

CANADIAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

A Journal of Theology, Scripture, and Culture

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Guest Editorial for Theme Issue: “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal”

J. Richard Middleton
Northeastern Seminary at Roberts Wesleyan College

The current issue of the *Canadian-American Theological Review* gathers selected papers from a conference on “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” held at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, in Kingston, Jamaica, September 8–9, 2017.

As a graduate (BTh, 1977) and longtime friend of the Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS), I was invited by Dr. Garnett Roper, the current President, to help organize and chair the conference.

This was the second conference hosted by JTS in an attempt to stimulate thinking about theology and the church in the Caribbean context.

The first was held in January 2010. Having presented a paper at that event, I subsequently organized and co-edited a volume of essays arising from the conference, supplemented by others solicited for the volume from a variety of Caribbean theologians. The essays were published as *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Garnett Roper and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013).

My involvement with the *Canadian-American Theological Review* does not go back as far as my JTS connection. In 1991 I gave a paper at the first annual meeting of the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association (CETA), the predecessor of the Canadian-American Theological Association (CATA), which sponsors the journal.

It was my privilege to serve as President of the Association for three years (2011–14), and I have continued on the executive committee since then, primarily in an advisory role for conference planning.

Based on my history with the Jamaica Theological Seminary and the *Canadian-American Theological Review* I am honored to be able to introduce the contributors to this issue.



Steed Davidson

**“From *Sola Scriptura* to Maroonage: Reflections
on Caribbean Biblical Interpretation.”**

The Zenas Gerig Memorial Lecture for 2017.

Steed Vernyl Davidson is associate professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. A native of Trinidad and Tobago, he earned a PhD in Hebrew Bible from Union Theological Seminary in New York, an STM from Boston University and both MA and BA from the University of the West Indies.

His work centers on deploying postcolonial theory as a means of interrogating aspects of power in the Bible, biblical interpretation, and the use of Scriptures in contemporary cultures. He is the author of *Empire and Exile: Postcolonial Readings of the Book of Jeremiah* (2011) and the co-editor of *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible: RumiNations* (2015). Davidson’s current research focuses on the oracles against the nations in the Prophetic Books in light of contemporary challenges of the nation-state.

Davidson was an ordained minister in the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas before becoming an elder in the United Methodist Church (USA). He served churches in St. Vincent, his native Tobago, as well as in the New York Annual Conference of the UMC in Manhattan and Long Island.



Garnett Roper

**“Was *Sola Scriptura* a Causal Factor in European
Imperialism? A Response to Steed Davidson.”**

Garnett Roper is President and Lecturer in Theology at Jamaica Theological Seminary. He is an ordained pastor in the Missionary Church Association, Jamaica, and is well known throughout the Caribbean as a communicator on social, political, and religious issues. He holds a PhD from the University of Exeter, a ThM from Westminster Theological Seminary, and a BTh from Jamaica Theological Seminary. Roper is the author of *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* (2013) and *This is the Year of Jubilee* (2012). He co-edited with J. Richard Middleton *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013). His latest book is a collection of radio sermons preached in 2017, entitled *Thus Says the Lord: Responding to the Resurgence of Empire, Readings from the Minor Prophets and the Book of Daniel* (2018).



Erica Campbell

“The Parable of the Good Samaritan: A Political Reading from a Caribbean Perspective.”

Winner of the Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Bible and Theology.

Erica Campbell is Head of the Department of Humanities and Lecturer in Humanities, Theology, and Biblical Studies at Jamaica Theological Seminary, where she has taught since 1994. She earned MA and MDiv degrees from the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology. Prior to teaching at JTS, she taught Spanish and French at Convent of Mercy Academy (Alpha Academy) and the Queen’s School. She has been involved with Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Jamaica Bible Translation project and has been active in promoting the value of Jamaican Creole as an issue of social justice. Her essay on language and identity is published in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013).



J. Richard Middleton
**“The Inclusive Vision of Isaiah 56 and Contested
Ethical Practices in Scripture and the Church: Toward
a Canonical Hermeneutic of Discernment.”**

J. Richard Middleton, a Jamaican Old Testament scholar living in the Diaspora, is currently Professor of Biblical Worldview and Exegesis at Northeastern Seminary, in Rochester, NY. He has a BTh from Jamaica Theological Seminary, an MA in philosophy from the University of Guelph, Canada, and PhD from the Free University in Amsterdam (in a joint-degree program with the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto).

Middleton is the author of *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (2014) and *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (2005). He co-edited with Garnett Roper *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013) and is coauthor (with Brian Walsh) of *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (1984) and *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (1995). His research and writing focuses on Old Testament theology, with particular emphasis on creation theology and the dynamics of human and divine power in the Bible.

He is currently working on a book entitled *The Silence of Abraham, the Passion of Job: Explorations in the Theology of Lament* (for Baker Academic), another entitled *Portrait of a Disgruntled Prophet: Samuel’s Resistance to God and the Undoing of Saul* (for Eerdmans), and a third entitled *Life and Death in the Garden of Eden* (with Cascade). He gave the first Zenas Gerig Memorial Lecture at JTS in 2012. Richard is married to Marcia, a public health nutritionist, who is also a Jamaican. They have two adult sons.



Eric G. Flett

“‘Him Likkle but Him Tallawah’: Dirt, the Dynamics of Disgust, and the Hospitality of the Spirit in Acts 10.”

Eric Flett is Professor of Theology and Culture at Eastern University, in Philadelphia, where he has taught since 2004. He holds an MA from Fuller Theological Seminary and a PhD from King’s College at the University of London. His interests revolve around the intersection of Trinitarian theology, contextual theology, economic development, and interdisciplinary theological reflection. He is the author of *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward A Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (2011) and has an essay on a Caribbean theology of culture published in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013). He gave the Zenas Gerig Memorial Lecture at JTS in 2015. Eric is married to JoAnn Flett, a Trinidadian, who also teaches at Eastern in the fields of business and social entrepreneurship. They have two adult sons.



Nicholas Astley Smith

“Pastoral Priorities for Biblical Interpretation in the Caribbean.”

Nicholas Smith is a licensed pastor with the Missionary Church Association in Jamaica and is currently Research Assistant to the President, Jamaica Theological Seminary. He has an undergraduate degree in theology from JTS, with a minor in leadership and ministry, and is currently pursuing an MA in Public Theology and Bible at JTS.

From *Sola Scriptura* to Maroonage: Reflections on Caribbean Biblical Interpretation¹

Steed Vernyl Davidson
McCormick Theological Seminary

Abstract

The transformative actions of Martin Luther’s challenge to the Catholic magisterium in October 1517 took place in the early days of modern European imperialism. The intersecting linkages between the Protestant Reformation and the formation of the Caribbean as marked by European colonialism, slavery, and indentureship meant that practices of biblical interpretation were tied to the theopolitical legacies of the Reformation. This article explores the impact of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* upon Africans trafficked to the Caribbean and the attempt to develop an authentic form of Caribbean biblical interpretation. As the trafficked Africans had to make a home out of materials available in the Caribbean, the posture of “maroonage” was a significant step toward constructing a form of Caribbean biblical interpretation that did not privilege Europeanized elements but rather used local material to build a home that ensures true flourishing.

History provides one of the most convenient contacts that Caribbean residents can have with Christians in the Lutheran tradition. Exceptions would be South American portions of the Caribbean community and St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, where the oldest Lutheran churches in the Americas are located. Despite the geographic, confessional, and liturgical distance between the vast majority of the Caribbean and Lutheranism as a Christian denomination, the Protestant Reformation—which arguably begins with Martin Luther’s challenge to the Catholic magisterium on October 31, 1517, when he nailed a list of ninety-five theses for debate—forms a critical factor in the formation of the Caribbean. The political, theological, social, cultural—and, in fact, ethnic—makeup of the Caribbean can all be attributed in part to the Protestant Reformation.

1 This essay is an expansion of the Zenas Gerig Memorial Lecture, given to open the conference on “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, Kingston, Jamaica, September 8–9, 2017.

Rather than a single historical event, the Reformation constituted several actions on the part of Luther and other Reformers in various parts of Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, actions that have continued to reshape Europe politically, and consequently the Caribbean.² Luther and the effects of his actions fall within the broad historical sweep from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment in Europe, periods that happen to coincide with Europe's imperial ventures. The Bible and Christian theology accompanied legal theory as key instruments in building the initial scaffolding for European imperialism.³ Scholarly enterprise reliant upon interpretation of biblical texts and shifting views of the Bible became an ally of emerging legal precepts, which laid the foundation for re-charting the world.⁴ Not simply parallel movements, and not aligned in a neat cause-and-effect relationship, the *longue durée* of the Reformation and the resulting formation of European nation-states with their imperial ambitions, are nonetheless part of a whole that created and enabled Europe to exercise supremacy vis-à-vis the rest of the world.⁵

My central claim in this article rests with Luther's (re)definition of the Bible that, in effect, (re)produced the Bible for his context and age. Rather than seeing the Bible as a static entity, Luther demonstrated, through this (re)definition, the necessity of (re)producing the Bible in the vernacular.⁶ By vernacular, I mean more than simply language; rather, as Garnett Roper puts it, a vernacular is "a mother tongue that connects to lived reality."⁷ Vernacular in this case relates to

2 Paget Henry resists the narrative of the Caribbean as largely produced by Europe by insisting on the depth of Caribbean philosophical thought. In his formulation, the Caribbean is not Prospero's Caliban taught to speak. He instead points to the sources that represent authentic Caribbean thinking unmoored from Europe. Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

3 Robert A. Williams Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 140; Yvonne Sherwood, "Comparing the Telegraphy Bible of the Late British Empire to the Chaotic Bible of the Sixteenth Century Spanish Empire: Beyond the Canaan Mandate into Anxious Parables of the Land," in *In the Name of God*, ed. C. L. Crouch and Jonathan Stökl (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2014), 5–62, here 9.

4 R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 135–138; Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 10.

5 For discussion on the construction of the Enlightenment and the subsequent discourses that fueled colonialists' actions, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7–8. For discussion on the connections between Western philosophical and Enlightenment ideals and aspects of colonialist and capitalist excesses, see Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review, 2000), 37–38. For discussion on how religion and the Reformation in Europe formed an important building block in the consolidation of the nation-state and nationalism see Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 189–209.

6 Here I make no assumption that Luther would have admitted that this was what he was doing.

7 Robert Beckford, "The Jamaican Bible Remixed," *BBC World Service Heart and Soul*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p059vrxr>

more than a translation of the Bible from one language to another. Rather, vernacular translations are (re)productions of the Bible that readers deem sacred and that connect them to the realities and implications of the transcendent. These vernacular translations communicate the theological, political, and other ideological aspirations of the receptor culture to ensure that the sacred texts can serve its interests.⁸

Lamin Sanneh emphasizes that vernacular translations are particular productions “for a particular people at a particular point in time.”⁹ Not surprisingly, European (re)productions of the Bible have become standardized as universal over the course of European Christian missionary activity, and so the initially expanding canon of vernacular translations has closed. Consequently, cultures evangelized by European and American Christian missionaries promote the European-enculturated Bible as the divine word with the full protection of *sola scriptura*. Thinking through how the principle of *sola scriptura* has first hindered but later ironically facilitated a Caribbean production—not merely translation—of the Bible is a central focus of this article.

The Luther Legacy

From the ferment where Europe rediscovered its inheritance from its Greek forebears and saw old things differently, Martin Luther emerged (as did others before him) to challenge the constructed authority of the church and its traditions. Historians indicate that several factors aligned in 1517 to make Luther’s challenge more successful than that of Erasmus, Hus, or Wycliffe.¹⁰ Strategically, Luther may well have been more daring than Erasmus and taken greater advantage of available technology. However, the point of comparison between the Dutch thinker and the German reminds us not to absolutize Luther as having found the once and future answer. As the history of Christianity has proceeded to show, the demand for change, redefinition, and reform remains a constant.

Luther initiated an important change in the place and role of the Bible within the church that was consistent with the expanding knowledge of the time. His

8 For a discussion on how vernacular translations designed to speak to cultures in turn shaped European cultures, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 219–258. For a review of Tyndale’s tendentious framing of biblical translation to reflect ideas such as the church as a community rather than a hierarchy or repentance as a personal act instead of a sacrament, see Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 34.

9 Lamin Sanneh, “Bible Translation as Intercultural, Historical Enterprise,” in *Translation That Openeth the Window: Reflections on the History and Legacy of the King James Bible*, ed. David G. Burke (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 155–180, here 157.

10 Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 11. Dana Robert indicates that political protection and the printing press played critical roles in ensuring Luther’s success as compared to Hus or Wycliffe. Robert, *Christian Mission*, 33.

own inheritance of the work of Erasmus on the New Testament enabled his critique of the papacy and his insistence on fidelity to the text of the Bible. In order to understand Luther and the Bible we need to go further than 1517, since in the ninety-five theses he mostly raised questions regarding the sale of indulgences with the occasional inference that indulgences lacked biblical support.

How does Luther understand Scripture? This is what he said at the Diet of Worms in 1521:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves) I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.¹¹

And in the Smalcald Articles in 1537, he affirms, “That means that the Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith.”¹²

By setting out a different place for the Bible in theology and practice Luther, in effect, produced a new Bible. He did this by reducing the canon from the broader Septuagint-influenced number of books to the more limited Jerusalem list and by actively devaluing works such as James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation to what Philip Jenkins regards as “a sub-biblical quality.”¹³ This created a physically and, more importantly, a theologically different Bible than the Vulgate. While this Bible differed in content, its noticeable reorganization of that content—promoted with the principle *sola scriptura*—placed that Bible in a radically different position within the power politics of Europe.

To be clear, the point here is not so much that the new canon on its own achieved a different political function in Europe, but that the different canon articulated through the principle of *sola scriptura* helped reshape the politics of Europe. *Sola scriptura* reordered the power structure that gave sole authority to the pope in matters of faith, placed the church in a subordinate position to the Bible, and in the process broadened the scope of decision-making power to include princes and religious leaders. As Jonathan Sheehan observes, Luther creat-

11 George W. Forell and Helmut T. Lehman, *Luther's Works*, vol. 32 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 112–13.

12 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 304.

13 Philip Jenkins, “Regions Luther Never Knew: Ancient Books in a New World,” in *The King James Bible and the World it Made*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 119–34, here 119. Jenkins goes further to show how this decision results in the initial loss of Apocryphal books in Bibles to nascent English-speaking Christian communities in Asia and Africa due to the decision of the British and Foreign Bible Society not to print Bibles with these books.

ed a “battle cry” that would ring throughout Europe and thus “alter forever the complexion of European society.”¹⁴

The rallying call “Scripture alone” marked out the contested territory for authority with the papacy on one side and the reformers with the Bible on the other. The distinction between the reformers *with* the Bible rather than simply *the Bible* in this face-off remains important. At stake here is the fiction of the neutrality of the Bible, which appears in the ideas of Luther and other reformers and that resulted in common Protestant dogma as the plain sense or the self-interpreting capacity of the Bible.¹⁵

The point here is not simply that interpreters shape the Bible in their image, which is the case, but that the Bible already has and promotes, in its internal theological and narrative framing, its own interested perspective. William Watty aptly reminds us that the Bible itself is captive to ideologies. For instance, he points out that the classical prophets did not underwrite the prevailing nationalist aspirations, but their provision of an alternative vision offers a “veto of those hopes.”¹⁶ *Sola scriptura* produces a closed system that tightly circumscribes what constitutes the Bible, namely, an established canon of original languages rendered accessible by a closed canon of vernacular translations governed by the principle of self-authenticating interpretation.

Philip Davies indicates that the capacity of a religiously sanctioned canon to invoke previously unthought-of authority should not be underestimated. In Davies’s studies of the Jewish canon, he observes that a critical step in the process of canon lies in the action of “a political and religious authority capable of dictating and imposing uniformity.”¹⁷ These various layers and more are seamlessly integrated into a product uncritically promoted as the divine word and seemingly protected from human vagaries by the consistent and stable world of a printed text.¹⁸ Essentially, the Bible’s particularism is placed at the disposal of the reformer’s agenda, serving as an important mechanism of power in social formation since, as Davies observes, “writing permits control of data.”¹⁹

Canons on their own are not neutral and neither are they harmless. Canons provide critical power-functions for the framers in their quest not simply to define

14 Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 1.

15 See Luther’s statement on his insistence on the ultimate clarity of the Bible: “I would say of the whole Scripture, that I do not allow any part of it to be called obscure.” Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1957), 129.

16 William W. Watty, “The New Missiology: A Biblical Perspective,” in *Out of the Depths*, ed. Idris Hamid (San Fernando, Trinidad: St. Andrews Theological College, 1977), 91–113, here 96.

17 Philip R. Davies, “The Jewish Scriptural Canon in Cultural Perspective,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 36–52, here 52.

18 R. S. Sugirtharajah, “The Master Copy: Postcolonial Notes on the King James Bible,” in *The King James Version at 400: Assessing its Genius as Bible Translation and its Literary Influence*, ed. David G. Burke, John F. Kutsko, and Philip H. Towner (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 499–518, here 506.

19 Davies, “Jewish Scriptural Canon,” 39.

the community of readers but to advocate for the worldview enunciated in that canon. As Sheehan points out, “To say scripture alone was to invest reform and reformers with the very authority of God, before which no human institution—church or state—might stand.”²⁰ The impetus that led Luther (namely, indulgences) may have been a narrowly construed religious issue, but the challenge to elevate the Bible at the head of authority and power in matters temporal and spiritual soon had significant political repercussions throughout Europe and its imperial ventures. Arguably, in his redefinition of the Bible, Luther contributed to the shift in the locus of power that resulted in an enhanced role for the Bible and its power in Protestant-defined spaces. The implications of the shift were not narrowly political; rather, the effect of this theological move in the heightened theopolitical context of the Reformation played out in the ethnocentrism of Christian missions and European colonization, which are forces that constructed the Caribbean.

Cultural (Re)Productions

Foundations once shaken become subject to further destabilization. If the intellectual output of the Renaissance enabled Luther to reposition biblical authority, the Enlightenment threatened to marginalize the Bible and religious matters.²¹ The scholarly resources of Greek and Latin helped to shore up the Bible during the Enlightenment by appealing to vernacular translations that convinced readers and listeners of the authenticity of the divine word. Both in Germany and England, efforts to produce scientifically sound translations that reflected the true text of the Bible and to make them accessible to the population meant drawing upon the intellectual disciplines of the Enlightenment. In effect, this process resulted in what Sheehan refers to as the Enlightenment Bible. The Luther Bible of 1522 and the King James Bible of 1611 represent not so much the first phases but the most notable and influential steps in the creation of vernacular Bibles.²²

These Protestant Bibles served as important cultural and political vehicles in the evolution of Europe away from the control of the Holy Roman Empire. Hastings offers the view that vernacular Bibles played critical roles in the construction of the nation-state in Western Europe as these translations not only featured the concept of the “nation” but also provided a common language that easily facilitated the move of narrowly religious discourse into more popular political discours-

20 Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 1.

21 Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 27–30.

22 For a corrective to the idea that the Luther Bible is the first vernacular translation in German and for details of the several Bibles available in German prior to Luther, see Andrew C. Gow, “The Contested History of a Book: The German Bible of the Later Middle Ages and Reformation in Legend, Ideology, and Scholarship,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2009): 1–37.

es.²³ The fragmentation of Europe into nation-states initiated by the Reformation and the consequent challenges of these nation-states to the imperial ventures of the Catholic empires of Spain and Portugal produced a Protestant imperialism—a religio-political phenomenon—underwritten by the mantra of *sola scriptura*. With the vernacular translations, these Scriptures became instruments of ethno-nationalism circumscribed by the tight application of civic and religious legality.²⁴

A cursory evaluation of the enduring legacies of the King James Bible²⁵ in English-speaking Christian contexts reveals the deep impact this biblical production had upon the popular imagination, particularly that which resulted from Euro-American evangelization.²⁶ The creation of an English vernacular translation was so successful that this text became equated with the actual voice of God. The quip that “if the King James Bible was good enough for Jesus, then it is good enough for me” reveals the nature of the captivity of the Bible to English culture that still persists in some quarters as a result of the absurdist functions of missionary culture.

The Bible, though not a primary agent in European imperialism, facilitated the Christianization of European empires. Given, as Sanneh observes, that by “the sixteenth century, Europe had become more Christian—and Christianity more European—than ever before” the distinction between Christianization and enculturation appears thin.²⁷ Whereas Catholic imperialism settled for a modicum of conversion to Christianity, Protestant imperialism engaged in civilizational change to fulfill the noble goal of *mission civilizatrice*—bringing the rest of the world to the standards of Europe.²⁸ Civic powers may not have bothered too much with biblical warrants in order to enforce European superiority and therefore colonization may have appeared as an exclusively secular activity.

However, religious agents—whether in the form of missionaries or colonial agents acting out the sincerity of their faith—made little differentiation between what was European culture and the details of texts formed in an ancient culture.²⁹

23 Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, 22.

24 In the case of English vernacular Bibles, Robert indicates how these Bibles “sowed the seeds of a broad-based English culture of personal initiative, rather than control by a wealthy, Latinized elite.” Robert, *Christian Mission*, 34.

25 The designation “King James Bible” rather than “King James Version” is intentional, following Sugirtharajah’s idea of textual takeover that conflates this particular ethnic English translation with the Bible. Sugirtharajah, “Master Copy,” 500–504.

26 Cheryl J. Sanders, “The KJV’s Influence Upon African Americans and Their Churches,” in *Translation That Openeth the Window: Reflections on the History and Legacy of the King James Bible*, ed. David G. Burke (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 139–52. See also Sugirtharajah, “Master Copy.”

27 Sanneh, “Bible Translation,” 158.

28 Hilary M. Carey, “Introduction: Empires of Religion,” in *Empires of Religion*, ed. Hilary M. Carey (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–21, here 11; Robert J. C. Young, *Empire, Colony, Postcolony* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 11.

29 For example, Victorian Era sexual ethics were equated with teachings from biblical texts, making monogamy divinely normative despite multiple examples of polygamy in the Bible.

Quite often, Protestant missionaries proclaimed a gospel that equated salvation with whiteness. This gospel was not simply an oral proclamation but in most cases was backed up with the letter of the text.³⁰ African religiosity had to be pagan because it was not Christian and Deut 7:1–6 indicated that those who were not Israelite deserved destruction on account of their worship practices. The quietist principle of the two kingdoms as read through a particular interpretation of Rom 13:1–7 fostered a culture that diluted the power of any other form of social and political leadership except that which demonstrated allegiance to European monarchs. The principle assumes that like the Israelite monarchy, European monarchs enjoyed the uncritical support of God.³¹ The effect of this view, Noel Erskine points out, is that “the Church may work for reformation but never for revolution.”³²

In several aspects of life the Bible became the touchstone to determine what that life should look like and how it should be ordered as the basis not so much for life now but as a guarantor of access to heaven. As Protestantism hardened Luther’s principles like *sola scriptura* into the literalist and fundamentalist approaches to the Bible that mark much of Protestant Christianity today, the reach of the Bible to define life narrowly and authoritatively has only increased.³³ Most Protestant Christian denominations hold to some form of the sole authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice. The intensity of the application of the principle varies across denominations, but the general teaching that the Bible is “the supreme rule of faith” indoctrinates Protestant Christians into the belief that their lives and the ordering of the world they support must reflect the Bible. Needless to say, *sola scriptura* has held and continues to hold a central place in framing Protestant biblical interpretation; this has not been limited to religious dogma but has spilled over into the shape and presuppositions of cultures impacted by Protestantism.

Textualizing Cultures

The technologies of print and literary culture facilitated the Reformation. Luther wrote his ninety-five theses and posted them on the church door not as invitation to an open public debate with all citizens but rather as an intellectual exercise among theologians. The Bible existed as a book accessible only to the learned and literate

30 Sugirtharajah, “Master Copy,” 506.

31 Although it is not even clear that this is an accurate reading of the Bible’s perspective on the Israelite monarchy.

32 Noel Leo Erskine, “Biblical Hermeneutics in Modern Caribbean Experience: Paradigms and Prospects,” in *Religion, Culture, and Tradition in the Caribbean*, ed. Hemchand Gossai and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), 211–25, here 214.

33 Steed Vernyl Davidson, “*Sensus Literalis*: Another View of Luther’s Legacy and Modern Readers of the Bible,” in *Lutheran Perspectives on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Laurie Jungling (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2010), 106–127, here 107.

at that time. Wrestling the power of the text away from the pope did not mean an open availability of the Bible to everyone in a grand gesture of democratizing the faith.³⁴ Luther's action occurred within the context of a literate sub-culture that operated on the assumption that the Bible was at the head of all written texts.³⁵

As the Bible became part of the tool of Protestant imperialism and mission, it became, in the words of Homi Bhabha, "the great English book."³⁶ The closed canon of vernacular translation created an uncritical reverence for European languages that discounted the value of non-European ones as suitable vehicles of divine speech. The equation of written English with divine speech made the Bible a repository for Englishness to which everyone should aspire. Even more, the hallowed perch of this one translation in imperialized context cannot be separated from the fact that in this Bible God speaks with the voice of the colonizer or that the poetry reflected the high English culture and offered the opportunity for those colonized to escape from what Césaire refers to as "thingification."³⁷ Englishness in its classical form was so conflated with divinity as to render them inseparable, to the point of denying space to another language, even modern English.

Robert Beckford examines responses to the *Jamaican Nyuu Testament* (a new translation of the Bible into the Jamaican language) and recounts the response of "Andrew" a street preacher in New Kingston, Jamaica: "devilish, corrupting God's word, you are changing the meaning."³⁸ As Sanneh indicates, objections to the translations of the Bible on the grounds of diluting the purity of the word date back as far as the fifteenth century.³⁹ In Jamaica, the grounds for objections reach beyond the complexities of manuscript traditions to the process of the Reformation that worked with colonization to produce malformed perceptions of Caribbean culture, and so as Beckford puts it, the "association[s] with slavery have led to mistaken characterisation [of Jamaican English] . . . as broken or bad English."⁴⁰ Inevitably, as Erskine explains, a level of comfort has developed with a picture of "God presented . . . through other people's cultural expressions."⁴¹

The move to focus supremely on the Bible elevates the written over the oral. Luther's instantiation of *sola scriptura* collapses the distinction that appears in Jewish thought between a written and oral Torah revelation into a single entity that restricts interpretive possibilities of non-literate cultures. The Protestant prin-

34 Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 11–12.

35 Sugirtharajah points to the destabilizing effect that the European discovery of the two fifty rolls of Sacred Books of the East had upon the notions of the superiority of the Bible. "Master Copy," 513.

36 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999), passim.

37 Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42.

38 Beckford, "Jamaican Bible Remixed."

39 Sanneh, "Bible Translation," 159.

40 *Di Jamiekan Nyuu Testament* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Bible Society of the West Indies, 2012), viii.

