begins with an article that was originally presented at the 2016 Canadian Evangelical Theological Association (CETA) Fall Conference, held at the Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS) in Langley British Columbia. The article, “The Grotesque Will Save the World,” by Justin Mandela Roberts, won the Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Bible and Theology. Additionally featured in this issue are articles exploring the role of sociology in critical theology, the work of Karl Barth on the prologue of John’s Gospel, the “Son of Man” figure in the LXX version of Daniel, and Psalm 149 in canonical context. Concluding the articles section is a memorial to the eminent Canadian Dead Sea Scrolls scholar, Peter W. Flint, by Andrew B. Perrin. The book review section of this issue consists of a compilation of two review panels—respectively held at the 2016 CETA Annual Conference in Calgary, AB, and the 2016 SBL Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX—interacting with the book, *Women of War, Women of Woe: Joshua and Judges through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters*, edited by Marion Ann Taylor and Christiana de Groot.

*Christopher Zoccali, editor-in-chief*



# The Grotesque Will Save the World<sup>1</sup>

Justin Mandela Roberts  
The Sanctuary, Hamilton, ON

## Abstract

This essay is part of a larger project that argues that the holy is a transcendental divine name, which stands in a hierarchical relationship to the other five transcendentals, as their culmination or concentration. Holiness is the transcendental *of* the transcendentals (namely being, one, truth, goodness, and beauty), and adds the aspect of *reverence* to existence. If the holy is the transcendental *of* the transcendentals, then everything must be seen as participating in holiness. Thus, we might ask, in what sense can we consider obscene atrocities and insidious horrors to be holy? This essay will argue that sanctity is the basis of horror, and thus even the most grotesque realities revere the holy. Moreover, the grotesque has a qualitative affinity to the holy, and thus the latter half of this essay will offer an *apologia* for a committed retrieval of the grotesque as an aesthetic genre or mood.

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“That Name rings like the cry of a bird of prey. Never speak it aloud.”<sup>2</sup>

*The Book of the Vampires*

“Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.”

PSALM 2:11

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1 This essay won the Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Bible and Theology, awarded to the best paper by a graduate student or non-tenured professor given at the “Hermeneutics in Context” interdisciplinary theology conference, co-sponsored by the Canadian-American Theological Association and the Associated Canadian Theological Schools, held at Trinity Western University, Langley, BC, October 15, 2016.

2 Quoted in *Nosferatu*, 14:15.



## Introduction

This essay is part of a larger project that argues that the holy is a transcendental divine name, which stands in a hierarchical relationship to the other five transcendentals as their culmination or concentration. Holiness is the transcendental *of* the transcendentals (namely being, one, truth, goodness, and beauty) and adds the aspect of *reverence* to existence. If the holy is the transcendental *of* the transcendentals, then everything must be seen as participating in holiness. Of the many possible issues with this thesis, perhaps the most precarious is what to do with the nefarious, the horrifying, and the grotesque. Recent theological discussion has well understood how holiness permeates the “mundane” and socio-political sciences, among other things. While this thesis might give way to further work in such areas, they are not *theoretically* problematic to the very idea of the holy as the transcendental *of* the transcendentals. Thus, because of the limited space, I would like to skip to what might be the greatest problem for this thesis, namely in what sense can we consider obscene atrocities and insidious horrors to be holy?

This essay will argue that sanctity is the basis of horror, and thus even the most grotesque realities revere the holy. Moreover, the grotesque has a qualitative affinity to the holy, and thus the latter half of this essay will offer an *apologia* for a committed retrieval of the grotesque as an aesthetic genre or mood.

## The Play of the Absurd

In his essay “The Corpse of Beauty,” Sergei Bulgakov says that “when one enters the room where Pablo Picasso’s works are collected, one is surrounded by an atmosphere of mystical fear amounting to terror.”<sup>3</sup> This darkness, he says, is the “Night” of Tyutchev’s poem “Day and Night”: “the abyss is laid bare before us with its fears and mists, and there are no more barriers between us and it. This is why night is fearful to us.”<sup>4</sup> Bulgakov sees in Picasso’s work a disincarnate, sterile, and ultimately evacuated view of human flesh. Picasso depicts femininity as unutterably hideous, heavy, shapeless, and the very “corpse of beauty.”<sup>5</sup> Though amazed, Bulgakov remains mostly hostile towards Picasso’s artwork.<sup>6</sup> For him, art

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3 This essay was written after visiting a Picasso exhibition. Sergius Bulgakov, “The Corpse of Beauty,” in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, ed. Nicolas Zernov and James Pain (London: SPCK, 1976), 67.

4 Tyutchev, “Day and Night.” Quoted in Bulgakov, “Corpse,” 67.

5 Bulgakov, “Corpse,” 69. Bulgakov gives the following examples: this is seen in “God-defying cynicism (*Nude in a Landscape*), in diabolical malice (*After the Dance*), as a decaying astral corpse (*Seated Woman*), or with the snake-like leer of a witch (*Woman with a Fan*).”

6 David Borgmeyer addresses Bulgakov’s hostility towards Picasso, who is otherwise praised by art critics, and says it is understandable in light of “Russian Orthodox culture, in which the image is (or at least can be) not merely an image, but an icon: a direct reflection of a spiritual, transcendental reality. To the extent that there is something profoundly disturbing about the *zeitgeist* of the first half of the twentieth century, and to the extent that these paintings really are icons of their times, both as representatives and influences, then Bulgakov might not be so wrong . . . Bulgakov saw in Picasso’s artwork something masterful, but still a herald of something both seminal and terrible:

is the most subtle form of “Luciferian infection” in the human spirit. Additionally, Picasso’s art is a religious trial to be exorcised by the sobriety of faith and the togetherness of the church, although Picasso remains a trial that the church must willingly face.<sup>7</sup>

Even in Bulgakov’s analysis we see something altogether spiritual about Picasso; the spiritual content of his artwork is permeated from beginning to end by one feeling, the ever-increasing horror of life.<sup>8</sup> He is frightening because he is demonically genuine, which is why after one views Picasso everything else in the gallery falls flat and seems insipid.<sup>9</sup> His artwork is “mystical throughout.”<sup>10</sup> It is spiritual, Bulgakov says, but has the “spirituality of a vampire or a demon.”<sup>11</sup> Because an “uncanny” power flows from them, Picasso’s pieces are like miracle-working icons of a demonic nature.<sup>12</sup> Even ordinary objects bear the same “mystic dread and anguish.”<sup>13</sup> The dark force that one feels emanating from these works is almost “tangibly felt,” as if coming from black icons.<sup>14</sup>

Bulgakov fails to see anything redeemable about the demonic in Picasso’s work. However, from the standpoint of the Christian tradition, one must challenge such a one-sided, wholly negative reading of this darkness. Bulgakov testifies to the recognizable and overwhelming power of spiritual dread, but we must ask, with whom does this power ultimately lie? The demonic conjures within us not merely fear but dread; in the presence of the demonic, one feels not only overpowered but haunted. We recognize the demonic by a distinctly frightening quality, one which instills the sense that something astral and terrifying looms. Rudolf Otto’s work has established this distinctive as the “numinous,” which is an ominous spiritual power (*numen*).<sup>15</sup> But is the demonic an alternative spiritual power, separate from the God of light and beauty to whom Scripture bears witness? The

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and in hindsight, perhaps he was right.” David Borgmeyer, “Modernism, Orthodoxy, and Russian Identity: Pablo Picasso and Sergei Bulgakov,” in *Cultural Identity and Civil Society in Russia and Eastern Europe: Essays in Memory of Charles E. Timberlake*, ed. Andrew Kier Wise, David M. Borgmeyer, Nicole Monnier, and Byron T. Scott (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 168.

7 Bulgakov, “Corpse,” 71.

8 Ibid., 67–68.

9 Ibid., 70–71.

10 Ibid., 67. He says, “The mystical nature of art is here laid bare and made self-evident.” Ibid., 70.

11 Ibid., 68.

12 Ibid., 69.

13 Ibid., 69.

14 Ibid., 69.

15 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John Wilfred Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 7. Otto says that the gothic in Western architecture draws upon primitive magic but exceeds the power of magic: “the impression Gothic makes is one of magic; and, whatever may be said of his historical account of the matter, it is certain that in this at least he is on the right track. Gothic *does* instil [sic] a spell that is more than the effect of sublimity. But ‘magic’ is too low a word: the tower of the Cathedral of Ulm is emphatically not ‘magical,’ it is *numinous*.” Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 70.

demonic is also dazzling, majestic, and attractive, which is seen in its enduring relevance to painting, poetry, film, literature, music, and fashion. If the demonic has an independent vivacity of its own, which operates autonomously from the spiritual realm of God, then one would have to re-construe the cosmos according to absolute ontological dualism. Or, one must consider evil to be an actual, positive substance that God created. Both alternatives disrupt the participatory ontology of the Christian tradition that understands evil as pure privation and creation as brought forth out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).

Moreover, the numinous belongs properly to the holy. Nothing is more frightening than God. Therefore, in light of the incomparably ominous, awe-inspiring, dread-inducing register of the holy, it is clear that the demonic is the idolatrous distortion of numinous fear. The terror of the demonic is nothing less than a participation in the holiness of God. The demonic is not in opposition to the holy, but can only be demonic—terrifying, frightening—because of the holy.

The relative fear conjured by demons is superseded by the terror of holy angels. At the birth of Christ, angels appear to shepherds in a field: “Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified” (Luke 2:9; cf. Exod 23:27, “I will send my terror in front of you”; 15:16, “Terror and dread fell upon them”; Acts 10:4). Then at Christ’s tomb, there was an earthquake, and “an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men” (Matt 28:2–4). When a demon saw Jesus, it begged of him, “Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34). When Jesus was called “Good Teacher,” he said, “No one is good but God alone,” displaying the participatory flow of all goodness back to the original Good (Luke 18:19). Christ envisions the same flow with regard to fear: “do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” (Luke 12:4–5). Thus, this unique fear belongs properly to the holy, which also fits with the Christian *mythos* that demons are fallen angels and therefore exercise their power not because of their fallenness but in virtue of their holiness, however corrupted (Luke 10:18; cf. Matt 25:41; Rev 12:9).

### **The Grotesque Will Save the World**

In Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *The Idiot*, we read those now famous words, “beauty will save the world.”<sup>16</sup> Merely attributed to the fictitious Christ-figure, the idiotic

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16 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: MacMillan, 1913), 383.

Prince Myshkin, in Dostoevsky's novel, the saying became all the more tangible when it came from the pen of Rome's Christ-figure, namely Pope John Paul II. In his *Letter to Artists*, John Paul II speaks to the timeliness of wonder: "People of today and tomorrow need this enthusiasm if they are to meet and master the crucial challenges which stand before us"; and thanks to this enthusiasm, humanity will be able to navigate through life's many trials by setting itself upon the right path, and thus, "In this sense it has been said with profound insight that 'beauty will save the world.'"<sup>17</sup>

If I say that the grotesque will save the world I make no attempt to counter Dostoevsky or John Paul II, but rather detail, restrict, or focus their contention. The grotesque is an aesthetic genre or mood and thus an aspect of beauty. For the grotesque is a perennial motif in all aesthetic mediums, as grotesques prove to be deeply mesmerizing and attractive (see below for further cultural examples). It is especially pertinent because it captures the point at which beauty vanishes. In an obvious sense, grotesques often show mutilated and disproportionate figures, which is a visible rupture of classically beautiful standards. However, grotesques please the eye not in spite of their disproportion, obscurity, and dread, but because of them. The combined elements of attraction and terror that together offer a more total beauty paradoxically appears in a way "beyond beauty." In light of the eclipse of the holy (or the white light of holiness), grotesques capture that moment, that stasis, when beauty returns upon the inscrutable white light of holiness. The visible *anti*-aesthetic speaks to the *ante*-aesthetic, namely the holy. Such encounters allow spectators to traverse beauty's return, its apotheosis. Therefore, the grotesque is an especially timely, though enduring, medium of beauty and holiness.

What exactly do I mean by grotesque? Historically, one finds a variety of definitions, classifications, and standards, but I mean "grotesque" in the broadest, and yet deepest terms.<sup>18</sup> My definition of the grotesque is: that which aesthetically

17 John Paul II, *Letter to Artists* (1999), 16: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html)

18 Wolfgang Kayser sees the grotesque beginning with the late fifteenth-century discovery of Roman work and traces it to the present. Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 13–29. Mikhail Bakhtin takes a rather ahistorical view of the grotesque as exemplified in the carnivals and festivals of the medieval era. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Others such as Ewa Kuryluk and Geoffrey Harpham see the grotesque as formally bound to historic forms, which cannot be repeated accurately in the general malaise of contemporary culture. Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome And Judas In The Cave Of Sex: The Grottesque Origins, Iconography, Techniques* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987); Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grottesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). See also Wilson Yates, "An Introduction to the Grottesque: Theoretical and Theological Considerations," in *The Grottesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*, ed. James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1–68, see 1–40.

renders the singularity that simultaneously generates attraction and fear. The “singularity” involved here is synonymous with the “holy.” In other words, the grotesque aesthetically depicts luminous darkness (ὕπερφωτον γνόφον).<sup>19</sup> To the degree the pseudo-grotesque fails to be “luminous” or compelling, it becomes inane, pretentious, or boring. To the degree it fails to be “dark,” it becomes trite, oppressive, and apathetic.

The grotesque is timely not only because it is formally mystical and holy, but because our time is begging for it, seeking it, and creating it. Grotesqueries saturate our culture and can be seen as the unspecified cry of Israel to the beyond: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver” (Exod 3:7–8; cf. 2:23–24). The church can radically impact the world for good by creatively incorporating the grotesque. I am not suggesting that we hang prints of Goya’s wartime etchings in every church, but I am suggesting that we commission the church at large to artistically saturate itself with notes, hues, and tones of the grotesque. This includes but is not limited to: the silencing reverence of a tasteful but rugged crucifix (like that which hangs in the interior of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris); the haunting, stoic purity of Mary in Michelangelo’s *Pietà*; or inversely, the eerie statue of Mary at Notre Dame de la Garde Basilica in Marseille, France, in which she hovers above the impassioned Christ while she is entirely covered by her cloak, looking almost like an angel of death or a grim reaper. While examples like these are already typical of certain ecclesiastical aesthetics and are of course inaccessible to many, they serve to open our imagination to all the ways, subtle and otherwise, that we can introduce grotesqueries.

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19 Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, in *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, trans. John Parker, (London, UK: Aeterna, 2014), 87–95, here 997B. On this *analogical* connection between Dionysian light and the grotesque: Otto von Simson asks the rhetorical question, how can God be manifest in human creations (namely through the gargoyles and features of the gothic cathedral)? He says, “The Pseudo-Areopagite answered this question by pointing to the frailty of our intellect, which is incapable of perceiving God face to face. Therefore, God interposes images between Him and us. Holy Writ as well as nature are such ‘screens’; they present us with images of God, designed to be imperfect, distorted, even contradictory. This imperfection and mutual contradiction, apparent even to our minds, is to kindle in us the desire to ascend from a world of mere shadows and images to the contemplation of the Divine Light itself. Thus, it is, paradoxically enough, by evading us that God becomes gradually manifest; He conceals Himself before us in order to be revealed.” Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 53. Moreover, Simson emphasizes that the connection is predicated upon analogical metaphysics: “At the basis of all medieval thought is the concept of *analogy*. All things have been created according to the law of analogy, in virtue of which they are, in various degrees, manifestations of God, images, vestiges, or shadows of the Creator. The degree to which a thing ‘resembles’ God, to which God is present in it, determines its place in the hierarchy of beings.” Simson, *Gothic Cathedral*, 54. In his important study *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, Geoffrey Harpham uses Simson’s passage on Dionysius to explicate the grotesque. Harpham, *Grotesque*, 109–10.

Moreover, Christianity has the greatest capacity to render the grotesque. On the one hand, Christianity positively accounts for grotesque-induced terror by refusing to see it as a limited quality of demonic darkness, opposed to angelic light. This duality would limit and thus belittle both divine light and the scope of the darkness one encounters in ominous dread. This fear would only reach as far as the counter-border of light and no further. Rather, Christianity sees the divine light itself not only as “fearful too,” but as *the* originary terror in which and to which all subsequent instances of terror stand. On the other hand, while Christianity can maximize the darkness of the grotesque more than any other worldview, it can also best save the inherent liberating power of the grotesque because it overcomes all ontological violence. A philosophy resigned to violence, whether in the guise of fate, determinism, or nihilism, will inevitably mute the grotesque by limiting ahead of time the extent of its power. The real poignancy of grotesques is that whatever violence is depicted on the surface, a “higher,” more inscrutable, more frightening, more powerful One forever remains “beyond” and sovereign. The real power here is that while the grotesque can make its attempt to incite violence and evil, it delivers its greatest threat as it bespeaks that divine Other who is wholly unaffected by and still more frightening than any particular moment of evil.

The apocalyptic drama in the book of Revelation displays this dynamic, namely that the grotesque is dreadful to the degree it conjures a still-more-frightening Other. The forces of darkness are led by the Red Dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan (Rev 12:9). He has seven heads with ten horns. With him are two beasts. The greater of the two emerges from the sea and also has seven heads with ten horns, but with the appearance of a leopard with feet like a bear and a mouth like a lion (13:1–2). Upon his head are blasphemous names. The lesser of the two rises out of the earth and has two horns like a lamb, and he speaks like a dragon (13:11–13). These creatures are great symbols of power and fear. But those who make war against the Lamb will be conquered, “for he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (17:14; emphasis mine). Even here, the supremacy of the Lamb over the Dragon and his beasts is comically absurd. The lamb is typically a symbol of meekness, but here the Lamb stands on Mount Zion with his followers who have the Father’s name written on their heads (14:1–2). Like the roar of many waters or the sound of thunder, John hears a voice like that of harpists playing their harps, and all are singing a new song before the throne (14:2–3).

God sends forth seven “holy angels” with seven plagues to destroy the beast and all its worshippers (14:10). Before the destruction, God sends forth one of his angels to proclaim an “eternal gospel” to every nation and tribe, language and people, “*Fear God* and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (14:7;

emphasis mine). Those who withstand the beast and do not succumb to him in fear sing the song of the Lamb, in which we hear, “Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy” (15:4). When the first three angels have poured their bowls upon the earth, the sea, and the rivers, which bring terrible sores to the people and turn all the water into blood, the angel in charge of the waters says, “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was” (16:5). When all the plagues have finished, multitudes rejoice in heaven, and the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures worship God saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, and all who fear him, small and great” (19:5).

These four living creatures are presented as the greatest of all creatures. Each is clothed in eyes and takes to flight by six wings. The first is like a lion, the second like an ox, the third has the face of a man, and the fourth is like an eagle (4:6–8). Forever they utter these words: “‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come” (4:8). They are mutated, grotesque figures, part animal, part human, part angel, with unsightly, even beastly features. Yet what is most remarkable about them is that these monstrous creatures, who would otherwise be among the most frightening things we could envision, are themselves filled with fright. In Isaiah’s vision, which depicts similar creatures, the Seraphim fly with two wings, which one can imagine are Jurassic-like, while with another two they hide their faces, cowering, and with the remaining two, they cover their feet (Isa 6:1–3).

From an initial assessment, one would imagine that the Red Dragon and his beasts are the most dreadful and thus the most grotesque of Revelation’s characters. But this is only to believe the demonic lie, which claims the dread of the holy for itself. Rather, Revelation shows that creatures are frightening and grotesque to the extent that they hallow the Holy One, and this hallowing is integral to their very natures. We can draw a direct, hierarchical line through all the creatures according to this principle. The following are in order from lowest to highest: the lesser beast and then the greater beast, the Red Dragon, the holy angels, the four living creatures, and finally the Lamb. The lesser beast reveres the greater, and the greater beast reveres the Dragon. Though the Dragon refuses to fear God, he is nevertheless conquered by him. Therefore, in the end, the Red Dragon’s might only testifies to the superior might of the One who conquered him. The angels are terrifying because of their power, and though we know little of their appearance, they exercise this power exactly as worship and service to God. Above them are the four grotesque living creatures who magnify our reverence of God, because though they are terrifying, they are still terrified of another. The Lamb, the perfect Son of the Father, absolutely hallows the Father and has supreme power and authority. If the four living creatures were dreadful because they were “obviously” monstrous and powerful beings, the Son is even more dreadful because he wields

more power than any other being but does so as the nonthreatening, vulnerable, and grazing animal that is the common lamb. Therefore, the power that we know he has is incomprehensible and unexpected. He is so entirely *beyond* created beings that nothing is in any way truly competitive with him. His supremacy is of another order, whereby he stands unrivalled though nonthreatening. He is, therefore, a dazzling, haunting, and truly ominous symbol of fear and power. But still, this grotesquery is predicated upon his manifestation of the Holy Father. Christ is most harrowing because he is pure hallowing.

Nevertheless, one might object that the church is no place for the grotesque. For the church, one might say, ought to be welcoming, not a horror house for some exhibition. Agreed, but however hospitable the church is, we have to keep that singularity which lures attraction and fear. Granted, a grotesque in a church will affect those who enter. One might wander in and shudder at the first glance of it. The one who brings a newcomer may feel the need to prepare his or her guest as they approach it. Children may need to be cautioned as they pass by it. Those who are in the throes of deep agony may need to avert their gaze from the grotesque. All this inconvenience may be the very reason why some feel we should abandon all grotesques. But let us imagine the impossible thing that we had the holiness of God in a glass jar and placed it upon a shelf in the church for all to see. Those who passed it would be shocked. Children would need to be cautioned and newcomers prepared. The same kind of dynamics is at play with the imaginary jar and the grotesque. If the holiness of God was bottled up, the very sight of it would be deeply disruptive to the otherwise natural order of our lives. An awe-inducing grotesque commands a certain kind of consecration that displays a structural affinity with the holy itself.

But is fear really a fitting response to God who has not given us a “spirit of fear” but of love (2 Tim 1:7)? Indeed, God has given a spirit of love, but before doing away with fear altogether, we should ask, what kind of person is without fear? A purely fearless person sees every impending threat to his or her health and safety as inconsequential. For reasons not yet specified, this person has given up on themselves and abandoned the task of survival. The implications extend beyond the confines of individual security. This person is altogether indifferent to the suffering of others. He or she cannot even acknowledge suffering as such because he or she has no connection to the dread of suffering. Nothing can phase this fearless person, and yet he or she will be alienated by the world, a world that is incomprehensible because of the economy of fear upon which it depends. In a fallen and violent world, the fearless person cannot receive life as a gift, as he or she is entirely unmotivated to protect it and thus receive it.

Because this person is fearless, the fretting of others can only appear silly. The more one is alienated from others the more one’s “amusement” towards suffering



becomes sinister, as he or she is disconnected from the deepest concerns and motivations that invariably guide his or her every decision. Also, fearlessness usually has the luxury of power, which liberates one from fear-inducing violence. Thus, the fearless person exercises a certain tyranny and is liable to find pleasure in torture. Without an acute, immanent knowledge of fear and thus the fear of those who suffer, one cannot distinguish between play, joking, and suffering. Therefore, we see that pure fearlessness is evil, and neither is actually real.<sup>20</sup>

But does life so entirely submit to fear as to depend upon it and thus violence also? In the absolute sense, no. For the basic creaturely fears that we all have are met by God, who, though being incomparably frightening and powerful, loved us before we loved him. God's fortuitous love comforts us, namely as God's Love who is the Spirit, the Comforter. By so loving us, God raises our fears towards himself, and they become awe, wonder, and delight, though never a delight that is wholly untroubled, but the weighty delight that is as shocked as it is grateful. Therefore, God's love is hauntingly beautiful, humbling in majesty, and incomprehensibly true. In other words, God's love is holy, and it fulfills the basic creaturely impulses of fear by the glory of reverence.

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20 In his fascinating work *God Is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human*, Dominic Johnson provides anthropological and sociological evidence for why the fear of the Lord is integral to human nature, and subsequently human flourishing. He argues that "belief in supernatural reward and punishment is no quirk of western or Christian culture. It is a *ubiquitous phenomenon of human nature* that spans cultures across the globe and every historical period, from indigenous tribal societies, to ancient civilizations, to modern world religions—and includes atheists too. Heaven and hell may be the best-known versions of supernatural reward and punishment, but they are mirrored by a panoply of others that are thought to occur in this life—notably negative outcomes such as misfortune, disease, and death—as well as in the hereafter. And while we in the West tend to think of a single, omnipotent God as our judge, in other cultures rewards and punishments may come from a pantheon of gods, angels, demons, shamans, witches, ancestors, ghosts, jinns, spirits, animals, sorcerers, and voodoo. In other cases, there is no specific agent at all, but supernatural consequences still come as the result of karmic forces of nature and the universe. The variation is remarkable, but there is a clear underlying pattern: our behaviour is strongly influenced by the anticipated supernatural consequences of our actions. They make us question our selfish desires, deter self-interested actions, and perform remarkable acts of generosity and altruism—even when alone and even when temptation comes knocking at our door." Dominic Johnson, *God Is Watching: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7. Moreover, Johnson argues that while there are indeed "many scientists who argue that religion is an accidental byproduct of human cognitive mechanisms that evolved for other reasons, there are many other scientists who argue that religion is the polar opposite of an evolutionary accident—rather, that it is an evolutionary *adaptation*. New work in anthropology, psychology, and evolutionary biology suggests that not only do religious beliefs and practices bring important advantages in today's world (such as promoting cooperation and collective action), but that they were actually *favoured* by Darwinian natural selection because they improved the survival and reproductive success of believers in our ancestral past. This offers a scientific alternative to the Dawkins model of God-as-accident. It also offers a striking twist on the old science and religion debate: religion is not an alternative to evolution, it is a *product of evolution*." Johnson, *God is Watching*, 11. For a more holistic account of religion and evolutionary theory from the Christian metaphysical perspective see Conor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

## A Grotesquerie to the World

Besides being passably Christian, why should the church consider implementing grotesqueries? By creating and engaging grotesques, we create innumerable opportunities to correct excesses and vices that plague the church. We also reach a new depth of profundity and insight that is otherwise inaccessible.

First, grotesques are acts of solidarity and compassion. This can be seen straightforwardly in images and music that speak directly to injustices and evil and so empathize with the suffering of the world.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the chosen medium, one has the ability to say with a grotesque, “I feel what you feel; I see what you see; I hurt how you hurt.” The insecurities that can accompany a newcomer to church can be addressed in love before any formal meeting. Will I be accepted, or judged? Are my sins too many, too heinous? Can they handle a drug addict, a prostitute? Is the church more than a bandage for sentimental folk; can it address the horrors I’ve seen, I’ve committed? We can speak Christ’s “Yes and Amen” without uttering a word (cf. 2 Cor 1:20). Also, by taking up the challenge to create grotesques, we will be made more sensitive to the pain of others and therefore be all the more ready to love. Moreover, these kinds of grotesques can also critique and condemn the latent apathy in many churches. Some may be unwilling to compassionately put themselves in others’ shoes, as it were, or go out into the world to see its hurt, but a confrontation with a powerful, and yet still appropriate, grotesque will be an immanent word of admonition.

Second, grotesques save us from nihilism. One may find this idea counterintuitive because the grotesque is often a symbol of nihilism itself. Here we might think of the contemporary master of the genre, Francis Bacon. But to retrieve the point about the sanctity *of* horror, the sanctity in-and-beyond horror, the act of painting is a way to bring meaning about in a meaningless world. However resigned to nihilism one may be, he or she defies such nihilism by the creative process. Painting is thus an unwillingness to surrender all truth, goodness, and beauty to nothing, even if this crusade for meaning has the false humility of one who says, “this life is all there is so we might as well do something with it.” Nihilism is not the logical, coherent theory that best accounts for human experience, but is instead a lament. Therefore, grotesques can subtly defend life by its “pleasing” and persuasive articulation of the lament that is nihilism.

In addition to this overt nihilism, grotesques critique modernist rationality (and its post-modern offspring), that ethos of belief that seeks to “get” the truth once and for all, whether this is the positivism based upon scientific method, theo-

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21 See my article “On the Humanity of *Mad Max*,” in which I seek to demonstrate how *Mad Max*, a thoroughly grotesque action film, exudes a deeply compassionate sensibility. Justin Mandela Roberts, “On the Humanity of *Mad Max*,” *The Other Journal* (February 25, 2016): <http://theotherjournal.com/2016/02/25/on-the-humanity-of-mad-max/>

logical foundationalism (including the revelatory positivism of Barth), or the various kin of dialectics (Marxian materialism or Hegelian idealism). Ultimately, the grotesque has the power to undercut false confidence like no other. Its effect is not tied to any single philosophy or ideology but always stands beyond one's grasp and finds a way of disrupting the status quo with an inconvenient truth.