41 Erskine, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 210.

principle of *sola scriptura* displaces forms of revelation that do not come from the Bible or at least are not reflected or authenticated by the Bible. As Sugirtharajah points out, revelation that comes via means other than texts is “viewed as inferior.”⁴² Further, one of the implications of this allergy to the oral is the discounting not only of all non-written traditions, but also of all non-biblical written traditions. In particular, this suspicion undervalues the collections of oral traditions that accompanied the Africans trafficked to the Caribbean.

In effect, normative religion (Christianity), became a literate religious expression through and through, requiring not only an educated clergy but an educated congregant. While the literary traditions within Christianity may have significantly advanced education and literacy in the Caribbean, as Watty proposes in his support for written prayers⁴³ and Sanneh suggests regarding resistance movements,⁴⁴ literate Christianity ends up truncating spiritual sources that would nourish the African soul.

In some cases, African-derived Christianity has thrived without becoming a religion of the book, as in the cases of Voodoo, Shango, and others that rely heavily upon verbal and immediate inspiration. These religions reflect stronger association with Catholic Christianity that provides greater room for non-biblical revelation. Other African-derived religions with stronger associations with Protestant Christianity reflect the reliance upon literary texts, though in modified form. For instance, the Shouter Baptists of Trinidad and Tobago and in St. Vincent can be characterized as reliant upon revelation but at the same time they subject revelation to authentication by the book. The practice of “taking a prove” rests upon the belief that God can communicate to the immediate felt needs of a particular situation, but that revelation receives confirmation via the Bible: the closed Bible is used to make the sign of the cross and then opened so that the verses where both thumbs rest offer the divine answer to the question. The legacy of *sola scriptura* for the Caribbean has meant that Caribbean Protestants have learned to read the text even before they read themselves, unlike the order as proposed by Roland Barthes and rearticulated by Antonio Benítez-Rojo in relation to the Caribbean. Benítez-Rojo offers that the first reading of any text involves reading the self, while re-reading allows texts to be seen simply as textual productions that provide critical insight but are not viewed as ultimately determinative of the reader.⁴⁵

42 Sugirtharajah, “Master Copy,” 506.

43 William W. Watty, “At Chapel on the Lord’s Day: Methodist Worship in the Caribbean,” in *The Sunday Service of the Methodists: Twentieth-Century Worship in Worldwide Methodism: Studies in Honor of James F. White*, ed. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Nashville: Kingswood, 1996), 255–63, here 256.

44 Lamin Sanneh, “The King James Bible, Mission, and the Vernacular Impetus,” in *The King James Bible and the World it Made*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 99–117, here 99.

45 Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*,

Maroonage as Ground for Caribbean Biblical Interpretation

Maroonage provides a space to think through how to deal with the Bible in the Caribbean. The Bible represents the oppressive world of a deleterious culture formed by European domination that generates maroonage. Maroonage, when appropriately seen as resistance and alienation that comes from flight (as the Maroons in Jamaica fled to the interior from their European masters), forms a suitable space to conceive of interpretation as rejection. Cynthia James proposes to go further and to see the demands by maroons as the search for a home and the attempt to build that home. James suggests that in leaving behind the alien-imposed and oppressive culture, maroons construct a new home using ancestral material “out of traces of previous cultural knowledge.”⁴⁶ As she focuses on the source material that maroons use to find their place in the world, James lists a series of positive and negative themes that appear in maroon narratives. James notes that although the flight from oppression is never lost as a memory, the desire to build a new place in the world and in history requires drawing upon the elemental strengths of the community. So among the positive themes in maroon narratives, she notices the following: establishing defense mechanisms; resistance and fighting; survival skills and retention of ancestral ways; religious mixing but also awareness of the spirit world; and a desire to establish order out of disorder and to invent the world afresh.⁴⁷ Caribbean biblical interpretation requires maroonage as one of its formative postures, in order to create something new that helps to construct home out of this material. Maroonage in this case requires abandoning the old oppressive order and finding the available material to build the house that provides security and full thriving.

Maroonage as biblical interpretation entails a critical distance from the Bible. This critical distance acknowledges the complicity of the produced Bible involved in evangelization that sanctified the worst impulses of European imperialism, not in the name of salvation but of ethnocentric pride. This critical distance affords a clear accounting for the events, forces, and institutions that shape and produce the Caribbean. This clear naming presents that which needs to be rejected and that which can be salvaged.

Critical distance is not novel within Caribbean biblical interpretation. It appears in Sam Sharpe’s clear defense of the Christmas Rebellion of 1832. The plain text of Scripture may not have supported or even enabled his armed rebellion, but Sharpe knew that God revealed in the text certainly did. So his famous

trans. James Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 2.

46 Cynthia James, *The Maroon Narrative: Caribbean Literature in English Across Boundaries, Ethnicities, and Centuries* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 14. The lower-case spelling of *maroons* represents a generalization from the historic Maroon communities in Jamaica to a paradigmatic form of response to colonialism.

47 James, *The Maroon Narrative*, 15.

response rests upon the certainty of human freedom as the highest interpretive principle: “If I have done wrong in that, I trust that I shall be forgiven for I cast myself upon the Atonement. . . . I would rather die upon yonder gallows than to live in slavery.”⁴⁸

Marcus Garvey reflects a similar critical distance when dealing with the distorted idea of the curse of Ham as the lot of Africans. Garvey boldly contradicts the evident text of the Bible, preferring to err on the side of the purposes of God revealed elsewhere in the Bible:

[God] never said to the white man,—“You are to be the perpetual master and lord, and negroes must be your slaves.” Although the white man had been so bad and wicked as to write a thing called the Bible and put in there and say that black men shall be [“]hewers of wood and drawers of water” (applause and laughter)—The white man put that there and expects that 20th Century negroes to believe that (laughter). Now, we believe in everything in the Bible except that (Cries of “No”).⁴⁹

Critical distance enables the rejection and selection of suitable building materials from the Bible for the home that can shelter, protect, and generate a new Caribbean. *Sola scriptura*—understood not as absolute fidelity to a fixed text but rather a broad reading of revelation within the text—enables this critical distance because it does not mean the erasure of actual text. Rather, it requires acknowledging that just as history has versions that privilege the conqueror, maroonage involves telling the story differently. *Sola scriptura* provides the space to speak the truth about the biblical text in terms of what it would have done for similar oppressed groups and what others have done with oppressive biblical texts.

The other critical aspect that maroonage contributes to Caribbean biblical interpretation is greater attention to Caribbean texts—both print texts and the texts of Caribbean life experiences. The literary milieu that surrounds the Bible suggests that it functions as part of a highly intertextual interpretive culture. Erskine believes that this culture can advance the cause of Caribbean theology by reducing, if not eliminating the fear that “the reading of the Scripture would be colored by our reading of the contemporary context in a form of eisegesis.”⁵⁰ He

48 Quoted in Henry Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being a Narrative of Facts and Incidents which Occurred in a British Colony During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation* (London, UK: Hamilton, Adams, 1853), 116–17.

49 A 1919 speech by Garvey quoted in Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983–2011), 507.

50 Erskine, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 211.

notes that inherent in these fears is the issue of “our bias, the prejudice of race,” which relevant biblical interpretation has not been able to fully confront.

Sola scriptura, not so much in articulation as in practice, has tended to close the avenues to equal engagement with other texts—not simply with printed texts but all systems of meaning. *Sola scriptura* in its hardest articulation denies the reliability of other texts, primarily those that reflect individual experience of God (revelation, dreams, visions, and other types of spiritual manifestations) that uniquely come to individuals as a result of their biographies—including their place of birth, parentage, and educational opportunities, among other vital avenues through which the divine encounters us. Despite the fact that the insights, individual interpretations, and biographies of numerous European males rise to authoritative status to determine the reading of the Bible, the witness of Caribbean interpreters remains excluded from shaping Caribbean biblical interpretation. Therefore the spaces of Caribbean experience where the divine invades and adds to experiences already become truncated.

For instance, Alexander Bedward was known for his mystical spiritual experiences. His idiosyncrasies led many to believe that he was insane. Whether he was or not distracts from the basis of Bedward’s belief that he could fly: his zealous faith in biblical texts inflected by an African spiritual worldview that convinced him of his mastery of natural forces. Experiences like those of Bedward are often easily dismissed because they do not reflect the normative expressions deemed credible by the Bible. The extent of Bedward’s following as well as his contribution to the evolution of Rastafari in Jamaica indicates that he touched on a core aspect of Caribbean spirituality. Oral tales of Anansi, African myths that offer answers to the complex questions of origins and destiny that appear in almost all cultures, proverbs and wise sayings that provide philosophical reflections on the thorny issues of life—these make little appearance in the scope of Caribbean biblical interpretation.

If the Bible in Caribbean interpretation does not interact with other texts, this results in part from the wall that the application of *sola scriptura* builds around the Bible, granting it special status, so special that it need not learn to play well with others. Paget Henry remarks that the Afro-Caribbean philosophical tradition is an “intertextually embedded discourse,”⁵¹ which is also a “subtextual discursive formation.”⁵² That is to say, the philosophical tradition hardly exists in written form, and as a result it easily becomes a minor discourse. The Afro-Caribbean philosophical discourse is not so much minor as it is silenced, selectively employed, and segregated out of formal settings like religion and theology. This philosophical discourse underlines the lives of people in the Caribbean—their

51 Henry, *Caliban’s Reason*, 3.

52 Henry, *Caliban’s Reason*, 6.

choices about work, family, sex, finances, and their outlook and worldviews—as much as Christian theology does. Yet these two discourses continually evade each other as their meeting point in biblical interpretation pays scant attention to Afro-Caribbean traditions.

Luther's redefinition of the Bible was a decidedly German event with global implications. As a narrowly contextual feature with universal dimensions, the space to redefine the Bible within the Caribbean has been open but not fully explored, particularly by the professional class of biblical interpreters. The tendency to settle for contextualizing the Bible falls short of this ideal. Contextualization assumes that the various texts involved in the interpretive process remain static, thereby disregarding the fluid nature of Caribbean reality. Contextual interpretation at best is a vernacular translation, a localized version of the King James Bible that accommodates the local culture to the Bible rather than subjecting the Bible to the local culture. In other words, contextualization anticipates that Caribbean culture converts and becomes Christian.

However, the task of authentic interpretation requires more than this. Derek Walcott resists this narrative of conversion as he tells the history of religion in the Caribbean. Rather than conversion, Walcott argues that Africans in the Caribbean were able to capture the Christian God and save it from the decaying European religion. Africans in the Caribbean embracing Christianity, he insists, provided a resuscitation for the decaying religion without doing so as defeated warriors; rather, they subjected the religion to their worldview.⁵³ In this light, Benítez-Rojo views texts that come from the outside the Bible as a set of “syncretic artifacts,” which he describes as “a signifier made of differences.”⁵⁴ As syncretic text, the Bible can accommodate Henry's notion of the Caribbean traditions as “intertextually embedded discourse” to enable relevant and revolutionary readings.

As an outside product, various processes are necessary to make the Bible intelligent in the Caribbean. As an outside product that becomes a part of the Caribbean, the Bible is seen as from *there* now being consumed *here*. The consumption or reading of the Bible takes place in codes that make sense *here*. In other words, the Bible becomes Caribbean rather than the Caribbean accommodates the Bible. Roper hints at this in his support of the *Jamaican Nyuu Testament* when he says that a Jamaican Jesus comes across as “talking about them [Jamaicans] or reality like theirs or similar to theirs.”⁵⁵ Jesus may talk like a Jamaican (contextually), but unless Jesus becomes Jamaican, he hardly speaks to the needs of Jamaicans.

53 Derek Walcott, “The Muse of History,” in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1974), 1–27, here 11.

54 Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 21.

55 Beckford, “Jamaican Bible Remixed.”

Conclusion

Building a maroon house out of the Bible calls for positive themes of reconstruction. Revolution provides a clear theme that can generate and sustain Caribbean biblical interpretation. The Haitian Revolution of 1804, rather than the later emancipation of enslaved Africans in the British Empire in 1834, forms a more productive source for building an authentic home. Revolution rather than emancipation serves as the defining marker in Caribbean identity. Unlike the negotiated and grudging grant of Emancipation by the British Empire that provided compensation for the enslavers rather than the enslaved, the Haitian Revolution represents a clear and collective rejection of global white supremacy by people of African descent enslaved in the Americas. More than rejection, the Haitian Revolution paved the way to build a homeland of freedom and full thriving. Interestingly, this project received the support of the non-literate Voodoo priests but no discernable support from the literate Haitian Catholic priesthood.

The textual tradition of the Bible has, more than anything, to facilitate and be authenticated by the expressions, yearnings, and experiences of freedom. The Bible has no value until it interacts with the texts of lives of the Caribbean and, in the process, articulates a vision of freedom. Only when texts meet readers do they interact with the capacity to change each other, thus releasing the power within the text.⁵⁶

The ancestral spirit to establish a place of full thriving for all people animates revolution and therefore serves as a guiding hermeneutical principle for Caribbean reading. Luther stands within the legacy of Augustine when he used love as his guiding hermeneutic to read the Bible. Ultimately, Luther advocates a useful Christocentric hermeneutic that places God's unmatched action of love on the cross as the evaluative standard for all biblical texts.⁵⁷

Caribbean biblical hermeneutics can go further to create what Burchell Taylor regards as an "overtly and self-consciously contextual" move.⁵⁸ He emphasizes that it is the demands of the context of the Caribbean with its unique histories and legacies (rather than the narrow concerns of confession, theism, or *apologia*) that provide the starting point for Caribbean theology and hermeneutics. The building material of divine justice that confronts the material concerns of people marginalized by centuries of European mismanagement of the earth's resources is available for our hermeneutical tasks.

The trajectory of our textual work becomes revolution that frees everyone im-

56 Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 23.

57 Terry C. Thomas, "Luther's Canon: Christ Against Scripture," *Word and World* 8 (1988): 141–49, here 141.

58 Burchell K. Taylor, "Caribbean Theology," *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 3 (1980): 18–32, here 19.

prisoned in one form or another and that makes no excuses for keeping anyone in prison because we have learned to create spaces of full thriving for the least, the lost, and the lonely. Mining those spaces out of the biblical text becomes our central focus. The daring creativity to foreground current need over tradition serves as a motivating move that Nathaniel Samuel Murrell advocates in order to focus attention on the “dangerous memories of oppression, exploitation, landlessness, underemployment, and other effects of colonialism.”⁵⁹ Maroonage as a posture for biblical interpretation may well result in the abandonment of long-cherished principles of interpretation, as well as the notion of a closed literary system of a sacred text such as the European-produced Bible. At the same time, maroonage picks up the resources, traditions, and experiences available in the Caribbean—previously seen as debris—to construct a thriving home of Caribbean biblical interpretation.

59 Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, “Dangerous Memories, Underdevelopment, and the Bible in Colonial Caribbean Experience,” in *Religion, Culture, and Tradition in the Caribbean* (ed. Hemchand Gossai and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell; New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), 9–34, here 32.

Was *Sola Scriptura* a Causal Factor in European Imperialism? A Response to Steed Davidson¹

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Abstract

This essay responds to Steed Davidson, granting his basic premise about the role of the Reformation in tandem with European imperialism in the colonization of the Caribbean. Yet the essay questions whether *sola scriptura* was indeed as decisive a factor in the shifts of power as Davidson claims. Yet Davidson is to be commended for raising the question of the relationship of biblical authority to cultural self-identity and the lived reality of the Caribbean.

I start by offering my thanks to Steed Davidson for his essay, “From *Sola Scriptura* to Maroonage: Reflections on Caribbean Biblical Interpretation.” Davidson here offers important insights on the Protestant Reformation five hundred years later, which are particularly appropriate in the context of a Caribbean seminary, the *raison d’être* of which is the study and proclamation of Scripture.

I found compelling Davidson’s analysis of the relationship between the Protestant Reformation’s disturbance of, and challenge to, papal authority, on the one hand, and the emergence of European colonialism, on the other. He argues that the Reformation reshaped Europe politically and, as a consequence, also shaped the Caribbean. More specifically, he notes that Christian theology and biblical interpretation joined with legal theory and the scholarly enterprise as “key instruments in building the initial scaffolding for European imperialism.”

The relationship between the Protestant Reformation and European imperialism is a central point of contention here. Davidson asserts that they are not simply parallel historical movements; yet he also denies that there is a neat causal relationship between them. Nevertheless, he claims that the Protestant Reformation is part of the whole movement that created Europe and that enabled Europe to act through notions of supremacy vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

¹ This response was presented at the conference on “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, Kingston, Jamaica, September 9, 2017.

To the extent that Davidson is describing historical circumstances, his point about the part of the whole and the enabling of Europe cannot be denied. However, Davidson is saying more than that. He is contending that it is the central Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* that made the decisive contribution. His argument is that the principle of *sola scriptura* is what eroded, challenged, and diluted papal authoritarianism. And then the previously unchallenged authority of the Pope over the church was replaced, wittingly or unwittingly, with the aid of *sola scriptura*, by the untrammelled authority of princes over the nation states of Europe.

Further, the principle of *sola scriptura* gave impetus to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Davidson argues that the content of the Bible, “articulated through the principle *sola scriptura*,” gave the Bible a unique “place in the power politics of Europe.” In order to clarify this, he writes this telling paragraph:

Sola scriptura reordered the power structure that gave sole authority to the pope in matters of faith, placed the church in a subordinate position to the Bible, and in the process broadened the scope of decision-making power to include princes and religious leaders. As Jonathan Sheehan observes, Luther created a “battle cry” that would ring throughout Europe and thus “alter forever the complexion of European society.”

Davidson’s observation about the coincidence of the Protestant Reformation and European imperialism is undeniable.

Where I think the case still remains to be made is in his suggestion that the principle of *sola scriptura* is problematic because it has had a causal relationship in the redistribution of power in Europe, thus rendering the unsuspecting peoples on the margins of history more gullible and more vulnerable to European hegemony. The argument has a baby-and-bath-water ring to it. Furthermore, it is rather like blaming the invention of the smartphone for accidents on the highway. It is the misuse of the smartphone in texting while driving, not the invention of the smartphone, that is the problem.

History suggests that power re-configures itself in order to counter the effectiveness of change that has eroded its stranglehold of oppression. What had previously been done by papal authority to oppressed people and those on the periphery is done in new ways as power is re-configured in princes and religious leaders, rather than concentrated in the authority of the Pope. This requires those who desire to be the harbingers of the change in pursuit of faithfulness to God and justice for people to be mindful not only of what we repudiate, but also of what we embrace in the course of repudiating.

Davidson is correct about the way in which the embrace of printing technology and the power of literature has managed to stifle orality in the course of privileging the vernacular. What started out as translations into the vernacular in Germany and England has ended up as the language of empire. The language of empire has managed to peripheralize the indigenous languages and cultures of the people of the Caribbean, as well the languages and cultures that came with the African slaves. This does not mean that the problem is with *sola scriptura* itself. It does mean that the centrality of biblical authority to Protestant faith needs to be held in tension with a determination to privilege the cultural self-identity and lived reality of the Caribbean people who are evangelized with this faith.

I commend Steed Davidson for his reading of the principle of *sola scriptura* from the perspective of the Caribbean in a manner that contends both with the residue of the European empire and the resurgence of the new empire of Western globalization. I commend his courage and independence of thought. I believe that his point of view has admirably brought to the fore factors of analysis that we neglect to our peril.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan: A Political Reading from a Caribbean Perspective¹

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Abstract

The concept of the Good Samaritan is a well-known one. Even the biblically illiterate use the expression in a contextually relevant way. It is usually applied to situations where significant or even sacrificial help is given; the giver of such aid is deemed a *Good Samaritan*. That application is derived from a simple reading of the text that informed the coining of the term: Luke 10:25–37. And it has been bolstered by the exposition of many a biblical scholar and expositor. One such exposition comes from Martin Luther King Jr. As was to be expected, King interpreted the parable in a way that applied to the issues of his day and advanced his cause. This essay begins with King’s understanding in order to lay a foundation for a detailed examination of Luke 10:25–37 in light of Caribbean political reality. This examination will draw on Luke 15 and 8:26–39 and make a link to the mission statement of Jesus in Luke 4:18–19. This essay argues that we cannot limit the parable of the Good Samaritan to a purely individual interpretation. Rather, this parable both challenges the clientelistic relationships entered into by politicians in the Caribbean region and calls government to its responsibility to be neighbor and to see the people of the Caribbean as neighbor. Not only is this a legitimate understanding of the parable in Luke 10, it is a necessary perspective from which to examine it in light of Caribbean political systems.

In his motivational “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address in Memphis, TN, given the day before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King Jr. called his audience to social action in the midst of the city’s sanitation workers’ strike. He encouraged

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 conference on “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, Kingston, Jamaica, September 9, 2017.

them to “develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness.”² In King’s estimation, it was that kind of unselfishness that was exhibited by the Samaritan in the parable named in his honor: the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). And unselfishness that is dangerous, it can be argued, is unselfishness that is political.

Although selflessness is definitely a characteristic that commentators throughout the centuries have identified with the Samaritan in the parable, not all have understood the parable itself to be making a political statement. They have typically understood it to be highlighting and commending an individual’s exercise of humanity to another individual in need. That understanding is the one most pervasive today and is thought to be a literal interpretation of the text. This understanding is so well known that even the biblically illiterate apply the parable in a contextually relevant way to situations where significant and, usually, sacrificial help is given. The giver of such aid is popularly deemed a Good Samaritan.

David I. Smith contends that the limited understanding of the parable “as a general moral exhortation to be kind to people in need” results from the fact that it “has floated loose from its context.”³ If such a criticism can justifiably be made of a literal reading of the text, how much more of the allegorical readings espoused by church fathers such as Irenaeus, Augustine, and Clement of Alexandria. Since for them the literal representation was only a gateway to the parable’s deeper “spiritual” significance, the relevance of the parable to the normal political sphere would have been even less of a consideration.

It is in the contextual analysis of the parable of the Good Samaritan that the inadequacies of its allegorical interpretation and “general moral exhortation”⁴ will be brought to light. In addition, the element of risk that Martin Luther King identified is evident in the parable when it is examined in the context of the Gospel of Luke as a whole and in the light of its original social setting. Jesus was requiring a radical shift in worldview. He challenged a system at the same time that he challenged the individuals before him.

This essay will argue that a political reading of the parable is not only legitimate, but imperative, and that it has significant implications for current Caribbean reality as it had for King’s America. One aspect of Caribbean political life to which the parable is applicable is clientelism. Indeed, the parable of the Good Samaritan both challenges the clientelistic relationships entered into by polit-

2 Martin Luther King Jr., “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (New York: Warner Books, 2001), 201–23, here 217. Speech to address the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike, delivered at Charles Mason Temple Church of God in Christ, Memphis, TN, April 3, 1968 (full audio and transcript of the speech is available online: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/ive-been-mountaintop-address-delivered-bishop-charles-mason-temple>).

3 David I. Smith, *Learning from the Stranger: Christian Faith and Cultural Diversity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 61.

4 Smith, *Learning from the Stranger*, 61.

icians in the region and calls government to its responsibility to be neighbor and to see the people of the Caribbean as neighbor, just as King recognized his role as neighbor to the sanitation workers.

Martin Luther King's Ethical Concern and the Allegorical Interpretation of the Parable

Martin Luther King Jr. began his speech in solidarity with the Memphis sanitation workers with words of encouragement to the congregation, recognizing their personal sacrifice and demonstrating that the era in which they lived was critical and pivotal. He wanted his audience to share with him a connection to the time and space in which they lived. He did so by taking them on a journey in time. At each point of that journey, Martin Luther King proclaimed that no past significant period of biblical or non-biblical history was as important to him as the “now” moment. Where he was, that was where he should be. That was where he wanted to be: not in the Exodus, not in the Renaissance, not in the Reformation, not in the age of Emancipation, but in the throes of the civil rights struggle. Then, King glorified the struggle by linking it to the work of the Lord: “I see God working.”⁵ God’s work was not in preserving his people from persecution, but in giving them the will to persevere and in increasing the number of those willing to endure harsh treatment for the sake of their brothers and sisters.

It was only in his so-called conclusion that King made reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan. It was a preacher’s conclusion, for it was almost as long as the preceding remarks. In relation to the entirety of his conclusion and to the speech as a whole, King’s direct comments on the parable were brief. But they were clearly connected to his overall presentation.

It was in transitioning from the first section of his speech to the parable of the Good Samaritan that Martin Luther King Jr. implored, “Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness.”⁶ This imperative preceded his recounting the story; the support was articulated after the position was declared. And how did the parable support the Civil Rights Movement and the specific cause of the sanitation workers’ strike? It did so by exemplifying the “kind of dangerous unselfishness” that King was promoting.

King began his storytelling by setting the stage as Luke had set it—but without Luke’s specifics. He did not identify the lawyer who had come with questions, and he did not repeat the questions. What he focused on, at first, was the *attitude* of the lawyer, and he gave his opinion on why this expert of the law wanted to trick Jesus: to show that he knew more than Jesus did. Perhaps, as intimated by King, the lawyer wanted to engage in a philosophical or theological argument.

5 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 209.

6 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 217.

But instead of answering him directly, Jesus told a parable instead, addressing the theological issue but in a clearly practical way. Jesus's major concern was ethical. That was King's own emphasis, but specifically as it concerned race relations and issues of injustice facing blacks in America. The allegorical interpretation of the parable would not have met his objective.

Yet we may ask if the allegorical understanding of the parable of the Good Samaritan was legitimate? Or did "the early fathers of the Church [who] saw a deep spiritual meaning veiled under the letter of this parable" miss the mark?⁷

Irenaeus, Augustine, and Clement of Alexandria looked at the parable from a Christological perspective; they took the Samaritan, of course, to represent the Savior of humankind, Jesus Christ.⁸ Irenaeus understood the victim to be "mankind in general, who by the agency of the devil and his hosts lost its original image and likeness to God, and received it back thanks to the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁹ Augustine identified the wounded man similarly but considered humanity to have been robbed of its immortality.¹⁰ Both, however, differed in their interpretation of the innkeeper (on Irenaeus's part, the Holy Spirit, on Augustine's, the apostle Paul) and the dinari (the image of the Father and Son as well as fruitfulness for Irenaeus, and the hope of the life to come for Augustine).¹¹

Clement of Alexandria agreed with Irenaeus and Augustine in essence; however, he deviated from them in significant ways. Clement focused not so much on what was stolen but on what the wounds inflicted by the "world-rulers of darkness" represented—"fears, lusts, wrath, griefs, deceits and pleasures"—and on Jesus's work, not in restoring God's image and life but in "cutting out the passions absolutely and from the very root."¹² Clement's innkeeper was principalities and powers who were co-opted "to serve us for great reward, because they too shall be freed from the vanity of the world at the revelation of the glory of the sons of God."¹³

What accounts for the similarities among the interpretations? The fact that the foundation is the gospel. The parable has been made to tell the story of humanity's sin and spiritual redemption. What accounts for the differences? The subjective nature of interpretation. Subjective readings are a reality of hermeneutics as a

7 William H. Van Doren, *Gospel of Luke* (London: R.D. Dickinson, 1876–78; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 388.

8 Van Doren, *Gospel of Luke*, 388.

9 Riemer Roukema, "The Good Samaritan in Ancient Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 58.1 (February 2004): 56–74, here 60.

10 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993).

11 For details, see Roukema, "The Good Samaritan," passim.

12 Roukema, "The Good Samaritan," 60.

13 Roukema, "The Good Samaritan," 61.

discipline and not just of allegorical interpretations. And they are not only a reality; they are a necessary reality. The gap between the past and the present and between writer and audience can only be bridged by bringing together the culture of each and seeing how the former's point of view relates to the latter's world and worldview. Martin Luther King Jr. made the connection between Jesus's world and his own. He showed the relevance of the parable of the Good Samaritan to his context.

One cannot afford, however, for subjectivity and creativity to be unbridled. If, therefore, the parable of the Good Samaritan is to be read as an allegory, there must be clues within the text itself and/or the book in which it is found that lead an interpreter to take that approach. Meaning is individual and subjective, but for it to be accepted by anyone outside of the interpreter it must have an objective basis. The matrix must be shared and understood, at least vicariously, and must be supported by the literary context. Besides, the nature of parables begs for a literal understanding. They are true-to-life stories whose purpose is to connect the audience in their lived reality to the message that the teller wishes to communicate.

One, therefore, feels compelled to ask what antecedents led to those ways in which the parable was decoded by Augustine, Clement, and Irenaeus. It would appear that its source is really Pauline theology. Augustine, Clement, and Irenaeus seem to have transposed Paul's theological arguments in his epistles onto Jesus's parables. Humanity's condition as dead in sin; the ineffectiveness of the law to save; the work of Christ in giving eternal life, in rooting out sinful attitudes and practices, and in producing fruit through the Spirit—all are ideas that resonate with Paul's writings. No wonder Augustine said that the innkeeper was Paul. That approach, however, distorts the core message of the parable.

Martin Luther King Jr. was right. The parable presents an ethical mandate. "What must I *do*?" "*Do* this." "Go and *do*." These formulations speak to action on the part of the lawyer. This interaction is about living out the commands of God himself. As Joel Green asserts, "Jesus has been about the task of presenting faithfulness to God as hearing and *doing* God's word."¹⁴ The specific question that Jesus was answering concerned love of neighbor as distinct from love of God. Of course, there is a relationship between the two, but the issues should not be conflated such that they cannot be addressed separately; indeed, the significance of one may clarify the significance of the other. That is what Clement did. Since he allegorically identified the Good Samaritan as Jesus, and the Good Samaritan as neighbor, loving your neighbor became loving Jesus—who is God. In the allegorical interpretations of the parable, the relationship among the questions that precede and immediately follow the parable and their relationship to the commands

14 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 425; emphasis mine.

is not explored; thus the overarching and specific goal of challenging the attitude and behavior of the interpreter's audience in relation to love of his or her fellow human being goes unaddressed.¹⁵ The force of that ethical imperative is lost.

In addition, how reasonable is it to expect Jesus to answer questions in a way that did not apply to the immediate context? Of course, Jesus could recognize a trick behind a question and could respond, in turn, by redirecting the discussion. Martin Luther King Jr. saw that redirection in the very fact that a parable was told; Jesus did not engage in any philosophical or theological argument as intended by the lawyer. One must also note, however, that in those contexts, Christ would often confront the perpetrators and respond in a way that allowed them to deduce the answer to their questions. He would, in effect, make them answer their own questions, and they would be the ones trapped, for in his response would be both an answer and an admonition. And that is what he did in this context too. What would have been the purpose of telling a parable that merited an allegorical interpretation that would take the spotlight off the questioner? The literal understanding presents a more direct and potent challenge than the allegorical one while not excluding an appreciation of Jesus Christ as the Ultimate Good Neighbor.

Martin Luther King's Ethical Concern and the Literal Interpretation of the parable

Martin Luther King Jr. understood the parable literally. Although King did not repeat the question, he recognized the parable to be the response to a specific question, with Jesus “[pulling] that question from mid-air and [placing] it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho.”¹⁶ It was on that dangerous road that “a certain man” was attacked and seriously injured.

King pointed out the response of the priest and Levite to the man who had fallen among thieves and proceeded to explore possible reasons. He made reference to some suggestions proffered by commentators. One was that “there was a religious law that one who engaged in religious ceremonials was not to touch a human body twenty-four hours before the ceremony.”¹⁷ E. J. Tinsley¹⁸ and Darrell L. Bock,¹⁹ among others, have posited a similar rationale: the priest and Levite may have been wary of the ritual uncleanness that would come with touching a dead body (Lev 21:1–3; Num 5:2; 19:2–13; Ezek 44:25–27). Bock, however,

15 Where comments were made in that regard, they were not central to the interpretation of the parable.

16 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 217. By speaking of it only as “that question,” King alluded to the popularity of the parable and, therefore, familiarity with that vital question: “Who is my neighbor?”

17 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 218.

18 E. J. Tinsley, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

19 Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

indicates that the Mishnah and Nazir “allowed for exceptions involving priests where no family was present.”²⁰ A decision to strictly observe the written law despite the qualification of the oral law might, therefore, have been a matter of convenience. In fact, Jesus’s interactions with the religious leaders often revealed their disregard for the law of God. They developed rules that would grant them immunity from exact adherence to the legal stipulations of Moses.

Convenience was another possible reason that King mentioned but as a separate matter from ritual uncleanness. There, he used colloquial expressions and changed the setting from the historical Jewish one to a Christian one: “At times we say they were busy going to a church meeting, an ecclesiastical gathering, and they had to get on down to Jerusalem so they wouldn’t be late for their meeting.”²¹ King had not suddenly seen the benefit of the allegorical approach. Rather, he was helping his audience bridge the gap by making the situation relatable and by helping them to put themselves in the position of the priest and Levite. It was an application tool.

King then raised concern for systemic change as an issue. Maybe the priest and Levite had to “organize a Jericho Road Improvement Association.”²² At first, it might appear that King was not positing that as a legitimate consideration, but, through sarcasm, he was helping his audience to understand that commitment to causes was not a replacement for compassion for people. And he did intimate just that: “Maybe they felt it was better to deal with the problem from the causal root, rather than to get bogged down with an individual effect.”²³

However, as leaders in the community, the priest and Levite could have tried to appease their consciences, referencing their occupation and community service as evidence that they were good people who just could not have helped in that particular situation.

Martin Luther King’s preferred rationale, however, fit well into his imperative: “Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness.”²⁴ Fear is what he believed was the motivation. He said that the reason came out of his imagination, which is a vital component of Bible exposition: “Teaching the Bible in any context calls for a creative blend of information and imagination.”²⁵ King achieved the balance well, for fear was indeed a possible motivation. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was treacherous. It has been renowned for robberies and assaults from before Jesus’s day until modern times. According to William Barclay, Jerome in the fifth

20 Bock, *Luke*, 300.

21 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 218.

22 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 218.

23 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 218.

24 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 217.

25 Carol M. Betchell, “Teaching the ‘Strange New World’ of the Bible,” *Interpretation* 56.4 (October 2002): 368–77, here 368.

century still referred to its name as the Red or Bloody Way; in the nineteenth century, Sheiks required protection money of travellers if safe passage were to be assured; and in the 1930s, “it was still dangerous to use it.”²⁶ Martin Luther King himself personally saw how it could facilitate ambushing. It was thus reasonable for the priest and Levite to contemplate the danger of stopping to assist someone who would likely die anyway. Why put your own life in danger for a stranger: “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?”²⁷

The reasons King mentioned for the decision to overlook the wounded man have been looked at as rationalizations, not because the concerns were not genuine but because they were not sufficient. Clearly, King had a similar perspective. In his brief exposition, the manner in which he connected his audience to the parable and challenged them by superimposing their reality onto the original demonstrated his position that compassion is not an option among competing interests; it is the only choice. He emphatically declared that compassion cannot take place by proxy. Each person is responsible for his or her own action.

And even when one’s own life and livelihood are in danger, one must act in the best interest of others. Those examples of when members of the audience stayed in the struggle despite fire hoses and attacking dogs being turned on them point to the direction in which they should continue to go. Interestingly, the imperative was framed in a way that suggested that they had fallen short: “Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness.”²⁸ But, really, it was a challenge for them not to hold on to the laurels of past good actions and to their association with “Jericho Road Improvement” organizations, such as the Civil Rights Movement, but to enter boldly into the realm of new danger with new resolve. Supporting others is a risk. The Samaritan was willing to take that risk. He did not ask, “If I help this man, what will happen to me?” but, “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?”²⁹ Martin Luther King Jr. asked his congregation to translate that into their own lives.

Indeed, King settled on fear of danger as the most plausible rationale for the decision not to help the injured man. However, he raised the issue of race: “You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side, they didn’t stop to help . . . Finally, a man of *another race* came by. He got down from his beast.”³⁰ King was not only connecting with his audience but was identifying a problem in Jesus’s day that affected how people related to each other. King had pointed out a boundary that the Samaritan had crossed. He was an outcast according to the

26 William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, (The Daily Study Bible; rev. ed.; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 139.

27 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 219.

28 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 217.

29 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 219.

30 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 217; emphasis mine.

Jewish regime. And so, some interpreters have gone beyond the valid perspectives highlighted above as possible explanations for the unresponsiveness of the priest and Levite to examine the Jewish understanding of neighbor.

Neighbor was, generally speaking, a fellow Jew, someone who shared the same socio-religious framework. It is, therefore, significant that the individual who was robbed was “a certain man,” identity unknown, stripped of any identifying markers. And that is where the problem could have arisen. The robbed man, suggests David Smith, was potentially a non-Jew. This “bleeding victim” may not have been “from the right group to count as a ‘neighbour.’”³¹ The lack of certainty was reason enough not to have a sense of obligation, as it was reason enough not to be held accountable under the law. That uncaring attitude of the religious leaders was highlighted by Luke earlier in his Gospel. On a number of occasions, they rebuked Jesus openly and/or planned his demise secretly for healing people on the Sabbath. On one of those occasions, before they could utter a word of open accusation, Jesus asked a rhetorical question: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” (Luke 6:9; Berean Study Bible). And that destructive attitude of the scribes and Pharisees was in relation to a Jewish brother. How much more a possibly uncircumcised “other”?

Whether or not the priest and Levite were concerned about personal safety or the potential of handling a dead body, the decision-making process would have been made easier by an exclusionary concept of neighbor. Unfortunately, that view of human relationship is often supported with reference to God. Chief among the supporters were the Pharisees who were holy by name and self-proclamation. Jesus was, therefore, an enigma to them. Having classified some people as sinners, they would not have expected a rabbi to be associating with such a class, and that is what Jesus did—to the point of eating with them. They looked at his associations with disdain. It was such an issue for Luke that he recorded Jesus addressing the matter in Luke 15 in the parable of the Lost Coin, the parable of the Lost Sheep, and the parable of the Lost Son (commonly called the parable of the Prodigal Son).³² While heaven rejoices over a repentant sinner, the Pharisees grumble. What a study in contrast! The religious leaders were set apart from the ungodly but not set apart to God. That motif of separation that Luke develops throughout his Gospel is an indictment of those leaders.

Jesus had an inclusive definition of neighbor. The implication of his perspective is that the Levite and priest exhibited no love of God since Jesus recognized an integral relationship between love of neighbor and love of God. At play in their decision was self-interest: do enough to be in compliance with God’s law. Sacrifice enough to be able to claim obedience. As can be seen from Matthew 5–7, God

31 Smith, *Learning from the Stranger*, 64.

32 Those parables, along with the parable of the Good Samaritan, are uniquely Lucan.

wants more than a legalistic response to his commands. “Love is an action word” is a common saying, and the parable seems to bear that out. However, just as strength is but *one* component of love of God, so it is in love of neighbor. Love of neighbor is also a condition of the heart, soul, and mind: it comes out of bowels of compassion. If the priest and Levite had identified the hurting man as a Jew and acted for that reason because of their duty to fulfill their understanding of the law, they would have demonstrated neither love of God nor love of neighbor. Empathy and compassion for a *person* is what made the difference for the Samaritan. That is what motivated him to help.

What Jesus did in putting the Samaritan in the position of helper rather than victim was masterful. First, Jesus placed him in the position of the helper exactly because he fit the profile of one in need of pity—just by being a Samaritan. And he did not fit the profile of the helper—just by being a Samaritan. But Jesus went against convention. He chose a “heretical” Samaritan to fulfill the stipulations of the law over against its Jewish religious guardians. The Samaritan ironically had become the true guardian of God’s word. Jesus gave him the means to help, and Clement insightfully observed that he came prepared to help. It is as if the Samaritan, knowing the dangerous conditions faced by travellers daily, deliberately equipped himself with “wine, oil, bandages, a beast, and payment for the innkeeper.”³³ He was a neighbor in heart before he met a neighbor in need. A guardian is a custodian, and a guardian is a protector. The Samaritan was a guardian in all respects.

Secondly, by placing the Samaritan in the position of helper, Jesus confronted the tendency to stereotype individuals. That the lawyer did not challenge Jesus’s choice of roles is an indication that he knew that the scenario was not implausible. It just would not have been his natural way of viewing reality. A radical shift would now be necessary, a shift that would not be supported by the community. Indeed, it is a shift that could jeopardize his own status as neighbor as conventionally defined. But Jesus’s message was not only for the lawyer.

The lawyer may have been the primary audience; however, as the story unfolded, the disciples must also have been flabbergasted. They had their own prejudices that would have been confirmed by the poor treatment their Master had experienced at the hands of Samaritans. The people of a Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus “because he was heading to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:53). So upset were the disciples that James and John offered to “call fire down from heaven to destroy [the people]” (Luke 9:54). Jesus’s positive portrayal of a Samaritan, therefore, would have been a surprise. His characterization of the Samaritan in that positive way was itself an embodiment of the attitude he was encouraging.

33 Roukema, “The Good Samaritan,” 60.

Thirdly, by placing the Samaritan in the role of helper instead of in the accustomed role as victim, Jesus placed him above the fray. Unlike the disciples in Luke 9, he chose not to respond to injustice with injustice. Instead, he was determined to serve. Clearly a man of means, he used his resources to do good and not evil, to heal and not destroy. That was in stark contrast to the religious leaders with whom Jesus had had to deal. Furthermore, Jesus reinforced his teaching that power comes through service not status—not self-serving service but service born of compassion. It is the Samaritan who stood out as a beacon of light in what could have been a totally gloomy picture. The Samaritan exhibited

compassion that risks much more than could ever be required or expected. He stops on the Jericho road to assist someone he does not know in spite of the self-evident peril of doing so; he gives of his own goods and money, freely, making no arrangements for reciprocity (cf. 6:32–36); in order to obtain care for this stranger, he enters an inn, itself a place of potential danger; and he even enters into an open-ended monetary relationship with the inn-keeper, a relationship in which the chance of extortion is high.³⁴

“Hurting people hurt” is a truism that does not have to apply to all who have found themselves at the margin of society, even when it is clear that they have so much to contribute.

Neighbor and Political Action

Martin Luther King’s Concept of Neighbor

So, who is my neighbor? Jesus answered the lawyer’s question by asking a question—and not a rhetorical question that required no answer. He asked, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The answer was obvious, but it needed to be declared: “The one who had mercy on him.” And, who was that? It was the Samaritan. The lawyer may have had difficulty saying the word “Samaritan,” but he did identify the quality that exemplified neighbor in the context of the question. Then Jesus said, “Do likewise.” For Martin Luther King, he and his audience had to take on the mantle of the Samaritan. They had to be the neighbor that, having asked, “If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?” then acts in their support.³⁵ By those targeted acts of solidarity, they would be helping “to make America what it ought to be . . . to make America a better nation.”³⁶

Martin Luther King was not talking about individual acts of kindness but stra-

³⁴ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 432.

³⁵ King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 219.

³⁶ King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 219.

tegic acts of solidarity. The Samaritan stood in solidarity with a fellow human being. He did not allow ethnic divisions to determine his attitude and his course of action. He responded to the need of someone who potentially could have been a Jew, someone who may have despised his aid if he were conscious. Smith points out in his aptly titled book, *Learning from the Stranger*, that “some rabbis taught that accepting alms from Samaritans would delay the redemption of Israel.”³⁷ That was the extent to which they were held in disdain. However, the urgency of the situation made benign any consideration about ethnic divisions—at least, in the Samaritan’s mind.

The urgency of the civil rights struggle was not lost on King, who saw his place in history as a Samaritan’s place in history. And, although not linking preceding generations to the Levite and priest, King did point out that one reason that he was “happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn’t force them to do it.”³⁸ And something else brought him joy: the fact that he could identify many religious leaders who stood on the side of the exploited. That was a role reversal as it relates to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Instead of being concerned only about themselves, they took the part of “the one who showed mercy,” the one identified by the lawyer as neighbor.³⁹

The Caribbean Politician and the Concept of Neighbor

At one point in his speech, King noted: “So often preachers aren’t concerned about anything but themselves.”⁴⁰ In the Caribbean, many citizens would readily replace “preachers” with “politicians.”

Before making that criticism of preachers, King had outlined what was expected of them. They were to have a prophetic voice in calling out injustice wherever it was found. They were to address difficulties faced by the poor. They were to be relevant. In other words, they were to serve people. Apart from the prophetic voice (and one may be able to debate that in a context of opposing political parties), everything else could be said to apply to the Caribbean politician. Politicians are supposed to be servants of the people, and that is why they became involved in public life, they say.

The parable of the Good Samaritan has given us an idea of what service does and does not look like, especially from the perspective of justice. The parable helps to define political action and circumscribe its expression as it contributes to

37 Smith, *Learning from the Stranger*, 66.

38 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 209.

39 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop” 213–14.

40 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 214.

the critique of systems of power that the book of Luke provides. Hans Conzelmann may beg to differ, however. Mark Allen Powell notes that Conzelmann “believes one purpose of Luke’s work is to present a political apology for Christianity to the Roman empire,” in order to “show the Romans that Christianity is politically harmless.”⁴¹ Conzelmann needs to appreciate, however, that a peaceful disposition does not necessarily translate into being “politically harmless.” Jesus’s stated mission was political in that it had implications for society. Jesus’s teachings and ministry were likewise political, and those who saw to it that he was killed were under no illusions to the contrary. Luke, in particular among the Gospel writers, promotes Christ’s political agenda. Caribbean political representatives can, therefore, learn from Luke, benefiting from his prophetic voice expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan and elsewhere.

Clientelism Explained

One area of political life that bedevils Caribbean politicians and may have the look (but not the essence) of compassion is clientelism,⁴² otherwise called patronage or pork barrel politics. Clientelism and patronage are “strategies for the acquisition, maintenance, and aggrandizement of political power, on the part of the patrons, and strategies for the protection and promotion of their interests, on the part of clients, and . . . their deployment is driven by given sets of incentives and disincentives.”⁴³ More simply put, they have to do with “the trade of votes and other types of partisan support in exchange for public decisions with divisible benefits.”⁴⁴

Where resources are unevenly distributed, scarce, or threatened, clientelism thrives. Carl Stone in *Class, State and Democracy in Jamaica* describes the fertile ground in which it developed in Jamaica. The economic power exercised over the country resided in a small minority of Jamaicans from particular families, with the middle class exercising significant (though limited) influence, because of their strategic placement in important public entities. He further explains that trade unions primarily represented the interest of the middle class, and so unemployed and underemployed young people in poor communities did not have a voice outside of that which emanated from their political allegiances.⁴⁵

Stone provides further commentary on the Jamaican situation: “The sub-culture of poverty in which [persons] are trapped generates survival strategies that

41 Conzelmann quoted in Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying About Luke?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1989), 83.

42 Clientelism is not peculiar or particular to developing countries.

43 Simona Piattoni, *Clientelism, Interests, and Democratization: The European in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

44 Piattoni, *Clientelism*, 4.

45 Carl Stone, *Class, State and Democracy in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Blackett Publishers, 1985), 56.

focus the individuals['] energies on coping with personal problems on a very individualistic basis or in mutual aid relationships with small face to face neighbourhood networks.⁴⁶ That then becomes the politicians' focus as well. Long-term developmental issues of concern to the community at large are subordinated under the immediate pressing needs of the individual, which are conveniently met through the patron-client relationship.

Like Stone, Percy C. Hintzen also addresses the issue of clientelism, but with regard to Guyana and Trinidad where race has been a major factor in determining party support. He points out that one strategy of patronage in Guyanese politics in the late 1960s was the engagement of well-placed employees in the state sector, as well as leaders of mass organizations and public opinion shapers. The masses themselves were not so much the target of the patronage "because of the declining significance of majoritarian support for regime survival"⁴⁷ as the regime became more and more authoritarian. The securing of power was dependent on limiting influential people's opposition to the government and on stoking the racial divide. However, with the re-democratization of the society in the 1990s, more patronage needed to be directed to those outside of the bureaucratic elite, that is, to the average citizen.

And, where Trinidad and Tobago is concerned, Hintzen points out that patronage from the outset involved both strategic and general patronage as resources had to be distributed "to generate and secure the retention of mass support" as well as elite support.⁴⁸ He contends that the middle class was targeted with the "award of high-paying jobs in the state corporate sector"⁴⁹ and that there was "direct allocation of jobs, services, facilities, loans and housing to individuals on a massive scale."⁵⁰

Whether it is Jamaica, or Guyana, or Trinidad and Tobago, or any other Caribbean territory, there is a symbiotic relationship between the elite and the masses in an entrenched system of patronage. The elite, select group, at the same time that they benefit from their high-paying jobs and even corrupt practices that guarantee greater financial security, act as political machines to expend state resources on the "massive scale" mentioned by Hintzen. What results in contexts such as those is a syndrome of dependence and continued inequity, as those who already have wealth and power increase in wealth at the expense of the poor, whose partisan political support they secure.

The description of clientelism bears out the point that it only has the look of

46 Stone, *Class, State and Democracy*, 56.

47 Percy C. Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival: Racial Mobilization, Elite Domination and Control of the State in Guyana and Trinidad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 71.

48 Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival*, 76.

49 Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival*, 76.

50 Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival*, 73.

compassion but essentially its motivation is selfish. Clientelism is a system that is rooted in injustice since it institutionalizes inequity, a dependence syndrome, and tribalism—all of which are repudiated in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Clientelism Repudiated

One question that clientelism begs us to ask is: what is the role of government? The parable of the Good Samaritan does not answer it directly for, clearly, it is a very complicated subject. However, the parable gives insight as it answers the question, “Who is neighbor?” The question seems to warrant a response regarding whom to love. Instead, Jesus responds by identifying the one who acts in love. Jesus identified the compassionate Samaritan as neighbor. He wanted his audience to understand that wherever they go, they create a neighborhood. Now, if “I” am neighbor and my neighborhood is where “I” am, that means that “I” will function differently according to my different roles.

Politicians as individuals relating to other individuals should act charitably towards them. People’s immediate needs should be addressed by the individual “Good Samaritan,” either alone or in concert with other members of a community, and government should encourage and support such ventures. However, in their role as policy makers and law makers, politicians should be concerned primarily about sustainable development, with special emphasis on vulnerable communities. They have the responsibility to undertake the Jericho Road Improvement Project in order to lessen the number of victims on the Jericho Road. Governments are elected to address the overarching problems whose solutions will translate into benefits at the micro level. For government by design to do less than it was elected to do is for it to be like the religious leaders in Luke who were willing to do the bare minimum to have the appearance of keeping the law.⁵¹

The actions of the Samaritan stand as a reprimand for politicians who have used the resources of the State in exchange for political allegiance. The resources that the Samaritan had were properly directed and properly employed. He used his resources in a way that addressed the problem that he had identified; he met the injured man’s need in as holistic a way as possible. With the limited resources he had at first, though a man of means, he bound the wound to cauterize the bleed-

51 Paradoxically, this perspective aligns with Martin Luther King’s point about the Jericho Improvement Association. It is the opposite side of the same coin. Concern about the broader issues of justice did not exempt his audience from responding to individual cases of injustice. And, in the case of Caribbean politicians, the exigencies of individual needs should not be an excuse for them to neglect their primary responsibility. In fact, the supposed concern for the individual poor may be, as we have seen, strategic. The poor really may be a pawn who are actually viewed with disdain and treated as such in normal one-on-one interactions. It is only as a statistic that can translate into votes that they are important. And so, the reverse of what King pronounced will demonstrate the compassion he advocated. Real compassion for the poor will lead politicians to look out for their affairs at the macro level.

ing. His application of wine and oil to the wound was also what the doctor ordered, as the wine acted as an astringent, cleansing the wound, and the oil acted as a soothing agent, easing the pain. Then the animal on which he was travelling served to transport the victim to a comfortable location where further aid could be given. He also looked about the continued care of the injured man with a promissory note to cover any further expense. And he did all that without expecting anything in return even though such an expectation would have been reasonable. As Green says, “He [gave] of his own goods and money, freely, making no arrangements for reciprocation.”⁵² He gave to empower.

That is so unlike the manipulative, exploitative giving of too many Caribbean politicians, who do not even give of their own resources but those over which they have been given stewardship by the citizens of their countries. Like the priest and the Levite, their choices belie their positions. Like the priest and Levite, they are the anti-Samaritan. In the manner of and the motivation behind the use of resources, they have not taken on the role of the Samaritan but with determination have taken the opposite path.

Now, people in inner-city communities, in particular, sometimes seem satisfied with the little that they receive from the coffers of their political representatives. Yes, they protest from time to time, but they remain open for handouts, short-term employment, patched roads, and the social safety net.⁵³ Why does clientelism work at the level of the poor when by virtue of their numbers they have the power to demand more? Stone says it in part: the focus is on survival. They define their need in an immediate, self-gratifying way. Bigger sustained battles expend energy and time that are in scarce supply. Because he knew how hard it was, Martin Luther King made sure to urge his people to stay focused and endure to the end as they exercised the power together that they did not have individually.

Not only does the daily grind of survival propel the poor of the Caribbean to keep on seeking help from politicians to meet their day to day needs, but they have accepted, in some measure, the view that it is the responsibility of the individual to strive for excellence and for a way out of poor communities. So instead of seeking for the transformation of their community, they hope that through their own effort, or that of their children, they will one day leave. Not enough pressure is placed on their political representatives to work with them in building communities where everyone would want to stay.

Another part of the equation is self-perception. People sometimes accept less than because they see themselves as less than. The parable of the Prodigal gives

52 Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 432.

53 The social safety net is necessary but should be envisioned as a short-term interim measure, while every effort is made to advance the agenda of sustainable development. People should not be satisfied with a safety net as a way of life.

insight into that. It was not only the older son who felt that his brother was not deserving of acceptance into the home; the brother had felt the same way. When he decided to return home, he rehearsed a speech wherein he expressed his willingness to be a servant to his own father. But the father lavished him with benefits that a son should expect. Jesus told that parable in response to the mumblings of the Pharisees over his associations with sinners. He wanted them to know that sinners were valuable to God.