Finally, grotesques mediate transcendence. Our discussion of Picasso and Goya has already indicated the phenomenological profile of transcendence that accompanies the grotesque. But this transcendent moment reaches further than the confines of art galleries and represents God in the collective imagination of a culture. We may belong to a secular age, but people are more indulgent in alternative modes of transcendence than ever. The examples are endless. Consider the unprecedented commercial success and cultural dominance of mega-franchises such as *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and what has now become the superhero war between Marvel (e.g., *The Avengers*) and DC (e.g., *Batman v Superman*). We also see the grotesque prominently in video games, which have become a multi-billion-dollar industry. Because they allow for more interaction, video games subsequently encourage a more all-consuming dedication. Some games (e.g., *World of Warcraft*) create an online virtual world in which people interact with other real people, though in the guise of their avatar. Thus, some people are more invested in virtual reality than their neglected somatic reality. One can easily see the new level of devotion at a fan expo or convention at which devotees arrive in full costume (a cassock?) and may be able to speak Klingon or Elvish.

This imaginative, transcendent alternative to religious consciousness is more than a chance to escape life; it is a chance to *finally* experience life. These fantasies are not a rival to religion and Christianity but the "religious" cultus of a people victimized by a secular age. They are cultural "high places" at which one can feel something of the ominous holy. Behind the lure of these franchises is a stunning, beautiful, and profound disclosure of the holiness of God through the darkness of grotesques. *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* not only have an exquisite variety of mesmerizing grotesque creatures (e.g., orcs and Uruk-hai), but the integrity of the story itself is predicated upon the ghost of Sauron, whose great eye burns within the walls of Mordor. Frodo and Sam set out to destroy the ring of power under the impending threat of Sauron's bodily return. In other words, Sauron haunts Middle-earth. *Star Wars* is sold on the basis of its iconic villains, from Darth Vader to Darth Maul and Kylo Ren. *Harry Potter* has its own dazzling grotesques, but again, its overall persuasiveness is tied to the looming threat of "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named," Voldemort, who is ethereally absent/present. Video games can be equally as grotesque and dark. Thus, people today are not less interested in the holiness of God, but the church may be. One might

argue that films and video games have contributed some of the greatest religious art in the last fifty years.

One might ask whether or not grotesques are inappropriate for children to see. Granted, children are uniquely vulnerable, and we must consider that when introducing grotesques. But we delude ourselves and harm our children if we think that they need to be shielded from or kept oblivious to the darkness in life. Moreover, children and youth are compelled by the grotesque. Old Disney films are deeply ominous (e.g., *Fantasia*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*). While these films mostly reserve such dread for the baddies, recent children's films have been exploring the positive aspects of the grotesque by making the protagonist and the storyline thoroughly grotesque (e.g., *Shrek*, *Hotel Transylvania*, *Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Despicable Me*, *Monsters Inc.*, *Megamind*). The grotesque has proved to appeal to children's sensibilities and educate them by gaining compassion for the "other."

For example, Shrek the ogre and his "steed" Donkey reluctantly set out to rescue Princess Fiona in a deal with the incompetent and self-absorbed Lord Farquaad. The comedic absurdities are everywhere, from Shrek carrying his donkey steed instead of the knight being carried on horse-back, to the affectionate dragon who was once seen as purely ferocious. Shrek and the princess fall in love, but in this film, the beautiful princess magically transforms into an ogre, rather than the more anticipated end of Shrek shredding his grotesqueries because of true love. By using films as examples, I am attending to the source that subsequently saturates culture. Children have these grotesque heroes on their clothes, backpacks, and pencils. They have them as toys, they sleep with them as stuffed animals, they watch and re-watch these films, and they memorize them.

We see these same impulses in adolescents and adults with their own grotesques. A powerful symbol of the grotesque's universal appeal is Kim Adams' sculpture *Breugel-Bosch Bus*. The sculpture is a 1960 Volkswagen that has been transformed into a diorama. Adams re-interprets two classic grotesques, *Tower of Babel* by Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569) and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516), by creating a scene made entirely of toys. By studying the grotesque in contemporary American film and literature, Schuy Weishaar describes the workings of the grotesque in remarkable continuity with our thesis: "The grotesque is the prism at the center of this process, constantly fragmenting and obfuscating, but in such a way that it adds variety, intensity, and color to the visions we perceive," and "Just as the prism refracts all light that tries to penetrate it, the grotesque effects a kind of leveling of those worlds that writers/artists 'shine' through it."<sup>22</sup> This "initiates the critic/theorist of the grotesque on a

22 Schuy R Weishaar, *Masters of the Grotesque: The Cinema of Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam, the Coen Brothers and David Lynch* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 4. In *Masters of the Grotesque*,

spiraling journey both into and out from the seats of contradiction and/or paradox.<sup>223</sup>

## Conclusion

Bulgakov recognized the dark spiritual power of Picasso's paintings but wholly resisted them as demonic temptations. But the church must consider the wider question: with whom does this power ultimately lie? The demonic omits a distinct spiritual quality that we can name with Otto as numinous fear, which is an originary feature of holiness. So, what are the consequences of opposing demonic dread and divine dread? Either we absolutize the difference between light and darkness in ontological dualism, or we suggest that evil is an actual reality created by God. Both disrupt sound Christian convictions. Rather, the demonic is the idolatrous distortion of numinous fear but nevertheless always a participation in the holiness of God. Thus, we can see a qualitative affinity between the demonic, or grotesque, and the holy.

By comparing Kayser's account of the grotesque with the holy, we also discovered a structural affinity. Kayser says the grotesque depicts a pregnant depth "in and behind" the image, which makes all contemplation and language regarding the "It" of the grotesque inherently posterior. Also, as a play of the absurd in an estranged world, the grotesque ruptures, fractures, and crosses all our finite categories and shows how tenuous our concepts and names are. In order to maintain

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which deals extensively with *Nightmare Before Christmas* creator Tim Burton, Schuy Weishaar ties a number of our themes together: "the comic and tragic drama of life persists simultaneously as we fruitlessly exert ourselves in our attempts to bring resolutions, to make them. They are parallel but particular blanknesses that can devastate and horrify as much as they astound or delight because they invite contradiction, opposition, conflict, combination, fragmentation, synthesis, and scission . . . the grotesque names this level of our conflict-ridden interchange . . . with reality aesthetically expressed. As with Ishmael's uncanny moment of recognition in the dark, his realization about the ineffability of whiteness, or Pip's mad sea-born sagacity, our categories, the contents of these categories, the meanings and associations with which they are invested, and the crippling effects their confusion entails for us—these are the junctures whereat the grotesque can emerge as the (metaphysical) aesthetic context within which such confusion arises, can be recognized, and/or expressed. It works according to a principle of macerated mimesis in its isolation, application, inversion, division, unification, etc. of any of the competing poles of the paradoxes between which human being finds itself drawn: light and dark, high and low, inside and outside, body and essence, contentment and anxiety, creation and destruction, life and death, good and evil, pleasure and pain, transcendence and obfuscation, the divine and the demonic, movement and stasis, self and other, official and carnival, imaginativeness and bleak materialism, reason and madness, mythic and modern, and the list goes on. Whether the grotesque finds expression as a literary mode, an artistic style, an aesthetic dimension, a pattern of thought (archetype, etc.), a metaphysical reality, a social ideology, or something else, it is utterly bound up with the human. Perhaps this is why its fruits seem forbidden but necessary. Perhaps this is why it can elicit desire and disgust, laughter and revulsion—or, simply put, love and hate and everything that comes with them—all at once. The grotesque is caught up with the breadth, depth, and confusion of what it means to be human."<sup>23</sup> Weishaar, *Masters*, 193. For Weishaar's argument that Dr. Seuss may be more subversively grotesque than Bruegel, Bosch, and Bacon, see Weishaar, *Masters*, 2–4.

23 Weishaar, *Masters*, 4.

estrangement, the grotesque must occupy a “suspended middle” between what is alien and what is familiar. All of these features accord with the dynamics of the white light of holiness. Moreover, the grotesque is mystical on a formal level, as the mystic sensibility is that which apprehends the aesthetic measure of paradox that unveils the holy. Therefore, the grotesque participates in the eternal gaze of the Son upon the Invisible Father.

With this renewed connection between the divine and the grotesque in mind, I suggested that in Dostoevsky’s “beauty will save the world,” beauty be replaced by the grotesque. For metaphysically, the grotesque captures that moment, that stasis, when beauty returns upon the inscrutable white light of holiness. The grotesque’s *anti*-aesthetic speaks to the ontological *ante*-aesthetic, namely the holy. Such encounters allow spectators to traverse beauty’s return to the holy. The grotesque is then what aesthetically renders the singularity that simultaneously generates attraction and fear, this “singularity” being synonymous with the holy.

Moreover, culture craves and seeks transcendence in the grotesque, and Christianity has the greatest capacity to render it. Additionally, I offered three concrete reasons why the grotesque will connect the world and the church, elevating both. In the end, I believe the grotesque will save the world, partially for the theoretical reasons I suggest, but really because all such reasons are predicated upon this basic truth, that the grotesque has saved the world. For in weakness and fear we proclaim the mystery of God, Christ and him crucified, who is that morbid if still radiant light of the world (1 Cor 2:2).

# Sociology as the Handmaid of Critical Theology

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## Abstract

The dialogue between sociology and theology spans centuries. With the recent emergence of critical theology in Canada, there has been an increasing use of sociological theories in service of theological hermeneutics. The exchange between these disciplines raises relevant theological questions, which forms the thrust of this essay: How have the critiques of sociologists helped theologians understand post-modern society and frame appropriate questions for theological discourse? What aspects of critical theology can enhance sociological studies? Can the dialogue between sociology and critical theology be expanded?

This essay examines the historical development of critical theology in the Canadian context as well as how sociology has continued to shape critical theological discourse in post-modern Canada. The essay examines selected contributions of sociology in the pursuit of critical theology, drawing mainly from the writings of German-Canadian theologian Gregory Baum as well as other relevant scholars. It also evaluates the exchange between sociology and critical theology and proposes an expansion of this intellectual partnership.

With examples drawn from the Canadian social context, the essay argues for a deepening of the exchange between sociology and critical theology to include the use of social demography in theological discourse. Besides numerical data, social demography provides critical theological discourse with data analysis that dissects the social conditions of persons in a given context. The essay contends that critical theology can benefit from consideration of socio-demographic

analysis, toward deconstructing social structures and institutions that reinforce poverty and perpetuate injustices.

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## Introduction

The dialogue between sociology and theology spans centuries. Since the emergence of critical theology in Canada in the 1970s, there has been an increasing application of sociological analysis and social theories in the service of theological discourse. Some four decades later, it is worthwhile to reflect on the role of sociology in the pursuit of critical theology, and how this collaboration can be expanded. Questions worth considering in evaluating the dialogue between sociology and critical theology include: What is the reaction of non-critical theologians to this collaboration? How have sociological theories and analysis helped critical theologians? Is the relation between sociology and critical theology mutual? What other aspects of sociology merit consideration in critical theological discourse? Without diminishing the worth of these questions, this essay argues for an extension of the dialogue between sociology and critical theology, most especially in appropriating insights from social demography. As a cognate field of sociology, social demography is a valuable tool for critical theology, offering statistical data analysis of social structures and institutions that oppress, marginalize, degrade, and reinforce injustices.

This essay is structured into three parts. The first is a summary of the historical transition from philosophy to sociology as a relevant dialogue partner in theological discourse. The second part presents an overview of the emergence of critical theology in Canada, as documented by the German-Canadian theologian Gregory Baum. It equally highlights examples of the application of sociological theories in the theological writings of Baum. It also underscores the conversation between critical theologians and sociologists in light of this collaboration. The conclusion argues for the inclusion of social demography as an appropriate sociological tool for critical theological discourse.

## Developments in the Union between Sociology and Theology

Christian theology has long been a dialogue partner with other academic disciplines. The medieval philosopher and theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) defined theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding).<sup>1</sup> Anselm's understanding of theology lays emphasis on the use of human rationality in discerning the mystery of the faith and indicates that the gift of faith

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1 St. Anselm, *Proslogium–Monologium: An Appendix on Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1951), 33, 178.



is illuminated by the gift of reason. This definition of theology contributed to a deepening of a systematic approach to studying theology. During the early centuries, Christian scholars drew upon philosophical categories to interpret Scripture and expound on doctrines.

Tertullian (ca. 160–215), for instance, though less fascinated with philosophy (describing it as deceitful and having nothing to offer the Christian faith), employed philosophy in constructing his claims. Tertullian’s dependence on Stoic philosophy was obvious in his theology of corporeity, and the dual nature of all beings. In *De Anima*, C. 5, Tertullian writes: “I call on the Stoics also to help me, who, while declaring almost in our very terms that the soul is a spiritual essence, will yet have no difficulty in persuading us that the soul is a corporeal substance.”<sup>2</sup>

Besides stoicism, Platonic philosophy was another principal interlocutor for Christian theologians. This gained currency in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354–430) whose insightful interpretation of the faith, most especially in the development of the transcendent, immaterial and omnipresent God, benefited greatly from his encounter with Platonism and Neoplatonism. He affirmed that mere belief without questioning, and truth-seeking without faith, were both insufficient, Augustine wrote in his tractates on the Gospel of John: “Understand so that you may believe, believe so that you may understand” (On the Gospel of John, 29.6; *Sermon CXVII.I*). Augustine applied philosophical analysis and reasoning to the issues of religion, thus sowing the seed for subsequent systematic integration of philosophy into theological discourse.

In the thirteenth century, theologians such as Albert the Great (1206–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) began to turn to Aristotelian philosophy to explain Christian doctrines. The dialogue between philosophy and theology continued into the sixteenth century, when theologians like Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) used nominalist philosophical categories in their theological writings.<sup>3</sup> During these centuries, philosophy (which then included the natural sciences) served as an appropriate vehicle for explaining Christian doctrine, exemplified by the phrase: “philosophy as the handmaid of theology.” During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, theologians from Europe and North America began to consider the social sciences as a dialogue partner for Christian theology.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, neo-scholastic classical tendencies endure, and thus the use of philosophical categories as representing the only legitimate way of doing

2 Tertullian, “*De Anima*,” in *The Theology of Tertullian*, ed. Robert E. Roberts, (London: Epworth Press, 1942), C.5.

3 Michael Bourgeois, “Why Social Theory Matters for Theology,” in *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*, ed. Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 34.

4 *Ibid.*, 33–48.

theology survives to this day. Indeed, many Catholic seminaries in some part of the world, such as Africa, still maintain this unbroken link between philosophy and theology.

The nineteenth century ushered in a new social order. It was a century characterized by growing industrialization, and the emergence of economic capitalism and democracy, as well as the tough consequences of unemployment and poverty. These social changes motivated a formal study of human society from the perspectives of social structures, behavioral patterns, forms of socialization, and social groupings.<sup>5</sup> Scholars sought to understand the driving forces behind these social changes, and to systematize the differences between the nineteenth century and its antecedents. According to Baum, this impetus to compare the nineteenth century's social order with those of past centuries generated a new branch of scientific inquiry—sociology.<sup>6</sup> Although a broad field of study, sociology is unified by the quest to examine patterns in human social relationships and institutions.<sup>7</sup> Using diverse approaches, early modern sociologists like Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Karl Marx (1818–1883) argued that society has a profound effect on individuals' consciousness and their cultural expressions. Their claims showed how the social transformation of the nineteenth century informs human self-awareness and cultural values. Such sociological insights would be later considered as relevant trajectories for theological studies.

The twentieth century appropriation of sociological theories into theology can be seen in the works of political and liberation theologians. Such theologians found conversation partners with sociologists, and these interactions have since come to define a unique approach to contextual theology. As Gustavo Gutiérrez has argued, liberation theology is “critical reflection on praxis” in the light of God's word, for the sake of social transformation.<sup>8</sup> Critical theological reflection goes beyond mere engagement between theology and philosophy, to the availability and use of sociological data and knowledge of social conditions as well as the causes of social conditions. Gutiérrez maintains that turning to social sciences as a dialogue partner allows for a broader knowledge of society and demonstrates with greater precision the challenge society poses to theological reflection.<sup>9</sup> The use of sociological theories in political theology and subsequently in liberation theology has had a significant influence on the method of critical theology.

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5 Margaret Lavin, *Vatican II: Fifty years of evolution and revolution in the Catholic Church* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2012), 44.

6 Gregory Baum, *The Social Imperative: Essays on the Critical Issues that Confront the Christian Churches* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 101.

7 Anthony Giddens, *Sociology* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1997), 2.

8 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 5.

9 Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Theology and Social Sciences,” in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 55.

## Gregory Baum and Critical Theology in English Canada

Critical theology is, ingeniously, a contextual theology. It offers a platform where social and political approaches to theology converge as a basis for bringing about concrete social transformation. Critical theology prioritizes historical reality as a legitimate locus for Christian theologizing—a place of encountering God. Critical theology can be traced to Christian-Marxist dialogue in Europe and Latin America during the 1960s. These creative dialogues contributed to the evolution of political and liberation theologies, prominent in the writings of Dorothee Sölle (1929–2003), Johann Baptist Metz (1928–), José Míguez Bonino (1924–2012), and Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928–).<sup>10</sup> By the late sixties into the seventies, the writings of these theologians had gained prominence in North America, contributing to the development of critical theology.

The emergence of critical theology in English-speaking Canada can be situated within the early 1970s. This era witnessed the rise of a ginger group in the New Democratic Party (NDP) called the “Waffle,” who advocated for a democratic socialism, economic independence from American capital, replacement of American-owned companies by publicly-owned corporations.<sup>11</sup> In 1972, the Waffles were expelled by the Ontario NDP. However, their aspirations had found a place in the hearts of Christians inclined to working for a social transformation of Canada.<sup>12</sup>

In the mid-1970s, with the rise of the faith-and-justice movement in Canadian churches, Christian concern for social justice led to cooperation in social ministry by Anglican, Catholic, and Reformed churches. These Christian faith-justice groups included the Jesuit’s Social Faith and Justice Center in Toronto, Citizenship for Public Justice, and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. The faith-and-justice movements published joint ecumenical statements, addressed to the various levels of government in Canada.<sup>13</sup> They also published theological reflections that drew upon political and liberation theologies. In 1977, a conference focusing on “Political Theology in the Canadian Context” was held at the University of Saskatchewan, with a goal of deepening the conversation on the Christian social response in Canada. Participants, including Canadian theologians, deliberated on a wide range of issues, such as the Canadian identity, and undertook a critique of capitalism. Conference lectures were published in a book

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10 Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon, “Introduction,” in *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 9.

11 Gregory Baum, “Critical Theologies in Canada: From Solidarity to Resistance,” in *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*, ed. Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 49.

12 *Ibid.*, 49–50.

13 Baum, “Critical Theologies in Canada,” 50.

entitled: *Political Theology in the Canadian Context*.<sup>14</sup> A major outcome of this conference was a renewed research interest in critical theology in Canada.

Baum defines critical theology as “a theological reflection on the emancipatory meaning of the Christian Gospel.”<sup>15</sup> He argues that the primary task of the critical theologian is to show how the Gospel ties in with human life. On the one hand, critical theology offers a critique of human life, and thus manifests its transcendence. On the other hand, it transforms human life, and thus demonstrates its relevance.<sup>16</sup> Similar to political and liberation theologies, the starting point of critical theology is an act of love, which leads to solidarity with the victims of society. It unearths social injustices, oppressive structures, system marginalization, and explores God’s summons to compassion and liberative action. In addition, critical theology is a method of doing theology that engages reflective Christians to become transformative agents who precipitate the movement from oppression and injustice to liberation and just human community.<sup>17</sup>

Given this primary task of critical theology—uncovering social injustices and exploring God’s summons to liberative action—Baum asserts that the theologian needs the social sciences as a dialogue partner. Sociological literature records insights that are otherwise absent from theology but are bound to shape theological discourse. Thus, critical theologians must possess adequate knowledge of what constitutes social reality as well as relevant analytical tools to undertake social analysis. Baum notes that sociology is not a unified discipline, but “a conflictual field of study,” involving a variety of interests, such as social institutions, organizations, religion and culture. These varied and often competing interests can be cataclysmic for the diverse aspects of sociology as a discipline: functionalism, empirical-positivism, phenomenology and critical sociology or critical theory. Each of these aspects of sociology adopts unique theoretical approaches, presuppositions and research methods.<sup>18</sup> Baum argues that adopting a particular field of sociology involves choosing from different conceptual models. Thus, a critical theologian is confronted with choosing what is best suited to his/her inquiry.<sup>19</sup> He writes: “The relationship of theology and sociology is something that must be

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14 See Benjamin G. Smillie, *Political Theology in the Canadian Context* (Waterloo, ON: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982); Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon, *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004).

15 Baum, “Critical Theologies in Canada,” 50.

16 Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), 9.

17 Baum, “Critical Theologies in Canada,” 50–51.

18 Baum, *The Social Imperative*, 99–100; Peter C. Phan, “Social Science and Ecclesiology: Cybernetics in Patrick Grandfield’s Theology of the Church,” in *Theology and the Social Sciences*, ed. Michael Horace Barnes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 62.

19 Gregory Baum, “Sociology and Theology,” *Concilium* 10, no. 1 (1974), 22–31.

created. It is not a given to be analyzed (given by the very nature of the two sciences), but a multiple project to be undertaken.”<sup>20</sup>

There are three procedural steps for critical theology, according to Baum: first, “listening to the voices of the oppressed and marginalized;” second, “dialoguing with social and political scientists;” and third, “paying attention to biblical scholars and church historians.”<sup>21</sup> These steps vary depending on one’s theological field of study. Regardless of which method is used, critical theology can offer an entry into the hermeneutical circle. The second step (dialogue with social scientists) implies drawing upon sociology as a conversational partner. Here, Baum’s preference rests with critical sociology. According to Mary Buckley, critical sociology studies society in a manner that supports relevant insights, highlights relationships, links the present with the past, and prepares the way for responsible action and commitment in the present.<sup>22</sup>

Before highlighting examples of how Baum employs social theory in his approach to critical theology, it is important to summarize his argument that there is no value-free study of society. Drawing from the axiom that the society to which an individual belongs creates a certain consciousness within us, Baum contends that every social critique is based on a specific social theory. Every given social theory adopts an implicit philosophical or religious worldview that includes a set of values. Consequently, there exists a subjective element in social analysis, since the consciousness of the sociologist is grounded in the consciousness of society. Hence, analysis of a society is based on the values that define a society. In the case of critical theology, analysis of society leads to articulating the social consequences of faith action, in terms of Christian teaching and witnessing. This is rooted in option for the poor, solidarity with victims of oppression, and commitment to the process of social transformation.<sup>23</sup>

Baum frames the contributions of sociology to this primary task of critical theology under two themes: “the historicity of truth and the historicity of error.”<sup>24</sup> For the “historicity of truth,” he affirms that the notion of symbols drawn from sociology assists the theologian and a believing community in interpreting reality, understanding itself and its mission, and opening itself to the divine self-communication. From symbolic realism it is possible to consider divine revelation in Israel and Jesus Christ as manifestations of God’s hidden but graced presence in human history. It also enables seeing revelation not only as a truth addressed to the mind, but also as providing symbols for the believing community. Since symbols can speak differently in different cultural and socio-political contexts, they

20 Ibid., 31.

21 Baum, “Critical Theologies in Canada,” 51.

22 Mary I. Buckley, “*Sociology and Theology: Response (II) to Gregory Baum*,” 41.

23 For this summary see Baum, *The Social Imperative*, 119.

24 Ibid., 119.

can also embody new meaning as societies undergo significant changes. While Christian symbols of divinity remain static for all ages and societies, their actual meaning continues to lead to renewed action-oriented understanding of divine revelation.<sup>25</sup>

An example of Baum's historicity of truth is discernable with social sin. Social sin is a deliberate act by a person or persons damaging the common good. For Baum, social sin is committed out of blindness, and comprises religious symbols operative in human imagination and fostered by society. Further, it reinforces unjust social systems and intensifies the oppression of peoples. This notion of social sin is at variance with moral sin, which is seen as a personal violation of a divine law, and freely committed. Emphasis on moral sin that can blind a community from seeing the oppressive trends built into their social structures and institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Under the "historicity of error," Baum maintains that every group of people produces their own blindness. Through an unconscious process they create an understanding of reality that legitimizes the abuse of institutional power and privileges. For Baum, this is an ideology that distorts the truth for the sake of social interest and can create a false consciousness. He believes that sociology provides tools for critical theology to critique the evil and injustice inherent in society. This tool constitutes analysis of society, which critiques the extent that religion legitimizes people's sufferings, and re-formulates the Christian teaching as being God's promise to deliver the oppressed.<sup>27</sup> With the example of social sin, sociological analysis becomes a valuable tool for showing how both individual and community actions can contribute to the enthronement of unjust structures, and falsely legitimate social injustices in society. As Karl Barth would say, a conscious Christian is one with his/her Bible in the right hand, and a newspaper in the left.<sup>28</sup>

### **Critiques of the Dialogue between Sociology and Critical Theology**

For its analysis of human society, critical theology benefits from using the valuable epistemological tools and social theories of sociology. In examining the world of the oppressed and the prevailing structures of social injustice, sociology provides critical theology with valuable insights for theological interpretation and a Christian response to a particular social context. Nevertheless, the Anglican theologian

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25 Ibid., 119.

26 Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 175.

27 Ibid., 119.

28 Though this quotation is often attributed to Karl Barth, the closest link of the statement to Barth was a *Time Magazine* piece on Barth, published on Friday, May 31, 1963.

John Milbank is skeptical of this collaboration. He maintains that such a partnership could lead theology to surrender its claim to be comprehensive.

Milbank sees theology as unnecessarily conforming to secular standards, and to the constraints of scientific objectivity. He contends that theology ought to maintain its historically specific faith in God, so as to render its unique account of the ultimate causes at work in human history. If there should be any cross-conversation, “it is to tell again the Christian *mythos*, pronounce again the Christian *logos*, and call again for Christian *praxis*, in a manner that restores their freshness and originality.”<sup>29</sup> However, Baum avers that only when there is a dialogue between critical theology and sociology can critical theology express “a new fidelity to its nature and mission.”<sup>30</sup> In developing this position, some theologians opine that critical theology requires interaction with other disciplines. Roman Catholic theologian Mary Jo Leddy observes that in the Canadian context, theology should be done at an intersection. Leddy argues that it is at intersections where realities and perspectives meet, and sometimes collide. It is at intersections where critique and creativity flourish, as well as where theological thought gets redirected and reoriented.<sup>31</sup> The tension between these two perspectives, those of the inclusivists and the exclusivists, is illustrative of the unresolved struggle between neo-scholastic classicalism and contemporary theological method in their paradigms of Christian social responsibility. While the inclusivists collaborate with others in contributing to a flourishing and humane society, the exclusivists maintain that theology and Christianity neither borrow from nor partner with the outside.

There seems to be some inconsistency in exclusivists’ withdrawal attitudes. First, it may seem they have forgotten the long history of theology’s interaction with philosophy and other disciplines, as mentioned in the initial part of this work. Paradoxically, as Baum observes, Milbank’s opposition to theology partnering with other disciplines is itself based upon social theories, such as the alienation theories of sociologists like Max Weber and Peter Berger.<sup>32</sup> These sociologists criticize modernity, locating its dehumanizing trends in the growing power of technology and bureaucracy.<sup>33</sup> Admittedly, growing technology and bureaucratic power heavily contribute to dehumanization, and, as structural evils, they should be critiqued. Yet, it is no remedy for these evils to abandon global partnerships or reject global solidarity for the common good of all. The potential for such aban-

29 See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (New York: Blackwell, 1999, 2006), 382.

30 Gregory Baum, *Theology and Society* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 160.

31 See Mary Jo Leddy, “Foreword,” in *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*, ed. Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon, (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 7; Emeka Xris Obiezu, “Community versus Empire: The Catholic NGOs/United Nations Relationship in an Augustinian Perspective,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 11:1 (2014), 162.

32 Gregory Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 19.

33 Baum, *Theology and Society*, 164–66.

donment is reason why Christian social justice activists may accuse the exclusivists of supporting the status quo, and rejecting a critical solidarity encouraging alignment with social change groups in challenging unjust and unequal institutional structures.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the dialogical relationship between Christianity and social change groups should be seen as complementary and not antithetical to Christian theology. Rather than divisiveness, this collaboration promotes solidarity.<sup>35</sup> Pope John XXIII promoted this partnership in his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, wherein he affirmed Christian participation and partnership with other social entities in the search for common good. He referred to this as a moment of discovering and adhering to the truth, but cautioned that such engagement should not be abandoned, not even on the account of a history of past failure.<sup>36</sup> The Second Vatican Council also supported mutual exchange between theology and the social sciences. In the Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council asserts that the Church's social mission entails reading "the signs of the times," which demands social analysis.<sup>37</sup> In his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis asserts that "dialogue with other sciences and human experiences is most important for our discernment on how best to bring the Gospel message to different cultural contexts and groups."<sup>38</sup> Generally, this points to the indispensable and invaluable role of non-theological disciplines in contemporary theological discourse.