But just as the lawyer was not the only part of Jesus's audience in the parable of the Good Samaritan, so the Pharisees were not the only ones listening to that parable. The so-called sinners were there as well. It is very likely that they too needed to hear how valuable they were. The marginalized are vulnerable in so many ways. One key way is the acceptance of what is deemed one's lot in life. It is not that the clients in the patron-client relationship do not want a better life, but many times they are resigned to the impoverished life they currently live or understand a better life in terms of greater handouts—positions held to their economic detriment.

The cost of the patron-client relationship to the client is not just an economic one, where allegiance to the political parties has nullified the influence of the masses, relegating them to lives of dependency; it is also a social one. Clientelism produces tribalism; it thrives on tribalism. In fact, it is a tribal arrangement. Distributing state or other resources to reward the party faithful either as individuals or by community creates hostility between the adherents of the governing party and the opposing side, and it affects civil interactions. The potential is always there for that hostility to be expressed violently.

When other issues come into play such as the significant ideological divide between Jamaica's two political parties, clientelism may breed actual violence because "the other side" is perceived as an even greater threat than it would be normally. In the latter part of the 1970s into the 1980s, Jamaica saw political violence reach an unprecedentedly high level. Stone explained how the animosity between the supporters of the Jamaica Labour Party and the People's National Party led to gang warfare and assassination attempts on the lives of local party operatives.⁵⁴ The 1980 election is infamously known for the high level of politically-motivated murders. Writing in 1985, Stone said: "A great deal of the violence that occurs between party faithful (*sic*) supporting the rival political parties centers around scarce benefits."⁵⁵ Now, the level of acrimony between party supporters has lessened tremendously in Jamaica, such that there is hardly any political violence at the time of the writing of this essay. However, the need to secure

⁵⁴ Stone, *Class, State and Democracy*, 61.

⁵⁵ Stone, *Class, State and Democracy*, 61.

benefits from political representatives keeps boundaries between opposing parties firmly in place.

Political boundaries are psychological as well as physical. Ramesh Deosaran of the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, in calling for “new politics” in his country, posits that “political patronage poisons civil society, especially when given in large doses It breeds victimisation since it diminishes equality of opportunity. And those who suffer usually feel obliged to suffer in silence because worse may befall them.”⁵⁶ But the problem is yet bigger than that since even those without those concerns may be silent through disengagement, which they see as protest.

In taking from the have-nots (the developing states) to give to the have-nots (poor citizens) and in putting the party faithful in key positions in the public sector to administer the pork distribution in order to gain or retain power, political patrons have helped to create apathy and cynicism towards the political system, politicians, and those affiliated with political parties. There has been a tendency to engage in stereotyping and clichés: “No politician has integrity.” “Nobody good comes from a political garrison.” “No better herring; no better barrel.” All these are in support of disengagement. Like the Levite and priest, the disaffected have figuratively walked on the other side, failing to act, this time, in their own best interest, as well as the interest of their fellow citizens.

We have seen where the Levite and the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan “epitomize a worldview of tribal consciousness, concerned with relative status and us-them cataloguing [sic].”⁵⁷ The situation was so bad that it was taught that “a Jew need not trouble himself to save a Samaritan’s life.”⁵⁸ The life of “the other” is usually not regarded as valuable. In a clientelistic system, they are the “other” of “the other party” as opposed to “my party,” and the “other” of the politically apathetic as opposed to the political adherent. Seeing people as other is in contradistinction to Jesus’s affirmation of people and their personhood.

The Samaritan was other, but he became the neighbor in Jesus’s regime. He was neighbor as the one who was compassionate toward another person. He saw “a certain man” in need but did not have the same inhibitions as the priest or Levite. He did not need to know the ethnicity of the man to recognize him as neighbor.⁵⁹ The Samaritan too was neighbor as one who should be loved regardless of his ethnicity. By making the Samaritan the protagonist, so to speak, Jesus affirmed the Samaritan’s right to exist and his right for regard. Jesus made it clear that tribalism has no place in God-directed human relationships.

56 Ramesh Deosaran, *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, 2010.

57 Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 431.

58 Smith, *Learning from the Stranger*, 66.

59 “Neighbor” is a relational term that speaks to mutuality—it moves in both directions. He or she to whom you are neighbor is neighbor to you.

Therefore, as the divide was bridged within the parable of the Good Samaritan, the divide in our current Caribbean political reality also needs bridging. Indeed, the divide needs to be bridged between all antagonistic groups. Politicians can play their part by breaking the circle of clientelism. It may not be the sole reason for tribalism, but it is a serious contributing factor. And, as has been demonstrated, it is not only a causative factor. Clientelism is itself an “us-them” mode of operating that must be challenged within the political sphere. Individual politicians must “develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness”⁶⁰ that leaves them vulnerable to alienation from their own party and even from the system itself as they could be seen as a threat to its continued existence.

Conclusion

The challenge is clear. The call is sure. The system of clientelism must be dismantled. Governments must act against their natural inclination for partisan self-service and do what is best for their nation states. The parable of the Good Samaritan has not only made the call; it has also laid the framework.

From our assessment of the key actors in the parable, we have seen that the fulcrum is ideological. The choices that the Levite and priest made were not arbitrary but were grounded in an exclusionary (versus an inclusionary) view of human relationships. The starting point in dealing with clientelism has to be a change of mindset. It is a change that has to be embraced by the society as a whole if sustainable development is to be achieved. Therefore, it would seem that civic engagement is necessary to reformulate people’s way of thinking. However, Ariel Armony points out that “the attempts to build civic capacity in settings marked by material deprivation, chronic unemployment, violence, and harsh economic constraints were largely futile If the protection of generalized rights is weak or absent, protest and political demands tend to find a niche within the clientelistic order.”⁶¹ The demise of clientelism does not serve the immediate interest of the marginalized. Thus, more than likely, it is the power brokers (the political and/or economic elite) who will have to not only start the process but persist despite opposition.

The Samaritan showed that ideology and attitude were pivotal, and he also showed that actions must be pragmatic. We saw how he used the available resources and made projections for the future with contingency plans for the unforeseen realities of life. For clientelism to be overcome, the complexity of the issue must be acknowledged. Immediate healing is not going to take place. There needs to be a plan to address the matter over time. There needs to be a systematic unraveling

60 King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 217.

61 Ariel C. Armony, *The Dubious Link: Civic Engagement and Democratization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 155.

of a structure that has become entrenched. The very problems that governments have not been able to address in a wholesome way because of the waste that clientelism causes have to be tackled in small measure over an extended period. This must be addressed until the trust that clients have in their patrons is transferred to the governmental system outside of party affiliations. It is in the strengthening of rights and the weakening of the grip of poverty that society, as a whole, will be convinced to eschew “a worldview of tribal consciousness.”⁶² Government has to be strategic in acting out its role as neighbor, following the good example of the Samaritan.

Martin Luther King saw in the parable of the Good Samaritan a mandate and pursued it with perseverance in the United States of America. The Caribbean has its own mandates coming out of that parable. The issues addressed by Jesus in Luke 10:25–37 that are of relevance to the Caribbean are multifaceted. They are micro and macro matters that could take volumes to explore, but, as it relates to the systemic injustice caused by clientelism, it is clear that boldness and even fearlessness is necessary on the part of the populace, in general, and the politicians, in particular, to stand against it. It will take “a kind of dangerous unselfishness.”⁶³

62 Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 431.

63 King, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” 217.

The Inclusive Vision of Isaiah 56 and Contested Ethical Practices in Scripture and the Church: Toward a Canonical Hermeneutic of Discernment¹

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Abstract

The inclusive vision of Isa 56 may be understood as addressing (and critiquing) certain practices of exclusion in postexilic Yehud mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah. While both Isa 56 and Neh 13 seem to interact with the same Mosaic legislation concerning the exclusion of certain categories of people from full participation in the community of Israel (Deut 23), their response to this legislation is widely divergent. This divergence is simply one example of diverse ethical perspectives evident in both Old and New Testaments. Given a commitment to the Bible as authoritative Scripture meant to guide faithful living in a complex world, this essay will explore a hermeneutical framework for understanding the ethical diversity of the Bible, without acquiescing in relativism. Beginning and ending with the case study of Isa 56, the essay draws on Jesus's teaching on divorce in contradiction to Old Testament legislation, the complex issue of the status of women in the Ephesian household code, as well as the rescinding of Kosher food laws (from Leviticus) in the New Testament, in order to develop a hermeneutical approach to Scripture that can guide the church in developing an authentically biblical vision of social justice for the contemporary world.

1 This essay is an expansion of a presentation given at the conference on "Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal," at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, Kingston, Jamaica, September 9, 2017. My work on this topic had its origins in an informal guest lecture on the Bible as a guide for living in the twenty-first century developed for a course at Northeastern Seminary in 2003 taught by Wayne McCown (then Dean of the Seminary). Later versions of this material were presented at a conference called "After Worldview" at Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids, MI (2004); at the Israelite Prophetic Literature program unit of the Society of Biblical Literature, Philadelphia, PA (2005); and as a two-part keynote talk for a series of conferences sponsored by the Institute for Christian Studies, in Toronto (2006), then in Vancouver, Edmonton, Ottawa, and Chicago (2007).

The Christian church confesses that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the primary written witness to the revelation of God. Hence the Scriptures have, since the beginning of the church, been read in public worship, studied in private devotion, and employed as the final authority in theological debate. The church also uses the Scriptures as a guide for living, which is appropriate since the Bible itself proclaims its own normativity.² Thus, in reference to the Torah or laws of the Old Testament, the psalmist affirms that God’s “word is a lamp to my feet / and a light to my path (Ps 119:105).³

Granted that the entire Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is meant to provide ethical guidance for the life of God’s people, the problem is that it is not always easy to apply Scripture to our lives in the contemporary world. Even if we limit ourselves to biblical laws or exhortations (which explicitly enjoin or prohibit particular behavior), it is not always clear what bearing these have on our lives today.

This essay addresses the question of how the Scriptures are able to function as ethically normative for the church despite the great historical gap between when the Scriptures were written and our contemporary situation, and especially in light of what seem like contradictory ethical directives within the Bible itself.

A case in point of contradictory ethical directives is the dispute evidenced in Isa 56 and Neh 13 regarding the inclusion or exclusion of foreigners in postexilic Israel.

Isaiah 56 in Its Historical and Canonical Context

Isa 56 begins that section of the book of Isaiah usually understood as addressing a postexilic (fifth century) context, specifically Judeans who have returned from Babylonian exile and are attempting to rebuild their society in the context of the Persian empire. This context is relevant to the situation of Christians in the Caribbean after slavery and colonialism. Given this checkered history, with the brokenness we have experienced, how do the Scriptures provide guidance for contributing to the flourishing of Caribbean society today?⁴

I am concerned here with the oracle found in Isa 56:1–8, which takes the form of direct speech from YHWH. Right after an introductory ethical exhortation to do justice and righteousness, with a blessing pronounced on those who keep the Sabbath and refrain from evil (Isa 56:1–2), we find a summarizing statement (Isa

2 Although the term “normative” is sometimes used in sociology to refer to typical patterns of human behavior, I am drawing on its ethical sense, which has to do with how things *ought* to be.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the Bible are from the NRSV. All emphases in biblical quotations are (or course) my own.

4 Of course, the relevance of this context is not limited to the Caribbean. Not only is the message of Scripture applicable to multiple contexts, but Christians everywhere are searching for a way forward in our conflictual postmodern global context.

56:3) addressing two specific categories of people—the foreigner [*ben-hannēkār*] and the eunuch [*hassārīs*]. The oracle then addresses these two groups in more detail, first eunuchs (Isa 56:4–5), then foreigners (Isa 56:6–7).

In the initial address to these two groups (Isa 56:3), YHWH tells foreigners who are “joined to YHWH” that they should not think that it is YHWH himself who is excluding them from the congregation of Israel. This suggests they were, indeed, experiencing such exclusion. Then YHWH tells eunuchs not to denigrate their identity as just a “dry tree.” Again, the suggestion is that they were, in fact, being denigrated.

Then, the oracle proclaims that as long as eunuchs and foreigners bind themselves to YHWH in covenant faithfulness and keep the Sabbath, doing what is right, YHWH will accept their worship and give them an important place in the heritage of Israel (Isa 56:6–7). The oracle ends with a declaration that YHWH is not yet finished gathering outcasts (Isa 56:8).⁵

Isaiah 56 as Counterpoint to Nehemiah 13 and Deuteronomy 23

Isa 56 has an important connection with another postexilic text, namely, Neh 13:1–3. This Nehemiah text recounts that a portion of the Book of Moses was read in the hearing of the people who had returned to the land; this Mosaic instruction was then applied to the contemporaneous postexilic situation of the hearers.

The Mosaic instruction quoted in Neh 13 is an abridged form of Deut 23:3–6 (MT 23:4–7), which is a portion of the Torah that addresses the exclusion of certain categories of foreigners (Ammonites and Moabites) from Israel, with a historical rationale (they had opposed Israel on their way to the promised land, in the time of Moses). It is clear that Neh 13, in quoting this text from Deuteronomy, is itself focused on the exclusion of foreigners from the congregation of postexilic Israel. The paradox is that Isa 56 (also postexilic) addresses not the exclusion, but the *inclusion* of foreigners. In this it seems to stand in contradiction both to Deut 23 and to Neh 13.

That Isa 56 is responding to Deut 23 is suggested by the fact that it addresses the inclusion of *eunuchs* (which is not mentioned in Neh 13). When we turn to the beginning of Deut 23 (just two verses earlier than the portion on the exclusion of foreigners), we find a reference to the exclusion of men with damaged sexual organs (Deut 23:1 [MT 23:2]), which is one way to describe eunuchs. Isa 56 thus seems to be drawing both on Deut 23:3–6 and Deut 23:1, and yet contradicting both texts.

5 Most modern Bibles and commentators treat Isa 56:1–8 as a literary unit, with verse 9 beginning the next unit. However, the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) divides the text between v. 9 and v. 10. This division suggests that we are to take v. 9 as a concluding invitation to the beasts of the field and forest to come and participate in YHWH’s banquet (along with foreigners, eunuchs, and other outcasts).

The Conundrum of Ethical Contradiction within Scripture

This concatenation of biblical texts presents an interesting (and stimulating) conundrum for those who take the Bible as an ethical authority, for here we have two biblical texts (in Isaiah and Nehemiah) that respond to Mosaic Torah in vastly differing ways. Indeed, *neither* text is strictly faithful to the Torah of Deut 23.

Isa 56 clearly *contravenes* Deut 23. But Neh 13 *expands* the original prohibition against two categories of foreigners (Ammonites and Moabites) to include *all* foreigners (with no distinctions made) and *reverses the direction* of the mandate—from *preventing* their inclusion to *expelling* those already included (Neh 13:3). When we consider that Ruth, the ancestor of David (and Jesus), was a Moabite (Ruth 1:4; 4:18–21; Matt 1:5), this simply compounds the interpretive conundrum.

Now, it is not my purpose *ultimately* to confound anyone looking to Scripture for ethical guidance, although *initial* confusion is a most helpful pedagogical method. Nor it is my purpose to force anyone to decide which text (Nehemiah or Isaiah) they think is normative based either on a knee-jerk response or even on their current theological preference. Rather, I want to use this interpretive conundrum to open up critical thinking on the matter of how Scripture functions as a norm for us. That is, how do we apply Scripture to our lives today?

I fully affirm the words of Ps 119:105, which describes the Torah as “a lamp to my feet” and “a light to my path.” The problem is that Neh 13 and Isa 56 use the light of Deut 23 to illumine quite *different* paths. I also affirm the New Testament claim in 2 Tim 3:16–17, that “all scripture” (which certainly includes our three texts) “is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”⁶ But this actually makes the contradiction between Deut 23, Isa 56, and Neh 13 *more* complicated, since it requires us to nuance the doctrine of inspiration beyond simplistic understandings.

Before we can get to the important question of how to apply the ethical instructions of these (or any) biblical texts normatively in our contemporary context, we need to address the question: *Why* do Neh 13 and Isa 56 interpret Deut 23 so dif-

6 What is said in 2 Timothy explicitly of the Old Testament (which is likely the referent of “all scripture”) is true by implication of the New Testament, writings that were only just beginning to receive canonical status. Indeed, in one of the later New Testament epistles, we find mention of the writings of “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pet 3:15) in connection with “the *other* scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16), which suggests that Paul’s writings were beginning to be regarded as authoritative for the church. It should be noted that it is entirely possible that “all scripture” in 2 Timothy 3 included not just what Protestants call the “Old Testament” (the name came later), but also various Jewish texts that did not end up being included, such as books from what we call the Apocrypha and the pseudepigrapha. This is because the Jewish and Christian canons were not yet clearly delimited in the first century. For example, we know that *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* were treated as authoritative Scripture by the Jewish community at Qumran. And *1 En.* 1:9 is quoted in the New Testament (Jude 14–15) as prophecy, which means that *1 Enoch* may have been treated as Scripture in some first-century Christian circles.

ferently? What is the *basis* for the divergence? And to do that we first need to think about the larger canonical context and how an understanding of the implicit macro-narrative of Scripture already points us toward a vision of what God intends for human life.

I will begin with a series of four proposals about the contextual nature of the Bible's ethical guidance, with a focus on discerning the contours of the larger biblical story in which any particular biblical text is placed. Without a clear understanding of the canonical narrative as that which reveals God's overarching purposes, it is only too easy to misread—and thus misuse—biblical texts from which we seek ethical guidance in the present.

The upshot of these proposals will be my claim that biblical texts are not always directly and immediately normative but require critical appraisal of the role of the text in its larger (canonical and historical) context. Given the controversial nature of this claim for some readers of Scripture, this essay will explore four case studies from the Bible that illustrate—and validate—this claim. The tension between Isa 65 and Neh 13 will constitute the final case study.

Each of these case studies will focus on what seem to be significant contradictions between different ethical directives in Scripture. But this does not mean that we are left with an undecidable relativism. Indeed, it is my thesis that by plunging boldly into these contradictions, rather than avoiding them—guided fundamentally by a hermeneutic of trust—we may gain valuable insights into a canonical approach to reading Scripture as a guide for ethical living today.

PROPOSAL #1: Old Testament laws and exhortations are not free-standing directives (all Scripture must be interpreted in context)

My first proposal is that the Bible does not contain any free-standing directives. This applies even to explicit biblical laws or exhortations that enjoin specific behavior.

A prime example is the Decalogue or Ten Commandments. These core instructions for Israel's communal life do not simply fall from the sky as contextless "absolutes," but are grounded in Israel's exodus experience. Thus the commandments are prefaced by the statement: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). The commandments that follow (Exod 20:3–17) are linked to this opening statement by an implied *therefore*. It is precisely *because* YHWH is Israel's deliverer that the people are enjoined to respond in obedience. Torah is thus grounded in God's prior gracious act on behalf of Israel.

PROPOSAL #2: Old Testament laws and exhortations are ultimately related to God's deliverance of Israel and grounded in the exodus story (story as context for Torah)

This leads to my second proposal, namely that Old Testament laws and exhortations are, in one way or another, rooted in the exodus story. Thus, peppered throughout the Torah (in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy) are motive clauses, many of which ground specific moral instruction in the exodus story.

Typical is Exod 22:21–23, which states, “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, *for you were aliens in the land of Egypt*. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, *when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry*.” This text explicitly appeals to the exodus narrative, evoking Israel’s prior experience of bondage (their memory of being aliens in a foreign land) and their experience of deliverance (God’s response to their cry for help).⁷

We may distinguish at least three ways that the exodus from Egypt is connected to Israel’s Torah obedience. Perhaps most basically, obedience to the Torah is motivated by gratitude for YHWH’s prior action of deliverance and is a sign of allegiance to this God. Second, Torah obedience constitutes the completion of the salvation that began with the deliverance from bondage. Salvation is never just *from* an impediment but also *towards* the goal of the restoration of flourishing, which includes the moral restoration of the people.⁸ Thus without a transformed people, shaped by Torah obedience, the exodus deliverance would be incomplete. And, third, Torah obedience is often equivalent to *imitatio Dei*, embodying God’s saving character and action (exhibited at the exodus) in our corresponding human acts of compassion and justice on behalf of others.⁹

Indeed, the very structure of the book of Exodus grounds the giving of the law at Sinai (Exod 19–24) squarely in the prior narrative of bondage and redemption (Exod 1–18). Without the exodus, the Torah simply would not make sense.

PROPOSAL #3: The overarching biblical story provides a normative framework for reading Scripture (the larger canonical context)

However, it is crucial to note that the exodus is itself only a sub-plot in a larger canonical story that stretches from creation to eschaton. This leads to my third

7 Other Torah texts that explicitly appeal to the exodus in their motive clauses include Exod 22:27; 23:9; Lev 19:33–34; 25:35–43; Deut 5:15; 10:17–19; 16:12; 24:17–18; 24:21–22.

8 For further discussion of restoration to flourishing as a crucial aspect of salvation, see J. Richard Middleton and Michael J. Gorman, “Salvation,” in the *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 5, ed. by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 45–61.

9 The links between the exodus and Torah obedience are explored in greater detail in J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), chap. 4: “The Exodus as Paradigm of Salvation.”

proposal, namely that the overarching biblical story provides a normative framework for reading Scripture.¹⁰

The Exodus in the Context of the Story of Israel

To gain a sense of the contours this larger canonical story, it is helpful to see the exodus (which is itself a complex story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and the journey through the wilderness to the Promised land) in the context of the larger story of Israel. Whereas the exodus constitutes the narrative framework of most of the Pentateuch (Exodus–Deuteronomy), the story of Israel starts with the call of Abraham and his family in Gen 12, and continues through the entire Old Testament, stretching even into the New Testament (Jesus and the initial disciples were all Jewish).

Whereas the calling of Abraham (whether articulated originally in Gen 12:1–3 or later in Exod 19:3–6 vis-à-vis the newly redeemed nation) specifies Israel's role as priestly mediator of blessing to the nations, the people of Israel had been prevented from accomplishing that task by Egyptian bondage. The fulfillment of Israel's mediational calling is predicated, in the promises of Genesis, on God blessing Abraham's descendants such that they become a great nation (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4–6; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:3, 14; 35:11) flourishing in their own land (Gen 12:1, 7; 13:14–17; 15:7, 18–19; 17:8; 22:17; 26:3–4; 28:4, 13; 35:12).¹¹ Although Israel's population does greatly increase while in Egypt, their enslavement and hard labor in a foreign land clearly prevents the fulfillment of the promise of having their own land; and certainly blessing and flourishing are contradicted by a situation of oppression. Egyptian bondage is, therefore, a significant impediment to the fulfillment of Israel's vocation.

This is the context for Moses, whose calling (recounted in Exod 3:1–4:18) is to get Israel back on track. In the exodus story, Moses figures prominently as God's agent to deliver Israel from bondage, to mediate the Torah as instruction for Israel's communal life, and to guide the people to the Promised Land, accompanied by God's presence in the tabernacle. The story of Moses thus functions as narrative resolution of the plot of Israel's story, when it gets stuck.

10 The summary of the biblical story given here is based on Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, chap. 3: "The Plot of the Biblical Story." That chapter is an expanded version of the earlier plot analysis given in Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 11 (2006): 73–97.

11 It is important not to reduce the calling and purpose of Israel to the purely instrumental, as simply a means to an end. I have addressed God's intrinsic purposes for the blessing of Israel in relationship to their function in the wider story of salvation in J. Richard Middleton, "The Blessing of Abraham and the *Missio Dei*: A Response to Walter Moberly on the Purpose of Israel's Election in Genesis 12:1–3," in *Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis: Essays in Tribute to Paul Livermore*, ed. Douglas R. Cullum and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019).

The Story of Israel beyond Moses

Indeed, it is possible to read the various (often stereotypical) call narratives in Scripture, beyond that of Moses—whether of Gideon (Judg 6:11–23), Saul (1 Sam 9:15–10:1), David (2 Sam 7:8–27), Solomon (1 Kgs 3:4–9), Isaiah (Isa 6:1–13), Jeremiah (Jer 1:1–19), or Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1–3:15)—as signaling sub-plots in Israel’s larger narrative.¹² In each case various judges, kings, and prophets are empowered as agents of plot resolution, called to address the various crises in the story of Israel, with a view to enabling the nation to fulfill its calling.

Israel in the Story of the World

But the narrative of Israel is itself only a sub-plot in an even larger story, one that begins with creation and stretches to the eschatological fulfillment of God’s purposes for the world. In the context of the canonical narrative, God selects Abram (later called Abraham) and his descendants in order to bring plot resolution to the original story, which has gone awry. The human race, which God empowered and called (in Gen 1 and 2) to rule or tend the earth as faithful stewards, has rejected God’s norms (Gen 3) and turned their power against each other (Gen 4), until the earth has become filled with (and destroyed by) violence (Gen 6). Inter-human violence has prevented the human race, now divided into differing geographical, cultural, and linguistic groups (the “nations”; Gen 10), from fulfilling their original calling from God. The initial narrative thrust of the biblical story has been thwarted.

The narrative function of Abraham and his family is to embody God’s blessing in such a way that this blessing will spill over to all the nations or families of the

12 Walther Zimmerli has classified two broad sorts of call narratives in the Old Testament, which I would distinguish as the *dialogue type* and the *throne vision type*. See Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, trans. Ronald E. Clements (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 97–100.

The *dialogue type* of call narrative recounts a personal encounter of the elect one with YHWH (or with his messenger/angel), in which there is divine-human dialogue and room for the expression of reluctance, and even objection, to the call. This objection is typically in the form of questions highlighting the elect one’s sense of inadequacy for the task (focused around “Who am I?”) and often accompanied by the promise of divine support. The call narratives of Moses, Gideon, Saul, David, Solomon, and Jeremiah are of this type.

In contrast to the dialogue type of call narrative is the rarer *throne vision type*, in which the elect one has access to the heavenly throne room (often by means of a vision), with YHWH seated on a throne as king, surrounded by the divine council of angelic beings, and is commissioned to represent God’s royal government on earth. There is no room in these call narratives for the expression of reluctance and little, if any, personal dialogue. The call narratives of Isaiah and Ezekiel are of this type, and it may be found also in the prophet Micaiah’s vision of the heavenly council, from which God sends a “spirit” to mislead King Ahab (1 Kgs 22:19–23).

It is intriguing that there are similarities between both types of call narratives and the statements of the human calling in Ps 8 and Gen 1. Ps 8:4–5 [MT 8:5–6] resembles the dialogue type of call narrative, with its questioning of why God would elect humanity to such a high calling, while the articulation of the human calling in Gen 1:26–28, with the angelic host implied in the divine plurals (“let us” and “in our image”), has similarities with the throne vision type of call narrative.

earth (that is, to the human race, in all their cultural diversity). The story of Israel can thus be read as intended to bring resolution to the plot of the larger, canonical story of humanity on earth. In this context, the New Testament understands Jesus, the Messiah, as the one who brings decisive resolution to the plot of Israel's story, which enables the blessing of the gentiles to be accomplished.

The Narrative Contribution to Ethical Discernment

In one sense, then, there is already a fundamental ethical norm built into the plot, since the story is precisely about the use of agency and power, which may function either to impede or to enact God's purposes. *Calling* or *vocation* is thus intrinsically a moral category. This provides an implicit norm for judging what actions in the story contribute to plot tension/complication or plot resolution (for example, it is illuminating to read the ancestor narratives in Genesis, asking whether Abraham and his family are bringing blessing to the nations or are impeding blessing by their actions¹³).

But we may also evaluate the function of various laws and exhortations given in Scripture vis-à-vis their role in the larger biblical story. This means that without attention to the overarching biblical macro-narrative (and especially its implicit plot thrust) it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the *point* of explicit ethical injunctions Scripture—whether in the Torah, the Old Testament wisdom literature, the moral exhortations found in prophetic oracles, the Sermon on the Mount and other teachings of Jesus, the New Testament epistles, or *implicit* norms embedded in specific biblical narratives. Indeed, without attention to the overall thrust of the larger biblical story we are in danger of reducing the Bible to moralism (independent and unrelated bits of moral instruction)—which it is most definitely not.

We may frame matters this way: All the Bible's ethical teaching is *grounded in* the overarching story of God's people on the move towards redemption, and all this ethical teaching is meant to *move* God's people closer to this telos or goal. This means that the ethical teachings found in Scripture are not ends in themselves; rather they are meant to serve the goal of the larger story. But this also means that we may *evaluate* the function of various laws and exhortations given in Scripture in terms of their role in the overarching biblical story.

13 For a summary of this approach to episodes from the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, see Middleton, "The Blessing of Abraham and the *Missio Dei*."

PROPOSAL #4: Biblical laws and exhortations are meant to be re-orienting in a post-fall world, but they do not always point due “north” (directly back to God’s original intent for creation)¹⁴

Undergirding my proposals (and my entire approach in this essay) is the metaphor of a journey. For us to *find our way* in both biblical interpretation and in our current praxis, we need a good *map* or *compass* to orient us. That is, we need to understand the canonical context that these texts are embedded in—the overarching biblical story—which *points to* the goal or telos that God intends for us, so we have a good sense of the destination we need to reach (we could call this destination “north”). But a good map or compass is not enough. We also need to understand the actual *lay of the land*, that is, the relevant historical circumstances that generated our texts, which have to be negotiated for us to arrive at our destination.¹⁵

This leads to my fourth proposal, namely that while biblical laws and exhortations are meant to be re-orienting in a post-fall world, they do not always point due “north” (directly back to God’s original intent for creation). To unpack this metaphor further, let us look at a number of biblical case studies that illustrate this point.

A Case Study: The Question of Divorce

The first case study is the dispute over divorce in the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matt 19:3–9. The Pharisees (drawing on Deut 24:1–4) ask Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” (Matt 19:3) Jesus answers, “Have you not read that the one who made them *at the beginning* ‘made them male and female’?” (a quote from Gen 1:27); and Jesus continues by quoting Gen 2:24: “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore [he concludes] what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matt 19:4–6) Jesus, in other words, answers the Pharisees in terms of God’s intent from the beginning—essentially pointing us to the overarching canonical narrative.

The Pharisees, however, object by asking: “Why then did *Moses* command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” (Matt 19:7). Even though the actual text of the Torah uses language of permission, not of command, Jesus does not explicitly dispute this point. Rather he resolutely frames the Torah by reference to God’s intent from creation and gives a contextual reason for the Torah’s

14 My inspiration for this way of putting things comes from Hendrick Hart, *Setting Our Sights by the Morning Star: Reflections on the Role of the Bible in Post-Modern Times* (Toronto: Patmos, 1989), 28–29. The analysis that follows, however, is my own.

15 A more contemporary analogy might be to say that we need a Global Positioning System (GPS), since a GPS does more than orient us to our destination, but also helps us navigate the lay of the land. However, I have been in situations where a GPS got me hopelessly lost, since the lay of the land had recently changed and the satellite data had not been updated.

divergence from this: “It was *because you were so hard-hearted* that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, *but from the beginning it was not so.*” (Matt 19:8) His application follows: “I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” (Matt 19:9)

In my analogy, the overarching biblical narrative functions like a *map* or a *compass* telling us which direction God wants us to travel. Let’s call this direction “north.” That is our original direction before we got off track and it is also our ultimate destination (since redemption is meant to reorient us to God’s norms for human life). However, the question is, How will we arrive at this destination, given the actual lay of the land?

From almost any location in the world, if we attempt to go directly north, there will be certain obstacles that we will need to go around—whether buildings, mountains, trees, or other objects. Travel will not typically be in a straight line. The astute traveler will thus need to be aware not only of the intended destination, but also of the roadblocks that may require us to turn aside temporarily—precisely in order to get to where we need to go. In the case of a physical journey, we may need to adjust the immediate direction of travel, perhaps first turning east or west for a while (or sometimes even south) in order to get to our intended destination.

Likewise, not all laws or moral exhortations in Scripture point due “north”; many are meant to help us negotiate the lay of the land, given the roadblocks and detours that bar the way. They point “east” or “west” and so cannot be used (out of context) as if they indicated “true north.” They are thus not *absolute* but *relative*.

It is illuminating that after Jesus makes his rather absolute-sounding application prohibiting divorce (“what God has joined together, let no one separate”; Matt 19:6), he goes on to make an exception: “I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, *except for unchastity*, and marries another commits adultery” (Matt 19:9). In other words, although Jesus specifies “north” (there should not be any divorce), he makes an exception, a concession that takes into account the lay of the land. And there are other possible roadblocks that might require even more exceptions (such as divorce in the case of spousal abuse).¹⁶

Let us now look briefly at two other case studies in Scripture before coming back to Isa 56. One of these case studies continues to address the issue of marriage, while the other begins to move closer to the question being addressed in Isa 56.

16 When we begin to apply Jesus’s teaching about divorce to our contemporary world, we will need to acknowledge another aspect of the lay of the land specific to ancient Israel, namely, that only husbands (not wives) had the right to initiate divorce proceedings; and, given the patriarchal social structure, a divorced woman was (like a widow) deprived of her means of support. This asymmetry of power may well have been a factor in Jesus’s opposition to divorce.

*A Second Case Study: Husband-Wife Relationships
in the Ephesian Household Code*

The second illuminating case study relevant to our topic is found in the injunctions concerning husbands and wives in the household code in Eph 5:21–33. The two heuristic questions to raise at the outset are: Who is commanded to “submit” (or “be subject”) to whom? And who is commanded to “love” whom?

This text begins by exhorting everyone in the church to submit to one other (Eph 5:21); this is stated as a universal principle. Then the text moves on to address the appropriate attitudes and behavior of husbands and wives.

If we start with the first question (Who is commanded to “submit” to whom?), we find a complex answer. On the one hand, everyone is to submit to (or be subject to) everyone else (Eph 5:21); on the other hand, wives are expected to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22);¹⁷ indeed, they are to do this as the church is subject to Christ (Eph 5:24). This presents a bit of a conundrum. Why is it that everyone is to submit to everyone else, yet Paul then singles out wives having to submit to their husbands?

Now for the second question: Who is commanded to “love” whom? And we might answer (correctly), that husbands are to love their wives (Eph 5:25, 28). But did we notice that the chapter begins with a universal love command (Eph 5:1–2)?

So the question arises: If we are all to love each other, and if we are all to submit to one another, why does Paul articulate the responsibilities of husbands and wives differently—in terms of *love* in the one case and *submission* (or *respect*; Eph 5:33) in the other?¹⁸

In discussing these questions, it is important to note that Eph 5 appeals to God’s creational intent by quoting Gen 2:24 (in 5:31), just as Jesus did in our previous case study. So we need to reflect on God’s creational intent for men and women; in other words, what is “true north” in terms of male-female relationships?

If we examine how the creation accounts of Gen 1 and 2 portray male-female relationships, it is clear that in Gen 1 *both* male and female are made in God’s image and they are *together* granted co-regency over the earth (Gen 1:26–28). In Gen 2 the woman is created to be a helper (‘*ēzer*) corresponding to the man (Gen 2:18). And here it would be important to unpack the typical use of “helper” (the

17 This is an implicit expectation, since the statement about wives submitting to their husbands (5:22) occurs in a dependent clause, which does not repeat the verb for “submit” or “be subject” from 5:21. A literal translation of these two verses would read: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to their husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph 5:21–22; NRSV adapted).

18 I realize that the authorship of Ephesians is a debated question in New Testament scholarship. Although I have no problem thinking it is an authentic Pauline letter, my analysis of Eph 5 does not depend on who wrote it.

noun ‘*ēzer* or the participle ‘*ozēr*) in the Old Testament, which consistently refers to one with superior power—therefore it is used of God as the helper (that is, Savior) of Israel.¹⁹ Here in Gen 2, however, the helper is meant to be an equal to the one helped, therefore the noun ‘*ēzer* is qualified by *kēnegdô* (“as his counterpart” or “as his partner”). The key point is that nowhere in the biblical creation accounts is one human being granted rule or power over another. Specifically, man is *not* granted rule over woman as part of the order of creation; this does not deny there are differences between male and female, but that there is an intended equality of power and authority between them.²⁰

However, a shift toward asymmetrical power relationships is indicated in Gen 3:16, when (as part of the consequences of the fall) we are told that the woman’s desire for the man is not reciprocated, but instead he begins to exercise dominion over her. And then this illegitimate rule is exemplified in the man naming the woman (Gen 3:20); this is precisely what he did to the animals, which proved that none of them was an equal companion for him. Naming signifies an asymmetry of power.²¹

So the beginning of unequal power relationships between men and woman is clearly (in context) part of the consequences of the primal human rebellion against God. It signifies going “south.” And it ought to be remedied by redemption, which ought to bend the direction of our journey back “north.”

Why then doesn’t Paul simply exhort the church to follow God’s creational intent as articulated in Gen 1 and 2?

Preciding for the moment from a suspicious reading of the text (and the way this text has been used to support the subjection of women), I suggest that we need to consider the first-century “lay of the land,” including the historical/cultural “roadblocks” that Paul was addressing. Given the hierarchical family structure in wealthy, elite Greco-Roman families, where the *pater familias* was husband, father, and slave master, and had absolute authority and power over everyone in the *familia*, the Ephesian household code is clearly pressing this pattern towards

19 For the use of “helper” in reference to someone coming the aid of another, see Ps 22:11 (MT 22:12); 72:12; 107:12; Isa 31:3; 63:5; Jer 47:7; Lam 1:7; Dan 11:34, 45. For God as helper of Israel, see Ps 30:10 (MT 30:11); 54:5.

20 This original equality of all people does not rule out the legitimate historical development of functional hierarchies for particular purposes (including the exercise of leadership in political, ecclesiastical, and commercial contexts, among others), but these are historically contingent developments, and are not grounded in the order of creation, and certainly not in any essential gender (or racial) qualities.

21 For a more extended analysis of the shift from Gen 2 to Gen 3 on the question of male-female relationships, see J. Richard Middleton, “From Primal Harmony to a Broken World: Distinguishing God’s Intent for Life from the Encroachment of Death in Genesis 2–3,” chap. 7 in *Earnest: Interdisciplinary Work Inspired by the Life and Teachings of B. T. Roberts*, ed. by Andrew C. Koehl and David Basinger (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 145–73.

a redemptive ethic.²² It does this by, among other things, addressing wives, children, and slaves as moral subjects, something no Greco-Roman household code ever did; such codes were addressed only to the *pater familias*, and they typically exhorted him to exert his authority, as lord and master.²³

Now Paul wants to convince the *pater familias* to change his behavior towards those over whom he had power. But Paul needs to speak carefully otherwise he might not be heard. So he articulates what we might call a compromised ethic vis-à-vis God's creational intent. In other words, he doesn't expect we can get from "south" straight to "north," since there are some obstacles to get around (and, as in the case of Jesus in Matt 19, these have to do with hardness of the human heart).

But note the rhetorical possibility that is opened up by Paul framing these *different* (seemingly unequal) instructions for husbands and wives with the prior notion of *mutual* submission (Eph 5:21) and *mutual* love (Eph 5:1). Paul's seemingly contradictory rhetoric is precisely what prods us to ask the hermeneutical question of *why* he does this.

And there is the further (ethical) question: What actually would be the *difference in practice* between *submission* and *love*, given the model Paul cites? The model is Christ, who so *loved* us, that he *submitted* himself to death on our behalf (Eph 5:25–33).

So, in contradistinction to those conservative believers who think that Ephesians 5 is enjoining a male–female hierarchy of authority (and that this hierarchy points "north") and in contradistinction to those suspicious Bible readers who think that this text is irreparably androcentric (thus pointing "south"), I suggest that Ephesians 5 (in contextualizing an ethic of human equality) may well be pointing closer to "north" than we often realize—perhaps "northwest" (if read properly, in context).

22 This, of course, is not widely recognized, either in the Caribbean or elsewhere. For a study of how the household instructions concerning slaves and women have historically been treated differently by African American interpreters, see Clarice J. Martin, "The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women,'" chap. 10 in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 201–31. Given that African American resistance to normalizing slavery has not typically spilled over into challenging the subordination of women, Martin (the first black woman in the U.S. to earn a PhD in New Testament, who was my colleague at Colgate Rochester Divinity School in the 1990s), proposes a set of hermeneutical strategies, grounded in the gospel, for engaging the household codes in the context of the rest of Scripture, along with advocating for the empowerment of black women today (228–231).

23 For an excellent summary of how Eph 5 critiques the Greco-Roman elite *familia*, see Gordon D. Fee, "The Cultural Context of Ephesians 5:18–6:9," *Priscilla Papers* 16 (2002): 3–8.

A Third Case Study: Kosher Laws and the Distinction between Israel and the Gentiles

The third case study concerns the Old Testament laws of *Kashrut* (Kosher foods) in Leviticus and how these laws (together with the hardened distinction between Israel and the gentiles) are called into question in the account of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10.

One of the emphases of the book of Leviticus is its distinction between clean and unclean animals (of which only the former may be eaten). This is summarized in the programmatic statement addressed to the priests: “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean” (Lev 10:10).

While the rationale for the distinction between clean and unclean, which undergirds the Kosher food laws, is a debated issue, it nevertheless makes sense to think that it is grounded ultimately in the distinction that God makes between Israel and the gentiles. Such a distinction is found, for example, in the Exodus plague narrative, where God spares Israel because he makes a distinction between Israel and the Egyptians (Exod 8:22–23 [MT 8:18–19]; 11:6–7). And it is strongly implied in Lev 20:22–26, which twice states that YHWH has separated Israel from the other nations (20:24, 26) and associates Israel’s distinguishing between clean and unclean animals (20:25) with not following the ways of the nations (20:23).²⁴ The laws of *Kashrut* may thus be understood as functioning to shape Israel’s sense of identity as distinct from the surrounding nations, who do not follow God’s ways.

But the clean/unclean distinction among animals, like Israel’s distinction from the nations, is not traceable back to any biblical creation account; it is not part of God’s original intent for humanity.²⁵ Thus the “lay of the land” that required the Kosher laws seems to have been the very real historical need for Israel to develop its own identity (and moral and religious life) distinct from that of its pagan neighbors—precisely in order that they might be able to impact the nations with blessing from God. In that case, laws of *Kashrut* are best understood as pointing not “north,” but “east” or “west” (to continue the metaphor). They constitute part of an interim ethic.

While this (implicit) rationale for the Kosher laws is supportable from the Old Testament, it is not until the late Second Temple period that the holy/common, clean/unclean distinctions of Leviticus came to be explicitly associated with (and superimposed upon) the distinction between Israel and the gentiles. One result is

24 The Hebrew verb for making a distinction (or separating) in Lev 10:10 and 20:24–26 (the Hiphil of *bādal*) is different from that in Exod 8:22 and 11:7 (the Hiphil of *pālāh*); but that does not affect the relevant point.

25 God, indeed, engages in acts of separation (using the Hiphil of *bādal*) in Gen 1. But while God separates realms (light from dark; waters above from waters above below; water from dry land), God is not said to separate clean from unclean animals (or groups of humans).

that many Jews refrained not just from prohibited foods, but even from fellowship with gentiles. This development provides the background for understanding Acts 10.

In Acts 10, Peter, while praying on the rooftop of the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:6, 9), becomes hungry and has a vision of many different kinds of animals being lowered down to him on a sheet, including some explicitly prohibited in the laws of Leviticus (Acts 10:11–12). When he is told by a heavenly voice to kill and eat (Acts 10:13), he objects that he has “never eaten anything that is profane or unclean” (Acts 10:14). But the voice explains: “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (Acts 10:15).

This explanation could mean that *at the beginning* of God’s creating there was no clean/unclean distinction; or it could mean that God has *now* made clean what was previously unclean. Either way, the laws of *Kashrut* are portrayed as historically contingent, without ultimate validity. And the point certainly is to prepare Peter for the arrival of a delegation from Cornelius, the God-fearing gentile (who would have been regarded as *unclean* in some quarters of Second Temple Judaism).²⁶

When the delegation has escorted Peter to Cornelius, Peter starts by citing not the Torah explicitly, but what amounts to Second Temple Jewish tradition: “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile”; but then he tells the gathered crowd what he has learned from the rooftop experience: “God has shown me that I should not call *anyone* profane or unclean” (Acts 10:28). That was the lesson of the abrogation of *Kashrut*. And to make the point even clearer, Peter adds: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.” (Acts 10:34–36)

We might say that the narrative of Acts 10 judges that the time was right to shift from traveling “east” or “west” and to start heading “north” again.

Excursus: Holiness and Separation in the Teaching of Jesus

Indeed, this is the judgment of the entire New Testament. It is evident, among other places, in the shift from *holiness* language in Jesus’s citation of the Levitical injunction: “You shall be holy as I am holy” (Lev 19:2) in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The holiness of God that we are to imitate is redefined by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel as *perfection* (Matt 5:48) and in Luke it is reconstrued as *mercy*

26 The fact that Peter is staying at the house of Simon the *tanner* (someone who works with the skins of dead animals) communicates the ironic point to the discerning reader that he was already in contact with someone who was unclean, according to Levitical law.

(Luke 6:36).²⁷ In both cases, imitating God's perfection or mercy means to love one's enemies (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27).

Now "holiness" is a perfectly good term.²⁸ Yet Jesus himself rarely used language of holiness because it was too easily misunderstood in his first century Jewish context.²⁹ The problem (the lay of the land) was that language of holiness, clearly used in the Old Testament in connection to God's separation of Israel from the nations (Lev 20:26), had come to be understood in Second Temple Judaism as having connotations of elitism and superiority. Thus, Jesus begins his teaching about love of enemies by stating: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall *love* your neighbor and *hate* your enemy'" (Matt 5:43). But this was a distortion of the original purpose of Israel's election from among the nations, which was precisely to bring blessing to them.

The legitimate separation from that which is evil (and the distinction between Israel and the gentiles, which was meant to keep Israel from being corrupted by idolatry) had hardened into an absolute distinction that prevented Israel from fulfilling their vocation to the nations. Going "west" so resolutely had itself become a roadblock to going "north."

It is significant that Jesus does not abandon the idea of Israel's radical distinction from the nations. Indeed, the heart of his critique of those who treat the "other" as an enemy (withholding love from them) is that such treatment simply copies what gentiles and sinners do (Matt 5:47; Luke 6:33–34), which is a deviation from "true north." Israel, however, should exhibit behavior *different* from the nations. God's people are to model their behavior not on fallen humans but on *God* who, as Creator, sends rain and sun on the righteous and the wicked alike (Matt 5:45), and is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked (Luke 6:35). It is only by imitating God's own radical love that we will show ourselves to be "children of the Most High" (Luke 6:35), reoriented to God's intentions from the beginning.³⁰

27 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48); "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

28 As a Wesleyan theologian, how could I think otherwise?

29 By far the majority of occurrences of the word "holy" (*hagios*) in the teaching of Jesus are in reference to the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:32; 28:19; Mark 3:29; 12:36; 13:11; Luke 11:13; 12:10, 12; John 14:26; 20:22; Acts 1:8), though we also find Jesus speaking about the "holy place" (Matt 24:15), "holy angels" (Mark 8:28; Luke 9:26), "Holy Father" (John 17:1), and "that which is holy" (Matt 7:6). For a seminal analysis of how Jesus differed from the Pharisees on the question of holiness, see Markus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (rev. ed.; New York: Trinity Press International, 1998), esp. chaps. 4 and 5. The core issue is summarized by N. T. Wright in his Foreword to the book (see xv–xvi).

30 Although the citation of Lev 19:2 in Matt 5 and Luke 6 replaces *holy* with *perfect* and *merciful* (in order to address first-century Jewish roadblocks), by the time we get to 1 Peter, which is addressed to the gentile church of the diaspora, there seems to be no more problem with using holiness language. Thus we find the exhortation: "as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Pet 1:15).

*A Fourth Case Study: Foreigners and Eunuchs in Israel (and the Temple)*³¹

So now we come back to Isa 56 and its contentious relationship to Neh 13 in the social context of postexilic Yehud (the province of imperial Persia that was roughly equivalent to Judah of old, though reduced in area).³²

The point of contention between these texts is that, although they both seem to be responding to Deut 23:3–6 (MT 23:4–7), which prohibits Ammonites and Moabites from being admitted to the congregation of Israel (because of how they treated Israel on the wilderness journey, in the time of Moses), they each respond quite differently. Whereas Neh 13 (which explicitly cites Deut 23) enjoins the divorce of foreign women *from any nations* who had married Jewish men, Isa 56 (which has only an implicit relation to Deut 23) goes in the opposite direction and argues *against* the exclusion of foreigners from Israel—so long as they worship YHWH.³³

The mention of *eunuchs* in Isa 56 suggests that the prophet is aware of returning Israelites who have compromised the wholeness of their sexuality, perhaps by working in the royal palace in Babylon in proximity to the king's harem. They were likely court officials who had been made eunuchs. They no longer bear the distinctive mark of circumcision in their flesh. Should they then be excluded from the covenant people and from temple worship now that they have returned to the land? Likewise, is there no place for God-fearing *foreigners* who desire to worship the God of Israel?

On the contrary, Isa 56 welcomes them both, with the proviso that they keep covenant with YHWH, especially the Sabbath. If they do, *eunuchs*, who have no biological descendants to carry on their name, will be given a memorial or monument and a name within the temple, by God himself, better than sons and daughters—a name that will never be cut off.³⁴ And faithful *foreigners* who desire even to be *priests* in the temple (for that seems to be the thrust of the text) will find that

31 Whereas Isaiah 56 addresses the inclusion of foreigners *in the temple*, Neh 13 seems to be focused on excluding foreigners from *the community of Israel*. This ambiguity or variation can be traced back to Deut 23:3, which speaks of excluding Ammonites and Moabites from the “assembly” or “congregation” (*qāhāl*) of Israel, where *qāhāl* can refer to the worshipping community, thus linking it to the temple (though it is not limited to that meaning).

32 For an excellent study of Isa 56 in its literary context, see Raymond de Hoop, “The Interpretation of Isaiah 56:1–9: Comfort of Criticism?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127.4 (2008): 671–95.

33 Just to complicate matters, we might ask how the divorcing of foreign wives in Neh 13 fits with Jesus's teaching on divorce in his discussion with the Pharisees (which we examined earlier). Or, just to stay with the Old Testament, we might wonder how Neh 13 fits with YHWH's proclamation through the prophet Malachi, “I hate divorce” (Mal 2:16). This pronouncement comes in the context of challenging Israelite men concerning “the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal 2:14). “I hate divorce,” found in almost all modern English translations, is literally “He hates sending away” (the traditional translation requires emending the Hebrew verb for “he hates” to the first person singular and translating “sending away” contextually).

34 Note that “a monument and a name” (*yād vāšēm*) in Isa 56:5 has become the title of the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem—Yad Vashem.

God accepts their sacrifices—for, says the LORD, “my house shall be called a house of prayer for *all peoples*” (Isa 56:7). This rationale, which Jesus quotes when he overturns the tables of the moneychangers in the temple (Mark 11:15–17), seems to have its eye on the larger narrative framework of the biblical canon, which envisions God’s desire for the flourishing of all nations and peoples.³⁵

Here we may ask what direction Isa 56 and Neh 13 are pointing. Indeed, what direction does Deut 23 point? Given that God is the Creator of all humanity (Gen 1 and 2) and desires the blessing of the nations (Gen 12), it makes sense to consider the flourishing of all humanity as “north” (the destination we need to begin moving towards). In that case, perhaps we could say that Deut 23:3–6 (for whatever legitimate historical reasons) is pointing “west.” Then Neh 13 points even further away from God’s original normative intentions, perhaps “southwest” (or even directly “south”).³⁶

So the question arises of *why* Neh 13 interprets and applies Deut 23 the way it does. What *roadblocks* is the text trying to steer clear of? What was the cultural and religious context of Nehemiah, the *lay of the land* that this text has its eyes on, so to speak?

A significant part of the answer to this question would include the sense of tremendous loss on the part of postexilic Israel (their history in tatters), yet with the opportunity to start over after exile. But this second chance that Israel has received is combined with an overriding desire *not* to make the same mistakes this time, namely, assimilating to the cultural and religious practices of the surrounding nations (which is precisely what brought about the exile as God’s judgment in the first place). Indeed, Neh 13 explicitly cites the case of Solomon, who married foreign women, which resulted in the introduction of idolatry into Israel (Neh 13:26).

It is this desire to avoid idolatry that generates a deep anxiety on the part of the leadership of the returnees about the presence of anyone of foreign descent among the people. This anxiety can be seen not just in the over-interpretation of the Deut 23 injunction in Neh 13:1–3, but also later in the chapter where Nehemiah is upset because Jewish men “had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples” (Neh 13:23–24).

35 It is possible that the promise of Jesus to the church in Philadelphia in Rev 3 is based on the promises given to eunuchs and foreigners in Isa 56: “If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name” (Rev 3:12).

36 Note that immediately following the verses on the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites, Deut 23 goes on to enjoin *different* (more positive) treatment for Edomites and Egyptians (Deut 23:7–8 [MT 23:8–9]).

Indeed, Nehemiah is so upset that he “contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair” and made them swear an oath in the name of God that they wouldn’t allow their children to intermarry with foreigners (Neh 13:25).