### Social Demography and Critical Theology

Social demography emerged as a field of sociology during the course of the twentieth century. It can be described as the analysis of sociological questions using statistical data, such as censuses and population surveys. Social demography makes the connection between social reality and demography on both a macro-level and a micro-level. On a macro-level social demography studies systems, cultures, and societies on a large scale. On a micro-level it studies individuals, groups, and families as units of society. With the latter, social demography gives priority to rigorous data analysis and population trends, backed by theoretical methods associated with sociology, statistics, and anthropology.<sup>39</sup>

Sociologists, Stewart Tolnay and Charles Hirschman, identify a three-phase

34 Obiezu, "Community Versus Empire," 162.

35 David Hollenbach, *The Global Face of Public Faith: Politics, Human Rights, and Christian Ethics* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), xii.

36 *Pacem in Terris*, nos., 159, 160.

37 See *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 38–40 in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations – a Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language* (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996).

38 Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), no. 133.

39 Stewart Tolnay and Charles Hirschman "Social Demography," in *Handbook of Population*, ed. Dudley L. Poston and Michael Micklin (New York: Springer Science Business Media, 2006), 419.



hermeneutical circle involved in social demography. First is “data collection and descriptive interpretation,” which involves a thorough process of accessing the numerical composition and exposition of the indicators of a given social concern.<sup>40</sup> The second is “theory development and model testing,” entailing analysis through a process of isolating, and comparing variables on a given social phenomena.<sup>41</sup> The third is “contextual analysis,” which interrogates the interaction between individuals and their social context in light of a given social issue.<sup>42</sup> These interrelated phases employed by social demographers provide an analytical tool for an immersion into a specific social concern and context. They support a transitioning from data collection to investigation of the personal experiences of the human subjects in a particular social order, leading to critical theological reflection in that context.

Some theologians have drawn from social demography in their studies. An example is the theological analysis of poverty in a global context by the Roman Catholic theologian Daniel Groody. In his book titled *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace*, Groody employs demographical analysis to articulate a hopeful vision for the twentieth-century social order. More recently, the British theologian Paul Lakeland writes from a Catholic perspective on the dialogue between ecclesiology and demography. Lakeland demonstrates how the present demography of the Global South and North informs the Roman Catholic Church’s self-identity, and its evangelizing mission.<sup>43</sup> Social demography adds value to critical theology, in articulating a socio-statistical analysis of the structures of inequality and social injustices, and in accounting for the victims of oppression.

The data collected and index analysis arising from studying inequality and social mobility by social demographers can be relevant resources for critical theologians. These statistical data are appropriated in the study of social issues related to poverty, gender, ethnicity, immigration, and ecology. Social demographers have developed a method to study inter-cohort social change from cross-sectional data, toward models of relationships among changes in social structure, social institutions, and social mobility. As a result, social demography as a dialogue partner for critical theology (1) offers analysis that can shed light on unjust social structures, (2) articulates a transformative vision, and (3) enables concrete action toward the liberation of the poor.

With reference to Baum’s assertion that every society has its own blind spot

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40 Ibid., 422.

41 Ibid., 422–23.

42 Ibid., 423–24.

43 Paul Lakeland, “Ecclesiology and the Use of Demography: Three Models of Apostolicity,” in *A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hahnenberg (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

that often creates a distorted view of social reality, the application of demographic data can become an analytical tool for critical theology in uncovering false assumptions that can reinforce such distortions. It is capable of leading not only to a statistically-based knowledge of the victims of oppression, but also to the demographical variations of the oppressed in light of their social conditions. Uncovering of the institutions that perpetuate injustice is also afforded.

Baum's assertion is relevant to the Canadian social context. Within the last two decades, the number of Canadians living in poverty has significantly declined, with a negligible number living with low income. Research from Statistics Canada, for example, shows that the percentage of Canadians living in households below the basic-needs poverty line has fallen from 6.7 percent in 1996 to 4.8 percent in 2009.<sup>44</sup> The percentage of Canadians living in households below the low income cut off (LICO) has also decreased, from of 15.2 percent in 1996 to 9.7 percent in 2013.<sup>45</sup> The challenge with such snapshot of poverty indices is that they rarely capture comprehensively the categories of persons and their specific social locations. Statistical reports on poverty often neglect to distinguish between people who experience short spells of poverty or low income versus those who have been stuck below the poverty line for many years.<sup>46</sup> Often lost in a broad poverty index are real persons with names—children, young people, women, single parents, the disabled, the terminally ill, and the aged. New immigrants to Canada, though, depending on government social interventions and the generosity of faith-based and non-faith groups are often living in poverty. For these new Canadians, acclimatizing and assimilating to a new environment is a process that spans several years.<sup>47</sup>

Social demography can assist in unearthing multifaceted levels of poverty, and thus provide verifiable statistics for undertaking critical theological reflection, and appropriate pastoral response. Such demographical perspectives are relevant for critical theology, providing for a proper contextual analysis and articulation of a theological response. A theology of social transformation ought to initiate a process of liberation in the present, as well as guide a hopeful-vision for the future, based not on a utopia but rather long-term demographical trends and differentials. Thus, critical theologians ought not to ignore social demography in pur-

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44 Charles Lammam and Hugh MacIntyre (2015), *An Introduction to the State of Poverty in Canada*, Fraser Institute. <http://www.fraserinstitute.org> (accessed September 2017), 1.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 See Dominique Fleury, *A Study of Poverty and Working Poverty among Recent Immigrants to Canada: Final Report* (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007), [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2008/hrsc-rhdsc/HS28-121-2007E.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2008/hrsc-rhdsc/HS28-121-2007E.pdf) (accessed September 1, 2017).

suit of solidarity with the victims of oppression and walking with them through a process of liberation.

## Conclusion

Assessing the contributions of critical theology to sociology may be a proper task of the sociologist. It is important to note that only a few sociologists are inclined toward the potential benefit of theology to sociological discourse. The British sociologist Graham Howes writes that students of sociology tend to see theology as an “archaic sub-discipline, lacking the rigor of pure ‘philosophy,’ the intellectual chic of contemporary social theory or the breadth and stimulus of religious studies.”<sup>48</sup> In contrast, the American sociologist Robert Bellah maintains that every theology implies a sociology, and every sociology implies a theology. Bellah argues that theology and social sciences are part of a single intellectual universe. To refuse to relate them is to admit to intellectual bankruptcy.<sup>49</sup>

Our analysis has been asymmetrical in the sense that it prioritizes how critical theology has benefited from sociology, and not vice-versa. Thus, this essay examined the dialogue between critical theology and sociology, with selected references from the writings of Baum. This dialogue serves as a backdrop for proposing the inclusion of social demography in contemporary critical theological discourse. The arguments advanced for this inclusion are not exhaustive. The objective has been to inspire discussion on how the dialogue between sociology and critical theology can thus avoid the constraint of “intellectual bankruptcy.”

There are limitations to the applicability of social demography in the field of theology, since population data cannot absolutely capture all social concerns or social changes in society. The strength of social demography lies in its ability to statistically decipher false claims or assumptions and set forth a reliable hypothesis for theological analysis. In some cultural contexts, statistical collection are sensitive processes. Active participation in social demographical assessment may be inhibited due to various religious and ethnic obligations on the part of participants, and concomitant fears of these persons or groups of violating cultural norms and expectations, along with the perceived consequences of such violation, by revealing the human subjects and social institutions that perpetuate injustice, oppression, and marginalization. While social demographers are faced with these challenges in many nations of the Global South, it is less likely to occur in nations of the Global North, where there exists strong institutional structures, and reliable systems of data and information management.

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48 Graham Howes, “Surprised by Grace: The Sociologist’s Dilemma,” *New Blackfriars* 78: 913 (1997), 136.

49 Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 206.

Nevertheless, sociology and critical theology holds the potential of mutually enhancing each other in breaking new ground for dialogue in the area of social demography. The field of social demography studies is driven by sound theory, high-quality data, and tractable research questions, which lead to cumulative research conclusions. To paraphrase Paul Lakeland, it is driven by human curiosity, to know more than we do about the world in which we live, the church we love, and the company we keep. If the use of statistics becomes the starting point of critical theology, then analysis can be the intermediary, and fruitful understanding can be the result.<sup>50</sup>

Expanding the dialogue between sociology and critical theology to embrace demography reinforces sound social analysis with concrete statistical knowledge. As a result, demographical interpretations become even more credible, improving the prospects for determining appropriate theological response to a given social issue and context. In all, the union between critical theology and sociology can be sustained through conversation on the points of divergence and convergence. On the points where they do intersect the critical theologian can speak effectively and be heard in the Canadian context.

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50 Lakeland, "Ecclesiology and the Use of Demography," 24

## “The Word became Flesh” in the Work of Karl Barth

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### Abstract

This paper traces Karl Barth’s use and exegesis of John 1:14, “the Word became flesh” from his original lectures on the Gospel of John through three sections of the *Church Dogmatics*: the doctrine of revelation (*CD* I/2 §15), the doctrine of election (*CD* II/2 §33), and the doctrine of reconciliation (*CD* IV/1 §59). This analysis contributes another piece of the puzzle in the ongoing discussion of Barth’s theological development, specifically regarding his use of the Chalcedonian definition, and the doctrine of the *logos asarkos*. This paper will demonstrate that Barth’s repeated use of his original exegesis from his lectures points to a high degree of continuity in Barth’s thought from the 1925 lecture through to the writing of the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics*.

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In 1925 and 1933, Karl Barth, in his duties as a university professor, taught a course on the Gospel of John. In neither class did he actually make it all the way through the Gospel, but only got as far as John 8. Despite the fact that the two attempts to teach through John were incomplete, the original exegesis from those lectures<sup>1</sup> would become foundational for Barth’s later theological writings. In 1926, Barth preached a Christmas sermon focused on John 1:14, in which he set the stage for the trajectory his theology would take in light of that verse. In that sermon, he said,

“The Word became flesh” is an equation of unequals which cannot be solved; it remains a riddle according to the riddle of the “darkness” which the Word encounters in the flesh, the Word that became flesh is “true God and true man,” not one or the other, and not some superior third form. The unity of His revelation is not syn-

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *Erklärung Des Johannes-Evangeliums (Kapitel 1–8)* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1976).

thetical but dialectical; it is the question which must always be asked and the answer which must always result.<sup>2</sup>

Barth's exegesis of John 1:14 would become a capstone verse for his theology, particularly in the *Church Dogmatics*,<sup>3</sup> where he explicated "the Word became flesh" in three key doctrines: the doctrine of revelation (*CD I/2* §15), the doctrine of election (*CD II/2* §33), and the doctrine of reconciliation (*CD IV/1* §59). This paper will examine Barth's exegesis of "the Word became flesh" in the early lectures<sup>4</sup> and in the *Church Dogmatics*, and will demonstrate that the exegetical decisions Barth made in 1925 (and in 1933 when he taught the course for a second time) became an exegetical foundation in the *Church Dogmatics* as he constructed his doctrines of revelation, election, and reconciliation. This analysis will lend itself to a re-evaluation of the conventional narrative of the development of Barth's theological thought, specifically, the idea in some quarters of current Barth scholarship that *CD II/2* represents a profound shift in Barth's theology. This shift is not so much about Barth's understanding of the doctrine of election, which does undergo a substantial change from how he presented the doctrine in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*; rather, in light of *II/2*, there appears to be a shift in two aspects of his understanding of Christology: in his use of the Chalcedonian statement, "very God and very man," and in his affirmation of the doctrine of the *logos asarkos*.

First, there is an ongoing debate, primarily between Bruce McCormack and George Hunsinger, about just how Chalcedonian Barth actually is. At issue is McCormack's suggestion that Barth is only truly Chalcedonian in his theology before *CD II/2*, but that after *CD II/2*, Barth's Chalcedonian paradigm undergoes a profound ontological shift.<sup>5</sup> This is because, while Barth may in *CD I/1* affirm and use the ontological definitions of "person" and "nature" as understood in the original formula of Chalcedon, by *CD IV/1* he redefines the terms by moving away from the language of "person" and "nature," and instead focuses on the language of "history." McCormack argues that the statement that Barth is Chalcedonian "has far more validity for the Christological material found in *CD I/2* than

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2 Karl Barth, "The Word Made Flesh -1926," in *Christmas*, trans. Bernhard Citron (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 13.

3 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010). All further references will be cited as CD and then the volume number in parenthetical references within the body of the essay.

4 Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1*, ed. Walther Fürst, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986). All further references will be cited as *WtW* in parenthetical references within the body of the essay.

5 Bruce McCormack, "Karl Barth's Historicized Christology," in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 201–31; George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000); George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

it does for the material found in the later doctrine of reconciliation.”<sup>6</sup> This leads to discussion about whether Barth was more Alexandrian (emphasizing the divinity of Christ) or Antiochian (emphasizing the humanity of Christ) in his use of Chalcedon. Overall, Barth uses an Alexandrian framework even when emphasizing the Antiochian side of the Chalcedonian paradigm.<sup>7</sup>

Second, McCormack and Hunsinger disagree over Barth’s understanding of the *logos asarkos* (the Word without flesh). The question is, in light of “the Word became flesh” (*logos ensarkos*), how should the relationship between the *logos asarkos* and the *logos ensarkos* be understood? McCormack argues, in light of CD II/2, that Barth abandons the doctrinal necessity of a *logos asarkos*.<sup>8</sup> Hunsinger, on the other hand, argues that Barth continues to affirm the ontological necessity of the *logos asarkos* in II/2 as evidence of God’s freedom, but that, at a practical level, humanity has no access to this *logos asarkos*, because it is only through the *logos ensarkos* that God reveals, elects, and reconciles humanity to himself.<sup>9</sup>

This paper will argue that an analysis of Barth’s use of “the Word became flesh” from the original lectures in three key areas of the *Church Dogmatics* (the doctrine of revelation in I/2, the doctrine of election in II/2, and the doctrine of reconciliation in IV/1) contributes another piece of the puzzle in the discussion of Barth’s theological development, specifically his use of the Chalcedonian statement and the doctrine of the *logos asarkos*. More specifically, Barth’s repeated use of his original exegesis of the Johannine prologue demonstrates a high degree of continuity in Barth’s theological thought, a continuity that lasted from the 1925 lecture through to the writing of the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics* thirty years later.

The overall structure of this paper follows the structure of “the Word became flesh” equation, and, by extension, the Chalcedonian statement that Jesus Christ is “very God and very man.” In the doctrine of revelation, Barth exegetes “the Word became flesh” and compares it to the “very God and very man” of Chalcedon. It is here that the most significant and in-depth exegesis occurs, as Barth devotes nearly forty pages to exegeting “the Word became flesh.” In the doctrine of election, Barth focuses on the “very God” or “the Word” side of the equation. In the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth focuses on the “very man” or the “became

6 McCormack, “Karl Barth’s Historicized Christology,” 201.

7 Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character”; Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*; Charles Waldrop, “Karl Barth’s Concept of the Divinity of Jesus Christ,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 241–63.

8 Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92–110.

9 George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 188–89.

flesh” side of the equation. In other words, at a larger level, Barth’s exegesis of “the Word became flesh” not only forms the foundation for his theology, but also structures the presentation of Barth’s theology. Therefore, at a textual level there is continuity in how Barth uses material from his original lectures in his exegesis of “the Word became flesh” in the *Church Dogmatics*, and at a literary or hermeneutic level, there is continuity in how Barth uses “the Word became flesh” to structure his dogmatic project. This, then, suggests that the exegesis that Barth prepared in his 1925 class on the Gospel of John is not only consistent, but is fundamental to Barth’s entire theology.

### **Overview of Barth’s Exegesis of “the Word became Flesh” in the John Lectures**

To appreciate Barth’s initial exegesis of John 1:14 in the original lectures, it is important to look to his exegesis of the first two verses of John 1. Barth wants his theology to follow Scripture, and here in John’s Gospel, John starts with the divinity, and not the humanity, of Christ. In these opening verses, the discussion is about the Word, and not the flesh, because the Word is the subject and must come first. As Barth notes, the Word is not the beginning of creation, but the Word stood at the beginning of creation. Thus, the Word is distinct from the world (*WttW*, 19). Not only that, since only God was “in the beginning,” John is boldly proclaiming that Jesus is God because there is no one else “in the beginning” (*WttW*, 19). Not only was the Word “in the beginning” with God, but the Word “was” God. It must, therefore, be of the same nature, essence and substance as God (*WttW*, 27).

Barth then explores the question of why John chose the term *Logos* rather than some other term. John could have easily used a word like *Sophia*, but Barth argues that, in choosing *Logos*, John emphasized that Jesus is “the divine address that is directed to humanity” (*WttW*, 25), and that this divine communication from God to humanity is not found solely in the words of Christ, but in his entire being, in the action of his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. As such, in whatever manner the Greco-Roman culture in which John lived may have used *Logos*, and whether or not Philo or the mystery religions’ use of John directly influenced or inspired John is irrelevant. John’s *Logos* is completely different, and as such the exegete should not look outside the text to understand the *Logos* but should stay focused on the text itself. John’s *Logos* is the event in which God “imparts himself to us,” and it is through the Word that God speaks, has spoken, and will speak (*WttW*, 27). This Word is “the provisional designation of a place which something or someone else will later fill” (*WttW*, 23).

The “became” in “the Word became flesh” is a theological word that anchors the entire statement. “Became” does not refer just to the birth of Christ; rather, “became” is grounded in epiphany, because it is “the concrete historical existence



of the Word in all its breadth, just as the coming of the Baptist in v.6 refers to his total appearance and not simply the first moment of his activity” (*WttW*, 87).

The flesh is at the heart of the revelation of God. The revelation of the Word occurs through the flesh, or more precisely, the revelation of the Word is that it became flesh. The Word is not to be understood without the flesh. One cannot talk about the Word without talking about the flesh, because the incarnate Word is “not without the flesh but in the flesh, through the flesh, as flesh” (*WttW*, 91). Furthermore, “became flesh” does not mean that Jesus took on neutral human existence, or that he simply took on the form of a male, because neither of these are enough to save humanity. The Word “became flesh,” which is in “exclusively hostile opposition to God” (*WttW*, 87), and the Word became flesh, which is a descendant of Adam “under the sign of the fall and in the sphere of darkness, of fallen and corrupt human nature which needs to be sanctified and redeemed” (*WttW*, 88). Jesus did not assume pre-fallen flesh, but flesh that is fully corrupted. Following Hermann Bezzel, Barth affirms that Jesus “lived out the idea of humanity in its distorted form” (*WttW*, 89).

That “the Word became flesh” means that God joins the ranks of his enemies, and chooses to bind himself to “base and ignoble men” (*WttW*, 89). John’s pronouncement that the Word “dwelt among us” further explains the mystery of “the Word became flesh,” because this tabernacling of God, or “lodging” (*WttW*, 94), is both intimate and temporary. God has pitched his tent, not on the edges of human existence, but right in the middle of it.

### “The Word became Flesh” and the Doctrine of Revelation

In constructing his doctrine of revelation, Barth asks two key questions: how much is God, without ceasing to be God, free *for* humanity; and how much is God free *in* humanity to deal with those who belong to God and obey Him, even though they are sinful? (*CD I/2*, 2). Barth’s thesis is that, “God is not prevented either by His own deity or by our humanity and sinfulness from being our God and having intercourse with us as with His own. On the contrary, He is free *for* us, and *in* us. That is the central content of the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit” (*CD I/2*, 2).

Thus, revelation is at the heart of both christology and pneumatology. God’s revelation is self-revelation. Humanity can in no way discover God without God first revealing himself. There are two reasons why it is impossible for humanity to discover God. First, there is the distinction between God’s holiness and humanity’s sin, which means that “revelation occurs, therefore, to reverse the epistemic consequences of the Fall.”<sup>10</sup> Second, the distinction is not merely about the differ-

10 Trevor Hart, “Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41.

ence between holiness and sinfulness, but it is about the wholly-otherness of God and the way in which, through faith, humanity is confronted by the “absolute mystery” of God.<sup>11</sup> Revelation is necessary because God is hidden and, at the same time, humanity is blind. Thus, “revelation and it alone really and finally separates God and man by bringing them together” (*CD I/2*, 29).

In *CD I/1*, Barth examines the doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to revelation, and in *CD I/2*, he turns to christology. In his definition of christology, Barth specifically employs the language of John 1:14, stating that christology is “the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word of God made flesh” (*CD I/2*, 3). With this definition of christology, the doctrine of revelation begins to take shape. For Barth, Jesus is the “objective reality of revelation.”<sup>12</sup> In other words: revelation is the event of Jesus Christ. Revelation had to be incarnation. It could not be anything else. Because revelation is the action of God, anything less than the incarnation of the Word becoming flesh would not be revelation. It is Jesus Christ who crosses the boundary between God’s hiddenness and humanity’s blindness, and it is in the event of the incarnation of Jesus Christ that the “togetherness of God and man” occurs, making the “boundary visible to [humanity] in an unprecedented way” (*CD*, *I/2*, 29).

Paul McGlasson argues that, overall, Barth’s use of exegesis in the *Church Dogmatics* represents a “conceptual-analytical approach,” wherein Barth uses exegetical excursus as a “conceptual support for a particular theological concept or argument.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, for the most part, Barth’s exegetical work is limited to the small-print sections that serve as support for the theology in the main body of the text. There are exceptions to this, however, including Barth’s exegesis of John 1:14 in §15 of *CD I/2*. Here, Barth’s exegesis of “the Word became flesh” is not relegated to the small print sections, but instead forms the majority of the large print text of this section, with the small print sections reserved for exegesis of tangential scripture passages, and discussions of the historical development of theological thought (e.g., the historical development of the an/en hypostatic union). Thus, the exegesis of John 1:14 “functions [so as] to introduce and guide the dogmatic presentation”<sup>14</sup> of the theme of christology as it relates to the doctrine of revelation.

The nearly forty pages of exposition in the second sub-section of §15 are divided into three parts, as Barth exegetes John 1:14 and juxtaposes its three key words, “λογος,” “σαρξ,” and “ἐγενετο” alongside the Chalcedonian statement that Jesus Christ is “very God and very man.” For Barth, this christological statement, “The

11 Hart, “Revelation,” 42.

12 Later, Barth examines the “subjective possibility of revelation,” that is, the Holy Spirit.

13 Paul McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 91.

14 McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth*, 93.

Word became flesh” is the heart of the mystery of revelation, and the mystery of revelation is the object of christology, that is, Jesus Christ (*CD I/2*, 133).

In part one, Barth starts with *λογος*, which he describes as “the divine, creative, reconciling, redeeming Word which participates without restriction in the divine nature and existence, the eternal Son of God” (*CD I/2*, 132). Very briefly (in a small print section), Barth makes note of the context of John 1:1–12 for exegeting *λογος*, emphasizing that the Word is “the object of John’s witness” (*CD I/2*, 132), and then begins to consider what it means that Jesus is “very God.” That Jesus is fully divine means that he is “the one, only, true, eternal God” (*CD I/2*, 132) and that he has the same “fullness of deity” as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (*CD I/2*, 133). As God, Jesus is “creator, reconciler and redeemer,” never ceasing to be God, and yet at the same time, Jesus presents something of a paradox, because “he is the king of kings just when he enters into the profoundest hiddenness in ‘meekness of heart’” (*CD I/2*, 133).

Barth then proceeds to make four statements that affirm that the Word is “very God.” First, the Word is the subject in the statement “the Word made flesh,” and, as such, the event of revelation in the Incarnation is by God’s action and is not reliant on any human effort, nor is it the result of an evolutionary necessity.<sup>15</sup> Second, “the Word became flesh” is an act of divine freedom, and it was not done out of a necessity from within the divine nature. In other words, the Incarnation is not the result of a fundamental necessity from any of the attributes of God, nor is the Incarnation done out of a sense of duty or debt to creation (*CD I/2*, 135). Therefore, “the Word became flesh” is a miracle.<sup>16</sup> Third, the equation “very God and very man” is irreversible because, while Jesus is the incarnate Word (that is, the Word with flesh), he was the Word prior to his enfleshment. The flesh is dependent on the Word, and therefore the Word “can never become the predicate or object” in the statement “the Word became flesh” (*CD I/2*, 136). The “and” in “very God and very man” is therefore extremely important. While Barth will more fully explore the “became” and “and” in part three, here he makes a point of emphasizing that the “and” serves to protect “the Word became flesh” from two possibilities: one, that the *λογος* had to change from his “mode of being” into the mode of being of a creature; and two, that Jesus became some sort of third thing, that is, some other mode of being that is neither divine nor human (*CD I/2*, 136). Fourth, and finally, Barth devotes several pages to a discussion surrounding the role of Mary. In short, Barth agrees that Mary, and doctrine concerning her, is “a legitimate expression of Christological truth,” but at the same time, he has harsh

15 In a small print section, Barth considers, and rejects, Schleiermacher’s understanding of Jesus as the continuation, or development, of creation. *CD I/2*, 134.

16 Barth goes on to consider more fully the miracle of Christmas in the third subsection of §15 (see pp. 172–202).

words for Mariology, calling it “an excrescence, i.e., a diseased construct of theological thought” (*CD I/2*, 139).

In part two, Barth shifts his focus to the “very Man” part of the statement “very God and very Man,” and considers the exact nature and meaning of “flesh” in John 1:14. Paralleling his discussion of the Word, Barth offers four points regarding the humanity of Jesus. First, Jesus assumed the same human existence as humanity. He was “participating in the same human essence and existence, the same human nature and form, the same historicity that we have” (*CD I/2*, 147). Jesus’ humanity is central for Barth’s doctrine of revelation, because “what in fact makes revelation revelation and miracle miracle is that the Word of God did actually become a real man, and that therefore *the life of this real man was the object and theatre of the acts of God*, the light of revelation entering the world” (*CD I/2*, 147).

Second, Barth defines “flesh” in general. “Flesh” is the essence and existence of humanity. It is “that which makes a man man as opposed to God, angel or animal” (*CD I/2*, 149). Jesus becoming flesh was not adoptionism, wherein a human male who already existed was taken up by the Son of God. The humanity of Jesus “was never a reality by Himself” (*CD I/2*, 150). That Jesus became flesh was also not an event in which God and humanity existed side by side in Jesus, dueling for control. Barth then emphasizes what Jesus was not: he was not a demi-god, an angel, or an ideal human. Instead, Jesus as the “Word became flesh,” who is both fully divine and fully human, “represents God to us and He represents us to God. In this way, He is God’s revelation to us and our reconciliation with God” (*CD I/2*, 151).

Third, Barth defines “flesh” specifically. Barth focuses on flesh as that which is under judgment from God; in other words, the fallen condition of humanity. Thus, Barth defines flesh as “the concrete form of human nature marked by Adam’s fall, the concrete form of that entire world which, when seen in the light of Christ’s death on the cross, must be regarded as the old world already past and gone, the form of the destroyed nature and existence of man as they have to be reconciled with God” (*CD I/2*, 151).

Flesh is an adversary of God, and Barth notes that this opposition of the flesh to God can be seen specifically in John 1 (vv. 5, 9, 11, 21). That Jesus assumes this flesh that is in opposition to God is integral to the event of revelation, because Jesus “would not be revelation if he were not man. And He would not be man if he were not ‘flesh’ in this definite sense” (*CD I/2*, 152). Finally, even though Jesus became the same flesh, he is also different. Jesus, in adopting the true being of humanity, hallows humanity by becoming human (*CD I/2*, 155–56). Here, Barth takes a critical swipe at the moral/exemplar understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, because in being obedient, Jesus Christ did not just live a sinless life, but actually became “the divine bearer of the burden which man as a sinner must bear” (*CD I/2*, 156).

In part three of §15, Barth exegetes the word “ἐγένετο,” arguing that it is this “became” that is at the core of the mystery of revelation. Barth considers the possibility of using the word “assume” to explain Jesus taking on flesh and suggests that the language of assumption can protect against teachings that would have Jesus Christ relinquish his divinity, or have Jesus Christ become something other than both fully divine and fully human. Expanding on his comments in part one about the necessity of the “and” in the statement, “very God and very man,” Barth explains that the “became” or “assumed” points to the unity and unchangeableness of God (*CD I/2*, 161). He then spends several pages evaluating anhypostatic and enhypostatic understandings of the unity between Jesus’ divine and human nature. Barth argues that “the Word became flesh” is both a *completed* event, and a completed *event* (*CD I/2*, 165). It is a *completed* event, because “the reality of Jesus Christ is an objective fact.” It is a completed *event*, because it is an act of revelation in which humanity has been reconciled to God. In Jesus Christ, there is a shift “from non-revelation to revelation, from promise to fulfillment, from the cross to resurrection” (*CD I/2*, 167), and this *completed event* of the “Word became flesh,” Barth concludes, is a mystery.