A similar anxiety (might we say xenophobia?) also surfaces in Ezra 9:1–4, which is placed narratively about thirteen years earlier than Neh 13, but still in the context of Israel’s postexilic return to the land. Here Ezra is greatly exercised about the intermarriage of Israelites (including priests and Levites) with the peoples of different lands, which has resulted in the “holy seed” becoming mixed (Ezra 9:1–2).³⁷ In response to this practice of intermarriage, Ezra explains: “I tore my garment and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice” (Ezra 9:3–4). Both Ezra 9 and Neh 13 make it clear that their primary concern was the idolatry that tends to accompany intermarriage with those from outside of Israel.

It is particularly significant that Ezra 9:4 uses the expression “all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel” to refer to those who were appalled at intermarriage with foreigners, since similar language is used in an oracle found in the very postexilic section of Isaiah (chaps. 56–66) that contains the encouragement to foreigners and eunuchs (Isa 56:1–8).

The oracle in question (Isa 66:1–2) begins with YHWH challenging those who would rebuild the Jerusalem temple as a “house” for God, since as Creator of heaven and earth he already has a “house” (heaven is God’s throne, earth is God’s footstool—the entire *cosmos* is God’s temple).³⁸ Given that the rebuilding of the temple (recounted primarily in Ezra 1–6) was a significant part of the rebuilding of Jerusalem (which was Nehemiah’s mission), and that his rebuilding was supported by Ezra, the teacher of the Torah, it becomes clear that there is a disagreement between Ezra-Nehemiah and the postexilic section of Isaiah (chaps. 56–66)

37 It is troubling that this text about the mixing of the “holy seed” is typically appealed to by white supremacists in their efforts to keep the so-called Aryan race “pure.” It is cited (along with other biblical texts about mixed marriages) in a section of the following Ku Klux Klan website about “Race Mixing” (<http://www.wckkkk.org/nature.html>). The Ku Klux Klan was originally founded in the 1860s in response to the era of Reconstruction in the American south, when the U.S. government was attempting to establish economic and political freedom for blacks after slavery. The current incarnation of the Klan is a post-World War II phenomenon, initially focused around opposition to the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

38 I have addressed the theme of the cosmos as God’s intended temple in a number of places, including J. Richard Middleton, “The Role of Human Beings in the Cosmic Temple: The Intersection of Worldviews in Psalms 8 and 104,” *Canadian Theological Review* 2.1 (2013): 44–58; “Image of God,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, vol. 2, ed. by Samuel E. Ballentine et al. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 516–23; *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, chap. 2 (esp. 37–50) and chap. 8 (esp. 163–76); and *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), chap. 2 (esp. 74–90).

concerning the Jerusalem temple. But the issue for Isa 56–66 is not simply the *fact* of the temple, but *how it was being used* to exclude some from access to the congregation of Israel, particularly eunuchs (Isa 56:4–5) and foreigners (Isa 56:6–7).

Having challenged those rebuilding the temple (Isa 66:1–2a), YHWH goes on to speak a word of assurance and comfort to one group among the returning exiles: “But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, *who trembles at my word*” (Isa 66:2b). In the context of Isa 56–66, this group is precisely those who were being excluded from the temple.

Since the language of *trembling at God’s word* (which signifies taking what God says seriously) is found in Ezra 9:4 and Isa 66:2b—and nowhere else in the Bible—we are justified in thinking that the expression was in use during the postexilic period, after Israel had returned to the land.³⁹ But given that the *referent* of those who tremble at God’s word in our two texts is not the same (indeed, they are diametrically opposite), we may fruitfully take Isa 56–66 and Ezra–Nehemiah as representing two sides of a debate about what constitutes genuine faithfulness to God in roughly the same historical context.⁴⁰ That is, these two sets of texts disagree profoundly about *which word from God* we are to tremble at.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, in line with previous Scriptures emphasizing the separation of Israel from the nations, assume that God continues to desire such separation, resulting in the exclusion of foreigners from the Jewish returnees. Isa 56, however, proclaims in no uncertain terms that this is not God’s will in the postexilic situation: “Let *not* the foreigner joined to the LORD say, ‘The LORD [is the one who] will surely separate me from his people’” (Isa 56:3; NRSV adapted).⁴¹ Where Nehemiah and Ezra seem to hyperfocus on protecting the identity of Israel, turning a blind eye to the overarching purpose of Israel’s election, Isa 56 understands the Jerusalem temple (like the people of Israel) as having a mediational function, intended to connect the nations to the one God of creation.⁴²

We may wonder, then, if it is just that the two sides of this postexilic debate are focused on different *landscapes* or whether they are, in fact, using different *maps* or *compasses* entirely, which results in understanding the ultimate destination of

39 It is, however, possible that the expression was not in widespread use, but that Isa 66:2a is responding specifically to its use by Ezra.

40 My thanks to Walter Brueggemann for stimulating my thinking on this subject in a lecture he gave in the early 1990s.

41 It is significant that Isa 56:3 uses the very verb for “separate” (the Hiphil of *bādal*) that is used for YHWH separating Israel from the nations in Lev 20:24 and 26 (among other texts), in order to *deny* that YHWH is the one behind the separation of foreigners in the postexilic period.

42 Note that in Isa 65 YHWH passes judgment on “a rebellious people” (Isa 65:2), those who tell others: “Keep to yourself, / do not come near me, for I am too holy for you” (Isa 65:5). Or, in the famous language of the KJV, they declare: “I am holier than thou.”

the journey differently. After all, not everyone reads the canonical thrust of Scripture the same way—the direction of “true north” is itself contested.

The Ethiopian Eunuch in Light of the Isaiah-Nehemiah Conflict

One New Testament text that may well be a commentary on Isa 56 is the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–39.⁴³ Here we have someone who fits both of the categories addressed in Isa 56:3–8 (a foreigner who is also a eunuch). And, significantly, “he had come to Jerusalem to worship” (Acts 8:27), presumably in the temple. Do we need to wonder what sort of reception he received?

This eunuch, we are told, “was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah” (Acts 8:28). The specific passage turns out to be Isa 53:7–8, which describes the suffering servant of YHWH, who was humiliated and had been denied justice (Acts 8:30).

What might have piqued the Ethiopian eunuch’s interest in this figure? Could it have been his own experience of humiliation when he attempted to enter the temple to worship the God of Israel? In Isa 53 he found a reference to someone in the Jewish Scriptures who had also been humiliated and was persecuted by his contemporaries. He could identify with this figure. No wonder the eunuch asks Philip about who this might be—the prophet himself or someone else (Acts 8:35). And starting with this Scripture, Philip “proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

But what made the Ethiopian eunuch think he might be welcomed at the Jerusalem temple in the first place? It makes eminent sense to think that he had been reading Isa 56:3–8, which announced God’s welcome of eunuchs and foreigners. If reading Isa 56 had encouraged him to seek the God of Israel, this may explain how he later (on the way home) encountered the passage about the suffering servant in Isa 53; after all, the texts are only three chapters apart.

But the eunuch had clearly not read Ezra or Nehemiah (or Deut 23, for that matter). He knew only one side of this ancient debate, and it was not the side that had won the day in first-century Israel among those who controlled access to the temple.

43 Although the eunuch is called an Ethiopian (Greek *Aithiops*), we should not automatically think that his refers to present day Ethiopia, which in biblical times was known as Abyssinia, not Ethiopia. *Aithiops* is the standard Greek translation for “Cush” in the Greek Old Testament. Edwin M. Yamauchi has shown why this most likely referred to the ancient nation of Nubia (today’s Sudan, between Egypt and Ethiopia). See Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), chap. 6: “Why the Ethiopian Eunuch Was Not from Ethiopia” (161–81). But even if he was not from present day Ethiopia, the eunuch may well have been the channel for the spread of the church to Africa, which then led to the founding of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. We might regard that as a possible fulfillment of the words of Isa 56:5 about “a monument and a name” for faithful eunuchs. But beyond that, the very narrative about the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 has fulfilled that promise.

Although Jesus himself taught a message of radical love and welcome, even for enemies (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27) and explicitly quoted Isa 56:7, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mark 11:17), the episode about the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 comes before Jesus’s radical message had been consciously worked out in the communal ethics of the early Christian movement. So Philip’s sharing the good news about Jesus with the eunuch (prompted by the Spirit) is an anticipatory example of reaching out to the gentiles, predating Peter’s important insight (in Acts 10) about the place of God-fearing gentiles in the plan of God.

The Jerusalem Council as an Example of Biblical Decision-Making

Indeed, it was not until Acts 15 that the early church called a council to formally and explicitly grapple with the status of gentiles in the growing Jesus movement. Here, in the famous Jerusalem council, we find the early church debating whether gentiles who wanted to join the Jesus movement needed to become Jews first.

The issue was sparked by some of the early Jesus followers who claimed that salvation—even for gentiles—depended on their being circumcised (in the case of men) in accordance with the law of Moses (Acts 15:1). We are told that Paul and Barnabas had quite a dispute with this group, and that as a result they were sent as a delegation to the mother church in Jerusalem to discuss the question with the apostles and elders there (Acts 15:2).

On the way there (as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria) Paul and Barnabas “reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers” (Acts 15:3). And then, when they arrived in Jerusalem, “they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them” (Acts 15:4). The consistent refrain so far is that Paul and Barnabas have been reporting the conversion of the gentiles as a significant fact to which they can testify.

But in Jerusalem, they were again opposed by some of the believers (associated with the Pharisaic movement), who claimed that the gentiles needed to be circumcised “and ordered to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:4). This was, after all, the authoritative Jewish tradition of what faithfulness to God involved. So “the apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter” (Acts 15:6).

What is particularly interesting is how the decision-making is narrated. First of all, Peter speaks (Acts 15:7–11), then Barnabas and Paul follow (Acts 15:12); all three testify to the fact that gentiles have been converted to the gospel of Jesus. Finally, James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, says his piece—quoting Scripture and rendering a verdict (Acts 15:13–21).

Peter, the first to speak, begins by reminding his audience that God chose him to bring the good news to the gentiles (an allusion to the events of Acts 10) and he

reports their conversion, claiming that God has “testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit” (Acts 15:8), “cleansing their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). Based on this *appeal to experience* (the claim that God has already been working among the gentiles, apart from circumcision), Peter recommends that the yoke of the law of Moses should not be placed on the necks of these new disciples (Acts 15:10), since this would amount to putting God to the test (Acts 15:9).

Then Barnabas and Paul speak, and although their words are not quoted, we are informed that, “the whole assembly kept silence, and listened to [them] as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles” (Acts 15:12). This is, again, an appeal to experience. For many contemporary Christians, including the Caribbean church, this is a bit disconcerting. Shouldn’t we begin with what the Bible definitively teaches, and subordinate our experience to that teaching?

It is only at this point that James begins to speak, and (thankfully) he brings Scripture into the mix. But he doesn’t start with Scripture, as we might hope. Instead, he begins by affirming the report given by Peter, namely, that “God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). So far there have been four cases of highlighting human experience (Acts 15:3, 4, 8–9, 14). It thus seems like a bit of an anti-climax when James notes that “this agrees with the words of the prophets” (Acts 15:15).

And then the prophetic text he quotes is an obscure one from Amos 9:11–12, which doesn’t even match what we find in the Hebrew Bible, on which our Old Testament is based. James seems to be quoting from a version of the Greek Septuagint (LXX), which speaks more clearly of the turning of the gentiles to the God of Israel than the Hebrew text did (and even then he seems to have modified the quotation somewhat).⁴⁴

But the real problem is not that the LXX text James quotes is different from the Hebrew, nor even that James (or Luke, the author of Acts) may have adapted the

44 It turns out that almost all Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are from some version of the LXX or other early Greek translation (rather than the Hebrew); and New Testament authors often seem to adapt the original in small ways (though some of what seem like adaptations may simply reflect a different textual tradition, since what we call the LXX is not a single Greek translation, but a variety of textual traditions, some of which were similar to Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran). The LXX that we find bound with the New Testament in various fourth and fifth century codices is an expanded, synthetic text, based on the *Hexapla* of the church father Origen. In the late AD 230s Origen compiled his Old Testament in six columns (thus *Hexapla*), with the Hebrew consonantal text in one column, a transliteration of the Hebrew into Greek characters in column 2, the Greek versions of Aquila, Symmacus, and Thodotian as columns 3, 4, and 6, with column 5 being a version of the LXX (as Origen reconstructed it, often supplemented with phrasing from the other ancient Greek versions). Although Origen used a number of textual notations to indicate both the changes he had made and how the Greek differed from the Hebrew, it was this harmonized Greek text in column 5, devoid of textual notations, that ended up becoming the *de facto* LXX in later generations.

LXX text to his purposes.⁴⁵ Both the citation of the LXX rather than the Hebrew and the adaptation of quotations by New Testament authors is standard practice, well known to biblical scholars.⁴⁶

More troubling for many contemporary readers of Acts 15 is that the appeal to Scripture by James seems to be an add-on to the primary appeal to human experience by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. What justifies this appeal to experience even *before* the appeal to Scripture?⁴⁷

And, beyond that, what justifies this *very selective* use of Scripture? If James could appeal to Amos 9 for the inclusion of the gentiles, couldn't his opponents have appealed to a broad swath of Scriptures that speak to God's separation of his chosen people from the nations (as in Leviticus) and even for the explicit exclusion of gentiles (such as Ezra-Nehemiah)? And what about those prophetic texts that suggest that Israel will rule over the gentiles, so that the situation of the nations oppressing Israel will be reversed in the age to come?⁴⁸ How would James—or anyone else—know *which* Scriptures were applicable to the situation in Jerusalem?

Let me state upfront that I do not think that the procedures of the Jerusalem council—beginning with human experience, and only then bringing Scripture to bear on the question—support either relativism (equivalent to a simplistic appeal to experience as absolute) or proof-texting (selecting only favored Scriptures,

45 For details about the form of the LXX used by James at the Jerusalem council, including an analysis of the changes that James (or Luke) made, see W. Edward Glenny, "The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22.1 (2012): 10–15 (full article 1–26). Glenny notes that James's phrase "the words of the prophets" (plural) may have been intentional, since not only was the LXX of Amos 9:11–12 already influenced by another prophetic text that speaks of the conversion of the gentiles (Zech 8:22–23), but the quotation in Acts 15 draws on phrasing from various prophetic texts with a similar theme, including Hos 3:5 (changing "In that day" to "after this" in Amos 9:11), Jer 12:15 (the addition of "I will return" in Amos 9:11), Zech 8:22 (specifying that it is "the Lord" that the nations will seek, in Amos 9:12), and Isa 45:21 (inserting the phrase "known from long ago," so that the Lord "who *does* these things" becomes the Lord "who *makes* these things *known from long ago*" at the end of Amos 9:12 [the verb *poieō* can mean to *do* or to *make*]). For a discussion of how (and possibly why) the LXX of Amos 9:11–12 is rendered differently from the Hebrew, see Glenny, 3–10.

46 For a lucid summary, see Timothy Michael Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 8: "The Septuagint behind the New Testament" and chap. 9: "The Septuagint in the New Testament." Although most Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are from earlier versions of the LXX, the quote from Zech 12:10 in John 19:37 is identical to the later Greek text of Theodotion (which meant that Theodotion was using this form of the Old Greek as the basis for his translation).

47 A helpful essay on the Jerusalem council is Sylvia C. Keesmaat, "Welcoming the Gentiles: A Biblical Model of Decision Making," in *Living Together in the Church: Including Our Differences*, ed. Greig Dunn and Chris Ambidge (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 2004), 30–49.

48 Christopher Zoccali notes that there are two general prophetic understandings of Israel's future relationship to the nations. One envisions Israel's "service to other nations," a process where they are restored to equity with Israel. But the other prophetic understanding focuses on Israel's "abiding privilege," which sometimes involves the nations submitting to Israel, who will rule them with a rod of iron. See Zoccali, *Whom God Has Called: The Relationship of Church and Israel in Pauline Interpretation, 1920 to the Present* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 160–62.

which support our own agenda). Clearly, the statement of the council, “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28), suggests a communal process of active listening to what the Spirit has been saying in and through the lives of those who are being transformed by this Spirit (the undeniable fact of gentile conversion is the starting point of the discussion). But this communal discernment of the current situation (the lay of the land, if you will) is undergirded by an implicit, though astute, reading of Israel’s canonical “map” (the overall narrative thrust of Scripture, which indicates the direction of “north”).

Certainly, this map-exploration (Scripture searching) is not explicit in Acts 15. But that is because the early church had been struggling, from its origin, with trying to understand why Jesus, the Messiah, was rejected by his own people, and what it meant for them to follow this one who was crucified and is now risen from the dead.⁴⁹ The church came to understand that the very trajectory of Scripture was summed up in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and future parousia of Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, the identity of the church, as the followers of this Messiah, had to be worked out by grappling with the Scriptures in order to understand the very meaning of their existence as God’s people.

Jesus himself, on the road to Emmaus, explained to two of his followers something he had been emphasizing to the Twelve on previous occasions (Matt 16:21; 17:22–23 26:1–2; Mark 8:31; 9:30–31; Luke 9:22; 18:31–33), that it was “necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory” (Luke 24:26). And “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27).

Likewise, Paul passed on to the church in Corinth what he had received as of first importance, “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor 15:3–5). And we saw that Philip came alongside the Ethiopian eunuch who had been reading from Isa 53, “and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). The church, in other words, had been struggling since its inception with how the complex Scriptures they had inherited cohered in the person of the Messiah Jesus.

This grounding of the Christ event in the Scriptures is not proof-texting. Rather, the interweaving of multiple scriptural quotations, echoes, and allusions throughout the New Testament discloses a profound reading of the Scriptures as telling a

49 We might say they were trying to put together their inherited map (the Scriptures) with the lay of the land they were confronted with (the Christ event, in all its complexity).

coherent story of God's purposes for the world.⁵⁰ I judge that some version of the plot analysis sketched earlier in this essay had already been discerned by the early church and was in play when the apostles and elders convened in Jerusalem.

The situation in Acts 15 is thus no different from our own communal discernment today, when we try to understand how Scripture (inspired by the Holy Spirit) addresses the church in its contemporary situation, faced with new contextual challenges. We encounter the same bewildering array of biblical texts, which often point in different directions. And, like the early Christians, we are confronted with various groups in the church using different texts to advance divergent interpretations of the way forward.

Faithful Improvisation as the Path Forward

Brian Walsh and I previously used an adapted form of N. T. Wright's model of a five-act biblical drama (consisting in *Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, and the Church*) as a helpful way to think about how God's people might live out our calling in a postmodern world.⁵¹ Wright suggests that we are currently in the midst of the fifth act of the biblical drama, equivalent to the epoch of the *Church*. More and more writers have been using Wright's model (often following our addition of a sixth act, the *Consummation*) in order to articulate how it is possible to be faithful to the biblical story in a new historical and cultural context.⁵²

Here it will be helpful to summarize Wright's model, in order to apply it to the Jerusalem Council and to our own context today. Wright invites us to imagine a previously unknown play by Shakespeare that had been lost, but is now discovered, perhaps in an attic somewhere in England. This would not only generate great excitement among Shakespeare fans, but many Shakespeare repertoire com-

50 Richard B. Hays has helpfully illuminated the way in which Old Testament quotations, echoes, and allusions are interwoven into the New Testament. See *Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014); and *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

51 N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7–32. For our adaptation of Wright's model, see J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 182–84.

52 Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen employ our suggestion of a sixth act in *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 14, 22, though they acknowledge their dependence only in a footnote (235, n. 6). Kevin Vanhoozer also adapts Wright's model to add the *Consummation* as a separate act but prefers to see *Fall* as part of the first act (*Creation*), thus ending up (like Wright) with a five-act drama. See Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model" in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 151–99 (see esp. 173–74).

panies would want to put on the play. The trouble is that this five-act play is incomplete. The script breaks off somewhere during the fifth act.⁵³

This, Wright suggests, is similar to the Bible, in that the script (the biblical record) ends soon after Act 5 gets going, near the conclusion of the first century (we could consider the first century church as equivalent to Act 5, Scene 1). Here is where the suggestion of a sixth act makes sense, since we have glimmerings (in the book of Revelation, and elsewhere) of the culmination of the biblical drama in a new heaven and new earth, when sin and evil are vanquished, the nations are gathered in, and creation is healed. But we live now between the times, after the fifth act has begun, but before the sixth.

Our situation is analogous to that of a repertoire company that wants to stage the unfinished Shakespeare play. What would be the best approach? In the case of the Shakespeare play, three possibilities come to mind. First, someone could finish writing the fifth act. The trouble is that this would put in finalized, fixed form an ending to the drama that might not cohere with what the playwright had in mind. A second alternative would be for a Shakespeare repertoire company to stage the play and when the script ends they could just stop. But that would be terribly unsatisfying, both for the actors and the audience.

There is, however, a third option, somewhere between the fixity of the first option and the unsatisfying predicament of the second. “Better, it might be felt,” explains Wright, “to give the key parts to highly trained, sensitive and experienced Shakespearean actors, who would immerse themselves in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, *and who would then be told to work out a fifth act for themselves.*”⁵⁴

The actors, in other words, would have to *improvise* an ending. But this ending would need to be consistent with the play so far. Different groups of actors would undoubtedly improvise *different* endings. But for these various endings to have validity, as legitimate (though not identical) improvisations of *this particular play*, the actors would need to immerse themselves in the script, practicing their roles until they come to an intuitive understanding of the various characters and their motivations. They would especially need to have a solid grasp of where the plot is going, with a sense of what might be appropriate in the scenes that follow.

Wright notes that the extant script would function as the “authority” for the actors, in that “anyone could properly object to the new improvisation on the grounds that this or that character was now behaving inconsistently, or that this or that sub-plot or theme, adumbrated earlier, had not reached its proper resolution.”⁵⁵

53 Wright’s essay is available online (<http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/how-can-the-bible-be-authoritative/>) and as a downloadable PDF (<http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/how-can-the-bible-be-authoritative-the-laing-lecture-for-1989>).

54 Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?,” 18; emphasis original.

55 Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?,” 18–19.

But he also cautions that the authority of the script does not mean that the actors are simply to repeat earlier parts of the play *ad infinitum*. Since the script has “its own impetus, its own forward movement,” this would lay a demand on the actors to take the creative risk of improvisation.

As anyone who has ever done improv theater or musical improvisation (whether jazz, blues, reggae, rock, or bluegrass) is aware, there is nothing arbitrary about *good* improvisation. It requires significant rehearsal time. Whereas improv theater involves intensive practice of multiple routines, as well as a sense of where the particular dramatic piece is going, musical improvisation requires regular practice of scales (until they are part of muscle memory), as well as a solid understanding of the underlying structure of the given musical piece.

When we apply this to the sort of improvisation required for *faithfulness* to the biblical drama, we might suggest that Christians need to have significant engagement with Scripture in its breadth (grasping its overarching narrative trajectory) and in its depth (attending to textual details). And such engagement cannot be limited to Bible study (whether formal or informal), but should include participation in the church’s liturgy (its patterns of worship), as well as participation in a life of discipleship, as we seek to embody the non-negotiable directives that Scripture provides (to the extent that we can discern such directives).

And then, when we come to those issues that Scripture does not explicitly address, where there is literally no script (which applies to a great deal of contemporary life), or where the direction Scripture gives is complex and even confusing—at that point improvisation comes into play. Such improvisation would need to be consistent with the direction of the biblical script so far and faithful to the Author’s plot intentions. But it would also need to take into account the current lay of the land.

It is no good for any one group of Christians to claim that they simply live out the script of the Bible, while other groups are making things up as they go along (this might well have been the attitude of the Ezra-Nehemiah group to the “deviant” perspective articulated by Isa 56–66). If we are honest with ourselves, we will recognize (and thus admit) that we are *all* engaged in improvisation. No one lives purely out of the Bible, unaffected by their context.

If we think about it, the church has been improvising on the script of the biblical drama for two millennia now. Some of that improvisation has been consistent with the script and, at the same time, innovative, opening up new avenues of faithfulness (such as the abolition of slavery by European Christians in the nineteenth century and, prior to that, the pervasive resistance to slavery by African Christians in the Caribbean). However, some of the church’s improvisation has been mixed or even sub-par, perhaps retarding or even impeding the fulfill-

ment of the biblical plot. Indeed, some of the church's improvisation over the centuries may be judged to have flatly contradicted the basic thrust of Scripture.

The question, therefore, is not *whether* we are improvising, but whether our improvisation is *faithful* to God's purposes in the biblical drama, given the present lay of the land.

The Faithful Improvisation of the Jerusalem Council—and Beyond

The result of the Jerusalem council's deliberations, after having heard the testimony of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, is James's decision "that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:19–20). This list, which may be intended to echo aspects of the so-called Noahide laws (which Jews understood as applying to all people), is repeated in the letter sent with Paul and Barnabas (along with two other representatives) to the church in Antioch (Acts 15:28–29).

Given this momentous decision (which exempts gentile converts from circumcision and counsels them to avoid eating food offered to idols), it is fascinating that when Paul later improvises on these themes in his letters to the churches, he seems to have a more lax attitude to the matter of food offered to idols (1 Cor 8:1–13; also Col 2:16–17) and he claims that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision *nor* *uncircumcision* counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal 5:6; also 1 Cor 7:18–19).

In both cases (food offered to idols and circumcision), Paul's point is that concern for the well-being of others is more important than particular rules (and is especially more important than our own agendas). But Paul never loosens the ruling about avoiding sexual immorality—though, unlike many in the church today, he does not highlight sexual sin as greater than any other sort (see the list of sins in Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:3–6).

Admittedly, the different (even contrary) ethical injunctions in Scripture can be disorienting for Christians seeking definitive guidance for contemporary living.⁵⁶ And the fragmented and often oppressive social realities with which we are confronted (in the Caribbean and elsewhere) make it difficult to discern a clear path ahead. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge one significant way in which the Bible is *different* from an unfinished play by Shakespeare. Unlike Shakespeare, the Author of Scripture is still with us to provide guidance in our improvisation.

56 Beyond these contrary ethical injunctions, the textual variants between the Hebrew and Greek sources available to the early Christians can be confusing for modern Bible readers, who assume a singular "Old Testament"; and this is even apart from the relative fluidity of *which* texts counted as "Scripture" for different Christian groups prior to the closing of the Old Testament canon (indeed, there are different canons for Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox communions today). There is really no way around it; the church has *always* been improvising.

The presence of the Author at the Jerusalem Council is evident in the famous words that preface the ruling that was passed on to the church in Antioch: “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit would remind them about his teaching (John 14:26) and would lead them into all truth, orienting them to what is yet to come (John 16:13).

The question for the church today in the Caribbean (indeed, for the church throughout the world) is whether we are attending to the overall direction of the biblical drama, while taking into account the complex lay of the land—all the while listening to the prodding of the Holy Spirit. Only then will we be led into innovative, yet faithful enactment of the next scene in the unfolding drama of God’s redemption, in the context of our fractured and hurting world.

“Him Little but Him Tallawah”: Dirt, the Dynamics of Disgust, and the Hospitality of the Spirit in Acts 10¹

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Abstract

British social anthropologist Mary Douglas asserted that one of the universals of human cultural activity is the establishment and maintenance of the categories of “clean” and “unclean.” These categories are used to *sociologically regulate* the moral boundaries of a cultural group and express the moral integrity of a larger narrative that shapes and guides human action. In addition to sociologically regulating the boundaries of a cultural group, the categories of clean and unclean inform the emotions of disgust and contempt. These are expulsive emotions that serve to *psychologically regulate* the actions of a social group, alerting members to threats that might contaminate the purity (and thus the legitimacy) of their moral world, a moral world that confers upon members of the group the critical needs of physical security and social significance. This paper will utilize the categories of clean and unclean and the dynamics of disgust and contamination as a lens through which to interpret the story of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10. Our goal will be to more deeply understand the inclusive nature of the atonement, the ethics of the kingdom preached by Jesus, and the identity and work of the Spirit in the world. Suggestions will be made as to how this story might inform the role

1 This essay is an expansion of a presentation prepared for the conference “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, Kingston, Jamaica, September 9, 2017. I owe a debt of thanks to J. Richard Middleton for reading a first draft of this essay and for offering some very helpful and substantive suggestions that have improved its substance and style. The patois title of this essay is a Jamaican proverb, suggested by Middleton. For those not of Jamaican heritage, it is worth explaining that “tallawah” means powerful. So the title contains a double entendre (one of my favorite lyrical devices in Trinidadian calypso). On the one hand “dirt” or uncleanness is a small but powerful notion that deeply influences all forms of social organization; on the other hand, the Spirit is a quiet but powerful agent in the transforming of human relations toward God’s purposes of human flourishing, justice, and shalom. As this essay will develop, the Spirit often transforms the notions of clean and unclean in order to accomplish God’s work toward these ends. God’s Spirit is ultimately more “tallawah” than our distorted categories of clean and unclean.

of language, music, and the arts in worship, and the posture of the Christian community toward the poor.

The encounter between Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 is a significant event in the narrative flow of the book of Acts and, indeed, in the Christian story as a whole. It records a pivotal development in the identity of the early Christian community, where the *praxis* of the Spirit in the baptism of Cornelius leads, in Acts 15, to some far-reaching contextual theologizing by the Jerusalem Council. This theologizing radically transforms the demographics of the Christian church and the way in which the early Christian communities understood the nature and scope of the redemptive work of Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

New Testament scholar Beverly Gaventa says that Acts 10 is “the climactic moment of the first half of Acts.”² Ben Witherington notes its significance beyond the book of Acts to the broader Christian story, in that it constitutes “another step along the way toward a more universal religion, universal both in its geographical and social scope.”³ But it is Willie James Jennings who highlights the cosmic significance of this encounter when he suggests that Peter’s residency in Joppa with Simon the Tanner portends an “earth shattering future” that is set in motion by a revolution; a revolution that “descends on a sheet.”⁴ As such, Acts 10 describes an encounter “that makes intelligible everything before and after it.”⁵

In this essay, I plan to follow Jennings’s take on Acts 10. I understand his “before and after” as extending as far back as creation, and as far forward as the eschaton. What the Spirit does in this chapter functions as a window into the identity of God, the nature of redemption, and the future of creation. And this cannot be understood apart from the socio-cultural categories of “clean” and “unclean,” which are central to the narrative; nor can this be understood apart from the related dynamics involved in the psychology of disgust.⁶ I am working with the assumption that the categories of clean and unclean, along with the emotion of disgust, provide the sociological and psychological substructure of the narrative in Acts 10 (and for much of Jesus’ prophetic ministry as well).

My interest in Acts 10 is not primarily Jesus, but the Spirit—though the ministry of one cannot be understood apart from the other. The Spirit, like the Son, initiates a revolutionary encounter in this narrative, one that transforms the

2 Beverly R. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 162.

3 Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 340.

4 Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 101, 105.

5 Jennings, *Acts*, 103.

6 My analysis of the psychology of disgust is deeply indebted to the reflections of Richard Beck in *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

self-understanding of Peter and Cornelius, and ripples out from there to change the demographics of the Christian community in a radical fashion. It is an encounter between the clean and the unclean that collapses the sociological and psychological boundaries between them—and this collapse is a manifestation of God’s unfolding kingdom. That encounter tells us something about the identity and work of the Spirit, and how we might identify and participate in that work today. I will make some brief suggestions towards this end at the close of this essay, with particular reference to the Caribbean context.

But first let us consider the sociological categories of clean and unclean, along with the psychological dynamics of disgust and contamination, dynamics that operate on the basis of these sociological categories. Then we will come to Acts 10, with special attention to these categories and dynamics, followed by some reflections on what this narrative and these dynamics tell us about the identity and work of the Spirit—and, by extension, about the Christian community that is empowered to participate in the Spirit’s mission of extending God’s kingdom through the renewal of creation.

Cultural Narratives and Moral Boundaries

No one has explored how the categories of clean and unclean shape social life and infuse it with meaning more than British social anthropologist Mary Douglas. Her 1966 book, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, is a rich exploration of how conceptions of dirt, cleanliness, pollution, purity, taboo, hygiene, deviance, and crime serve as indicators for the central plot-line of a cultural narrative and the operative assumptions of its moral universe.⁷ For Douglas, simple artifacts and common ideas can reveal the inner logic of a culture. They function like a peephole, offering a panoramic perspective on the moral boundaries and priorities of an entire cultural system.⁸ For Douglas, there is no more pervasive or powerful window for seeing into the breadth and depth of a cultural system than the notion of “dirt”—of what is clean and what is unclean.

In Trinidad and Tobago that peephole might be the rituals that make up Carnival, and in Jamaica (as well as Trinidad and Tobago) we could point to the notion

7 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

8 A peephole (also called a peekhole, spyhole, or doorhole) is a small security feature found in the entry doors of most North American homes. Approximately a 1/2 inch in diameter, the peephole allows someone on the inside of the house to get a wide-angle view of the area outside of the door while at the same time allowing little to no visibility from the outside.

of Anansi, the spider man trickster of West African folklore.⁹ Our narrative in Acts suggests that the notion of *kosher* deeply shapes the moral boundaries of Jewish identity. When you've understood these rituals and notions you've gotten very close to the essence of what it means to be Trinbagonian or Jamaican or Jewish, and what the good life entails for each.¹⁰ But for Douglas, dirt is the most basic, universal and revealing notion of all, such that all other competing notions are ultimately built upon it.

Douglas defines dirt as "matter out of place." In order for something to be considered "dirty" in this sense two conditions have to be in place: A set of ordered relationships, or a classification system, and a violation of that order. So, earth outside is not dirty; but earth on the kitchen table is dirty. Saliva in the mouth is not dirty; but saliva dried on the side of the mouth is dirty. Mucus in the nose is not dirty; but mucus on the finger is dirty. A plastic bottle in your hand is not dirty; but a plastic bottle on the side of the road is dirty. What makes the earth, saliva, mucous, and bottle "dirty" are where they are located. When they are located in areas that are classified as "clean," those areas become contaminated or "dirty." When the earth, saliva, mucous, and bottle are removed from those areas they are "clean" again. Cleanliness and dirtiness then become a matter of things being in their proper place according to a classification system. Dirt, saliva, mucous, and the bottle are not "dirty" *per se*, they become dirty when they are found in places they should not be. Dirt does not belong on the table, saliva does not belong on the side of the mouth, mucous does not belong on a person's finger, and plastic bottles do not belong on the side of the road.

The same principle applies when something out of place undermines a social classification system. For instance, Canaanites in Canaan are not dirty; but Canaanites in the Promised Land are dirty. The poor person on the side of the road is not dirty, the poor person at an upscale wedding reception is dirty. The Muslim visiting the church is not dirty, the Muslim queuing up for the Eucharist is dirty. Thus, for Douglas, "dirt is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there

9 For the figure of Anansi/Anancy in Jamaican culture, see chap. 3: "Speak of the Advent of New Light: Jamaican Proverbs and Anancy Stories," in Hugh Hodges, *Soon Come: Jamaican Spirituality, Jamaican Poetics* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008). The Jamaican aphorism "him little but him tallawah" (used in the title of this essay) embodies the Anansi spirit, by referring to someone whose ambitions and accomplishments ought never be limited by physical size, financial resources, or political power. This is true of many Caribbean nations. In Jamaica, we can think of many accomplishments in the fields of athletics (especially track and field) and music (reggae) that far outstrip the size of its population and its financial and political assets, not to mention three Miss World titles (1963, 1976, 1993). With regard to Trinidad and Tobago, my late father-in-law would regularly note in conversations that "the most beautiful women in the world are from Trinidad" (based on his devotion to his two daughters, and that a Trinidadian woman had won a Miss Universe Title in 1977 and a Miss World title in 1986). His greatest boast however was that Trinidad was the originator of the only musical instrument created in the twentieth century (steel pan).

10 Trinbagonian refers to people from Trinidad and Tobago.

is a [classification] system.”¹¹ These classification systems constitute part of the cognitive dimension of a culture, and as such are the building blocks for the moral boundaries of any cultural system.

Further, these classification systems are never morally neutral. Things are classified the way they are according to a design and for a purpose. There is always an *ought* behind every ordering, a *purpose* behind every pattern, a *target* for every taxonomy. Any ordering is always an ordering *towards something*, towards some *telos* or goal.¹² It is not simply a fact that food is on the plate and not on the table; food *ought* to be on the plate and never on the table. It is not simply a fact that Peter might choose not to go into Cornelius’s house, he *ought* never go into Cornelius’s house.

When the boundaries of clean and unclean are crossed moral boundaries are violated and contamination takes place. Immediately the imperative to re-order and atone for the violation arises. Whatever is challenging the classification system, and thus threatening its implicit *telos*, has to be fixed. We have to “clean up the mess,” “atone for our sins.” or otherwise purify what has become polluted. This obligation to assert and sustain moral order is so strong that sociologist Christian Smith says it is a fundamental motivator behind all human activity.¹³ Consequently, we should expect to find the notions of clean and unclean, and the classification systems they suggest, at the center of any moral vision, and therefore as the drivers behind much of our social action.¹⁴

Disgust Psychology as Boundary Indicator

When we talk about moral stories and moral orders driving human action we need

11 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 48.

12 On this point see Eric G. Flett, *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), chaps. 2–3, and James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Cultural Liturgies 1; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), chaps. 1–2.

13 Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 2.

14 To move our analysis even deeper into the theological anthropology that informs this essay, we might note that the classification systems we inherit from our social environments provide the human creature with two fundamental needs: security or safety; and significance. This is why the maintenance of social order is such a primal motivator for human behavior. When we can classify things into a coherent pattern we feel safe, and we usually classify things into patterns that also confer upon us a sense of personal significance. In effect, we classify the world in such a way as to deny our own fragility and vulnerability by rooting our security and significance in our ability to deny the reality of death. So, when our classification systems are challenged (as they are in Acts 10) we confront “death” psychologically by being reminded that our classification systems are social creations, and highly idiosyncratic ones at that, and that there is more than one way to categorize human experience. If our security and significance are not tethered in some way to something *that transcends our classification systems* we will inevitably engage in violence in order to assert our own safety and significance in the face of death. See further on this Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973).

to come to terms with the psychological dynamics of disgust, as this emotion is deeply connected to what a given culture classifies as clean and unclean, pure and polluted, orderly and deviant, sacred and profane. The *sociological* concepts of clean and unclean regulate the *psychological* experience of disgust. In order to map the geography of a people's moral vision we must attend to human emotions, and no emotion is a better indicator that a moral boundary has been discovered and breached than disgust.¹⁵ The emotion of disgust is structurally bound to a given culture's moral vision, and in particular how that moral vision defines what is clean and the unclean.

The emotion of disgust is of particular interest in this essay not simply because it features prominently in the narrative of Acts 10 (as we shall see), but because it is one of the most powerful and universal human emotions for highlighting threats to the safety and significance of human persons.¹⁶ It does this by protecting boundaries (physical, social, and ontological) and by expelling threats in a way that other emotions do not. These factors and functions make the emotion of disgust in Acts 10 an interesting lens through which to consider the universal work of the Spirit in fostering a moral vision where transformed relationships between persons and groups is a significant indicator that the kingdom of God is at hand and that shalom and justice are being pursued.

When we attend carefully to the narrative of Act 10 we shall see that the dynamics of disgust, via the categories of clean and unclean, reveal the radical hospitality of the Spirit's work, the reconciliatory nature of the atonement, and the revolutionary inclusivity of the kingdom of God. With the descent of the sheet and the baptism of Cornelius a significant boundary marker in the moral narrative

15 Sociologist Christian Smith notes that "emotions provide excellent telltale indicators of the moral assumptions, convictions, and expectations that pervade and order our personal and collective lives...[emotional responses] are signs of moral orders fulfilled and moral orders violated." Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, 15. The professors reading this essay may recall the emotions they felt the last time they read a student paper and discovered that plagiarism had taken place. Feelings of disgust and indignation are likely the first emotions to arise. For the student, when called to the professor's office to explain, the first emotions were likely fear that they had been caught and would be "expelled" from class. In both instances the emotional responses signify a boundary crossing, and in this case the boundaries of the moral world of academia.

16 In terms of the universal nature of disgust, Richard Beck cites the work of Paul Ekman who notes that the distinctive facial expressions that accompany the experience of disgust are universal across cultures, making disgust, according to Beck, "an innate feature of a shared and universal human psychology." See Beck, *Unclean*, 14–15. In terms of the power of disgust as an interpersonal boundary-monitoring psychology one need only note psychologist John Gottman's assertions that the most reliable predictor for marital failure are the emotions of contempt and disgust. See Beck, *Unclean*, 110. On a social level one need only note the metaphors used to justify wars, crusades, and genocides, rooted as they are in appeals to ethnic "cleansing." The metaphors used often have to do with purity and pollution, and as such capitalize on the emotions of disgust and contempt.

of Israel is displaced, and consequently, the work of the Spirit is radically universalized and socially embodied.¹⁷

But before we get to Act 10, it will be important to understand the kinds of disgust that sociologists have classified and what stimuli commonly generate disgust; we will also examine how disgust functions to protect purity and cleanliness and how contamination works. All of this plays a role in making sense of the narrative in Acts 10 and the work of the Spirit.

Disgust Domains and Stimuli

Social psychologist Paul Rozin identifies three forms of disgust, which he calls “disgust domains.” They are *Core Disgust* (revulsion centered on eating and oral incorporation), *Animal-Reminder Disgust* (revulsion centered on death reminders; they remind us that we are animals who will die), and *Sociomoral Disgust* (revulsion centered on moral and social judgments).¹⁸ Although all three forms of disgust are related, Core Disgust is concerned primarily with threats to the physical well-being of a person, while the latter two forms are concerned primarily with threats to the social and ontological security and significance of persons.¹⁹

Each disgust domain is triggered by different kinds of stimuli. *Core Disgust* is commonly triggered by food (discoloration, offensive odors), bodily products (mucus, blood, semen, pus, vomit, feces), and poor hygiene (body odor, bad breath, discolored teeth, oily skin, etc.).²⁰ It reminds us that ingestion of certain kinds of food or bodily products and poor bodily maintenance can be a threat to our physical wellbeing. We recoil at bad breath, potential contact with fecal matter, and discolored food.

Animal-Reminder Disgust has to do with stimuli that remind us of our finitude,

17 Drawing on the essay by J. Richard Middleton (“The Inclusive Vision of Isaiah 56 and Contested Ethical Practices in Scripture and the Church: Toward a Canonical Hermeneutic of Discernment”) in this themed journal issue, we could say that by moving the boundary marker that designated gentiles as “unclean” in Acts 10 the Spirit reasserts and restores a creational trajectory of shalom that reaches back to the narrative of Genesis 1. The Spirit thus restores just relationships between persons and groups that have been broken and fragmented; this fragmentation has resulted from the placement of boundaries that force one group to identify another as pollutants, contaminants, and threats. The work of the Spirit thus returns us to the plenitude and plurality of the Garden in the context of shalom by making all things clean, holy, and sacred. Clean and unclean, even if they were temporary categories to be used by Israel to designate various foods, are no longer to be used to designate other persons.

18 See Beck, *Unclean*, 19.

19 Ontological here refers to our very existence.

20 Consider for a moment the global deodorant industry and its dedication to combating and covering up human odors that are deemed dirty and disgusting while promoting those we define as clean and pleasant. Billion-dollar industries revolve around the cleaning rituals that take place in our bathrooms (soaps, shampoos, body washes, body sprays, chewing gum, mints, mouthwashes, toothbrushes, floss, mouth sprays, toothpastes, anti-perspirants, and deodorants (for the feet, underarms, and genitals). And this does not even account for the many products we use to keep the bathroom itself “clean.”

vulnerability, and mortality. We typically avoid contact with dead bodies, assigning this responsibility to a special class of person. We turn away from violations of the body that result in blood, gore, deformity, or decay. We look with suspicion and anxiety at the person whose worldview assumptions are a direct challenge to our own and label them lunatics, mentally ill, heretics, liberals or fundamentalists (depending on where we stand), or fanatics, etc.²¹

Finally, *Sociomoral Disgust* occurs when certain persons, or animals (rats, snakes, insects, wild meat), or symbols (the Confederate flag, the Rainbow flag), or actions (especially sexual behaviors such as incest, rape, harassment), or other social behaviors (not standing for the national anthem, passing gas loudly in an elevator) become sources of contamination. We keep our distance from those we consider unclean. This may include those who are morally corrupt, socially deviant, or spiritually malevolent; those with whom we differ politically, theologically, ethnically, or racially.

So we may refuse to socialize with the church gossip, or entertain the ideas of the homosexual, or visit the obeah lady; we may refuse to participate in Carnival, or avoid bringing reggae or patois into a Christian service of worship. If we do any of these acts of boundary crossing, we might feel that contamination has taken place and a purification process will be required. If we don't participate in the purification process (however defined), we will remain contaminated and will suffer social exclusion for violating the moral order of the group.

Disgust Dynamics

Although the emotion of disgust is triggered by different stimuli in each of these domains, there are some universal features of disgust psychology that are operative regardless of the disgust domain or the triggering stimuli. Beck explains that disgust functions as a *boundary monitor* and is *expulsive* in nature; contamination is thought to take place according to *magical thinking*; and disgust is *promiscuous*, in the sense that it can be triggered by a wide variety of culture-specific stimuli.²² Let's concisely note each of these fundamental components that dictate how disgust works, and then examine the principles by which contamination appraisals are made.

1. *Boundary monitoring.* Disgust is an emotion that monitors boundaries hav-

21 Combating and covering up body odors of whatever kind, while a seemingly superficial act of politeness in consideration of others, can also be understood as an act that seeks to repress the fact that that we are (according to the Bible) finite creatures that have originated from the dirt and are destined to return to it (Gen 2:7; 3:19). We prefer the language of Psalm 8:5 where we are described as being "a little lower than the angels" (LXX) to the metaphors of the Garden that describe us as earth creatures (made from the dust of the ground). However, the way we smell in unguarded (and un-deodorized) moments is proof enough of our earthly origins.

22 See Beck, *Unclean*, chaps. 1 and 2 for a fuller discussion of these dynamics.

ing to do with “in” and “out”—whether those boundaries are physical or social—in order to prevent contamination. Physically, those boundaries center around the mouth and what we put into it. Disgust instructs us to keep out that which is toxic.²³

But human beings rarely limit themselves to their bodies when it comes to boundaries for the self. We are, according to sociologist Peter Berger and anthropologist Ernest Becker, constantly “externalizing” the self into the social world through symbols, relationships, institutions, and artifacts of all kinds.²⁴ And so, disgust monitors social boundaries as well. In this domain, disgust seeks to prevent threats not only to our physical wellbeing, but also to our existential security and significance. Thus someone may be disgusted when they see their national flag burned, their children belittled, or their favorite athlete (for example, Usain Bolt) accused of doping. Disgust thus indicates a perceived threat to the boundaries of one’s identity.

2. *Expulsive.* Disgust is an expulsive mechanism, whether it causes one to withdraw from a potential contaminant or causes one to expel or annihilate an actual contaminant. So when that threat presents itself, it must be immediately and decisively dealt with; the preservation of safety requires immediate withdrawal, expulsion, or annihilation of the contaminant. If disgust says “don’t eat that smoked oyster,” but under duress from a friend you do so anyway, disgust may call upon a gag reflex and the sensation of nausea to have it immediately expelled after it has passed the boundary of your mouth.²⁵

Indeed, even if something passes these tests and we are later told, after swallowing, that the milk we just drank was not in fact cow’s milk, but some other sort of milk that we do not typically drink in our culture, that violation of a sociomoral boundary will send our physical bodies into expulsion mode to dislodge the contaminant in order to preserve not only our health, but the boundaries of our moral vision.

For instance, in American culture cow’s milk is lauded as a basic and nutritious part of a healthy and successful life (there are posters towards this end in every middle school and high school cafeteria across the United States), as are other cow products like cheese, yogurt, leather, and beef. A cow is defined as “clean” in the moral vision of American culture. But change the animal to one not con-

23 Thus, we don’t eat fecal matter; we avoid food that is discolored; and we turn away food that generates an offensive smell. More often than not disgust is a faithful instructor in maintaining healthy boundaries for the body, but sometimes disgust gets confused and instructs us to restrict something that, although disgusting in appearance or offensive in odor, is actually both delicious and nutritious—like (in my opinion) smoked oysters.

24 Becker, *Denial of Death*, passim; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

25 Spitting, gagging, and vomiting are universal, physical reflexes for expelling contaminants from our bodies, whether on the basis of taste, texture, temperature, or smell.

sidered clean according to the classification system underlying the American moral vision, such as a dog, goat, horse, or camel, and you will get a very different response indeed.²⁶

And of course, the human person is in a category all of its own. To use a human body to generate products like milk, meat, and organs, as if a human was simply another animal, would completely undermine our moral vision; we are thus properly disgusted when we read about instances of cannibalism, the sale of organs, or the exchange of people as if they were commodities.

These latter examples take us into the realm of interpersonal boundaries and, as such, the domain of Sociomoral Disgust. Expulsive mechanisms are just as powerful and forceful in the sociomoral domain as in the physical domain of Core Disgust. Sociomoral Disgust warns us to avoid, withdraw from, insult, and even destroy those people and things we deem unclean or deviant, lest they contaminate the social envelope we maintain around ourselves. And so, proximity to that which is deemed unclean needs to be highly regulated.

This explains, in part, why Peter in Acts 10 needs a divine vision, a divine voice, *and* Cornelius's personal messengers, in order to get him from Simon the Tanner's house to the house of Cornelius.²⁷ As the communication theorist Edward T. Hall once noted: "space speaks."²⁸ It speaks volumes about what we consider clean and unclean. Peter wants to maximize his distance from that which is unclean but the Spirit goes to great lengths to get him closer to the perceived contaminant: Cornelius and his house. Thus the Spirit transforms Peter by transforming the classification system that sustains Peter's moral vision. This in turn is generative of the new social order that Jesus referred to as the kingdom of God, the experience of which the Spirit is sent to confer upon all humanity.

3. *Magical Thinking.* Disgust determines contamination on the basis of a causality that often defies the laws of rationality and physics and has more to do with the laws of similarity and association. This is true especially in the domains of

26 In 2013 Burger King restaurants in the United Kingdom discontinued purchasing meat from an Irish beef supplier when traces of horsemeat were found in the beef patties it supplied, sometimes consisting of up to 29% of the product. Burger King noted that the decision was not related to "food safety," but instead to the fact that people in Britain and Ireland "do not have a tradition of eating horses." For that breach of moral norms Burger King was sarcastically referred to as "Sherger King", "Sherger" being the name of a famous Irish racehorse. There are examples from the United States, but they are not nearly as entertaining.

27 Why Peter is in the house of a tanner in the first place is interesting enough. That puts him spatially proximate to someone working with dead animals, and thus in danger of contamination himself. But, with Simon being a Jew, both he and Peter would have shared the same assumptions for maintaining their moral purity via rituals of cleansing, thus preventing permanent contamination. And they would both have followed Jewish dietary habits. Such assumptions, however, would not have been shared by Cornelius and his household, thus making entering the space of a gentile more dangerous.

28 Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), chap. 10: "Space Speaks."

sociomoral and Animal-Reminder Disgust. Sympathetic magic is an anthropological term used to describe “a variety of primitive beliefs about how spiritual or magical artifacts might have effects upon other objects.”²⁹

A good example is a voodoo doll. Its potency as a tool of manipulation is rooted in the fact that it is not only composed of some physical item from the person the practitioner of voodoo wants to manipulate (a piece of hair or clothing), but also resembles the appearance of the person they want to control. Similarity and association are critical if the doll is to exert its causal powers.

It should also be noted that sympathetic magic is not a form of causality employed only by “primitive” people. It is a pervasive feature of human thinking, on evidence in the case of anyone who follows a horoscope, goes out of their way to get a selfie with a celebrity, or is an avid follower of a sports team. At a subliminal level, if not always explicitly, such persons expect the alignment of the stars, their proximity to a famous person, or their particular forms of devotion to an athletic team to have some causal effect on physical realities in each instance.³⁰

In the case of disgust, magical thinking instructs us to conclude that contamination has or will take place if we come too close to a contaminant. Thus magical thinking might make us cringe from the idea of wearing a sweater once worn by Hitler, Idi Amin, or Pol Pot. Some people would never exchange goods or services with an openly gay couple. Some Christians refuse to listen to non-Christian music. Others might intentionally avoid contact with the poor and vulnerable lest their “bad luck” might somehow be transferred to them. These kinds of contamination appraisals take place according to magical thinking, a form of logic that overrides normal reason, and relies more on similarity, proximity, and association to determine contamination than any actual transfer of evil, deviance, death, and pollution.

4. *Promiscuous.* Different cultural contexts connect the emotion of disgust to a variety of stimuli, usually in a way where disgust is triggered by stimuli a particular group considers a threat to its collective purity, security, and significance.

It’s been frequently said that children have to be taught to hate. They also have to be taught that specific stimuli are disgusting.³¹ Often the two coincide. It is the promiscuous nature of disgust psychology that is the most personally and culturally revealing, as it takes the general and universal dynamics of disgust and at-

29 Beck, *Unclean*, 24.

30 In the example of someone devoted to a sports team, I think of the character of Pat Sr played by Robert DeNiro in the film *Silver Linings Playbook*, where one storyline involves his recurring efforts to co-opt his son into the magical rituals he employs to ensure the success of his beloved Philadelphia Eagles. Special snacks are prepared, fabrics employed, jerseys worn, and the TV remote has to be orientated in a specific position if success is to be achieved.

31 For instance, a very young child will think nothing of eating what comes out of its nose, spreading fecal matter over a bedroom wall, peeing indiscriminately and upon impulse, or placing in its mouth any number of colorful or curious items found on a sidewalk or under a desk.

taches those dynamics to culturally specific stimuli, often in the earliest years of life.³² The result is that the child is habituated into the broad contours of a moral order, which will communicate to them that they are persons of significance in a world of meaning—the social equivalent of a second womb.³³

This makes disgust an incredibly powerful instructor for moral boundaries—revealing what a culture values and protects, and what it deems dangerous and defiling. Objects of disgust disclose the priorities of a cultural system precisely because objects of disgust differ widely from one social grouping to another.