The structure of Barth’s exegesis obviously looks different between the original lectures in *Witness to the Word* and the *Church Dogmatics*. This is understandable given the difference in purpose. In the lectures, Barth is exegeting John, verse-by-verse, word-by-word. In the *Dogmatics*, Barth is exegeting select verses, which, while being cognizant of the scriptural context in which they appear, still means that he can only summarize his fuller exegetical research.

In looking specifically at John 1:14, one of the most obvious differences is that in the original lectures, Barth does not actually exegete λογος in his discussion of v. 14. This is because Barth had already exegeted λογος in his analysis of v. 1. Thus, in the original lectures, save for a brief, one paragraph summary of his previous discussion of the λογος, Barth starts his exegesis of v. 14 with σαρχ ἐγένετο. Another difference is that, in the original lectures, Barth’s exegesis of John 1:14 is linear. He exegetes λογος first (albeit thirteen verses earlier), then ἐγένετο, and then σαρχ. In *CD I/2*, Barth exegetes John 1:14 in a different order: λογος, σαρχ, and then ἐγένετο. This is because Barth is exegeting “the Word became flesh” alongside the Chalcedonian definition of “very God and very Man,” which functions as a hermeneutical construct in the *Church Dogmatics*.

That being said, Barth does not abandon his exegetical work from the original lectures to start over again. Instead, throughout his exegesis in §15 there are re-workings and selections from his original research. For example, in part two, where Barth considers what it means that Jesus is “very Man,” there is an extended small print section in which he gives an overview of the historical exegesis of John 1:14. Barth starts with Calvin’s reflection on the verse, and uses the same quote

about the derogatory nature of the term ‘flesh,’ and how Jesus taking on flesh demonstrates the extent to which he humbled himself in order to do so (*CD I/2*, 152; *WttW* 88). Barth then considers how the incarnation of Jesus, which on the surface may bear a resemblance to incarnations in other religions such as Egyptian mythology, Buddhism, or Zoroastrianism, is actually something quite different. Only in Christianity is the Incarnate One made sin, and only in Christianity is there “so strict a concept of Emmanuel, of revelation and reconciliation” (*CD I/2*, 152). Barth makes the same comparison in his original lectures, but with a little more detail. In the original lectures, Barth cites the work done by Walter Bauer on parallels between different religious incarnations, and besides mentioning Egyptian mythology, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, also mentions Aesculapius from Greek mythology, and Anos Uthra from the Gnostic tradition of the Mandeans. In noting the difference between the incarnations as found in various religious traditions and the Incarnation of Jesus in Christianity, Barth says that John “speaks explicitly of becoming flesh, of assuming the nature of Adam, of the servant form which is proper to human nature under the sign of the fall and in the sphere of darkness” (*WttW*, 88). This language of assumption does not occur in this specific small print section of §15. Instead, Barth incorporates this imagery in his later discussion of the “and” / “became” component of the “the Word became flesh” / “very God and very Man.” As well, in this same section of historical exegesis in part two of §15, Barth provides several quotes, which also appear in the original lectures, from the work of Hermann Bezzel, regarding the corruption of human flesh, and that Jesus entered into this “body of weakness” (*CD I/2*, 155; *WttW*, 89).

Another example of significant overlap occurs in Barth’s exegesis of ἐγένετο. In his original lectures, Barth argues that ἐγένετο is “the sign equating ὁ λογος and σαρχ” (*WttW*, 90). As in *CD I/2*, Barth emphasizes that the statement, or equation, “Word became flesh” is irreversible, and that this equation does not in any way lead to either the Word ceasing to be the Word, or to the creation of a new third mode of being (*WttW*, 91). The significance of ἐγένετο for the statement “the Word became flesh” is the same in the original lectures and in §15, especially in terms of exegetical content. The difference is in presentation. Nowhere in his original exegesis of v. 14 does Barth overlay or even refer to the Chalcedonian statement “very God and very Man.” The building blocks are there for it, but it is not fully realized until §15. This demonstrates maturation in Barth’s thought, as he moves from a heavy emphasis on exegesis with minimal theological reflection in the original lectures, to a balance of exegesis and theological reflection in *CD I/2*.

Of the three doctrines (revelation, election, and reconciliation), revelation is the most prominent and well-developed theology present in the original lectures. This is not surprising given that, in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth had already linked John 1:14 to revelation, defining “the Word became flesh” as “the objective

possibility of revelation.”<sup>17</sup> Consequently, in the original lectures on John’s Gospel, the doctrine of revelation runs throughout the text. In his introductory remarks, just prior to the commencement of verse-by-verse exegesis, Barth argues that the entirety of John’s Prologue is focused on “the question of the situation that arises when we hear a witness to revelation” (*WttW*, 18). Both John the Baptist, and the Gospel of John are witnesses to revelation. Both point to Jesus Christ, and it is this relationship between witness and revelation that is the “formula” and “guiding thread” of the Johannine Prologue (*WttW*, 18–19). In his discussion of the definition and etymology of *λογος*, Barth rejects the idea that contemporary uses and definitions of the term (such as in Philo, or in Mandaean Gnosticism) are significant for understanding John’s use. Instead, Barth argues that what is important is examining how *λογος* functions in the Prologue, mainly, as “the principle of revelation” (*WttW*, 25). The *λογος*, Jesus, is “the revealer,” and it is “in the fullness of the Word [that] God reveals himself and has revealed himself” (*WttW*, 27).

In his exegesis of v. 14, the doctrine of revelation takes centre stage. As revelation, the “Word became flesh” is an action, not just an abstract idea, and the reality of the action of God’s address to humanity (*WttW*, 89–90). Revelation is not the *λογος* on its own, but it is revelation specifically in the Word becoming flesh. The enfleshment of the Word is the epiphany, which he defines as “the concrete historical existence of the Word in all its breadth” (*WttW*, 87). In his discussion of the irreversibility of the equation “Word became flesh,” Barth argues that the Word, as the subject, is the Word who speaks, acts, reveals, and redeems, and yet at the same time, it is the entirety of the equation that is “the reality and possibility of revelation” (*WttW*, 91). This revelation, this epiphany, is historical and real, and entirely the work of the *λογος* rather than the *σαρχ*.

The dialectic of hiddenness and revealing is apparent, as Barth continues to exegete the rest of the verse, specifically, “and dwelt among us.” It is in this tabernacling of the divine *λογος* in human *σαρχ* that the revelation of God is “complete,” “once-for-all,” and “here and now” (*WttW*, 95).

### “The Word became Flesh” and the Doctrine of Election

In *CD* II/2, Barth examines “the Word became flesh” as he argues that Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected human. But he uses the material from the original lectures in a substantially different way than in *CD* I/2. In this instance, the exegetical material is relegated to the small print section and Barth focuses on John 1:1–2, examining how “the Word” demonstrates that Jesus Christ is not only the elected human, but first and foremost the electing God.

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17 Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, Vol. One*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 166–67.

*CD II/2* starts with a shift from the doctrine of the knowledge of God to looking at the election of God. Barth's thesis for this new chapter is that:

The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because of all words that can be said or heard it is the best: that God elects man; that God is for man too the One who loves in freedom. It is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because He is both the electing God and the elected man in One. It is part of the doctrine of God because originally God's election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself. Its function is to bear basic testimony to eternal, free and unchanging grace as the beginning of all the ways and works of God. (*CD II/2*, 3)

In §32, Barth argues that the election of God is an election of grace, a grace in which God, in his freedom and love, covenants to be 'God for us' in Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> This covenanting is not done by God out of a sense of duty or debt to humanity, but out of God's divine freedom, which "means that grace is truly grace" (*CD II/2*, 10). God elects to enter into covenant with humanity "in order to not be alone in His divine glory, but to let heaven and earth, and between them man, be the witnesses of His glory. He elects the way in which His love shall be shown and the witness to His glory established" (*CD II/2*, 11). This election of grace, this decision by God, in Jesus Christ, is the "whole of the Gospel. . . . It is the very essence of all good news" (*CD II/2*, 13–14).

In §33, Barth focuses in on the heart of election: Jesus Christ, who is both the electing God and the elected human. Barth begins by reminding the reader of the event of reconciliation: "between God and man there stands the person of Jesus Christ, Himself God and Himself man, and so mediating between the two" (*CD II/2*, 94). Alluding to the language of John 1:1–2, which he will more fully exposit in the subsequent small print section, Barth says that Jesus Christ is the election of God because he was with God from the beginning: "He is the beginning of God before which there is no other beginning apart from that of God Himself," and He is the election of God "before which and without which and beside which God cannot make any other choices" (*CD II/2*, 94).

After this brief introduction, Barth begins an extended small print section where he presents his exegesis of John 1:1–2. Barth focuses on the Logos, arguing that, because Jesus is the Logos who was with God and was God Himself, Jesus is the electing God. Barth ties the Logos to revelation ("He was the principle, the

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18 "Jesus Christ is indeed God in His movement towards man, or, more exactly, in His movement towards the people represented in the one man Jesus of Nazareth, in His covenant with this people, in His being and activity amongst and towards this people. Jesus Christ is the decision of God in favour of this attitude or relation." *CD II/2*, 7.



intrinsically divine basis of revelation”) and to reconciliation (He is the “Word, the divine self-communication proceeding from person to person and uniting God and man”) (*CD II/2*, 97). Barth describes the Logos as being “the x in an equation whose value we can know only when the equation has been solved” (*CD II/2*, 97). This idea of the Logos being like the x of an equation is not new in *II/2*, but appears in his exegesis of John 1:1 in the original lectures, where he argues that “As an ideogram it can stand there like the inscription on the diadem of the white rider in Revelation 19, which can be read but not understood, like the x in the equation whose value will appear only when the equation is solved” (*WttW*, 27).

This idea of the Logos as placeholder suggests that for Barth’s understanding of the eternal Son (the *logos asarkos*—the Word without flesh) this placeholder, this word without flesh, is necessary because it speaks to God’s freedom. The event of the Word becoming flesh is a miracle (*CD I/2*, 135), and as such was not dependent on either a necessity in God’s nature or on a world-process.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, while acknowledging the theological need for a *logos asarkos*, Barth does not want to dwell on the abstract, and what matters is the concrete event of the Word became flesh, because “in the name and person of Jesus Christ we are called upon to recognize the Word of God, the decree of God and the election of God at the beginning of all things, at the beginning of our being and thinking, at the basis of our faith in the ways and works of God” (*CD II/2*, 99). Barth demonstrates this notion by referencing John 1:2, which describes Jesus Christ as being the one who made the whole world. He lends further support to it by giving examples of New Testament verses that describe Jesus Christ as the “head,” “first-born,” and “heir.” In each of these verses it is Jesus Christ “*in concreto* and not *in abstracto*” who has this authority and place (*CD II/2*, 98).

McCormack argues that Barth needs to abandon the *logos asarkos*, and seems to suggest that Barth never should have held to the doctrine in the first place, because it posits “a mode of existence in God above and prior to God’s gracious election.”<sup>20</sup> Following McCormack,<sup>21</sup> Paul Dafydd Jones argues that Barth’s

19 Paul Molnar, “Can Jesus’ Divinity Be Recognized as ‘Definitive, Authentic and Essential’ If It Is Grounded in Election? Just How Far Did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?,” *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 52 (2010): 53. See also, *CD II/1*, 306–308.

20 Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 102; Molnar characterizes McCormack’s argument this way: “For instance, it has been said [by McCormack] that Barth should have seen that election is the ground of God’s trinity and that therefore it was and is impermissible to maintain that God ever could have been the triune God without us.” Molnar, “Can Jesus’ Divinity Be Recognized as ‘Definitive, Authentic and Essential’ If It Is Grounded in Election? Just How Far Did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?,” 40.

21 McCormack’s hesitation concerning Barth’s understanding of *logos asarkos* can be seen in his worry about the implications of the idea of “God becoming.” McCormack’s hesitation is misplaced given that Barth clearly defines in *I/2* what the function of “became” is, that is, as an equal sign

understanding of the *logos asarkos* changes in II/2 because his “use of the *logos asarkos* is strictly circumscribed.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, where Barth could say in the original lectures that “inasmuch as every word here relates to Jesus Christ, it also relates to the Logos as the revealer of God who announces himself before and even apart from Jesus of Nazareth” (*WttW*, 43), Jones argues that by II/2 Barth can no longer say the same thing. What Jones fails to note, when referencing this quote to support his argument, is that Barth’s statement is taken from his exegesis of John 1:4, and not from his exegesis of 1:1–2. Thus, Barth’s omission of it does not necessarily represent a circumscribing of the *logos asarkos* in II/2, because Barth is exegeting John 1:1–2 and not John 1:4 in this small print section. If anything, that Barth directly alludes to his “x equation” in II/2 without change from the John lectures suggests more continuity rather than discontinuity in his understanding of the *logos asarkos*.

Molnar offers a helpful critique against those, like Jones and McCormack, who see Barth abandoning the *logos asarkos*. He views Barth’s assertion that Jesus is divine and human from all eternity not as an abandonment of the *logos asarkos*, but rather an attempt “to uphold God’s pre-temporal, supra-temporal and post-temporal existence in way that corresponded to his eternal Trinitarian being and action as actions of one who loves in freedom.”<sup>23</sup> Hunsinger’s analogy is also useful for understanding the relationship between the eternal and incarnate Son, between the *logos asarkos* and the *logos ensarkos*. He likens it to the sentence “the Queen was born in 1819,” where he states, “I am speaking about the infant who would eventually be the queen. Though she was not yet the queen, she enjoyed coronation in due course. We might say that Victoria became what she was ordained to be. In that light one can say, retrospectively, ‘the Queen was born in 1819.’”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the Logos is the placeholder, the x in the equation, and one can speak of this *logos asarkos* only in light of the reality of the *logos ensarkos*. As it relates to election, the *logos asarkos* is necessary to establish the divinity of Jesus Christ, but the actual event of election occurs only in “the Word become flesh.”

Barth concludes his exegetical section by noting that Jesus Christ is the start-

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between Word and flesh. I would suggest that McCormack’s reservation about “became” could be resolved by looking at how Barth translates the second half of John 1:14, “and dwelt among us.” The “dwelt among us” being provisional “rather than complete fulfillment of the divine presence” (See Webster, “Karl Barth’s Lectures on the Gospel of John”, 228) helps to protect against the supposed danger that McCormack sees in “God becoming.”

22 Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 95.

23 Molnar, “Can Jesus’ Divinity Be Recognized as ‘Definitive, Authentic and Essential’ If It Is Grounded in Election? Just How Far Did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?,” 64.

24 George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 182.

ing point of election, because Jesus Christ is the name that God elected to bear, and as such, “Jesus Christ is the eternal will of God, the eternal decree of God and the eternal beginning of God” (*CD II/2*, 99). The decision that Jesus Christ would be God’s election was always God’s plan, for just as the Logos was in the beginning with God, so too was it God’s decision from the beginning that the Word made flesh would be the election of grace for the world. “God anticipated and determined within Himself . . . that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious toward man, uniting Himself with him” (*CD II/2*, 101). Again, Barth ties election to reconciliation, because God elected to be reconciled with humanity.

After the small print section, which relies on the exegesis from his original lectures, Barth continues to use the framework of “the Word became flesh” to carry forward his exploration of the doctrine of election in the subsequent large print section. Just as in *CD I/2*, where Barth considers the implications of the Word, or the “very God” side of the equation, and then flips to the flesh, or the “very man” side of the equation, in *II/2* Barth maintains the same structure. Having considered the implications of Jesus, the Word who was with God and who was God, as the subject of election, he then examines the other side, that Jesus, who is “very man,” is the object of election. That Jesus Christ is “very man” means that

the passive determination of election is also and necessarily proper to Him. It is true, of course, that even as God He is elected; the Elected of His Father. But because as the Son of the Father He has no need of any special election, we must add at once that He is the Son of God elected in His oneness with man, and in fulfillment of God’s covenant with man. Primarily, then, electing is the divine determination of the existence of Jesus Christ and election (being elected) the human (*CD II/2*, 103).

Even in exploring the “very man” side of the equation, Barth is quick to once again return to an Alexandrian voice by reiterating that Jesus Christ as “very man” can only be understood in light of him first being “very God.”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Barth concludes the first part of §33 by defining that to which Jesus is elected: Jesus is elected to suffering. Again, Barth brings in John 1:14. “The Word became flesh,” because “this formulation of the message of Christmas already includes within itself the message of Good Friday. For ‘all flesh is as grass’” (*CD II/2*, 122). Even though Barth has been talking about how Jesus is the elected human, he points back to his discussion in *CD I/2* about the difference and signifi-

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25 “Jesus Christ is the electing God. We must begin with this assertion because by its content it has the character and dignity of a basic principle, and because the other assertion, that Jesus Christ is elected man, can be understood only in the light of it.” *CD II/2*, 103.

cance of Jesus taking on flesh specifically, and not just humanity in general. Jesus Christ, as the elected human and because he is “the Word became flesh”, is elected to suffering, judgment, wrath, and rejection.

In his analysis of Barth’s doctrine of election, Paul Dafydd Jones expresses surprise that Barth has apparently “lifted sections from these [John] lectures to pad the excursus” of *CD II/2*.<sup>26</sup> Given how Barth has used the John lectures in *CD I/2*, his continued use of those lectures in *CD II/2* should not be surprising. Instead, it demonstrates that Barth is a scholar who desires to stay as close as possible to the biblical text when doing his theology.<sup>27</sup> Other than the fact that in *CD II/2* Barth relegates his exegesis of Logos to the small print section rather than incorporating it into the main text as he did in *CD I/2*, his use of the original exegesis continues in the same manner. While not quoting large sections of the original lectures, Barth obviously relies on those original lectures. Not only does Barth’s characterization of the Logos being like the  $x$  in an equation that is yet to be solved come directly from the lecture material, but Barth also relies heavily on the lectures in his discussion of whether John was aware of the different uses of Logos in the ancient world, such as when he describes Philo’s use of Logos and the “personal, semi-personal and impersonal essences” of the Mandaean religion (*WttW*, 24; *CD II/2*, 96–97).

There are additional pieces of evidence that Barth relied heavily on his original lectures. Coming directly from the lectures, and reappearing in the exegetical section of *CD II/2*, is Barth’s reference to Goethe, where as soon as Faust tries to translate the “word” as “deed” the devil appears (*WttW*, 26; *CD II/2*, 97). Barth also draws heavily from his exegesis of v. 2, where he considers whether the  $\acute{\omicron}\tau\omicron\varsigma \eta\nu$  refers backwards to the  $\acute{\omicron} \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ , or if it can refer forward to Jesus. In looking at Zahn’s and Schlatter’s exegetical work on the passage, Barth ends up agreeing with Schlatter that the  $\acute{\omicron}\tau\omicron\varsigma \eta\nu$  does not point backwards, but forwards (*WttW*, 28; *CD II/2*, 98). In using  $\acute{\omicron}\tau\omicron\varsigma \eta\nu$ , John was appropriating John the Baptist’s words as found in v. 15, but was doing so while pointing forward to Jesus Christ rather than back to the  $\acute{\omicron} \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ . The Word who was with God and was God is the Logos who has come in person, that is, Jesus Christ, who is the Word became flesh. The Logos is then “by definition *incarnandus*.”<sup>28</sup> This would suggest that while holding to a *logos asarkos* even in the original lectures, Barth was at

26 Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*, 95.

27 “The biblical exegesis in the *Church Dogmatics* is, above all, an attempt to stay close to the biblical text. It is a remarkably sober, painstaking, almost mundane corpus of exegesis, at least insofar as it stretches the scope of a biblical text seemingly beyond its limits only after the most careful and precise mapping of its textual, literary, and theological coordinates.” McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth*, 13.

28 John Webster, “Karl Barth’s Lectures on the Gospel of John,” in *What Is It That the Scripture Says? Essays in Biblical Interpretation, Translation and Reception in Honour of Henry Wansbrough OSB*, ed. Philip McCosker (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 226.

the same time uninterested in abstracting the Word from the flesh. The Logos, because he has come and he has now been revealed, is none other than Jesus Christ. Thus, Barth is able in *CD II/2* to make Jesus the subject and object of election, without having to deny the dogmatic necessity of holding to a *logos asarkos*.

### **“The Word became Flesh” and the Doctrine of Reconciliation**

For Barth, reconciliation is not just about forgiving sins, or about individual salvation. It is about fulfilling the promise and command of relationship: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Reconciliation is the restoration of God’s relationship with humanity to what it was always intended to be. Barth further defines reconciliation as “the restitution, the resumption of a fellowship which once existed but was then threatened by dissolution” (*CD IV/1*, 22). Reconciliation maintains, restores, and upholds the relationship even when it is faced with the possibility of being disrupted or broken (*CD IV/1*, 22). This reconciliation is grounded in the covenant that is fulfilled in the atonement of Jesus Christ. Covenant is at the centre of the whole Christian message, and Barth argues that failure to get the covenant right means that all the rest of Christian theology will be fundamentally flawed (*CD IV/1*, 3).

Because covenant is at the heart of the Christian message, faith, then, is the acknowledgement of the truth and reality of the covenant of reconciliation.<sup>29</sup> Covenant is the foundation of the three Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love. One cannot start with faith, hope, and love and work one’s way back to a theology of reconciliation. Rather, it is necessary to first start with the message of covenant, which is, in turn, “the subject-matter of the Christian faith, the origin of Christian love, and the content of Christian hope” (*CD IV/1*, 3). As Busch notes, faith, hope, and love are not “precondition[s] but rather consequence[s] of the validity of reconciliation.”<sup>30</sup> Reconciliation is a call to faith, a call to confess that reconciliation, through the event of Jesus Christ, has really and truly happened (*CD IV/1*, 76).

The Chalcedonian paradigm of “very God and very man” structures Barth’s presentation of covenant. The divine covenant is a relationship between the divine and the human, each being fully themselves, and yet they are united in their distinction. They are not equals, with equal tasks and responsibilities, but they are both active partners participating and contributing to the asymmetric relationship of the covenant. In each chapter of his doctrine of reconciliation, Barth employs this asymmetric dialectic to explore the relationship between God and the world, and more specifically between God and the Church. Barth examines the character

29 Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology*, ed. Darrell L Guder and Judith J Guder, trans. Geo Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 216.

30 Busch, *The Great Passion*, 216.

of God (as demonstrated through the person and work of the Son), the failure of the covenant partner (humanity), and the work of God to make humanity a fit covenant partner (justification, sanctification, calling).

In *CD IV/1*, Barth returns to the issue of the *logos asarkos*. In §57, Barth states that “in this context we must not refer to the second ‘person’ of the Trinity as such, to the eternal Son or the eternal Word of God *in abstracto*, and therefore to the *logos asarkos*” (*CD IV/1*, 52). There is a spectrum of opinion in the scholarship regarding this issue. At one end, McCormack and Jones argue that in *CD IV/1* Barth has abandoned the *logos asarkos*. At first glance, Barth’s statement might lend itself to a reading in which Barth is rejecting the concept of the *logos asarkos* in light of his doctrine of election.<sup>31</sup> Paul Molnar goes so far as to say that not only does Barth not wholly reject the “special Christology” of the *logos asarkos* in *CD IV/1*, but his entire discussion of the incarnation as it relates to reconciliation “was possible only because of his consistent perception of the divine freedom” of the Logos.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Darren Sumner suggests that Barth moves from “enthusiastic affirmation to sharp critique” of the doctrine.<sup>33</sup> According to Sumner, in *CD II/2*, Barth relativizes the *logos asarkos*, because it is Jesus Christ and not the Logos who is the subject (and object) of election. In *CD IV/1*, however, rather than denying the *logos asarkos* completely, Barth “reframe[s] the doctrine so as to maintain its sacramental intent while at the same time forestalling the most minute or well-intentioned separation between the logos-in-himself and the logos-become-human.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the *logos asarkos*—*logos ensarkos* distinction is not sequential, but is so closely related that “one does not take place without the other because the one is actualized in and through its union with the other.”<sup>35</sup>

The key is Barth’s use of the phrase “in this context.” The “context” in which Barth is discussing the relevance and usefulness of the *logos asarkos* is not dogmatic theology in general, but his specific consideration of the doctrine of reconciliation, in this case covenant as the “presupposition of the atonement” (*CD IV/1*,

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31 Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100. Hunsinger charges McCormack with taking a “revisionist” approach to Barth’s understanding of the Trinity, as opposed to a “traditional” approach. George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 179.

32 Molnar, “Can Jesus’ Divinity Be Recognized as ‘Definitive, Authentic and Essential’ If It Is Grounded in Election? Just How Far Did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?,” 42.

33 Darren Sumner, “The Twofold Life of the Word: Karl Barth’s Critical Reception of the Extra Calvinistic,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15 (2013): 42.

34 Sumner, “The Twofold Life of the Word: Karl Barth’s Critical Reception of the Extra Calvinistic,” 52.

35 Sumner, “The Twofold Life of the Word: Karl Barth’s Critical Reception of the Extra Calvinistic,” 56.

52). Barth is not denying the importance of, or changing his mind on the *logos asarkos* as it relates to the doctrine of Trinity, or its importance in relation to God's freedom. But in the context of reconciliation, a discussion of the *logos asarkos* is pointless, because reconciliation occurs *not* through the abstract "Word," but through the incarnate Jesus Christ. For Barth, any discussion of a *logos asarkos* in relation to reconciliation is a philosophical endeavor rather than a theological one that "pay[s] homage to a *Deus absconditus* and therefore to some image of God which we have made for ourselves" (CD IV/1, 52). This is because Jesus Christ is the event of reconciliation and the fulfillment of the covenant. From eternity, God covenanted in Jesus Christ and in him the Gospel, "the gracious address of God," and the Law, "the gracious claim of God," are fulfilled (CD IV/1, 53). Jesus Christ "is therefore the concrete reality and actuality of the promise and command of God, the fulfillment of both, very God and very man, in one person amongst us, as a fellow-man" (CD IV/1, 53). Thus, the *logos asarkos* is irrelevant to the discussion of the reconciliation, because reconciliation is found only in Jesus Christ who is "the Word became flesh."

In §59, Barth focuses on the condescension of Jesus. In becoming human, Jesus enters into the far country, that is, the fallen and evil society that actively opposes God. Barth argues that it is precisely in his going into the far country and becoming a servant, that Jesus is revealed to be "very God" (CD IV/1, 157). Any discussion of Jesus' becoming flesh must be done in light of the priority of his deity. Thus, Barth continues his pattern of an Alexandrian Christology, wherein the deity of Christ takes precedence over his humanity,<sup>36</sup> because it is in his obedience that Jesus shows himself to be very God (CD IV/1, 164).

As he considers this obedience and condescension, Barth exegetes "the Word became flesh" of John 1:14, focusing specifically on the "flesh." He writes:

'Flesh' in the language of the New (and earlier the Old) Testament means man standing under the divine verdict and judgment, man who is a sinner and whose existence therefore must perish before God, whose existence has already become nothing, and hastens to nothingness and is a victim to death. 'Flesh' is the concrete form of human nature and the being of man in his world under the sin of the fall of Adam – the being of man as corrupted and therefore

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36 While Hunsinger's tracing of where Barth employs an Alexandrian or Antiochian voice through CD IV is useful, it should be held in balance with Charles Waldrop's observation that, while Barth does appear to take an Antiochian voice at various points in his Christology, the Antiochian elements that he embraces ultimately fit into an overall theological framework that is Alexandrian. George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 137; Charles Waldrop, "Karl Barth's Concept of the Divinity of Jesus Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 260.

destroyed, as unreconciled with God and therefore lost. (*CD IV/1*, 165)

While Barth does not copy verbatim his original definition of flesh that he used in the original lectures or in *CD I/2*, his description of flesh is substantially the same. In each case, the point that Barth is making is that Jesus did not become just a human, but that in specifically becoming flesh, he submitted himself to the “wrath and judgment of God” (*CD IV/1*, 166).<sup>37</sup>

It is at this point that Barth’s examination of the “flesh” includes a significant clarification to his original exegesis. As Barth returns to the large print section of his argument, he qualifies the significance of the flesh by pointing out that the Word not only became flesh, but it became *Jewish* flesh. This is not an insignificant qualification. That the Word became Jewish flesh is of such great importance that “the Church’s whole doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement becomes abstract and valueless and meaningless to the extent that this comes to be regarded as something accidental and incidental” (*CD IV/1*, 166). That the Word became Jewish flesh means that Jesus entered concretely into Israel’s history, and fulfilled God’s covenant with Israel. As such, there is no room for a docetic theology, because this Jewish flesh means that the New Testament cannot be separated from the “soil of the Old Testament” (*CD IV/1*, 166). The gracious election, wherein God chooses to reveal himself to the king and the kingdom of Israel, and which called them to a vocation of obedience and service to God, is what Jesus takes up, because he is the perfect king of Israel, and the perfect Israelite. Even in God’s original covenant with Israel, God was entering into the far country of sin and evil and opposition, because, in electing Israel, God was already ruling and demonstrating faithfulness to an unfaithful and rebellious people. Thus, Jesus, taking the place of Israel, takes “the place of this disobedient son, this faithless people and its faithless priests and kings” (*CD IV/1*, 171). In other words, Jesus is very God and very Israelite, because it is in Israel, as is testified to in the Old Testament, that “the being and nature of man are radically and fundamentally revealed” (*CD IV/1*, 171).

So why does Barth only now modify his discussion of the flesh to emphasize that the Word became Jewish flesh specifically? Mark Lindsay observes that Barth’s appreciation and acknowledgement of Jesus’ Jewish heritage was not a post-World War II development, but rather, even as early as 1924, Barth recognized “the Jewish particularity of revelation’s historicity.”<sup>38</sup> But here, in the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth’s discussion of the Jewishness of Jesus is more than

37 Compare with *CD I/2*, 151, where Barth writes that flesh includes “the narrower concept of the man who is liable to the judgment and verdict of God.” See also *WitW*, 88–89.

38 Mark R. Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 94.



just an acknowledgment; it is fundamental to his theological presentation of the Word condescending to take on flesh. It could be that Barth is using the Jewish flesh as an archetype for sinful humanity.<sup>39</sup> That is, in becoming Jewish flesh, Jesus is taking on the most sinful, and the worst of the human condition. Barth had used archetypes that represented the Jewish people previously in his doctrine of election, where he devotes nearly fifty pages to an analysis of Judas Iscariot, who serves as a representation of both the Jewish election and rejection. Judas, elected as an apostle, “willed to persist in opposition to Jesus,” and like Esau, another archetype, sold his birthright, rejecting the gracious election he had received (*CD* II/2, 465). Thus, Judas (in accepting thirty pieces of silver), Esau (in exchanging his birthright for a bowl of stew), and Israel (in rejecting the call to be a kingdom of priests to the world), all willfully and deliberately forsook their election, doing so not with closed eyes, but with open eyes (*CD* II/2, 469). In this rejection of God’s election, Israel (“the tribe of Judah,” “the city of Jerusalem”), as represented by Judas, “can only perish and disappear, to make way for another. Its lost and forfeited life can only continue in this other, being raised again from the dead... This is the judgment which is carried out in the death of Judas” (*CD* II/2, 470). Given this “anti-Judaic—though not anti-Semitic”<sup>40</sup> presentation in *CD* II/2, it is possible that Barth is using Jesus’ Jewish humanity to represent just how far into the far country God was willing to go to reconcile the world to Himself. It is more likely that, in emphasizing Jesus’ Jewish flesh, Barth is affirming that the Jewish people continue to be elect. Because the Jews are chosen by God, that “determines Israel to be the necessary and appropriate place in which God, in Christ, condescended to come—certainly in solidarity with Israel... but [also] on behalf of Israel and the whole world.”<sup>41</sup> This emphasis on Jewish human flesh once again protects against any theological interpretations suggesting that the “Word became flesh” somehow indicates a change in his mode of being, that he became a *tertium quid*, or that he did not truly and concretely tabernacle in the full reality of human existence.

After characterizing flesh as existing “with the ‘children of Israel under the wrath and judgment of the electing and loving God,” Barth concludes his discussion of the issue by reminding his reader that this existence is Jesus’ existence: “*He* [Jesus] stands under the wrath and judgment of God. *He* is broken and destroyed on God” (*CD* IV/1, 174). Barth then circles back, reminding the reader that this discussion of the flesh is an example of the condescension of God, and that this act of condescension of becoming flesh is an act of His divinity. In other

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39 Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel*, 95.

40 Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew: Karl Barth’s “Doctrine of Israel”* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 174.

41 Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel*, 96.

words, even though he spent time looking at the humanity of Christ using an Antiochian voice, it is now time to return to the Alexandrian voice that overarches his entire Christology. He returns to the framework of “the Word became flesh,” and once again, picking up the argument he made in both the original lectures and in *CD I/2*, states that the statement, “Word became flesh,” (or “very God” and “very man”) is irreversible, and that “the divine being does not suffer any change, any diminution, any transformation into something else, any admixture with something else, let alone any cessation” (*CD IV/1*, 179; *WttW*, 90–91).

Barth’s reiteration of this idea that the Word does not cease to be the Word when it condescends to become flesh, in nearly the same way as he argued in the original lectures and in *I/2*, is evidence of continuity in Barth’s thought regarding the relationship between the Word and flesh after *CD II/2*. That is, while Barth does not specifically reference the issue of the *logos asarkos* here in §59, his repeated emphasis that the Word does not cease to be the Word suggests that the ontological necessity of a *logos asarkos* factors into Barth’s theological presentation of the Word became flesh.

Compared to *CD I/2* and *CD II/2*, Barth devotes less space to exegesis of John 1:14 as he sets forth his christological groundwork of the doctrine of reconciliation. But this is not unique in regard to John 1:14 in *CD IV/1*. Indeed, there is less exegesis in general in *CD IV* than in the previous volumes. It is possible that the lack of exegesis in *IV/1* is for pragmatic reasons. By *CD IV/1*, Barth has been working on his dogmatics for twenty-five years (closer to thirty when *Göttingen Dogmatics* and his abandoned *Christian Dogmatics* are included), and he is still, at this point, not even close to completing the project. Barth would not finish his dogmatics, passing away in 1968, leaving the final volume on the doctrine of redemption unfinished. Another possible explanation is that the decrease in exegetical material around John 1:14 in *CD IV/1* is evidence that Barth’s exegetical material is sufficiently mature, and thus Barth has no need to repeat *everything* he had previously said. And yet, Barth finds specific moments where it is necessary to repeat exegetical concepts, because they have significant impact on his doctrine of reconciliation. That Barth repeats his discussion of the irreversibility of the equation that “the Word became flesh” suggests that Barth has not completely abandoned the need for an ontological affirmation of the *logos asarkos*, and it demonstrates more continuity than discontinuity in his christology before and after *CD II/2*. In adding the qualifier that the Word became not only human flesh, but Jewish flesh, Barth in no way contradicts or repudiates his earlier exegesis, but instead demonstrates that he continues to plumb the depths of the biblical text. Whatever the reason for the paring back of exegesis, there is no indication that, in the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth has begun to do theology divorced from the foundation of Scripture. Whether it is in the original lectures, in *CD I/2*, *II/2* or

IV/1, Barth continues to keep Scripture, the “witness to revelation,” at the centre of his dogmatic project.

## Conclusion

Several observations result from this analysis of Barth’s exegesis of “the Word became flesh.” First, and most generally, there needs to be more study of Barth’s early exegesis. Only the first chapter of his work on the Gospel of John has so far been translated into English at this time, with his material on John 2–8 available only in German. Even within the German scholarship, study of Barth’s course on the Gospel of John is lacking. Similar projects to this one could be done, tracing Barth’s exegesis of specific passages and verse in the original lectures and comparing it to material in the *Church Dogmatics*. Second, in the ongoing discussions over issues like the *logos asarkos*, there is little interaction with Barth’s early exegetical material. A closer reading of Barth’s exegesis, both in the original lectures and in the *Church Dogmatics*, could nuance and enrich the very focused academic discussions that develop around these crucial points in Barth’s theology. Finally, and most importantly, what this examination of Barth’s exegesis of “the Word became flesh” demonstrates is that there is a profound continuity in Barth’s theological thought. While there can be debate over whether or not Barth shifted from being a dialectical theologian to being an analogical theologian, or whether or not Barth moved from a pneumocentric christology to a christocentric christology, or whether Barth changed his mind on the *logos asarkos*, what cannot be debated is that from 1919 until his death, Karl Barth remained a theologian who was shaped by, dependent upon, and constrained by Scripture. The Bible is the witness to revelation that testifies to Jesus Christ, who is both the Revealer and the Revelation, who is both the Electing God and the Elected human, and who is both the Reconciler and the means of reconciliation.

Barth never did teach again on the Gospel of John, but if he had taken the opportunity later in his career, it is almost certain that he would not have gotten any further through the material than he did in 1925 and 1933. Through forty years of exposition and theological reflection, Barth continued to plumb the depths of “the Word became flesh,” and discovered deeper and deeper layers to the significance of these four simple words: ὁ λόγος σαρξ ἐγένετο.

## The Prophet Daniel in the Septuagint: an “Historical” Sign of Both the Eschatological Son of Man and Ancient of Days (God Most High)?<sup>1</sup>

Eugene E. Lemcio

### Abstract

At least a century before the Common Era, there existed in Septuagintal Daniel a paradigm of a human’s already signaling in Israel’s past the role of its God and God’s Viceroy in the future. Furthermore, continuing research into the Hellenization of the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia increases the probability that Daniel could well have been read by Greek-speaking Jews not only in the Diaspora but also in the Galilee, Judaea, and in Jerusalem itself.

The thesis of this short note is that, at least a century before the Common Era, there existed in Septuagintal Daniel a paradigm of a human’s already signaling in Israel’s past the role of its God and God’s Viceroy<sup>2</sup> in the future. Furthermore, continuing research into the Hellenization of the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia increases the probability that Daniel could well have been read by Greek-speaking Jews not only in the Diaspora but also in the Galilee, Judaea, and in Jerusalem itself.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 I retain the gender-specific expression, “Son of Man,” since it has become something of a technical term—used as such in the extensive secondary literature. In context, the human in question is one of subordinate status or role, nothing being said about “nature” or gender. If I were to offer a translation, it would be something on the order of “child of dust.” See my “‘Son of Man’, ‘Pitiable Man’, ‘Rejected Man’: Equivalent Expressions in the Old Greek of Daniel,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56.1 (2005): 43–60.
- 2 Nothing in either the Aramaic or Greek text suggests that he is a redemptive figure. However, that he might reign is a natural inference, having been given a kingdom and authority. Benjamin Reynolds and others go farther in suggesting that, as king, [the] son of man is by implication a proto-messiah and son of God (with Ps 2:6–7 providing the backdrop for such associations). See “The ‘One Like a Son of Man’ According to the Old Greek of Daniel 7,13–14.” *Biblica* (2000): 77–78.
- 3 See the extensive epigraphic evidence marshaled by Hannah M. Cotton, Werner Eck, *et al.*, eds., *Corpus Inscriptionum Palaestinae et Judaeae: Volume 1, Jerusalem, Part 1* (New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 1–704. Furthermore, the Theodotus synagogue inscription (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE) from the Ophel—the area between the City of David and the Temple Mount—provides dramatic evidence of reading and teaching the Law in Greek for pilgrims in the heart of the Old City itself. A photograph and edited text may be found in Jean-Baptiste Frey. *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum. Receuil*

In an earlier study, I had argued that the Seer of the Septuagint experiences himself a version of that which he envisions regarding one who resembled a [mere] human<sup>4</sup>—whether an individual or collective symbol is not germane to my point here. I attempted to show that *typical* vocabulary belongs to the following *narrative* pattern: a (1) superior (2) bestows upon an (3) inferior or subordinate the legacy of a (4) kingdom, (5) glory, and (6) authority. Such recitals occur within and among chapters 1–6 (where the agents are earthly and human as well as heavenly and divine) and between them and chapter 7 (dominated by two figures in heaven, one of them human-like).

In a subsequent essay,<sup>5</sup> I sought to demonstrate that Daniel in the “appended” *Bel et Draco* functions as an “historical” sign of the Ancient of Days or God Most High. By destroying the dragon of Babylon and demolishing Bel’s idol, the prophet anticipated locally and in the past that which God would do globally in the eschaton—according to certain prophets and sages. This action is prefigured earlier in the body of the text of Daniel itself by the destruction of the idol envisioned by Nebouchodonosor in ch. 2.<sup>6</sup>

Combining the results of this back-to-back research, I contend that there was available in the full Septuagintal translation of Daniel a ready-made, double-paradigm for adoption and adaptation by Jesus and the early Christians: a human’s signifying in “history” that which the future son of man figure would undergo and that which the eschatological Ancient of Days/God Most High would accomplish. That Jesus and his followers taught in Greek, at least on some occasions to certain audiences, would account for some of the son of man sayings that the developing tradition, both oral and written, subsequently appropriated.<sup>7</sup> Would it be going too

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*Des Inscriptions Juives Qui Vont Du IIIe Siècle Avant Jésus-Christ Au VIIe Siècle de Notre Ère*, vol. 2, Asie-Afrique (Rome: Pontificio Instituto di Archeologica Cristiana, 1952), #1404, 332–35. The inscription is discussed in Eric M. Meyers and Mark A. Chancery, *Alexander to Constantine. Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (v. 3; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 208–209.

- 4 “Daniel and the Three (Principally in the Old Greek): ‘Historical’ Signs of the Apocalyptic Son of Man and Saints of the Most High?—a Paradigm for Christology and Discipleship,” in *A Man of Many Parts: Essays in Honor of John Westerdale Bowker on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Eugene E. Lemcio (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 43–61. The full text of this essay can be accessed on Academia.edu, permission having been granted by the publisher.
- 5 “Daniel: an ‘Historical’ Sign of the Eschatological Ancient of Days/God Most High? Reading Bel et Draco in Eschatological Contexts: Apocalyptic (Daniel 2 and 7), Prophetic (Esaias 27:1), and Sapiential (Wisdom of Salomon 14:11–14),” in *Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis: Essays in Tribute to Paul Livermore*, ed. Doug Cullum and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming, 2018). Less securely, I have suggested in an excursus to the latter that Daniel’s role as judge in the “appended” *Susanna* also compares with the role of the Ancient of Days in chapter 7. Likewise, the full text of this essay can be accessed on Academia.edu, permission having been granted by the publisher.
- 6 In the work cited in n. 4, I observe that Daniel does not balk at the repentant king’s offering him the kind of ritual worship normally reserved for God alone. After falling on his face in obedience (προσκυνεῖν), “he ordered that sacrifices and libations be made to him” (ἐπέταξε θυσίας καὶ σπονδάς ποιῆσαι αὐτῷ). Θ, following the MT, does not contain the quoted statement.
- 7 In LXX Daniel, the prophet is subjected to the sentence of death three times: if the king’s dream

far to suggest that Jesus also appears in the Gospels as “Great Daniel’s Greater Son”?

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were not interpreted (2:12–13), when consigned to the lions by Darius (6:14–28), when consigned to the lions (under Cyrus, in Θ) by a crowd (Bel et Draco, 31–32). If associating this contextual motif with the experience of the son of man figure in ch. 7 is methodologically contestable, then other details warrant consideration. The appearance of v. 8c in the original vision of the OG (ἐποίησε πόλεμον πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους) strengthens the association of the saints’ suffering with [the] son of man in vv. 13–14 since it creates a kind of *inclusio* with the fullest explanation of the initial dream in v. 21: πόλεμον συνιστάμενον πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους. According to the wording of v. 27 in the OG, ἔδωκε λαῶ ἁγίῳ ὑψίστου βασιλεῦσαι (“he gave to [the] holy people of [the] Most High to rule”), τοὺς ἁγίους in vv. 8c and 21 cannot refer to angelic beings. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the LXX obliges us to understand the Aramaic in the same way. And there is the possibility (however probable) that the translator was using a different Semitic *Vorlage*. Collins, regarding v. 8c as an intrusion upon the dynamics of the vision, does not consider the possibility that a (literarily clumsy) *theological* motive could have been at work here. See John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 299, n. 199.

## The High Praises of God as a Two-Mouthed Sword: Psalm 149 in Canonical Context<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

In the *Book of Common Prayer* Psalm 149 is set (on the basis of the KJV in vv. 1, 9) for use on All Saints Day. To the extent that the Word of God heard in the Bible calls for a non-violent engagement with violence and evil, Psalm 149:6 can stick as a bone in the throat, with its apparent picture (exemplified in Cromwell and his troops on the field before the Battle of Naseby) of *concomitant* actions, on the part of the “saints of God,” of “high praises” in their throats and a “two-edged” (literally, “two-mouthed”) sword in their hand. This article proposes that a proper reading of this verse discloses it to be (in the spirit of Psalm 8:1–2 KJV/NRSV) a radical subversion of just such an understanding and practice. I proceed by a close line-by-line reading of the psalm accompanied by canonical and extra-canonical contextualizations of various motifs. The result is to disclose a psalm that becomes a “sharp sword” (Isa 49:2; cf. Heb 4:12–13) in the mouth of those who would be servants of God.

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I begin with two pre-suppositions: First, it is now increasingly recognized that the Shape of the Psalter is itself a proper object of study; that the compilation of the Psalter in its final form is not simply an aggregative affair, but a result of further theological reflection in the way the component psalms, and component sub-groups of psalms, are ordered in relation to each other.<sup>2</sup> This means that a full study of any given psalm includes its placement within the Psalter, and a consider-

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1 This essay was originally presented at the Canadian-American Theological Association Annual Meeting, as part of the Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences, held at Ryerson University, Toronto, ON, May 28, 2017.

2 On intertextuality, compare T. S. Eliot in his essay, “Tradition and the Individual talent.” He writes, “what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations,

ation of how its components not only serve that placement but also interact with resonating components throughout the Psalter.<sup>3</sup>

Second, I take the Psalter, by its very title, *tēhillīm*, “Praises,” to gather up all the essential themes of the rest of the Bible and cast them in the mode of praise.<sup>4</sup> Given, then, the placement of Ps 149 as the Psalter’s penultimate psalm, and given its call to “sing a New Song,” it is properly read in intertextual relation to the Bible as a whole, but especially in relation to that part of the Bible, and that locus in the Biblical story, in which the “New Song” seems to have its origin. That part is Deutero-Isaiah, and that locus is Israel’s exile, where the prophet-poet, after introducing God’s Servant in Isa 42:1–8 and distinguishing between the “former things” and “new things” (42:9), calls out (42:10), “Sing to the LORD a New Song, / his praise [*tēhillāh*] from the end of the earth.”

Psalm 150 brings the Psalms’ long, tortuous path to a fascinating conclusion in that it picks up one the Psalter’s formal elements, the “call to praise,” but this time provides no rationale for the praise. That is, it contains no trace of the standard “for” clause as introducing the grounds and content of the praise, no “for he [does or is this or that]” (compare, e.g., Pss 95:3, 7; 96:4, 5; 100:5; 149:4<sup>5</sup>). It as though all possible rationales have already been canvassed in Pss 1–149 and need not be re-stated. Psalm 150 simply calls on “all breath” to praise: *hallēlū-yāh*. But there is a tension between the “all breath” of Ps 150 and the thematics of Ps 149. For in Ps 149 we are still at the impasse to which we were introduced at the Psalter’s beginning, where Ps 1 presents the righteous as initially alone and beleaguered by the wicked, only to end up in the congregation of the righteous, while the wicked “will not stand in the judgment [*mīšpāṭ*], / for the way of the wicked will perish.” In Ps 2, God’s “Son,” appointed heir of “the ends of the earth,” is surrounded by hostile nations and their kings. These figures are warned: come to terms with God’s royal Son, lest they “perish in the way.” These two opening psalms, functioning as an introduction to the Psalter, engage the same generic conflictual situation from two different perspectives, *tōrāh* in Ps 1 and *māšīāh* in Ps 2. In so do-

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proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new” (italics original). Accessible online at: <http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html>

3 David M. Howard models this form of Psalms study in his monograph, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997). For the bearing of his analysis on the construal of Ps 100:3, see my essay, “‘And Not We Ourselves’: Psalm 100:3 and the Eschatological Reign of God,” in J. Gerald Janzen, *When Prayer Takes Place: Forays into a Biblical World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 99–133. In my analysis, Ps 149 takes up the eschatological thematics of Psalms 93–100, including the ‘New Song’ motif, and raises them to a new level.

4 See James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1994), especially ch. 7.

5 Where chapter and verse numbering differ between Hebrew, Greek, and English Bibles, I shall cite only the English numbering, as scholars will know how to find their way to the Hebrew and Greek numbering.



ing, these psalms initiate the problematic that Ps 150 celebrates as finally resolved. If, then, Ps 149 paves the way for the praise of God by “all breath” in Ps 150—by resolving the conflictual situation that informs Psalms 1 and 2 and runs all through the Psalter, and in this resolution giving the rationale for the final “call to praise”—the question arises: *How* does Ps 149 resolve the conflict so as to leave only praise from “all breath”?

The answer lies in v. 6: “The high praises of God in their throats and two-mouthed swords in their hands, / to wreak vengeance on the nations . . . to execute on them the judgment [*mišpāṭ*] written!” There it is. It would seem that with the high praises of God in our throats and the sword in our hand we see to it that God’s enemies “perish in the way,” so that all that is left to breathe will, by golly, praise the LORD. Those who are old enough to remember World War II will recall hearing, in 1942, a “new song” belted out over the radio, “Praise the LORD, and pass the ammunition / And we’ll all stay free.”

I confess that when we sing Ps 149 each year on All Saints Day, v. 6 sticks in my throat like a bone. It doesn’t jibe with the character of the redemptive role of the Servant of the LORD as *imago dei* in Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>6</sup> For this Servant is announced in Isa 42 as one who will “bring forth” God’s *mišpāṭ* to the nations. And that *mišpāṭ* is equated with God’s “*tōrāh*,” “law,” or “teaching,” and in this role the Servant will be “a light to the nations,” to “open blind eyes,” and “bring from the prison those who sit in darkness.” And when, according to Isa 53, the *mišpāṭ* or “just cause” of this Servant is *subverted*, the Servant’s *vengeance* on the transgressors is to *intercede* for them. It is *this* figure, in *such* a role, who is the “arm of the LORD” as *revealed* in Isa 53—not a sword-wielding arm, but an arm raised in intercession. If, then, Ps 149 issues a call to “sing a New Song” as echoing the founding call to that new song in Isa 42, then v. 6 seems to go against the grain of the Servant as God’s *imago dei*.

Unless we have been mis-reading the conjunction, “and” (Hebrew *vav*) in Ps 149:6b. One of the functions of this all-purpose conjunction, in Biblical Hebrew, is what grammarians call a *vav explicationis*, where what comes after this conjunction *explicates* what went before, or further *characterizes* it. In the case of Ps 149:6b I note that, in Hebrew, the phrase, “two-edged” (*pīpīōt*) means, literally, “two-mouthed” (from the singular noun, *peh*, “mouth”). And if we take the conjunction as explicating the previous line, then we have a deliciously subversive

6 This paper, though conceived and developed on its own terms, stands in organic relation to two previous papers: “On the Moral Nature of God’s Power: Yahweh and the Sea in Job and Deutero-Isaiah,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56/3 (1994), 458–478; and “*Ecce Homo*: The Servant of YHWH as *Imago Dei* in Deutero-Isaiah,” *Canadian Theological Review* 2/2 (2013), 1–14. The first paper focuses on how the Servant’s embodiment of God’s *mišpāṭ* is grounded in God’s own *mišpāṭ* as manifest in non-violent creation of the world; while the second paper explores the way in which the Servant is presented as God’s true *imago vis-à-vis* the idols of the Nations.

interplay between the two verse-halves: the “high praises in the *throat*” as a “two-mouthed sword in the hand.”<sup>7</sup> In this way, Ps 149:6 subverts the kings and nations in a manner similar to the subversion exercised by the Servant of Isa 53. Their wisdom and their power are based on the literal sword and the violent force by which their rule is enforced. And this wisdom, this power, is enshrined in their creation stories, where the creator God founds creation through acts of war against rebellious heavenly forces. But in Israel’s mature creation accounts (Gen 1 and Deutero-Isaiah), God creates not by violent force, but through the generative power of the divine Word. Just so, when Ps 149 celebrates its “Maker” and King” (v. 2), implicitly, the psalm celebrates God as “making” and “ruling” through a divine *mišpāṭ* that we see running through Deutero-Isaiah and grounded there in God’s creation of the cosmos (Isa 40:14).<sup>8</sup>

But how plausible is my figurative construal of “a two-mouthed sword in the hand” as consisting in “the high praises of God in the throat”? Consider the following figurative usages of the imagery of military arms: (1) Hos 6:5: “I have hewn them by the prophets / I have slain them by the words of my mouth, / and my judgment [*mišpāṭ*] goes forth as the light.” (2) Isa 11:4: “With righteousness shall he judge [*šāpaṭ*] the poor, / and decide [*hōkiāh*] with equity for the meek [*‘ānāwīm*]; / he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, / and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.” The result of this action by this Davidic “shoot” and “branch” is an Eden-like *šālôm*, in which even age-old enemies within the natural world come to live at peace with one another. Thematically, the vision is of a piece with Isa 2:4, which begins, “He shall judge [*šāpaṭ*] between the nations, / and shall decide [*hōkiāh*] for many peoples,” and ends with a conversion of military arms into agricultural tools. (3) Ps 8: Humankind, as *imago dei*, is commissioned to dominion in the earth. What does the psalm say about how to “still” the “enemy and the avenger” [*mitnaqqēm*]? “*Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings*, you have founded a bulwark, to still the enemy and the avenger (v. 2).” Consider, finally, these texts in Deutero-Isaiah concerning the *Servant* as *imago dei*. (4) Isa 49:2: “He made my mouth like a sharp sword; . . . / he made me a polished arrow; / I give you as a light to the nations, / that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (5) Isa 53:1: Kings and nations, amazed, exclaim, “To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” These last texts follow Isa 42:1–

7 For another, thematically contrasting, correlation of the words “throat” and “mouth” in reference to human utterance, compare Ps 9:5: “For there is no truth in their mouth; / their inmost self is destruction; / their throat is an open grave; / they flatter with their tongue” (ESV).

8 For the theme of God as “Maker” in Deutero-Isaiah, see Isa 45:9, 11; 54:5; and especially 51:13, where Israel, in calling on God to act in *warlike* fashion in creation-redemption, is chided for “forgetting” the LORD its Maker and the Maker of the cosmos. In the Psalms, see, e.g., Pss 95:6; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 136:4, 5, 7; 146:6; and especially 115:15, where the LORD is contrasted to the idols of the nations (115:4–8).

4, where the servant is called to “bring forth justice” (*mišpāṭ*) and “law” (*tôrāh* | “teaching”) to the nations. It is almost as though Deutero-Isaiah reaches back to the figure in Hos 6:5 and elaborates upon it vis-à-vis the development of the portrait of the God’s Servant-*imago*. I take all these usages to support my construal of “a two-mouthed sword in the hand” as figurative of the “high praises in the throat.”

With this, I return to Ps 149, and focus on the three purpose-clauses with which the psalm ends. In singing to the Lord this New Song after the manner of Isa 42:10, and specifically in letting the “high praises of God in their throat” be as a “two-mouthed sword in their hand,” the addressees in this psalm—precisely in this subversive way—are

<sup>7</sup>to [*lě-*] do [*’āsôt*] vengeance [*něqāmāh*] on [*bě-*] the nations [*gōyyim*], chastisement [*tikěḥôt*] on [*bě-*]<sup>9</sup> the peoples [*lě’ummim*],

<sup>8</sup>to [*lě-*] bind their kings with [*bě-*] chains and their nobles with [*bě-*] fetters of iron,

<sup>9</sup>to [*lě-*] do [*’āsôt*] on them the judgment [*mišpāṭ*] written!

I draw attention to the progression: *vengeance* > *chastisement* > *judgment*. In a political context the first noun, Hebrew *něqāmāh*, connotes the re-assertion of an *imperium* over rebellious vassal states. It is not simply an act of “getting even,” as the word might connote in inter-personal contexts. Rather, it connotes the restoration of proper order. The general scenario is identical to the one in Ps 2:1–3. How is that vengeance, that *imperium*, re-asserted? By the power of a literal sword? Or, on analogy with the Servant’s intercession, by (so to speak) “killing them with kindness”? The psalm spells out the nature of this “vengeance” by the two words that follow: *chastisement* and *judgment*.

The word, “chastisement” (Hebrew *tikěḥôt*), is the noun cognate of the verb, *hōkīāh* that I have noted as parallel to the verb *šāpaṭ* (“judge”) in Isa 2:4 and 11:4. Verb and noun occur often in *wisdom* contexts, with connotations of a chastening or punishing that has as its end correction and the inculcation of wisdom rather than condign condemnation. When the word occurs in political contexts, such as we see in Isa 2 and 11, it carries the same connotation. John Goldingay puts the connotations of the two nouns in Ps 149:7 aptly when he translates the verse, “To execute redress among the nations, / rebukes among the countries,” and comments,

Here it seems that Yhwh takes redress, though to translate *něqāmāh* as vengeance gives a misleading impression (see on 94:1). Indeed,

9 *bal’ummim* for MT *bal’ummim*, as commonly recognized.

the function of the redress is to rebuke them . . . . It is to put them in their place, to chastise them for their attitudes and to get them to see the truth about their position in the world and before Yhwh.<sup>10</sup>

To be sure, the second purpose clause speaks of binding kings in irons and nobles in iron fetters. But the language again may well be figurative, a form of non-violent “restraint” analogous to the “bulwark” in Ps 8 that is “founded” in the mouths of “infants” and “sucklings.” The purpose of that “bulwark” is indicated in the Hebrew phrase, *lēḥašbît*, involving the preposition *le-* (as in Ps 149:8, 9), where the infinitive *ḥašbît* expresses a *causative* nuance in the basic verb *šābat*. Given that the base meaning of the latter verb is “to cease, stop,” this would mean that the function of the “bulwark” thrown up from “the mouths of infants and sucklings” is simply to render the aggression of the enemy ineffectual or bring it to a standstill. The “binding in chains” of Ps 149:8 would serve the same general function. Goldingay, interestingly, makes this comment on v 8: “The . . . account of the way this redress and rebuke will be administered continues to follow the promises of Isa. 40–55. Those chapters speak of kings being put in their place, of people coming to Israel in shackles (Isa. 45:14).”<sup>11</sup>

What, now, of the term in the third purpose clause, “To do on them the *mišpāṭ* written”? What does “written” refer to? A judicial *ad hoc* decision handed down as a “last judgment” on those doomed to perish, before those who remain and still breathe are then, in Ps 150, called on to praise God? Or, does the word refer to something written down previous to this eschatological action; some text or texts that this action *accords* with? Citing the *Midrash on the Psalms* (2:385), Goldingay notes various voices proposing the *tôrāh*, or specific texts in Deuteronomy, or the prophets, or even the Psalms. For himself, Goldingay writes that “Yhwh has made a decision (cf. 146:7; 147:19–20) concerning these nations and their leaders; it is the negative side to the decision spoken of in Isa. 42:1–4.”<sup>12</sup> I believe that the direction in which he points is squarely on target. In order to show this, I must back up a bit to consider how the matter of *writing down texts for future reference* functions in the Isaianic tradition.

### Excursus: Isaianic Wisdom vis-à-vis That of the Royal Court

In this excursus I want to draw on the work of Joseph Jensen and a comment of

10 John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3: Psalms 90–150* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 741–42. His reference to Ps 94:1 is significant insofar as that psalm forms part of the little sub-collection spanning Psalms 93 through 100 a sub-collection marked by repeated references to the eschatological “new song” (Pss. 96: 1; 98:1). Again, in Psalm 94, the issue is one of *wisdom* over against *folly* (v. 8), the former distinguishing Yahweh as “judge of all the earth” (v. 2, 15) as manifest in *chastening* (v. 10, 12).

11 *Ibid.*, 741–42.

12 *Ibid.*, 743.

Martin Buber to sketch a background for the construal of the “*mišpāṭ* written” in Ps 149:8 as a reference to the *mišpāṭ* // *tôrāh* of Isa 42:1–4. In a nutshell, Jensen argues<sup>13</sup> that the verb, *hôrāh*, “direct, teach, instruct,” and its cognate noun, *tôrāh*, “direction, teaching, instruction, law,” in Isaiah carry a primarily *wisdom* connotation, as countering the conventional wisdom informing political theology and practice throughout the royal courts of the ancient Near East. This word, in verb or noun forms, occurs in a variety of contexts, most graphically perhaps in Isa 28, where the prophet asks, “Whom will he teach [*yôreh*] knowledge, / and to whom will he explain the message [*šēmû’āh*, “what is heard”]? / Those who are weaned from the milk, / those taken from the breast?” (vv. 9–10). Given the “deafness” of King, court, and people, God will have to address them through the events of their history, as one would teach a newly-weaned child, where it will be “precept upon precept [*šāw lē-šāw*], precept upon precept [*ditto*], line upon line [*qāw lē-qāw*], line upon line [*ditto*], here a little, there a little.” (v. 10). The Hebrew terms here, by the way they stand for the alphabetical letters *šādhe* and *qoph*, and at the same time echoing the verb *šāwāh* (“to command”) and the noun *qāw* (“measuring-line”) (as, ominously, in 28:17), drive home the intimate nexus between Isaiah’s prophetic word and God’s activity in history as instruction in divine wisdom. It is as though God’s word is inscribed in two alphabets: in the proclaimed and then written-down oracles of the prophets, and, for those who have not been taught to read, God’s word as spelled in the events of history.

In Isa 30 we see Isaiah uttering a divine oracle concerning current attempts of the Judean monarch to enter into a treaty with Egypt “without asking for my counsel” (v. 2), but instead relying on the conventional political wisdom represented by the court’s stable of counselors and sages. The oracle itself is then to be written down, as God’s says to Isaiah, “And now, go, write it before them on a tablet, /and inscribe it in a book, / that it may be for the time to come / as a witness for ever. / For they are a rebellious people, lying sons, / sons who will not hear the instruction [*tôrāh*] of the LORD” (vv. 8–9). Following a dire warning of events to ensue upon such rebellion, Isaiah then ends this particular oracular “teaching” on this note: “Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious [*hānan*] to you; / therefore he exalts himself to show mercy [*rahēm*] to you. / For the LORD is a God of justice [*mišpāṭ*]; blessed are all those who wait for him” (v. 18). What is striking in this last verse is not only the palpable echo of Exod 33:19 and 34:6, but the way in which the word *mišpāṭ* is here infused with the connotations of those two words of grace and mercy. When it is considered that the prophetic *tôrāh* (“instruction” or “teaching”) earlier in the chapter moves through a penultimate emphasis on disciplinary chastening through the events of history to an ultimate emphasis on

13 Joseph Jensen, *The Use of tôrâ by Isaiah: His Debate with the Wisdom Tradition* (CBQM 3; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1973).

a divine *mišpāṭ*—understood in terms of grace and mercy—we have here the development of a *nexus of meaning* between *tôrāh* and *mišpāṭ* as the heart of Isaiah’s message. And this *tôrāh-mišpāṭ* nexus of meaning lies over against the so-called wisdom of the royal court and its counselors with their knowledge of conventional state-craft.

But the call to write oracles down comes already in Isa 8, where the prophet says, “Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching [*tôrāh*] among my disciples [*limmudîm*]. I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from Jacob” (vv. 16–17). This binding/sealing is so that, at a later time, this “teaching” and “testimony” may be consulted (v. 20). Now, in Isa 50, the Servant of the LORD says, “The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught [*limmudîm*],<sup>14</sup> / that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. / Morning by morning he wakens, / he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught [*limmudîm*]” (v. 4). I follow Martin Buber<sup>15</sup> in taking the Servant’s self-description as one of the *limmudîm*, as that Servant’s self-identification with the *limmudîm* referred to in Isa 8. The implication is of a prophetic tradition transmitted down through a prophetic circle founded by Isaiah, and perhaps continuing to speak to their own respective times as informed by the *tôrāh*-wisdom at the core of Isaiah’s original message. In that case, the Servant in chapter 50, who goes on to say, “The LORD God has opened my ear, / and I was not rebellious” (v. 5) stands in contrast to those exilic contemporaries, within Israel and in surrounding nations and peoples, who cling to conventional notions of divine *mišpāṭ*. Over against them this *limmud*, this “disciple,” practices a *mišpāṭ* of non-violent witness to God’s *mišpāṭ-tôrāh* as announced in Isa. 42:1–4, and as grounded in the divine creative actions referred to in Isa. 40:12–14. But if this Servant-figure, as one of the *limmudîm*, has his ear “opened” through reading in the “*tôrāh*-testimony” of Isaiah, may we assume that the exilic message of Deutero-Isaiah is itself written down? So that, for example, it becomes the written platform for the further oracular activity now to be found in Isa 56–66? And may we not implausibly wonder if, analogously, the reference to the eschatological “New Song” in 42:10, together with all the subsequent references in Deutero-Isaiah to singing, may have spawned (or informed) a psalmistic tradition that now appears in the eschatological hymns of praise in the Psalter—not least of all in those psalms calling to “sing to the LORD a New Song”? And in such psalmistic contexts, might we not assume that references to the divine *mišpāṭ* and to God’s activity in judging (the verb *šāpaṭ*) would carry the connotations that this word has in Deutero-Isaiah?

14 NRSV translates the phrase here with “the tongue of a teacher.” I assume because the translator(s) forgot that in the ancient world one *reads aloud*, and that one learns while reading aloud. In such reading, one does not hear one’s own tongue but the tongue in the word itself. The result is that the tongue, thus practiced, can then speak the word that has been learned.

15 Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 202–205.

Parentetical note: One signature-mark of Deutero-Isaiah is the repeated contrast between “Former Things” and “Latter Things,” or between “The Old” and “The New.” The contrast is perhaps drawn most sharply in 43:18–19a: “Remember not the former things, / nor consider the things of old. / Behold, I am doing a new thing; / now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” This generic contrast is given concreteness in juxtaposing how God acted in the Exodus (43:16–17) with how God will now act (43:19b–21), where, not incidentally, the new action ends on the note, “that they might declare my praise.” The praise, presumably, will take the form of the New Song. In that case, what was the Old Song? Presumably it celebrated the Exodus deliverance referred to in 43:16–17. Now, in that Old Song, in Exod 15:1–18, God is celebrated quintessentially as “a man of war” (*’iš milhāmāh*) (v. 3). In the Deutero-Isaianic call to “sing to the LORD a new song” in Isa 42:10 we shortly encounter this very title for God. Following the exclamation to “Let them give glory to the LORD, / and declare his praise in the coastlands” (42:12), the praise announces,

The LORD goes forth like a mighty man,  
like a man of war [*’iš milhāmāh*] he stirs up his fury;  
he cries out, he shouts aloud,  
he shows himself mighty against his foes.

It would appear that the New Song, like the Old Song, continues to celebrate God as a Divine Warrior. But the lines that follow—not in the third person, as descriptive of how one might perceive the LORD “from the outside,” but in the first person, as voicing God’s own “inner warfare”—suggest a subversion of the old portrait to place it on a different footing:

For a long time I have held my peace,  
I have kept still and restrained myself;  
now I will cry out like a woman in travail [*ka-yōlēdāh*],  
I will gasp and pant.

The point here is twofold. First, the very shapes of the two verses underscores how the second is modeled on the first, with the crucial contrast coming in the simile-phrases: “like a man-of-war/like a woman in travail.” Secondly, the phrase, “like a woman in travail” carries a connotation of the otherwise “hidden underside” of warfare. In almost every other occurrence of this phrase (nine times, appearing in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and Ps 48), the phrase is used figuratively of men in anguish at the prospect of defeat by an enemy army. Only in Mic 4:10 is such a party given hope. In this instance, it is “Daughter Zion,” encouraged, it would seem, to pass through straits of captivity and beyond to redemption. In the larger context of the mission of the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah, and the series of contrasts

between the Former Things and the Latter Things, I take the startlingly subversive or transformative dialectic of Isa 42:13–14 to lie at the heart of the shift from the Old Song to the New. In such conflictual conflicts God is victor in a manner that is imaged by the servant in Isa 50 and 53.

In short, I propose that in Ps 149 the “*mišpāṭ* written” refers specifically to the *mišpāṭ* // *tôrāh* of the first Servant Song in Isa 42:1–8, by this time written down. It is a *mišpāṭ* // *tôrāh* whose “bringing forth” as a “light to the nations” issues in the “new song” referred to in 42:10. *And if* the oracles of eight-century Isaiah, as written down and then studied, can spawn a prophetic tradition that re-surfaces in the exile in the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah; *and if* those oracles call for a “New Song” to celebrate the “new things” that God is about to do; *and if* in Deutero-Isaiah itself we see, in several places, a bursting forth into singing, not only by exilic Israel, but by jackals and ostriches, and even the trees of the fields clapping their hands; *then* we may well imagine this exilic and post-exilic visionary circle as composing, or inspiring, the other “New Songs” that appear in the Psalter now as Pss 33, 96 and 98—and Ps 149. And that brings me to the *mišpāṭ* written: The reference is to the *mišpāṭ* of God as embodied in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah. It is in *those* servant passages that the singers of Ps 149 are to find their own thematic script. And that Servant script, in *imaging God*, subverts conventional wisdoms as to governing power. It subverts this conventional wisdom by identifying *human praise of a non-violent God* as the true “two-mouthed sword” by which one may celebrate, announce, and enact God’s *mišpāṭ*.

In precisely this way, Ps 149—and particularly v. 6—may be taken up on All Saints Day as one way of following the script laid down even further back, in Isa 2, of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

I mentioned at the outset that the shape of the Psalter is in itself a proper object of study.

Those who currently engage this subject are divided as to whether the Davidic King still figures toward the end of the Psalter, or whether the Psalter ends with a focus on God as Israel’s King.<sup>16</sup> I propose that in linking Ps 149 with the thematics

16 May one detect such an implication in Ps 149 in the verb, “adorn” (*pi’er*) in v. 4? Consider that of this verb’s 13 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, three come in Deutero-Isaiah, and five in Third Isaiah. In Deutero-Isaiah it occurs in the reflexive (*hitpa’el*) form, of God “getting himself glory” in Israel (Isa 44:23), and in the Servant *as* Israel (Isa 49:3). In Isa 55:5 it occurs in the factitive (*pi’el*) form, of God glorifying Israel *as* recipient of the “witnessing” commission of David vis-à-vis the peoples (the *lē’ummîm*, as in Ps 149:7). In Third Isaiah it occurs twice in *pi’el* form, of God glorifying his (restored) house (Isa 60:7, 13; so too in Ezra 7:27), twice in *hitpa’el* form, of God getting himself glory through the restored people (Isa 60:21; 61:3), and once in *pi’el* form, echoing Isa 55:5, of God glorifying Israel (Isa 60:9). Given the prominence of this theme in Second and Third Isaiah, I suggest that the announcement in Ps 149:4, “he shall adorn (*pi’er*) the humble with victory,” echoes Isa 55:5 and 60:9, and in so doing, implicitly portrays the addressees in this psalm as the community now bearing the Davidic commission vis-à-vis the nations. This particular echo of Deutero-Isaiah joins the “New Song” connection with Deutero-Isaiah in cementing Ps 149’s



of Deutero-Isaiah, and specifically with the Servant figure there, Psalm 149 (as with Isa 55:3–5) portrays God’s covenant with David as now encompassing the whole messianic community, commissioned to the testifying task originally invested in the Davidic King. Those who meet the literal sword of the powers of *this* world with the High Praises of God in their throat *as like* a two-mouthed sword in *their* hand—these singers of the psalms, like the babes and sucklings of Ps 8, *are* the community of the Messiah. They are thereby the agents of God’s rule through the Son announced in Ps 2. It is this agency, faithfully carried through, that paves the way to the universal praise, or *téhillāh*, of Ps 150.<sup>17</sup>

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close relation to the other “eschatological hymns,” Pss 96 and 98 (and, I would additionally argue, Ps 33).

17 The study of Ps149 presented above was worked out independently, in simply following the implications of a construal of the conjunction in v. 6b as explicative, and then tracing other verbal and thematic leads back into Second Isaiah. I am gratified, then, in returning to the magnificent commentary of Erich Zenger, to see that much of what I had thought to identify—including, in particular, the explicative construal of the conjunction—finds general support in his own work, and even perhaps provides additional support for his general construals. See Erich Zenger in Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Hermeneia: Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 641–53. This three-volume commentary is a monument to the richness of theological and practical implication that can lie in the study of the Psalter as a dynamic intertextual whole informing its individual parts. On the theme of praise as a form of (non-violent) *power-enactment*, I am indebted to the work of Erhard Gerstenberger, as represented in his paper, “The Dynamics of Praise in the Ancient Near East, or Poetry and Politics,” delivered at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the *Society of Biblical Literature*, Atlanta, GA.

## Remembering Peter W. Flint (1951–2016)<sup>1</sup>

“To live for a time close to great minds is the best kind of education.”

*John Buchan, Canada's fifteenth Governor General*

On November 3, 2016 the field of Dead Sea Scrolls studies said farewell to one of its own. Born on January 21, 1951 in Johannesburg, South Africa, Peter W. Flint passed away at the age of sixty-five. There is indeed much to reflect and remember from Peter's life which included three decades of research and publication on the Qumran finds.<sup>2</sup> At once a citizen of the ivory tower and public servant sharing the Dead Sea Scrolls with any interested in the Bible, history, and theology, Peter's work is marked by the rare quality of making the complex accessible, engaging, meaningful, and even inspiring. Peter was a prolific writer, editor, speaker, and mentor on Dead Sea Scrolls research and made a particular impact in Canada academic culture. Since 1995 Peter was the Co-Director of the Trinity Western University Dead Sea Scrolls Institute and in 2004 was appointed to the Canada Research Chair in Dead Sea Scrolls Studies (Tier 1). All of this was done while proudly wearing a tie with Dead Sea Scrolls fragments strewn across it.

The following memorial paints Peter's accolades and accomplishments in Qumran scholarship in broad strokes. A comprehensive bibliography of his research contributions will be included in what was to be a *Festschrift*, now memorial volume, forthcoming in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

Peter's foray into the world of Qumran began when he and his family moved from South Africa to the United States, so he could pursue doctoral studies under Eugene Ulrich at the University of Notre Dame. Peter's dissertation on the Qumran Psalms materials was completed in 1993, a revised version of which was published as *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Psalms*, STDJ 17 (Leiden: Brill 1997). Bookending his career was another landmark publication of the bib-

1 This article originally appeared in *Revue de Qumran* 28.2 (2016): 153–55 and is reprinted here with permission.

2 For another memorial including many details of Peter's education and surviving family, see that of my colleague Martin Abegg, “In Memoriam: Peter W. Flint (1951–2016),” *Henoah* 38 (2016): 413.

3 Andrew B. Perrin, Kyung S. Baek, and Daniel K. Falk, eds., *Reading the Bible in Ancient Traditions and Modern Editions: Studies in Textual and Reception History in Memory of Peter W. Flint*, EJL (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017). While Peter will not have the chance to see the completed collection of essays written by students and peers, near his sixty-fifth birthday the editors disclosed to him the project was in preparation.

lical scrolls: the edition of the cave one Isaiah texts, edited jointly with Eugene Ulrich.<sup>4</sup> This volume was promptly awarded the “Best Book Relating to the Hebrew Bible (2009–2010)” by the Biblical Archaeological Society. In addition to these contributions to the books of Psalms and Isaiah at Qumran, Peter invested greatly in the publication of both biblical and parabiblical texts from Qumran in the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series.<sup>5</sup> This foundation of research contributed to the best-selling English translation written in collaboration with Martin Abegg and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1999).

Beyond this extensive work in publishing the primary texts, Peter’s bibliography includes more than eleven edited volumes, eighty-five articles and essays, and over 100 conference papers, which attest to his ongoing work in building the collection of secondary research sources on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Arguably the most celebrated of these is the introductory textbook co-authored with James VanderKam, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2002), which was also the recipient of the “Best Book Relating to the Hebrew Bible (2002)” award by the Biblical Archaeological Society. More recently, Peter consolidated, revised, and updated his materials on the Qumran texts and archaeology in a new introduction, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013). Because of these volumes, many past and future students will find their first invitation into the world of Qumran in Peter’s writings.

Peter’s perspective on the Qumran materials was also brought to bear on the work of students and peers through his numerous graduate thesis supervisions and roles on several editorial boards. In the course of his career, Peter served on the boards of Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, The Formation and Interpretation of the Old Testament Literature, The Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature.

As Qumran texts and artefacts made their way around the globe to museums and universities, Peter also regularly served as a consultant for exhibits and contributor to events, as was the case in Fort Worth, Texas (2012–2013), Kansas City, Missouri (2007), Seattle, Washington (2006–2007), Charlotte, North Carolina (2006), and Mobile, Alabama (2006).

4 Eugene Ulrich and Peter W. Flint, *Qumran Cave 1.II The Isaiah Scrolls*, 2 parts, DJD 32 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010).

5 See: “The Psalms Manuscripts from Qumran Cave 4,” with Patrick W. Skehan and Eugene Ulrich, *Qumran Cave 4.XI: Psalms to Chronicles*, DJD 16 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 7–160, 163–68; “Pseudo-Daniel,” with John Collins, in James VanderKam (consulting ed.), *Qumran Cave 4.XVII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 3*, DJD 22 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 95–164; and “4Q238 (Habakkuk 3 and Songs),” “5/6 Psalms,” “2XHev/Se Numbers,” and “3Hev/Se Deuteronomy,” in James VanderKam and Monica Brady (consulting eds.), *Miscellaneous Texts from the Judaean Desert*, DJD 38 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 133–66, 173–82.

One of Peter's last publications was on a new fragment of Micah 1:4–6 in the care of the Museum of the Bible in Washington D. C.<sup>6</sup> While Peter had several in-progress and forthcoming projects, this final publication is a fitting capstone to a career cut short as it captures the true spirit of Peter's academic legacy: it is marked by scholarly erudition and incisive textual analysis, involved student collaboration in the research process and publication, and focused on an artefact that is an important component of a collection geared towards the public's experience with these ancient finds.

For Peter the Dead Sea Scrolls were life-giving and indeed life-changing. Every word mattered. He would regularly remind us that many texts even held significance pointing beyond themselves, giving hope in times of loss, confusion, or adversity. At such a time when family and friends are reflecting on a rich past with Peter and, with heavy hearts, are moving ahead now with only memories of him, it seems fitting to close with a passage that was forever changed by the Qumran discoveries, and was a regular item of Peter's repertoire of examples of how the words of the scrolls changed the world. Isaiah 53:11 in the "Great Isaiah Scroll" reads as follows:

Out of the suffering of his soul *he will see light* (יִרְאֶה אֹרֶךְ) and find satisfaction. And through his knowledge his servant, the righteous one, will make many righteous, and he will bear their iniquities.<sup>7</sup>

*Andrew B. Perrin*  
*Trinity Western University*

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6 Peter W. Flint and David R. Herbison, "Micah 1:4–6 (Inv. MOTB.SCR.003183)," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fragments in the Museum Collection*, ed. Emanuel Tov, Kipp Davis and Robert Duke, PMOB 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 177–89.

7 Hebrew text from Ulrich and Flint, DJD 32, 88, with accompanying English translation from, Abegg, Flint, Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, 360.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Women of War, Women of Woe: Joshua and Judges through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters.* Edited by Marion Ann Taylor and Christiana de Groot. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 9780802873026. Pp. x + 278. \$35.00 (USD).

*What follows is a compilation of two review panels for this volume. The first, held at CETA's annual conference during the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in May 2016 at the University of Calgary, included panelists Lissa M. Wray Beal, Rachel Krohn, and Matthew Forrest Lowe, with responses by the co-editors; the second, held at a "Recovering Female Interpreters of the Bible" session of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2016 in San Antonio, included panelists Beal (whose papers are merged here), Danna Nolan Fewell, and Joy A. Schroeder, with the co-editors again responding in turn. The panel papers have been edited to avoid unnecessary repetition (summaries of the book's contents, for example), while each of the co-editors offers a combined response to the two panels.*

### **Lissa M. Wray Beal, Providence Theological Seminary**

I am pleased to respond to this latest contribution by Drs. Taylor and de Groot to the ongoing work of recovering women biblical interpreters.<sup>1</sup> I had the privilege of attending Taylor's first class on recovering women biblical interpreters, at Wycliffe College in the early 2000's. I well remember two emotions that repeatedly surfaced for many in that class: first, surprise at the number of women through history involved in interpretation yet shut out of the academy; and second, anger that they had been so long neglected, and thus further silenced. Several years and anthologies later, I add another emotion: thankfulness that through the recovery work of Taylor, de Groot and others, my interpretive foremothers speak once again—and that to a broad and receptive audience.

I shall marshal my response to this present volume in two directions. First, a

<sup>1</sup> See the early co-edited work by Christiana de Groot and Marion Ann Taylor, *Recovering Nineteenth-Century Women Interpreters of the Bible* (SBL Symposium Series 38; Atlanta: SBL, 2007); see also *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth-Century Women Writing on Women in Genesis*, edited by Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006) and *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide*, edited by Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

few words about this particular project of recovering women's voices in *Women of War* and second, some hermeneutical questions broached by this project.

The volume centres around eight women depicted in Joshua and Judges, highlighting a variety of women interpreters on each biblical character. Each excerpt also includes a biographical note for the interpreter. The editorial skill of Taylor and de Groot is evident: the selections range widely and include several genres. Interpreters represent many Christian denominations as well as Jewish and post-Christian voices, from various social backgrounds. Not only is this a thoughtfully compiled cross-section of writers, but the editors provide an overall introduction to the volume and summative introductions for the offerings for each biblical character. In addition, the editors provide study questions at the end of each chapter. These work well toward uncovering the different interpretive questions, contexts, and approaches of these interpreters in comparison to our own. These additions are one of the volume's strengths and display compassion and genuine interest in the interpreters as people, as well as their work. The editorial sections make one aware that interpretation is *placed* and flows out of the writers' life experience, gifts, and social convictions, while preparing the reader to interact respectfully and thoughtfully with the material.

Taylor and de Groot's work reveals that certain interpretive and contextual interests coalesced around certain biblical women—that is, a biblical character often attracted particular readings. A good example of this surfaces when comparing the chapters on Jael and Deborah.

Within the diversity of women interpreting the narrative of Jael, much of the focus throughout the selections is on the issue of violence. A similar diversity is found among the interpreters excerpted for Deborah. For this biblical woman the focus primarily is the Woman Question. The different approaches to the two biblical women are heightened through the placement of the Jael chapter immediately after the Deborah chapter (granted, this is a given as the volume follows the biblical narrative order). The different foci when comparing the treatment of Deborah and Jael by nineteenth-century women are clear, but each of their stories also addresses issues of violence, and questions regarding the role and status of women. For instance, Deborah could be charged with inciting violence and even celebrating it in song! The reason for the focus on violence for Jael, without concomitant attention given to the violence associated with Deborah, is rarely explored by the nineteenth-century interpreters of Deborah. The distinction in foci is a fact the editors make clear amid the introductory comments to the Deborah excerpts: "The issue of war was occasionally engaged, often indirectly. The more important issue for them was Deborah's transgression of expected gender roles, which invited reflection on appropriate spheres of women and men" (76).

What were the reasons behind the nineteenth-century interpreters' selective

focus of interpretation? Was Deborah not charged with violence because of her Israelite status? Or were the social issues surrounding the Women Question simply too readily addressed by the Deborah story so that other pressing issues were not widely taken up by her interpreters? These more far-ranging questions are not dealt with at length by the editors, nor are they the volume's purpose. But the editors' introductory comments do often point to the particular interpretive concerns coalesced around each biblical woman.

Elsewhere, the work of Taylor and de Groot shows that the Victorian context could lead to certain biblical characters being underrepresented in interpretation. The power of the Victorian context is particularly true for stories of sexual violence. Given Victorian mores regarding sex (one imagines Victorian mamas quickly passing over such texts with a hushed and embarrassed blush), it is not surprising that the chapter on the Levite's concubine held the fewest entries (only three, from two interpreters; Delilah surpasses her with five). In their introduction to this chapter, Taylor and de Groot helpfully cite (but do not include an extended excerpt from) Sarah Trimmer. Trimmer's comments illustrate an apparently typical treatment: the event is related in one paragraph, without referencing the rape (245). Other interpreters are noted as voicing disapproval of the act; this is the case with one of the included excerpts from Mary Cornwallis. She notes the concubine was "abused . . . to death," "an atrocious act" (247). Her disgust and outrage is apparent, but she does not name the act of rape.

In contrast to this reticent outrage, the two entries by Josephine Butler are explicit in describing the concubine's fate. Of note is Butler's context: as a woman working against the Contagious Diseases Act and its unfair treatment of prostitutes while not likewise penalizing men, her writing shows great compassion for the lives of these women. She clearly reads the tragedy of the Levite's concubine as a call for Victorian Christians (and women, in particular) to exercise compassion towards abused "Levite's concubines," that is, Victorian prostitutes:

Christian people! there is a weak and prostrate figure lying at our door; to this door she turns for help, though it be but in her dying fall; her hands are upon the threshold. . . . What if the Judge should come and find us scarcely risen from our torpor, our door scarcely opened, our morning salutation scarcely uttered to the victim whose voice is stilled in death—should come and should require of us an account of our protectorship, and show to us such mercy as we have shown to her? (250–51)

Butler's explicit retelling of the story, and her evident compassion are noted by Taylor and de Groot as "fresh and prophetic" (249). While some may have been shocked by her explicit treatment of sexual violence in the biblical text, Butler's

work is strong evidence that social action could be fueled by a particular reading of a text—and that reading was itself informed by the interpreter’s context.

This openness to highlight the unique aspects of the interpretive foci, and the willingness to direct the reader to question the contextual realities behind these interpretive decisions, is one of the volume’s strengths. Even more, this commitment to engage nineteenth-century interpreters through their own writings has the potential to raise questions that might only be answered through further engagement with the interpreters’ original works.

I was surprised by a *lacuna* in the offerings: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—those persistent daughters of Zelophehad (after appearing twice in Numbers, they surface again in Joshua 17)—do not appear in the volume. These women are definitely both women of war *and* woe: of war because their story is part of Israel’s warfare in the land; of woe because their request is apparently spurred by, and then constrained by patriarchal interests. Since the volume includes “female figures in Joshua and Judges” (4), I wondered at their absence. The law promulgated by their predicament is mentioned briefly in Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s offering on Achsah (69) and hinted at in other comments on the same figure, in the context of arguing for the rights of nineteenth-century women to hold property, even after marriage.

Given a growing voice in the nineteenth century on behalf of women’s right to property ownership, Achsah’s narrative is particularly supportive: although married, she receives and holds property. On one hand, the narrative of Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah could be viewed as supportive of such a goal, for through their persistence they gain a right to land. But on the other hand, the daughters of Zelophehad receive land within two strictly patriarchal concerns: (1) the continuity of their father’s name within Israel; and (2) the recognition of patrilineal land inheritance. These realities make this narrative much less amenable to promoting the right of women to property ownership. It may be that for this reason, the daughters of Zelophehad are not engaged by nineteenth-century women interpreters. If this is so, then nineteenth-century women interpreters were shrewd enough—or constrained enough by their interpretive goals—to overlook those narratives that did not readily promote those predetermined goals.

Perhaps it is that no women wrote on these daughters, so no excerpts could be included. I wondered that their absence was not remarked upon (perhaps in the volume’s introduction). Taylor and de Groot have great expertise in the issues and interests of the nineteenth century and their suppositions as to the daughters’ absence in the literature would have been instructive.

This leads me to some of the hermeneutical issues this volume raises. Repeatedly, it reveals the truth that interpretation always comes out of a context. The prevalence of the Women Question in the face of the cult of domesticity, the reti-



cence regarding sexual violence, the fight for women's property rights—these are issues and stances that are not those of North American, white, privileged readers today. Being confronted by this difference serves as a reminder that we, too, interpret from our locations: in time, in gender, in society, even in interpretive history. Engaging this volume can lead us to more readily see and own our own interpretive context, assessing its strengths, biases, and weaknesses.

Additionally, reading a collection of women's voices is a reminder that there may not be something as identifiable as an interpretive "woman's voice." This is a conclusion the editors draw in their introduction, in which they state that "we have found that women often read with a distinctive female lens, but not exclusively. Other factors, including class, nationality, culture, literary genre, and audience, influence a woman's interpretive process" (4). Certainly, many of the interpreters looked at these biblical women through questions that touched on women's lives—but one wonders if there were not men addressing the same issues. Likewise, methodology was not a gendered "given," as these women interpreters utilized many of the same methods that were current amongst their male counterparts. I think the hermeneutical point this volume makes in this regard is that *all* interpret from a location—whether the nineteenth-century male academy or the many venues of women's interpretation. All were interpreters; all can instruct; all should be part of our ongoing interpretive discourse. None should be relegated to a gendered subset as somehow a less-valid interpretive effort.

As another contribution to bringing women interpreters out of the shadows, this volume presses that hermeneutical (and political?) point home. Indeed, Taylor and de Groot argue that anthologies such as theirs allow "forgotten majority voices to speak again" (4). This is, perhaps, a logical extension of the Reformation principle: that Scripture can and should be read, heard, and digested by all listeners—not just the academiéd elite. These women in all their varied life experiences and contexts; their varied interpretive methods and textual engagements are a reminder that the text has lived and interacted with real people in real lives, bringing real comfort, direction, and correction.

Finally, this volume affirms the necessity of engaging interpretive history towards discerning the meaning of the text, undercutting the false dichotomy between what a text meant and what it means (2). The nineteenth-century women this volume showcases lived in a time of interpretive paradigm shift: from pre-modern, largely figural reading to historical-critical reading. In that shift, they had available to them a variety of interpretive methods. They applied them within the matrix of their own context to answer pressing questions. I think their context is in some ways not too different from ours: we too live in a time of interpretive paradigm shift, now from the hegemony of historical-critical interpretation towards, well, many interpretive models. One of those is the reengagement of pre-

modern interpretation and the attendant call to interact with, and learn from, the interpreters of the past. This is a reclamation of a hermeneutic of humility; of listening and learning in community.

I hope, then, to learn from these interpretive foremothers: to learn to use various interpretive tools, selecting those that seem best suited to engaging the text; to learn from their commitment to the task and their appreciation of its import; to learn to share my findings with the broader community, including the learned and the unlearned. I hope to learn these things well from my foremothers. Thank you, Drs. Taylor and de Groot, for seeing their value, and sharing them with us.

### **Rachel Krohn, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto**

In their edited volume, Taylor and de Groot make a significant contribution to the ongoing project of recovering “missing female voices in the history of biblical interpretation” (ix). The contributions include examples of “traditional” biblical commentary but also “nontraditional interpretive genres, including poetry, catechetical writing, drama, historical fiction, devotional essay, published notes, and female biography” (9). The diverse selection of biblical stories is matched only by the diverse interpretation of these stories. While all the interpreters are British and American, they represent a wide range of views on the roles of women and biblical texts in public life.

By way of response, I would like to discuss two of the strengths of the volume. First, I will discuss the way in which *Women of War* underscores the socially conditioned nature of all biblical interpretation. I will then turn our attention to the way in which this work highlights the fact that biblical interpretation is not limited to the work of the academic elite in their ivory towers nor the spiritually “elect” persons secluded in their cloisters, but rather, biblical interpretation is available to anyone who has access to texts and the opportunity to reflect on them. In this way, *Women of War* demonstrates that the various *contexts* in which biblical interpretation takes place produces the diverse *application* of these same texts.

For me, one of the highlights of this collection is the chapter on Deborah, which illustrates clearly the socially conditioned nature of all biblical interpretation. I expected that some interpreters would use the story of Deborah to argue for the moral equality or even superiority of women,<sup>2</sup> while others would see Deborah-

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2 Interpreters in this volume that understood Deborah’s leadership as evidence of the equality of women in ancient Israel include Grace Aguilar, Barbara Kellison, Julia McNair Wright, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Clara B. Neyman.

ah as exceptional, and thus, not an example to be followed.<sup>3</sup> These expectations were not disappointed. However, what surprised me was the persistent defense of Deborah's femininity, a concern present in many of the nineteenth-century interpreter's writings of the volume. As a twenty-first-century biblical scholar, it has never occurred to me to defend Deborah's femininity when interpreting Judges 4–5, but this was top of mind for many nineteenth-century women. Clara Balfour argues that Deborah was “a peculiarly feminine character”<sup>4</sup> and speaks out against the masculinization of women leaders. Balfour argues that the belief that fulfillment of public office requires a “sacrifice of womanly qualities . . . is a mere vulgar error” (87), reasoning, “Had Deborah been a fierce, stern, masculine woman, she would have aroused no enthusiasm . . . she would have been a sort of second-rate man” (88). Julia McNair Wright argues along a similar line: “The high position of Deborah, as a judge of her people, did not militate against her true womanliness, or her domestic life” (95).

In defending Deborah's femininity, many of the interpreters felt compelled to defend Deborah's excellence in the domestic sphere in spite of her holding public office. Paralleling Wright's comment above that Deborah's judgeship “did not militate against” her womanliness or domesticity, Grace Aguilar notes, “The history of Deborah in no way infers that she was neglectful of her conjugal and domestic duties” (83). Elizabeth Baxter argues that “No prophetic gift, no calling of the Spirit of God into active and public service can excuse a woman for unfaithfulness in family and domestic matters. The being a worker together with God can never excuse her from being a helpmeet to her husband; but the two things can go blessedly together where the public call is really from God” (110).

These interpreters' comments regarding Deborah's femininity and domestic excellence draws attention to the extent to which our social and cultural location influences our biblical interpretation. While the cult of domesticity clearly colored these nineteenth-century female interpreters, it would not cross my mind to discuss Deborah's femininity, or to defend her ability to keep her tent in order as she juggled public and private responsibilities. Whereas femininity may have been deemed a virtue in nineteenth-century Britain and America, its importance and definition are under negotiation in twenty-first-century Western society. To include a consideration of Deborah's femininity in an interpretation of Judges 4–5

3 Elizabeth Baxter makes the argument that Deborah was exceptional: “It is not the usual order of God to put woman in the place of authority: ‘Adam was first formed, then Eve.’ (1 Tim. ii.13.) Deborah was an exception. The children of Israel had sinned grievously against the Lord, and apparently there was no man that could serve His purpose as judge over Israel” (107). This is not at all the view of Julia McNair Wright: “There were men enough in Israel to judge the people and exhort Barak; there were warriors, priests, legists, and the princes of Judah; but God called this woman to stand in the breach, to destroy Jabin, free the tribes, and judge them” (97).

4 The phrase “peculiarly feminine” arises in Balfour's reading several times (87, 89, 90).

would be considered decidedly odd today, at least in the contexts in which I do biblical interpretation!

Attending to the various contexts in which biblical interpretation takes place is another great strength of this volume. The contextual aspect of interpretation particularly struck me in the discussions of Manoah's wife and the Levite's concubine. As Taylor and de Groot note in their introduction to this chapter, most of the interpreters included in this volume "expected the biblical stories to speak into their lives" (204), and as so often happens in biblical interpretation, the interpreter's lives also spoke into the biblical stories. For example, Aguilar used Manoah's extemporaneous prayer as an example to buttress her argument against Christian apologists. Aguilar argued against the Christian argument that the Israelites could not approach God directly, and therefore needed Christ as their mediator, writing, "the Israelites needed no *mediator* whatever, be he man or angel, to bring up their prayers before God, and obtain His gracious reply" (207; italics original). This is hardly an emphasis in Judges 13, but Aguilar's historical context and the purpose of her work led her to use the text this way. Similarly, the verses in which Manoah's wife is told to abstain from alcohol to ensure that Samson was a Nazirite even in utero became a platform for Mary Elizabeth Beck to advocate complete abstinence from alcohol for contemporary Christians. The interpreter M.G. used the very same passage to exhort mothers to faithfulness in their task of raising their children as disciples of Christ. All three women were reading the same text but provided diverse interpretations because of their historical context and audience.

It seemed to me that the interpreters of Judges 13 highlighted elements that were present, but not *dominant* within the biblical story itself. I would not go so far as to say that they were "bad" interpretations, but I would say that they were highly contextual interpretations, and on those grounds, seemed somewhat suspect to my twenty-first-century academic mind. However, Josephine Butler's pieces in the closing chapter of the book were profoundly inspirational to me and are (in my opinion) brilliant examples of contextual interpretation of lasting value.

Butler was a fierce campaigner for women's rights in education, law, and employment, who fought the discrimination and dehumanization of prostitutes in Britain (248–49). In her interpretation of the story of the Levite's concubine, Butler explicitly links the biblical story with the plight of contemporary prostitutes, pleading, "At this close of the year 1898, let me, once more, O! Christian people, implore you to look back over the history of the world, and to realize this tragedy has been repeated all through the centuries; that the story I have cited is the story of the egotism of man and the sacrifice of womanhood to that egotism, invoking a curse which is to this day hanging like a dark and threatening cloud over the nations of the earth" (254). To my mind, this is biblical interpretation at its best. It

takes both the ancient biblical text and the contemporary human situation seriously, and, in bringing them together, calls for action. By highlighting the socially conditioned and contextual aspects of all biblical interpretation, *Women of War* reminds us that the questions we bring to biblical texts play a decisive factor in the answers we find there. However, it also reminds us that these texts have inspired faithful people throughout the ages to fight for a more just and equitable world. This collection of remarkable writings has inspired me to once again take stock of what it is I believe I am doing every time I set about the work of biblical interpretation, and for that, I thank Professors Taylor and de Groot for this remarkable volume.

### **Matthew Forrest Lowe, Independent Scholar, Hagersville, ON**

Echoing my co-panelists in expressing thanks to Taylor and de Groot for their book (and their willingness to respond to this panel), I will begin by following Lissa Wray Beal's example in drawing attention to the introductions and study questions as evidence of the editors' careful work—for the individual voices of the gathered interpreters remain distinctive throughout. The number of different nineteenth-century female interpreters found for each biblical character ranges from as few as two (for the Levite's concubine) to as many as twelve (on Jael; no surprise there!). After readers have heard from the commentators included in each chapter, they're presented with compelling study questions, which strengthen the book's value as a textbook, as well as for personal study.<sup>5</sup> Each interpreter is introduced in detail (where possible) the first time she appears, and more sparingly later on, with references pointing us back to her earlier appearances. This, like the study questions, helps to bring a sense of harmony, if not unity, to the chorus.

Before commenting further on the book's content, I'd like to substantiate the editors' insistence on the necessity of reclaiming women's voices as interpreters of Scripture. My evidence takes the form of another book from Eerdmans, released less than four months before *Women of War*: Stephen and Martin Westerholm's *Reading Sacred Scripture*, a critical review of twelve of the most significant voices in the history of biblical interpretation.<sup>6</sup> With all due respect to the Westerholms, it wasn't especially surprising that all twelve voices were male. Rather, the sad surprise is that one of the few women even *mentioned* is Gunilla Westerholm (Stephen's wife, Martin's mother), quoted in the preface for her equivalent of *bon appétit*—a hospitable invitation, yes, but one that left me won-

5 I found the study questions on Achsah (73–74) especially noteworthy, asking readers to demonstrate strong compare/contrast skills and applied thinking for today's world in response to the biblical and historical texts.

6 Stephen and Martin Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

dering what role, if any, women were expected to play in this task of interpreting the great interpreters.

Having received the Westerholms' book for review just weeks before *Women of War*, I was even more appreciative of the latter's strengths than I might otherwise have been. These strengths include Marion and Christiana's unapologetic, thoroughgoing emphasis on "gendered exegesis"; their admittedly "broad" definition of "what constitutes biblical interpretation in this collection"; and their inclusion of nontraditional, sometimes even culturally transgressive, interpretive genres (8–10). Another strength is their gentle sense of humour, as when they note how Sarah Ewing Hall, who presents a "sanitized" Rahab for family Bible studies, may be expecting "moving day in nineteenth-century Philadelphia" when she describes Rahab's family being "conducted with . . . all their moveable property to the suburbs" of the Hebrew camp (20–22, 24). But the editors are largely and wisely content *to let their interpreters speak for themselves, and to let their readers do their own interpreting*—surely two of the goals of the book! Thus we are free to find treasures like Sarah Hale's conclusions that the Bible "glosses over no characters," such that "it is not incumbent on us to defend all the life" of an individual like Rahab (32); or the balance that Grace Aguilar seeks, as she interprets Deborah's story, between established gender roles on the one hand, and on the other, a diatribe against "those who would thus cramp the power of the Lord, in denying to any one of His creatures the power of addressing and comprehending Him."<sup>7</sup> And at still other moments, Marion and Christiana point out a political issue the first time it arises, then allow readers to discern it for themselves afterward. For example, they note English colonialism as an influence on one interpreter's work (71) but make no remark on Sarah Hall's comment that women "have even governed empires with ability" (119)—a comment that must have seemed rather prescient at Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne, only twenty years later.<sup>8</sup>

The only drawback I see in Taylor and de Groot's nuanced and unassuming work as editors is that we as readers are sometimes left curious about *their* opinions on some of the very questions they raise. I can see how they might not want to voice these too strongly within the pages of the book, but I would close by

7 *Women of War*, 84; the larger argument that Aguilar makes here, invoking the use (and shameful repression) of God-given talents and near-prophetic gifts, is all the more remarkable coming from a Jewish interpreter who believes that "the prophetic spirit is removed from Israel" (83).

8 Hall's *Conversations on the Bible* was originally published in 1818, with a 4<sup>th</sup> edition released in 1827, while Victoria's reign began in 1837. One further strength of *Women of War* is the inclusion of Josephine Butler's hermeneutical protest against the injustices of human trafficking. See Lissa Wray Beal and Rachel Krohn's portions of this panel for more detailed engagements with Butler; it should be noted that Joy Schroeder also commented favourably on Butler's fierce compassion, though her remarks overlapped sufficiently with those from Beal and Krohn that, for brevity's sake, it was not necessary to include them in these proceedings.

asking them to respond to any of the following three questions—not as hostile challenges, but as invitations to speak further, in ways that might supplement what they have already assembled in the book itself. (1) With reference to their remarks about their selected interpreters’ struggle to discern whether the “differences” observed in these biblical characters’ behaviour were to be read as exceptions to the norm, or “generative or prophetic” (13), how do Taylor and de Groot frame responses to this question in their own lives? As they put it in one of their excellent study questions: Do the commentators’ findings “ring true? Can we find insights and lessons” in these stories “for our own place and time” (73)? (2) Are there instances where they find themselves following their commentators’ hermeneutical leads, perhaps in seeking “intertextual dialogue,” as they note (20)? Is there an implicit project in biblical theology—or simultaneously biblical and historical theology, perhaps—here in their scholarship that also finds applications in other aspects of their lives? (3) Having noted for us how stories like that of Rahab tended to reveal commentators’ “theology of war either explicitly or implicitly,”<sup>9</sup> have Taylor and de Groot found that their encounters with these commentators (and the “women of war” on whom they comment) have changed their own theologies, concerning war, for instance?

### **Danna Nolan Fewell, Drew University**

This illuminating anthology is a result of a happy discovery: a formerly planned general volume of nineteenth-century women’s writings on biblical women could not contain all the eligible writings and writers! It turns out that there were hundreds of women in the nineteenth century publishing works on the Bible, and on biblical women in particular. One might say this was a mining operation that hit a virtual “mother lode” (!)—for many of us, a load of foremothers we did not know we had. By necessity, the original survey project had to be segmented, and what we are reviewing today is but a portion that focuses on the female characters in Joshua and Judges.

I use the term “female characters” loosely, of course, because, for the majority of the writers represented in this collection, the women of the Bible were far more than literary characters: they were historical women who, though dead and gone, still had something profound to say through their speech and behavior to women of the nineteenth century. This is illustrated most profoundly by the title of Edith Dewhurst’s 1890 volume, *“They Being Dead, Yet Speak”*: *Outlines for Mothers’ Meetings and Women’s Bible Classes*. Consequently, when we read these nine-

9 19; cf. 117, remarking on Hall’s addition to the command to love our enemies, “that this law applies insofar as it coincides with our own safety—an interesting addendum that allows Christians to support just-war theory,” followed by Hall’s own un-ironic assessment, “It is a peculiar glory of our amiable religion that it has abolished unnecessary violence” (118); or Elizabeth Jane Whately’s skilled use of the nations-as-God’s-retributive-instruments argument, 142.

teenth-century women, we acquiesce to a telescopic experience: we are listening to voices of the past who were, in turn, listening to voices of the even more distant past. Today, we, like these nineteenth-century writers, are, in the words of philosopher of literature Robert Pogue Harrison, “choosing our ancestors,” recognizing that those chosen ancestors who speak to us from “the dominion of the dead” obligate us to attend to, to respect their moral visions, whether we necessarily agree with them or not.<sup>10</sup>

Some of these ancestors’ names we recognize: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, abolitionist, suffragist, and editor of and contributor to *The Woman’s Bible*; Grace Aguilar, novelist, Jewish historian, and author of the popular mid-nineteenth-century publication *The Women of Israel*; abolitionist and novelist Harriett Beecher Stowe; and poet and hymnist Cecil Francis (Fanny) Alexander. Some names are unfamiliar, because little is known about their bearers. Yet other names, occluded by pseudonyms, escape us completely. In between there are several names that we will all now know and lives we will want to investigate further, thanks to this thoughtful and well-researched volume. Across the board, these women authors were remarkably lucid, even rhetorically compelling, writers, close readers of the Bible, aware of and conversant with biblical scholarship (especially issues of translation), engaged in the social and political issues of their day, and pedagogically astute. For seemingly behind every entry is the impetus to teach, especially women and children. But what we have here is not the watered-down catechetical lessons that we often see in religious curricula today; rather, we see most often textual scrutiny that asks hard questions and applies the resulting meanings to difficult personal and social issues. These women may have all been genteel, ladylike, and reluctant to trade their domestic roles for fulltime public service, but they were relatively fearless in tackling some of the most disturbing passages in the Bible, especially those where the lives, identities, and futures of women and children were at stake.

In this volume, the more well-known female figures in Joshua and Judges become magnets for discussing the social and national violence pervasive in both the biblical accounts and the nineteenth-century landscape. Many of the commentators, touched personally by war, wrestle with when or whether violence is justified; some see in the biblical text rationales for protesting war; some see the violent story world placing constraints on human (and to some extent divine) moral agency; some see war as the outcome of human sin and hubris. Some question the divine directive to eradicate the Canaanites; others seem unperturbed by the idea of divine wrath executing a death sentence for disobedient idolators. As Leigh Norval calmly explains to her young readers in 1889, “Now and then when people

10 Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).



get so corrupt that even the little children are trained in wickedness, God uses some means to destroy them” (45). The children of Jericho, by her logic, must have been so indoctrinated in iniquity they must have been beyond all hope. Hence, we should not feel too sorry for Jericho or question God’s rough justice. If we had been the children targeted in Norval’s lesson, I suspect we would have been eyeing the walls around us, grateful to be coached in good God-fearing piety than to be “trained in wickedness”!

In addition to providing a framework for confronting the theme of warfare, the women of Joshua and Judges beckoned these nineteenth-century thinkers to other kinds of moral reflections, many of which landed firmly one way or another in the camp of situation ethics. Rahab, Jael, and Delilah raise the question of deception. Is lying ever justified? In what kinds of situations might trickery be acceptable? Does Rahab’s saving of the spies cancel out her deception of her own people? Some commentators insist on Rahab’s conversion to the worship of the one true God, and conclude that separating herself from wickedness, whatever form that takes, is to be celebrated. Stanton, however, entertains the possibility of a more pragmatic Rahab: “From the text and what we know of humanity in general,” she writes, “it is difficult to decide Rahab’s real motive, whether to serve the Lord by helping Joshua to take the land of Canaan, or to save her own life and that of her kinsmen. It is interesting to see that in all national emergencies, leading men are quite willing to avail themselves of the craft and cunning of women” (53). Here, it seems to me, we are but a few steps away from a more complicated, even quasi-postcolonial reading of Rahab, who could be hedging her bets and playing both sides against the middle.

Jael, of course, is a trickier trickster due to what was seen as the cold-blooded assassination of Sisera. To justify the murder of a sleeping guest and to understand why she might be called “the most blessed of women,” these commentators leaned heavily on the end of Deborah’s song, where Sisera’s mother condones the rapes of Israelite girls. They conclude that Sisera was not simply an enemy of Israel, but one known for sexual assault. Eliza Stansbury Steele even goes so far as to retell Jael’s story with elaborate embellishment, assigning Jael’s motives as the protection of her own daughter, the moral being that women will and should use any means at their disposal to defend and save their children. But whether Jael is seen as a courageous patriot, a desperate opportunist, or a ruthless assassin, nineteenth-century writers also had typology in their interpretive arsenal. Sisera has many faces—sin, Satan, demon drink, those who seek happiness in the things of this world—and readers are admonished in light of Jael’s story to make no truces with Satan and “to nail their Siseras” to the ground, whatever those Siseras may be.

Jael, as does Delilah and Deborah, invokes the question of gender and the basic

natures of men and women. Jael's violence renders her "manly" while her cunning is stereotypically feminine. Delilah, the quintessential "bad girl" of the Bible, takes advantage of male weakness and betrays God's commissioned leader, a cause for censure. On the other hand, Samson's foibles were as easily recognized in the nineteenth century as they are today, and his less-than-stellar behavior complicated assessments of Delilah. Even when seen to be a villain, Delilah seems to inspire grudging admiration. Harriet Beecher Stowe, even while denouncing the infamous *femme fatale*, exclaims:

Delilah! Not the frail sinner falling through too much love; not the weak, downtrodden woman, the prey of man's superior force; but the terrible creature, artful and powerful, who triumphs over man, and uses man's passions for her own ends. . . . [T]he strength of Delilah lies in her hardness of heart. . . . [S]he who cannot love is guarded at all points; *her* hand never trembles, and no soft, fond weakness dims her eye so that she cannot see the exact spot where to strike. Delilah has her wants, —she wants money, she wants power, —and men are her instruments; she will make them her slaves to do her pleasure. (238; italics original)

I can imagine some of Stowe's own readers cheering Delilah on: "You go, girl!"

Deborah, of course, attracts questions regarding leadership roles for women in society. Most of these nineteenth-century writers are much more comfortable admonishing their female readers to "influence" their husbands than encouraging them to replace men in the public square. In the readings of Judges 4–5, much stress is put upon the narrator's identification of Deborah as a wife—the wife of Lappidoth—and Deborah's self-description as "a mother in Israel." A judge, prophet, and military leader she might be, but she is first and foremost a wife and mother. Moreover, Barak's hesitancy to go into battle without her results in the conclusion that, while Deborah was clearly an exception to the gender rule in terms of public office, women must rise to the occasion when their men fail to be manly enough.

Other female figures create openings to discuss additional social issues: Achsah's request to Caleb for water rights in Judges 1 broaches the question of whether women should be allowed to own property, and Caleb's offering of his daughter as a military prize sparks a debate about whether women *are* property. Samson's mother's adherence to Nazirite rules becomes the occasion to decry "demon drink" and bolster arguments both for temperance and prenatal care. Jephthah's daughter raises the question of the rights of women and children over their own bodies—an issue especially timely as we continue to witness in the United

States the violence against black bodies and as we contemplate what is about to happen to *Roe v. Wade* with the next appointments to the Supreme Court.

Throughout these readings there is a persistent wrestling with women's identity, the welfare of children and vulnerable women, the double standards and different expectations for men and women in private and social spheres. While there seems to be an overarching desire to find straightforward instructions, lessons, and morals from Scripture, most of these biblical interpreters acknowledge and replicate for their own readers more complicated textual meanings, and seem to recognize, even in the choices of their own genres, the multivocality and elasticity of the biblical texts. By couching their excursions in dialogues between adults and children, by recasting the stories in poetic form or more elaborate prose midrash, by shaping texts into sermons, and by co-opting the discourse of the mostly male academic world, they demonstrate repeatedly that there is more to think about in these biblical texts than first might meet the eye. The strategies of allowing children's questions to drive the storytelling and of shifting the perspectives from which the stories might be told, amplify voices that are rarely if ever heard. While the resulting dialogues might be somewhat scripted and stilted, the gesture of presenting biblical teaching in such a form underscores how questions are critical for healthy personal development and even how children (as I learned from many conversations with my own daughter as she was growing up)<sup>11</sup> can offer deep insights that bring adults up short.

The creative use of genre by these nineteenth-century writers is a precursor to much of the writing on the Bible done by contemporary women. Female biblical scholars and religious writers seem, more often than male scholars and writers, to be drawn to more imaginative presentations of biblical interpretation. I suspect that this is not only a response to an aesthetic impulse, but an attempt ultimately to reach, to move, a broader audience. For many of us, it has never been enough to converse simply with the academy. There is a wider world hungry for meaning, thirsty for resources to guide ethical and theological reflection; and this wider world makes demands on us. Like these nineteenth-century women writers, we are aware, perhaps now more than ever, of the ways in which the Bible can be used to shape the world for good and ill. Is it now not up to us, as they no doubt felt it was up to them, to ensure that the Bible, with all its dangers and liberative possibilities, is used for good?

I end with a couple of additional thoughts. First, I commend the co-editors for embodying the spirits of these nineteenth-century interpreters in their presentation. By juxtaposing these various voices with their differing viewpoints, by carefully framing and contextualizing each commentator, and by posing reflective

11 See Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

questions at the end of each section, they dramatize the pedagogical impulses that drive much of our collective work. They target an audience that includes the academy but reaches far beyond. They expose and interrogate issues that continue to be critical for women and children, families and communities, across today's cultures. They show us that the most pressing intellectual questions are those tied to actual lives, livelihoods, and identities. And they remind us that all of our intellectual quests and questions are part of rich, extensive conversations that began long ago. Here are lost ancestors, they seem to be saying to us. Choose them. Hear what they have to say. Listen for the life-and-death issues that prompted them to write in the first place.

Second, I would like to relay an observation made recently by David Morris, publicist with Zondervan, a Christian publishing house that has catered to white evangelical audiences. In the last five or so years, Morris claims, there has been a decline in the popularity of authors—such as Rick Warren—who built their reader base as pastors of large mega-churches. These authors have been replaced on religious bestseller lists by women who are not mega-church pastors, but who rather have built and sustained their reader base networks on social media. This turn in publishing trends is significant, notes Morris, not only because of obvious shift in gender and source of social capital, but also because of what this might say about where Christians in the U.S. in particular are looking for community, authority, guidance, and inspiration. I can't help but think of our nineteenth-century women writers finding their authority and offering their voices in their own alternative frameworks. If only social media had been an option for them—we might not be reading these words from the past with such a sense of surprise and wonder.

When I put Morris's observations about religious publishing and these once lost, but now found, nineteenth-century writings together with the results of the recent U.S. presidential election, I keep coming back to the kind of work, the kind of publishing that we do as scholars. I admit a sense of failure—my own certainly, but also communal failure—that we as academics and teachers have not done an adequate job of sharing, teaching, and learning with the wider world. What might we do to make our work more comprehensible? More relevant? More compelling? What should we be doing to ensure that our own writing, teaching, and commitments are not simply destined for archives, whether material or ethereal, but are sustainable resources for cultural and communal transformation?

**Joy A. Schroeder, Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Capital University**  
*Women of War* is a wonderful, affordable collection of writings by nineteenth-century women reflecting on stories found in the book of Joshua and Judges. It is a lens into the varieties of ways that middle- and upper-class British, Irish, and Euro-American women approached biblical interpretation and struggled with

questions of morality, gender roles, and the ethical questions raised by biblical narratives of sex and violence. The cover illustration—a determined Jael with her mallet and tent peg—is quite striking.

Each of the fifty-eight excerpts [of commentary] has an evocative title, added by the editors. Sometimes the excerpt's title is taken from the historical women's own words. Other times an imported phrase captures the essence of the excerpt, such as the selection from Elizabeth Cady Stanton, about Achsah insisting on her inheritance rights, entitled "Assertiveness Training." When the reader views the table of contents, he or she does not simply see a rote list of the women authors. Instead, the reader sees compelling titles like: "Etty Woosnam: Unsexing Jael and Fighting Demon Drink." This makes me want to dip into particular passages—sampling from the selections based on what most intrigues me.

The volume has an insightful introduction, which I will elaborate on below. There is also a separate introduction for each unit, first introducing the biblical woman and the Scripture text, then providing an overview of the diverse ways that nineteenth-century women approached the texts. And then there is a really great introduction to each separate excerpt, providing biographical material for each of the women authors and an assessment of the women's approaches. I appreciate that when a female author is excerpted a second or third time, there is, again, a brief one- or two-sentence biographical introduction and a footnote leading back to her earlier appearances; a mere footnote would not have been enough, particularly since these authors are unfamiliar to most readers. Though studying female interpreters of the Bible is part of my life's work, Taylor and de Groot managed to find and include some women I had never heard of before. I learned much about women's interpretation while reading this collection. The names of some authors would be familiar to readers with a college education: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Other names ought to be an assumed part of the educational canon. Seminary-educated people should know that Grace Aguilar, a Jewish woman living in Victorian-era Britain, wrote a volume defending Judaism against accusations that her religion denigrated women compared to Christianity, which, according to many Christian interpreters, elevated women. Reflecting on Deborah's role as judge, Aguilar says pointedly that Deborah's example is "rather an *unsatisfactory* proof of the degradation of Jewish women" (79; italics original). Biblical scholars—especially women interested in their forerunners—should know about the Hebrew linguistic skills of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, a Moravian.

The introductory chapter and the material introducing the various excerpt includes a reminder that these women were struggling to interpret violent biblical texts during an era of colonialism, warfare, and violent conflicts such as the American Civil War, the War of 1812, the Crimean War, and conflicts in the Eng-

lish colonies in Canada, India, South Africa, Nepal, and Ireland (5). De Groot and Taylor draw attention to the overt orientalism in the text: some women's claims, e.g., that Arab culture remained static and backward while western culture had progressed (120). The editors also point out the gender assumptions we find in some of these passages, including Victorian values that we might not be comfortable with, celebrating women's place in the home to the exclusion of the public sphere.

There were things that I wish nineteenth-century women had not said. For instance, Elizabeth Baxter, an evangelical Anglican, thought that Deborah was not sufficiently modest and humble when she sings her song in Judges 5: "There was so much of herself in it. The position had been too much for her; she could not forget the part she had played in it" (109).

Other passages I found empowering, such as the work of Julia McNair Wright, who used the story of Deborah to advocate for women's education.

There are times when a woman can do a man's work more nobly and fitly than he can do it himself. . . . The capacity of women for learning is, on the whole, the same as that of men. . . . There has been much prating about women's *intuition* and *instinct*, and her weakness being her strength. Woman's weakness is *not* her strength; for her, as for man, knowledge is power. Intuition is no more the peer of education than the dog's instinct is the equal of his master's knowledge. (98–99)

In the text we also see Elizabeth Cady Stanton's indignation that so many biblical women are unnamed—mentioned only as "daughter of Jephthah," "wife of Manoah," and so forth. Stanton calls these women part of the "no-name series," and she draws a parallel with the practice of women replacing their surnames by taking on their husbands' names (198, 228–29). In another selection—that section entitled "Assertiveness Training"—Stanton comments on Achsah requesting an inheritance from her father:

Achsah's example is worth the imitation of the women of this Republic. She did not humbly accept what was given her, but bravely asked for more. We should give to our rulers, our sires, and sons no rest until all our rights—social, civil and political—are fully accorded. How are men to know what we want unless we tell them? They have no idea that our wants, material and spiritual, are the same as theirs; that we love justice, liberty and equality as well as they do. (69)

There are interesting temperance lessons, such as this from Etty Woosnam on the

story of Jael impaling Sisera, a lesson on quitting alcohol cold turkey, with total abstinence, rather than tapering off:

Let every woman among us be a spiritual Jael and nail to the ground her Sisera. For sin will ever continue to tempt and harass a Christian. . . . There are thousands of men and women in England who resolve every day to give up strong drink gradually, and become very moderate drinkers—poor misguided creatures! . . . Did Jael use over-strong measures when she took one of the long pins or stakes with which the tent was fastened? And yet it was the only available one which was effectual. Are we thought to be stretching a point too far if we advocate total abstinence in an age in which fearful ravages are being made by the demon drink? It is the only available means of crushing it that we know of which is effectual; and God works by means. (145–46)

Even more delightfully, in a selection titled “Drink Milk Not Beer,” Mary Elizabeth Beck uses the case of Manoah’s wife, who abstained from alcohol while pregnant with Samson so that he would keep the Nazirite vow even *in utero*. Beck urges pregnant and nursing mothers to abstain from alcohol so that their children would not acquire the tendency to drink. Samson’s mother exemplified this: “What, then, is the lesson to the mothers of the present day? Prepare for the duties and responsibilities of your motherhood. Do not let one drop of intoxicating drink flow through your system” (214). When people object that hard-working mothers must drink beer or substantial stout to keep up their strength, Beck gives us a recipe for porridge: “It should be carefully made—clean boiling water, a clean saucepan, and good meal. Mix three tablespoons of oatmeal very smoothly with a quarter of a pint of milk and three-quarters of a pint of boiling water. Boil gently for two hours, and flavour as you please” (214).

Some of the authors represented in this collection wrote reference works or commentaries on the entire Bible or at least substantial portions of it. A greater number of excerpts come from a genre called Scripture biography, a genre in which writers provide short, imaginative biographical portraits of biblical characters. Dozens of nineteenth-century women published such collections featuring female biblical figures, usually with an intended female readership. Scripture biographies offered an opportunity for women to explore psychological motives of the characters, moral issues arising from the plot, historical details, and comments on women’s roles. Grace Aguilar’s *Women of Israel* was a bestseller, as was Stowe’s impressive coffee table book, *Women in Sacred History*.

In their introduction, Taylor and de Groot note that they mention or briefly quote more than seventy women and formally excerpt thirty-five. They report that

their search did not yield substantive writings on women in Joshua and Judges by “Catholic, Canadian, African American women, and other racialized minorities” (16). I think that the absence of African American voices has to do with the genres. Most of the female writers in this volume are women of privilege, who were able to publish Scripture biographies, commentaries, and the like. A major genre preserving the words of nineteenth-century African-American women is the spiritual autobiography—slave narratives and the memoirs of freeborn women who were preachers and evangelists—though African-American women also published sermons, poems, and essays. This means that scholars have not found sustained treatment on the women of Joshua and Judges, at least among the written material that survives. We have no idea how many oral sermons or Bible studies were delivered but not committed to paper. However, even if there are not substantial pieces of material to include as major excerpts, there should have been more effort to include black women’s voices in the introductory material, both in the general introduction and also in the sections introducing the biblical women.

Even a sentence or passing reference recorded by an African-American woman can warrant a short paragraph or several sentences in the introductory sections, which could provide details about the particular black woman’s life, work, and significance. That way, even if we do not have substantial excerpts from African-American women, we nevertheless would be provided with a fuller picture of the range and diversity of women doing interpretive work in the nineteenth century.

For instance, in the introduction to the chapter on Deborah, there could have been a quotation from Zilpha Elaw, a black preacher in the Methodist tradition who published her spiritual autobiography. She reports that an Englishwoman once told her that there was no place for female preachers in Methodism. When told that she should join the Quakers, Elaw responded that “the Lord who raised up Deborah to be a prophetess, and to judge His people, and inspired Hulda[h] to deliver the counsels of God, sent me forth not as a Quakeress but a Methodist, and chiefly employed me to labour amongst the Methodists.”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, there could have been a brief quotation from Maria Stewart, an African-American speaker and writer from Boston who lectured on women’s rights and condemned American racism. In 1833, she justified her call to public oratory with biblical examples: “What if I am a woman; is not the God of ancient times

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12 Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour; Together with some Account of the Great Religious Revivals in America [Written by Herself]*, in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrew (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 147.



the God of these modern days? Did he not raise up Deborah, to be a mother, and a judge in Israel?"<sup>13</sup>

Virginia Broughton, an African-American missionary in the Baptist tradition, left written outlines for Bible studies she taught. In "Bible Authority for Women's Work," she included subsection called "Women as helpmeet in business." She writes: "Illustrations: Deborah, Esther, Ruth, Lydia."<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the most striking example of an African-American woman's engagement with the text of Judges comes from Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the noted activist who brought public attention to the travesty of lynching. In 1892, in a speech delivered to African-American women at New York's Lyric Hall, Wells-Barnett referenced Delilah in order to deconstruct the myth that black men were particularly inclined to assault white women. She described a case on record where a married white woman from Ohio, a minister's wife, entered into a consensual relationship with an African-American man. Fearing the affair would be discovered since the neighbors had seen the man depart from her house, and afraid that she might give birth to a black child, the woman tried to escape blame and social stigma by claiming that he had raped her. She later recanted and gave testimony that she herself had initiated the affair. The man had already served four years in prison before the truth came out and he was released. As Wells-Barnett described the incident: "I feel that the race and the public generally should have a statement of the facts as they exist. They will serve at the same time as a defense for the Afro-American Sampsons who suffer themselves to be betrayed by white Delilahs."<sup>15</sup> Twice in her speech, Wells-Barnett uses the Delilah story, warning African-American men, "poor blind Sampsons," to use caution when considering entering into relationships, asserting that they cannot trust that the white women that they love will not betray them. This is the sort of example that could have added additional diversity and texture to the volume—to have Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching activism and use of the Delilah image mentioned alongside the numerous white social reformers in this book.

Overall, this is a tremendous volume, worthy of inclusion in classes on the Bible, women's studies, and women's history. De Groot and Taylor are to be commended for their laborious research, insightful introductions, and accessible structuring. Also, it should be noted that the book is part of an emerging new

13 Maria W. Stewart, "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address to her Friends in the City of Boston," in *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 68.

14 Virginia W. Broughton, "Texts of Special Significance in Virginia's Twenty Years' Experience," in *Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology*, ed. Marcia Y. Riggs (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 40.

15 Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (New York, 1892); and Anita August, "Shaping Presence: Ida B. Wells' 1892 Testimony of the 'Untold Story' at New York's Lyric Hall," *Peitho Journal* 16/2 (2014): 145–67.

genre—twenty-first-century women’s Scripture biography collections containing nineteenth-century women’s Scripture biographies, excerpts framed by the biographies of nineteenth-century writers. Ten years ago Taylor co-edited with Heather Weir a similar volume, entitled *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth-Century Women Writing on Women in Genesis* (Baylor University Press, 2006), and now, also recently released from Eerdmans (2016), is a new volume—a companion to this one—from Taylor and Weir, *Women in the Story of Jesus: The Gospels through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters*. Taylor and de Groot have been among a handful of pioneering forerunners in the work of retrieving nineteenth-century women’s voices. I am grateful to them for bringing to light the forgotten and previously overlooked voices of women from previous eras.

### **Response: Christiana de Groot, Calvin College**

First of all, let me thank the CETA conference in May and the SBL meeting in November for organizing these panels. It’s an honour for Marion and me to have our book given this close attention by scholars in this field. Also, many thanks to the panelists, who read our book so carefully, and have made thoughtful, insightful, and gracious comments in their responses. Finally, I’d like to thank my co-editor. Marion Taylor is a leading scholar in the area of women’s interpretation and has been very generous with her resources. Unlike the scholars who discovered the Qumran manuscripts and tended to hoard them, Taylor has been a model of encouraging and empowering colleagues by pointing them to new interpreters and interesting works that she has discovered. She operates with an economy of plentitude rather than of scarcity, and I and many others have benefitted. Indeed, in the past fifteen years we have discovered a treasure trove of biblical interpretation by women, and we haven’t seen the end of it yet.

Now, some comments in response to the panelists’ points. You have applauded our inclusion of a variety of voices. The interpreters we included do not all agree with each other on what the biblical text means or what it teaches. They hold diverse views on women’s role, identity, and status, and what constitutes an appropriate ethical response. Some we would label traditional, some progressive. They write out of their context, and those contexts also differ. Most are upper class, with resources and leisure to allow them to read and write. A few interpreters write to support a family, and have experienced poverty firsthand, and their views reflect that. In effect, our book is an archaeological exercise. We are bringing to light what our research uncovered. We decided not to limit our publication to any particular ideology, even though that is a legitimate exercise for scholarship. For example, Marla Selvidge’s book *Notorious Voices: Feminist Interpretation, 1500–1920* (New York: Continuum, 1996) only included writings which promote

feminist leanings. Our criteria required that these women's writings had a significant impact in their own time and place. We intentionally allowed the variety of women's viewpoints to emerge.

I am grateful to Joy Schroeder for pointing out one of the limitations of our project. The voices of African-American women are missing. Schroeder rightly points out that though there may not be extensive material written by slaves and freeborn women, their words can be found in slave narratives and memoirs. The few women that she discovered in her own research convincingly demonstrate that this volume would have been stronger if their voices were present.

Danna Fewell and Matthew Lowe asked us delightful questions about how we engage these commentators today. Who has captured our imagination and why? Lowe asks us to answer some of the questions that we pose at the end of each chapter. For example, do our commentators' findings ring true? For me, one commentator whose interpretation and application do *not* ring true is Elizabeth Baxter. She wrote later than many of our interpreters and dispels the idea that progress towards women's equality moved at a steady rate: her popular *Women and the Word*, published in 1897, contains views among the most traditional represented in our volume. That alone is not the reason that I find her frustrating. Rather, it seems to me that she does not walk the talk. In her life Baxter was a sought-after public person. She worked with her husband, and together they toured England speaking and preaching. She taught as many as fifteen hundred women each week when they joined Dwight L. Moody in his crusades. She authored some forty books on the Bible and the Christian life and contributed to the *Christian Herald* for many years. She was an accomplished public figure, yet she counseled women that their calling was domestic, and their first loyalty was to their family. Baxter was critical of Deborah, who filled the roles of judge, prophet, military leader, composer, as well as mother and wife, describing her as "an imperfect, but a useful woman" (110). Baxter allowed that God did use women to promote his cause, but only because the men were not being faithful. The goal of women's involvement in public life was to shame men into taking their rightful place.

In no place in her writing does Baxter reflect on her own successful career and how she managed to fulfill her domestic and family obligations. It's hard to imagine that she could have been so productive and at the same time have given full attention to their son, fulfilled the calling of the "angel of the home," been a loving wife and attended to the details of running a household. She does not seem to embody her own ideals, and by requiring women to do it all, sets them up for failure.

An author whose writings are still inspiring today are those of Grace Aguilar. Perhaps this choice is influenced by the 2016 American presidential election campaign in which Muslims have been targeted and vilified. Aguilar was an advocate

for her Jewish faith, concerned with educating her Jewish sisters so that they would not be tempted to convert to Christianity. Nineteenth-century Christianity in England tended to portray Judaism as a rigid, legalist religion which worshipped a distant, an uncaring God, and Aguilar countered this view in her essays on women in the Hebrew Bible. What I find so remarkable and inspiring about Aguilar is that she speaks powerfully out of her Jewish faith tradition and yet does not demonize Christianity. She is in conversation with Christians, speaks positively of Protestant Christianity, and even visits churches on occasion to listen to beautiful music. She does not merely tolerate Christianity but appreciates it. Her posture of remaining loyal to Judaism while also staying in dialogue with other faiths is a model of how we in North America need to think and behave towards those who believe differently than ourselves. We do not need to give up our own convictions to be respectful of others and to value the diversity that different faiths and traditions contribute to our common life. We need more Grace Aguilar in the twenty-first century if we are to live at peace with one another.

Another set of issues that these interpreters model for me is the difficulty of being a pioneer. Each woman represented here stepped out of the expected norms for women when they addressed “promiscuous” public gatherings and when they published their writings. These actions involved claiming new roles for women and required them to transgress boundaries. Yet, it seemed to me that they were not consistent when they did so. For example, the Deborah narrative is used by Aguilar to support religious education for girls and women, since Deborah as a judge would surely have been highly educated in the Jewish laws. She further argued that the office of judge was not inherited, and therefore it was held by those who were best equipped to hold that office, regardless of their sex (78). She concludes that the Almighty is not a respecter of persons but looks only at the heart. Given these claims, one might expect that Aguilar would support women’s full inclusion in public life. But she ends her essay by describing the calling that married and single women have from God in nineteenth-century England: “Every married woman is judge and guardian of her own household. She may have to encounter the prejudices of a husband, not yet thinking with her on all points, but if she have a really great mind, she will know how to *influence*, without in any way *interfering*” (84; italics original). Again, this conclusion seems inconsistent, given her statements on how God used Deborah. Aguilar herself remained single for her short life, and her instructions to single women seem more consistent with her treatment of Deborah and would allow for the vocation of writer and teacher which she herself pursued: “To unmarried women, even as to wives, some talent is intrusted, which may be used to the glory of its Giver” (84).

I’d like to explore this inconsistency by considering our current situation in the United States. For the past eight years we’ve had an African-American President

and First Lady. Michelle Obama is a highly educated woman, graduating from Princeton and Harvard Law School. She practiced law in Chicago and was even Barack Obama's supervisor when he started at that law firm. However, she has been criticized by many as not being feminist. (See for example the Nov. 21, 2013 article *Leaning Out* by Michelle Cottle.) The causes she has promoted include the need for children to exercise, the promotion of healthy eating, and gardening. These have been seen as "domestic" and "motherly" issues. In addition, she has described herself as "mom-in-chief," a traditional label.

Has Michelle Obama been inconsistent in her choices? A more sympathetic reading might note that she transgressed many boundaries when she became the first African-American FLOTUS. For many Americans, the simple fact of the Obamas residing in the White House is staggering. In the Jan. 2, 2017 edition of the *New Yorker*, Amy Davidson details the many prejudices that Michelle Obama has had to overcome on the long road from the South Side of Chicago to the White House. Perhaps, given the context of racism in the United States, her new status as First Lady was enough change. Perhaps publicly promoting traditional women's concerns was her intentional strategy. Amy Davidson's article, "Mrs. Obama," ends with this appraisal, "But no one could doubt that Michelle Obama's courage has left an indelible mark. Her time as First Lady has changed this country and clarified its vision. And she has been one of the revelations" (18).

Although I have not found anywhere that Aguilar reflects on the seeming inconsistency between her assessment of Deborah and her application to nineteenth-century Jewish women, perhaps she, like Obama, decided to constrain her actions and her writings so that she could bring her constituency with her. Is this not the task that every pioneer of new thinking and actions must consider? Perhaps the inconsistency that I notice in Aguilar and Obama is better described as being pragmatic and aware of social context.

Let me close by thanking the panelists for allowing me to ruminate on what I'm still learning from these courageous foremothers. Their struggles with their roles and their engagement with Scripture to show them the way forward is inspiring. Their writings, taken together, give us a complex, multi-faceted picture of the life of faith. Although we may not agree with the particulars of all their convictions, they compel us to continue the conversation with them and the biblical texts they seek to interpret.

### **Response: Marion Taylor, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto**

First of all, I want to thank the respondents for their willingness to read and comment on our book at these two conferences. By reading, you were introduced to the lives and writings of many of the women whose books now sit on the shelves of my personal library and whose stories and writings continue to surprise me with

delight as their writings open up the forgotten world of women's interpretations of Scripture in the nineteenth century. Their stories also evoke sadness when I think that these women were denied equal access to education and employment and even the right to vote and own property. I experience anger because women's voices were not included in past accounts of the reception history of the Bible. But I too have hope and wonder what revised histories of the interpretation of the Bible will look like when the voices of women are included. Moreover, I often think about what a history of feminist biblical interpretation that moves beyond the notion of three waves beginning in the late nineteenth century will look like.

As the panelists noted, nineteenth-century women engaged the stories of women in Joshua and Judges with passion and zeal. Most often these women used the biblical stories as platforms for discussing not only such obvious subjects as war and violence, but also such less obvious topics as prayer, conversion, ethics, women's roles in the home and society, women's rights, temperance, prostitution, and even prenatal care. Nineteenth-century women's writings on the women in Joshua and Judges make me laugh and cry. I am continually amazed not only by what they wrote, but by the fact that so many women in the nineteenth century actually published what they wrote, taught, and preached. I am impressed with the depth of their engagement with the texts themselves, with issues being debated in the church, the academy, and the culture at large, and with the variety of approaches they used to interpret Scripture for diverse audiences using a surprising number of genres.

As Lissa Wray Beal notes, knowing something about the biographies of the nineteenth-century authors not only sheds light on what women said about each biblical story, and how they interpreted various texts, but also as makes us very aware that interpretation—past and present—is placed and flows out of the writers' life experiences, gifts, and social convictions. This is especially evident in the very sophisticated interpretive writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose work is indelibly shaped by her experiences as daughter of a theologian who trained all his children to preach and think theologically, as wife of an underpaid early American biblical critic and seminary professor, as mother attuned to questions about women's rights and roles, and as abolitionist and social justice advocate. What biblical scholar is not surprised by Stowe's application of the insights of German scholar, J. C. Herder, to her reading of the poetry of Deborah's Song? And what reader does not recognize her use of a hermeneutic of sympathy as Stowe picks up on the theme of wartime violence against women in Judges 5? Thus, she writes: "The outrages on wives, mothers, and little children, during twenty years of oppression, give energy to this blessing on the woman [Jael] who dared to deliver" (140). Stowe is a great reader of texts whose work merits close study.

Unfortunately, as Danna Nolan Fewell observes, little or nothing is known

about a number of the authors who published on the lives of women in Joshua and Judges. Their surviving work, however, sometimes gives us a small window into their lives and makes us want to know more. I would love to meet the colourful author M.G., whose writings reveal her Anglo-Catholic theological leanings and suggest her vocation as clergy spouse and teacher of mother's meetings. I would love to meet all these nineteenth-century foremothers, to hear their stories, and fill in the many blanks of their lives. I would love to ask Adelia Graves, the American author of a five-act play on Jephthah's daughter for teenaged girls, what or who inspired her to write a play on Jephthah's daughter? I would also love to know how the teenaged girls she wrote the play for received it. I imagine the play, which not only gives the unnamed daughter a name but strains to find significance in her Christ-like sacrifice, was a success. It certainly was in a class I taught on *Bad Boys and Bad Girls in the Bible*, when students read and sang various parts of the final moving lament for the lost daughter of Jephthah, the warrior whom Graves judged too proud to back down on his foolish vow.

Rachel Krohn highlights how our book underscores the socially-conditioned nature of all biblical interpretation, with the writings of Josephine Butler pressing this point. Butler's keen sense of social justice was fostered by her parents; reinforced by her experiences at Oxford, where college masters often turned a blind eye to the plight of prostitutes impregnated by students; and established by Butler's experiences of working with prostitutes more broken than she was following the tragic death of her five-year-old daughter. Such social conditioning definitively shaped her experiential approach to interpretation. However, other factors also influenced Butler's hermeneutic. She practiced what we now identify as theological exegesis and read stories like that of the Levite's concubine as a "typical tragedy" that speaks prophetically to Christian readers of the story in her day. Moreover, as Butler and her contemporaries recognized, she practiced what was named as an "angelic," "motherly," and prophetic approach as she purposefully listened to what she felt were the quiet whispers of God at a time when "manly," scientific, and objective approaches were on the rise. Butler's brilliant readings of Scripture stand out from many others as unique and timeless. I love her interpretation of the concubine's story. Why she alone grappled with the gruesome story that others passed over and why she found in Judges 19–21 a message that called for change and redemption are questions that should cause us to ponder again that nature of the interpretive task.

I would like to address the important issue Lissa Wray Beal raises about the female figures in Joshua and Judges that are missing from our book, notably, the five daughters of Zelophehad (Num 26:33; 27:1–11; 36:2–12; Josh 17:3–6; 1 Chron 7:15). The omission of these and other minor female figures should have been noted and explained in the book's introduction. We should have explained

our process of choosing the women we included in our book more fully. I had a file folder for each female figure in Joshua and Judges, and as we found women's writings on each figure, we put them into the appropriate files. We later culled the files, choosing the most significant and representative pieces. Although I still have a file for Zelophehad's daughters, it is very thin, and we decided not to have a chapter on the daughters early on in the selection process. The only substantive commentary in the file on these women is that of Grace Aguilar, who found in the story of Zelophehad's daughters an inspiring and relevant message for her contemporaries. Perhaps we should have included them after all.

Joy Schroeder calls attention to another kind of omission in our book with her suggestion that we could have introduced additional voices, notably those of African-American women, if we had expanded our search to include such sources as slave narratives and the memoirs of freeborn women. While Schroeder admits that the references to the female characters in Joshua and Judges in these writings are brief, she suggests that we could have at least incorporated black women's voices into both the general introduction and into the sections introducing the biblical women. The examples Schroeder provides are undeniably important and would have done much to complete the picture of nineteenth-century women's engagements with the women in Joshua and Judges. I regret that I did not consult with Joy early on in the process of collecting materials, as the examples she found would have been a wonderful addition to our book. The larger lesson learned from this is that the work of recovering forgotten, lost, or little-known voices needs to be collaborative. Biblical scholars need to work side by side with scholars whose expertise includes materials ensconced in sermons, diaries, slave narratives, novels, drama, poetry, memoirs, and even anti-lynching speeches!

Matthew Lowe asks the probing question, is there is an implicit biblical (or biblical-historical) theology in our scholarship that finds application in other aspects of our lives? I would want to say that finding the writings of women interpreters through the ages has provided me with a much more complete and satisfying account of the history of the interpretation of the Bible. I always wondered about how women in the past read and interpreted Scripture. I had even looked for women's writings in the archives at Princeton as I was working on the materials related to how the Old Testament was taught at Princeton from its inception in 1812 to 1929 when the split to form Westminster Seminary took place. But the only material I found was a handwritten note of Archibald Alexander, entitled, "Hints to finding a wife." I have personally found the courage of many of the women writers to be inspiring and life giving. While I certainly don't agree with all their readings, many of their ideas excite me, especially their interpretive approaches, which anticipate those rediscovered and honed-in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I had never really paid much attention to the character of



Caleb's daughter, for example, but our foremothers have taught me to love her boldness and her father's willingness to respond to her ask. As practitioners of Celtic spirituality have long recognized, Caleb's daughter's bold ask can encourage us to also ask for what we need from God.

Finally, the larger project of recovering forgotten women interpreters of the Bible is far from complete. I encourage others to be part of the important work of recovering and integrating of women's voices into our accounts of the history of the interpretation and reception history of the Bible.

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