When the boundaries of the cultural system are breached the parent will usually reinforce them quite forcefully, gouging the pollutant from the mouth or hand of the child and throwing it far from the child's body with some well-chosen words. Through this the child learns an important lesson about what belongs in its moral world and what does not.

These lessons continue, and as the child gets older those lessons have more to do with pollutants in the sociomoral and animal reminder domains than with the Core Disgust domain having to do with food (Who are your friends? Who do you welcome into your house? What makes you anxious and afraid? What political opinions to you ridicule and which do you affirm? What do you spend your money on? etc.). The promiscuous nature of disgust means that “disgust can be captured and harnessed by multiple aspects of a given culture, connecting disgust to stimuli unrelated to food or food aversions. This is the reason why we find disgust—a food aversion system—associated with social, moral and religious domains.”³⁴ And we find all three interrelated in our narrative in Acts 10.³⁵

32 Richard Beck notes that the same cannot be said regarding the emotions of happiness, fear, sadness or anger. The triggers for those emotions appear to be relatively consistent across cultures. Disgust, unlike these other emotions, has a “sensitive period” where it is deeply connected to culturally specific stimuli. See Beck, *Unclean*, 18.

33 This habituation process is incredibly powerful. My sons know that jazz plays a critical role in my own moral world, not because I sat them down and said “jazz is the greatest art form in the world and it is very important to me” (although I have done that), but because I listen to jazz all the time, take them to concerts, know the names of the musicians, the songs played, the variations on those songs, and the albums produced. They see me look with scorn upon someone talking during a performance and arrive with me well in advance of the performance time so we can get seats up front. They listen to me anticipate the event weeks before it arrives and watch me applaud and whistle upon the completion of each solo. A moral order is communicated through ritual performance and deeply impacts the plasticity of the human creature in a nearly irreversible fashion. Words are rarely necessary, and by the time words arrive on the scene much of the heavy lifting involved in shaping one's moral order is complete. Any new additions or subtractions come only under great pressure and effort, like learning a new language. Such is the power of disgust.

34 Beck, *Unclean*, 18.

35 The narrative of Acts 10 shows the power of disgust. For Cornelius to be deemed clean by Peter will require a strange dream and divine assistance, and the hospitality and patience of a stranger. Such is the Spirit's work.

Principles of Contagion

But how exactly does contamination take place in each of these domains? Paul Rozin has identified four primary principles of contagion, means by which the clean comes to be contaminated by the unclean.³⁶

While it would take us too far afield to go into all four principles, two are directly relevant to our study of Acts 10—the principles of dose insensitivity and negativity dominance.

The principle of dose insensitivity asserts that the *amount* of the pollutant is irrelevant in making a contamination appraisal. It does not matter if one, or many, unclean persons touch Jesus, he will be just as unclean after the first touch as he would with the last. It does not matter if he is casually touched on the hand by someone unclean, or if he is given a hug and a kiss. Each gesture confers contamination equally. Likewise, it does not matter how many gentiles Peter associates with in Acts 10, he will be rendered unclean by contact with even one—Cornelius.

In contrast, the principle of negativity dominance asserts that the *power* of the pollutant will always overcome the power of the pure object. It does not matter how “holy” a person is, whether they are a scribe or the Chief Priest, if either has contact with something unclean they will be equally contaminated. Pollutants don’t need to prey on weakness; they have the power to contaminate things large or small, like a virus.

Negativity dominance and dose insensitivity seem to be clearly operative in assertions that, as far as God is concerned, one sin is the same as any other. In addition, both of these principles of contagion are behind legal prohibitions and anxieties regarding racial mixing found, formally and informally, in many parts of the world.³⁷ Bob Marley suffered under such anxieties as the child of a white father and a black mother. This perhaps explains why Marley, in the end, rooted the deepest features of his identity in God:

36 Beck, *Unclean*, 27–28. These four principles are *Contact* (contamination is “caused” by direct physical contact, spatial proximity, similarity, or association); *Dose Insensitivity* (contamination occurs regardless of the amount of the pollutant or the duration of contact/proximity); *Permanence* (contamination is irreversible; once something is ruined it cannot ultimately be restored to its original state); and *Negativity Dominance* (contaminants have more power to defile than pure objects can resist). All four principles illustrate the applicability of the proverb “Him little but him tallawah” (in the title of this paper) to the dynamics of “dirt” and disgust.

37 In the United States these “one drop rules” were the basis for the discriminatory regulations that sustained Jim Crow prohibitions and anti-miscegenation laws, the last of which were overturned as late as 1967 with the Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia*. Nevertheless, the spirit of these laws is still in wide circulation, sustained by unexplored assumptions about racial purity, the logic of contamination, and sociomoral notions regarding clean and unclean, which are encoded in dominant cultural institutions. A ballot referendum in November 2000 to remove language in the Alabama State Constitution barring interracial marriage won with only 59% support. Apparently 41% of voters felt the language should remain. The prevalence of colorism in the Caribbean is part of this legacy, a legacy that reaches back to colonial influences on both American and Caribbean societies.

I don't have prejudice against meself. My father is a white, and my mother black. Now them call me half-caste, or whatever. Well, me don't deh pon nobody's side. Me don't deh pon the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me deh pon God's side, the Man who create me; who cause me to come from black and white.³⁸

Marley's observations could almost be a summary of what the Spirit is sent to tell Peter in Acts 10.

Peter, Cornelius, Food, and Filth

The principles and dynamics above provide us with some powerful conceptual tools for thinking about Acts 10 and the identity and work of the Spirit.

We find all three disgust domains interrelated in the Acts 10 narrative—there is the Core Disgust of food (unclean food), the Sociomoral Disgust of socializing and eating with a gentile (unclean person/house), and the Animal Reminder disgust of realizing that the security and significance conferred by Peter's cultural narrative is being challenged and expanded to include threatening elements (not only is he socializing with a gentile, but that gentile is a conduit for God's word to Peter, whereas he had assumed the dynamic would run the other way around). Peter is the Apostle after all, not Cornelius. But in this narrative that is not so clear.

In this narrative the Holy Spirit is, ultimately, the Apostle, bringing to Peter a very strange and difficult teaching indeed. Jesus's disciples had complained that his teaching regarding his death and resurrection was difficult; but this teaching of the Spirit may be at least as difficult to receive, if not more so. The teaching of the Spirit suggests that Peter's identity has been rooted in a narrative that was not wide enough for God's grace, and this teaching asserts that any story that secures one's identity by deeming another person sociomorally unclean is incompatible with the work of Jesus and the ongoing ministry of the Spirit.

Peter's narrative identity, once based on boundary markers revolving around clean and unclean foods *and persons*, is about to become creolized—two languages, ethnicities, and two histories will now be carriers of God's work of reconciliation. Before there was only one. The singular and pure now becomes plural and, in Peter's mind—at least initially—polluted. But the Spirit asserts otherwise. This particular kind of syncretism can be sanctified. In the face of Peter's "Surely not," the Spirit says "Yes, indeed."

From this point on both the narrative of Peter and that of Cornelius will be forever intertwined, their identities "mixed," their classification systems modified from the ground up. They cannot tell their personal stories without reference to

38 Kevin Macdonald, "Marley" (Magnolia Pictures, 2012).

one another; and they cannot tell the Christian story with integrity while ignoring the identity and voice of the other.

Let's look at a few critical scenes in the narrative of Acts 10 with regard to disgust psychology, and then move on to some theological reflection implied by this narrative.

The Revolution Descending on a Sheet (10:9–16)

This narrative involves two God-fearing men; two prayers; two visions (with Peter's set in an apocalyptic context); two angelic directives; and two very different social locations and identities—one a gentile and the other a Jew. Their moral worlds, with regard to the categories of clean and unclean, could not be further apart, even though Luke paints Cornelius as a mediating figure between paganism and Judaism.³⁹ Those moral worlds are about to collide due to divine initiative. This fact is highlighted in the story by Luke's characterization of Cornelius as a person who is as close to the kingdom as a gentile could be—except that he's a gentile. And what makes him a gentile is also what makes him a threat to Peter as a Jew. They inhabit moral orders constructed upon notions of clean and unclean that make the one a source of contamination for the other. The issue of moral boundaries is directly addressed in Peter's vision.

A sheet descends; it is a bounded space. And "in" that space is contained "all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air" (Acts 10:12). The spatial metaphor is important here, for it plays a significant role in determining Peter's forceful and negative response. Since the sheet contained clean as well as unclean food options (reptiles are mentioned, which are unclean for food purposes), Peter could have fulfilled the command to "kill and eat" by selecting the clean animals for consumption and ignoring the unclean.

However, Peter may have assumed that all the animals on the sheet were rendered unclean due to the fact that they shared the same bounded space and were, consequently, in close enough proximity to one another for cross-contamination to take place.⁴⁰ The principle of contamination through contact and proximity might be applicable here, as well as magical thinking. According to these principles, and this logic, the entire sheet was, in effect, filled with unclean food. But even if Peter did not think that the unclean animals automatically contaminated the clean ones, the command to kill and eat all the sorts of animals in the sheet (including unclean ones) would have come to him as God asking him to do some-

39 Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 340 n. 46.

40 This point, however, is not self-evident, since Jews regularly used some unclean animals, such as donkeys (and even camels) as beasts of burden, and did not regard proximity to these animals as contaminating them.

thing “frowzy,” which would have thereby undermined the moral order within which he understood his identity as a Jew.⁴¹

So, Peter replies in verse 14 “By no means, Lord.”⁴² And he adds, “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” Peter initially thinks that this is an exchange around the oral incorporation of food and Core Disgust domains. But the reply Peter receives draws upon the categories of clean and unclean in their broadest sense, applying them beyond food to *persons*. Food is simply triggering stimuli for the real issue at stake in Peter’s dream—the domains of sociomoral and animal reminder disgust, which are keeping apart two people that God’s work has joined together.

The heavenly voice asserts: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (v. 15). And if all these things are clean, there is no longer any reason for some of them to be quarantined from one another. Purity metaphors, contamination principles, and disgust dynamics are clearly at work here.⁴³ As Beverly Gaventa rightly perceives, “What is at issue between Peter and the heavenly voice is not Peter’s luncheon menu but the way he applies the terms ‘profane’ and ‘unclean.’ The subject is not his practice [of eating], but his assumption that he knows what is clean and what is unclean.”⁴⁴ It turns out that Peter’s assumptions about the content of these social categories, and the *telos* towards which they direct his actions, cannot be reconciled with his confession that Jesus is Lord of all. That is about to be rectified.

The power of disgust to demarcate boundaries and expel potential contaminants is likely the reason why Peter, when confronted by the vision of the sheet, has to be commanded to eat “three times” (v. 16). Only then does the narrative transition to Peter’s internal “wondering about the meaning of the vision” (v.17) and his

41 “Frowzy” is Jamaican patois used to describe something disgusting; particularly an offensive body odor. It is used to insult and shame the offending person into cleaning up in order to remove the offensive odor. An equivalent Trinidadian phrase might be “Yuh smell like a bag of ol’ puttigal,” or when the offending smell is mixed in with the smell of soap or perfume one would refer to the resulting odor as “stink-a-sweet.” Either way, generating an offensive smell renders one an object of disgust and shame, and thus to be either cleaned up or avoided in order to reinforce normative social categories.

42 Ben Witherington explains that this phrase “is found nowhere else in the NT except in the parallel account in Acts 11:8, but in both the LXX and in secular texts it indicates a very strong negative reply.” See Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 349 n. 94. The emotional context of this “strong negative reply” is derived from disgust and its attending dynamics.

43 Given that Peter’s reply is triggered by a command having to do with the oral incorporation of (contaminated) food, it seems highly likely that the dynamics of disgust psychology are shaping his perceptions and actions and will continue to do so throughout the narrative, as he moves from the domain of Core Disgust in this episode, to the domains of sociomoral and animal reminder disgust later in the narrative.

44 Gaventa, *Acts*, 166.

“thinking about the vision” (v. 19).⁴⁵ Peter has been given some serious food for thought, with radical implications for his identity as a Jew and a Christian. How he resolves the psychological disequilibrium that has just been introduced into his life will be critical to the integrity of the message of Jesus, the work of the Spirit, the demographics of the Christian community, and the embodiment of social justice.⁴⁶

Peter’s Rationalization (10:27–29)

Where there is a breach in a moral order, there is a rationalization nearby, and that rationalization is provided in verses 27–29.⁴⁷ Peter, upon his arrival at Cornelius’s house, feels it necessary to make explicit the assumptions that undergird his existing moral order and why he is about to violate those norms: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection.”⁴⁸

Peter, though “wondering” and “thinking” about a vision/command that has been presented to him three times, is now clear about its meaning.⁴⁹ He is no longer at liberty, as a follower of Jesus, to define what is clean and unclean strictly by reference to social habit and cultural tradition. These critical social categories are instead to be filled with content by “Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (v. 37). Which in turn implies a radical social reorganization where God can no longer be used to justify any kind of “favoritism” legitimated on the basis of some persons

45 This threefold exhortation may also be a reference to Peter’s earlier failed test when asked if he was associated with Jesus. Not only did he deny Jesus three times (Matt 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:54–62), but Jesus had to ask him three times if he loved him (John 21:15–19). Will Peter pass this second test of faithfulness to his Lord?

46 Willie James Jennings, in his commentary on Acts, notes that the command given to Peter to “kill and eat” should be “read first communally before it may be read consumptively”. Jennings, *Acts*, 107. As such, the command to Peter is more than a command to eat something Peter finds disgusting. It is also and at the same time a command to enter into a moral order represented by unclean animals and the people who consume them. Again, all three disgust domains are implicated in the command to kill and eat when read in this fashion. Jennings continues: “Peter is not being asked to possess as much as he is being asked to enter in, to become through eating a part of something that he did not imagine himself a part of before the eating.” The dynamics of the Eucharist are precisely the same.

47 On rationalization and moral orders, see Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, 12–13.

48 It was, in fact, not against Jewish law for a Jew to associate with or visit a gentile. They could do so if they were willing to pay the social price of being made ritually unclean. The contamination principles of proximity and contact are operative here. But to say such associations are “against our law” is a bit strong, reflecting perhaps the psychological force on Peter of what is essentially a cultural taboo, not a religious law. See Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 353.

49 I find such a fundamental realignment of Peter’s moral vision to be a miracle in itself, particularly since human psychology and disgust triggers are rarely undone or reassigned in such an immediate fashion, regardless of the power of a singular experience. These triggers would have been assigned early in Peter’s life during the promiscuous and developmental stage of disgust formation and as such would have taken immense effort and time to be reassigned.

being clean and some unclean (v. 34). These conclusions are then directly connected to, not only the vision, but one of the more developed and lengthy presentations of the life and ministry of Jesus in New Testament preaching (vv. 34–43). The work of the Spirit, in the dream and in the baptism that is to come, is explicitly set in the context of the work of Jesus—his own baptism by the Spirit, his healings, his undoing of the work of the devil, his resurrection, and his offer of forgiveness of sins to all. The baptism that the Spirit is about to confer upon Cornelius and his entire household is a continuation of this trajectory, generating a critical social manifestation of the kingdom of God: “peace” or shalom between persons (v. 36). The embodiment of peace or shalom must certainly be the primary reason behind Peter’s claim that Jesus “went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (v. 38), making the *telos* of the actions of “healing and doing good” fundamental to Jesus mission of forgiving sin—something that kept people “under the power of the devil.” Understood in this light, the “power of the devil” is deeply connected to the power of a social order to classify some persons as clean and some as unclean (Sociomoral Disgust), and to root the security and significance of human persons in socio-cultural groupings that are constructed and bounded by these categories, with no transcendent reference to relativize them (Animal-Reminder Disgust).⁵⁰

The Unilateral Baptism of the Spirit (10:44–48)

Although Luke portrays Cornelius as a mediating figure between paganism and Judaism, and thus as a special category of person perhaps deserving of the attention of God, the Spirit nevertheless baptizes his entire household, a household that would no doubt be characterized by mixed forms of piety. This “indiscriminate” act signals that the Spirit is willing to go even further than the God-fearing, pious, socially powerful gentile Cornelius in order to demonstrate the radical hospitality of the kingdom of God. Peter claims that he has learned from his visions that “God does not show favoritism” (v. 34) but the Spirit is about to show him the full extent of what that entails by interrupting Peter’s presentation and getting on with the main event. It has clearly been the Spirit’s show from the beginning, and the point of the entire narrative is brought home in a dramatic fashion. The Spirit cleanses all in the house, down to the very bottom, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. No wonder the circumcised in Peter’s entourage were “astounded” (v.

50 Paul’s language regarding the principalities and powers seems applicable here. Instead of making the social structures generated by the principalities and powers ultimate (the categories of clean and unclean being among them), we are instead to make Jesus the ultimate anchor for our security and significance because he is “Lord of all.”

45), perhaps even some were disgusted at the sight of this gentile Pentecost.⁵¹ To hear God being praised in a language foreign to one's own (particularly given the way in which Jews understood their special role in God's plans) can be threatening, and to hear it strange speech coming from unclean persons and being directed to a holy God must have been overwhelming. With the Spirit's action there was no longer any room left to leverage the sociomoral categories of clean and unclean to anyone's advantage. In terms of Animal-Reminder Disgust, there was no more room for the Jews or the gentiles in this story to see the other as a mortal threat to their security and significance. Those essential human needs were now rooted, not in social classifications that revolved around clean and unclean, but theological classifications having to do with the lordship of the resurrected Christ over all persons.

Peter, puzzled and confused days earlier by his dream, knows exactly what to do. The baptism of the Spirit, the incorporation of these gentiles into the people of God, must be followed by baptism with water in the name of Jesus Christ—itself an act of symbolic cleansing that follows upon the cleansing action of the Spirit, which itself follows from the fact that, ontologically speaking, God had never created the gentiles unclean in the first place. Creation is being restored through Spirit baptism—through undermining a social classification system that stood in opposition to the work of Christ. Reconciliation between the domains of core, sociomoral, and animal reminder disgust flickers to the surface with an offer of hospitality—"they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days" (48). The shared food, the shared social contact, the shared identities (they are all now believers) bear witness to the radical hospitality of the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁵²

Fallout in Jerusalem (11:1–3)

But an account has to be given for this breach of the Jewish moral order (word gets

51 In contrast to the negativity dominance and dose insensitivity principles of contagion, both Jesus and the Spirit are not contaminated through contact with the unclean. Instead, they cleanse the unclean, and in that sense reverse the logic of these two principles. The Spirit is not defiled by the unclean gentiles in Cornelius's house, but rather cleanses them all due to a kind of "positivity dominance." In this way the proverb "Him little but him tallawah" (in the essay title) applies not only to categories of uncleanness, but also (even more so) to the work of the Spirit, who is able to overcome our distorted categories.

52 Ben Witherington notes that such a gathering suggests, not an occasional community, but the existence of a house church where these kinds of ritual practices would generate a sustained social witness to the *telos* of the Gospel. See Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 361. Witherington also notes that the sharing of food constitutes "the final proof that all reservations about these matters had been left behind Peter." Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 360. Given the powerful and promiscuous nature of disgust, I'm skeptical. Surely Peter continued to struggle with these deeply ingrained emotional and social habits, the incident in Antioch being the most obvious instance (Gal 2:11–14). But a critical trajectory had been established for the Christian community, and to struggle along that continuum, and toward its ultimate goal, is a perfectly appropriate manifestation of being sanctified, both individually and socially, in the Spirit.

around when social violations like this take place, particularly when authoritative figures are involved). It has to be explained theologically and translated into ethical practices that will 1. reinforce the new classification system, 2. bound the new moral order in concrete ways, and 3. direct the subsequent actions of the Christian community toward the *telos* of the kingdom of God unveiled at Cornelius's house. Some contextual theological reflection on the praxis of the Spirit in Caesarea has to occur in Jerusalem.

Peter is criticized by “the circumcised believers” (11:3), no doubt because of his sustained violation of the moral boundaries, which were generated by defining the gentiles as unclean and the Jewish believers as clean. Again, this is not simply a sociomoral threat. Such threats are easily dealt with by following accepted rules for cleansing oneself of sociomoral contamination. Either stay away from gentiles, or if you make contact, purify yourself. There's something more radical going on here in Jerusalem, and I think it has to do with the Animal-Reminder Disgust domain. If the gentiles are equal members in the kingdom of God, what then of the significance of one's Jewish identity and its attendant practices? Will these new believers have to be circumcised? Upon what basis is the Jew now secure with regard to their role in divine history? Those are terrifying thoughts—reminders of one's radical fragility and mortality, and they are familiar to any Jew who knows about exile. The gentile had never been an existential threat like that before. Now, with the baptism of the Spirit, things have changed. If Jesus is the ultimate basis for our security and significance, then what is the value of our history and heritage? These questions are not entertained in any explicit detail in Acts 11:18, but they are likely behind the concern and criticism Peter encounters upon his return from Caesarea if the psychology of disgust offers any light on this narrative. But for now, it is enough to tell the story (yet again) of Peter's dream and the baptism of Cornelius's house, with the result being that those hearing Peter “had no further objections” (11:18). Peter must have been a very good storyteller indeed for this socially and psychologically messy narrative to generate such clear consensus. But, social relationships and cultural change never function like this, even in small communities, so it is no surprise that we find the very same issues and concerns on the table just a few chapters later in Acts 15.

The Father, Son, and the (Holy) Spirit

We need to remember that the identity of the Spirit is more tied to the identity and work of the Father and the Son than our pre-existing notions of what is holy or profane, pure or polluted. That is critical in this narrative. With the baptism of the Spirit in this narrative the Holy Spirit is extending and fulfilling work initiated by the Father and secured by the Son, and that work seems to have significant import for how we negotiate the sociomoral and animal reminder disgust domains. Once

the Spirit baptizes Cornelius's house Peter loses any theological permission to look upon a gentile as a pollutant outside the radical hospitality of the kingdom of God. This is simply an extension of the ministry of Jesus, and a fulfillment of Jesus' promise that the Spirit Jesus sends will lead the fledgling Christian community "into all truth". That truth, in this narrative, is that no person should ever be categorized as "unclean" and treated as an object of disgust or contamination beyond the embrace of the Father, Son, and Spirit or the hospitality of the Christian community.

The events in Acts 10 are followed by the contextual theological work in Acts 15; work which is then encapsulated in Paul's disruptive words in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." On the surface this statement is radical enough, but its implications for how the categories of clean and unclean are used to legitimate social hierarchies and injustices are more radical still. There's an eschatological vision here that is made possible because new rules about the clean and the unclean have been put in place, newly aligned and orientated towards the reality that Jesus is Lord of all.

Which is to say that there's a trajectory here, implicit in the creative work of the Father, the redemptive work of the Son, and the perfecting work of the Spirit—a trajectory that originates in a Garden and that will find its fullest realization in a kingdom that is to come, foretastes of which we are granted in the present when we experience joy, peace, justice, and flourishing. Progress along this trajectory, at least according to the narrative we've considered here, requires that we designate as "clean" people and things that we have previously been taught to label "unclean" for the purposes of maintaining a moral order that makes our particular group feel safe and significant.

With the angelic declaration "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15), the baptism of the Spirit falling upon Cornelius's house (Acts 10:44–46), and the Jerusalem Council's removal of circumcision as a boundary marker for inclusion in the Christian community (Acts 15) I think we can say, by extension, that other sociomoral boundary markers that have been historically used as disgust triggers have also been relativized and "made clean" by God through the work of the Son⁵³ and the action of the Spirit—race, ethnicity, gender, color, class, sexual orientation. By so doing the Spirit carries out its perfecting work of radical hospitality, making all things new by generating an entirely different classification system as the basis for the Christian and the human

53 Ben Witherington notes that there was a Jewish tradition that taught that "when the Messiah came, all the animals in the world previously considered unclean would be declared clean (Midrash PS. 146/4 [268]). A beautiful thought, and theologically aligned with the argument of this essay. See Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 350.

community, one that will sustain the social embodiment of the kingdom of God as a community of justice and shalom.

What might all this entail for the church in the Caribbean today? I'll venture only two brief suggestions.⁵⁴ The brevity is primarily due to a lack of space, but also to the fact that I do not have a thick feel for how these suggestions might play out in the complex social dynamics that attend to any social group, especially those with which I have not had sustained, immersive contact. But, I have been explicitly told by a Jamaican friend not to disqualify myself as a foreigner, and then "leave us with all the hard work to do." Let's consider how the argument above might be brought to bear on a couple of issues identified as important by those directly working with the church in the Caribbean (specifically Jamaica) today.⁵⁵

Conclusion: Redrawing Moral Boundaries

Patois and Reggae as Vehicles of Worship

The categories of clean and unclean are part of a larger classification system called language—the components and rules of which constitute the DNA of a cultural system. In both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago English is the national language, but it is an English in two forms: "standard" English and patois/creole.⁵⁶ The two "languages" run alongside each other in day to day use where the words and pronunciations in standard English differ only in terms of pronunciation, and at other times where patois operates with a unique vocabulary and syntax all its own.⁵⁷ Though some consider one a language and the other a dialect, my experience in both Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, is that English and patois are distinct languages.

Regarding this distinct language Garnett Roper notes that the Caribbean

54 Those interested in the broad theological framework I bring to these contextual reflections can consult Eric G. Flett, "Dingolayin": Theological Notes for a Contextual Caribbean Theology," in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Middleton and Roper (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

55 I'll be drawing broadly upon essays written by David Pearson, Erica Campbell, Garnett Roper and J. Richard Middleton for these suggestions. See Garnett Roper and J. Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

56 Two fantastic sources cataloging the English of Trinidad and Tobago are John Mendes, *Cote Ci Cote La: Trinidad and Tobago*, Second ed. (Trinidad: New Millenium, 1986) and Lise Winer, ed., *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad and Tobago* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

57 I recall my first trip to Trinidad with my wife and the isolation and strangeness I felt as she broke into patois upon meeting her sister. I could not understand a single word of their conversation. Once I picked up some patois of my own an insider status was conferred upon me that was not on offer when I spoke "standard" English. Language is a fundamental boundary marker for any moral order.

church “avoids using the vernacular and accent of the Caribbean in its liturgy.”⁵⁸ This avoidance suggests that patois is somehow inadequate or inappropriate as a vehicle for expressing not only one’s self-identity, but also for giving that self to God in worship. Those two goals can only be secured through the use of a form of English imposed upon the English-speaking Caribbean by colonial masters as a tool of domestication. According to Erica Campbell, and referencing the thought of Marcus Garvey, internalizing the language of a colonial master and then being forced to express the deepest part of one’s self through those categories generates a form of mental slavery: if I want to connect with myself, and with God, I have to use a language that is not my own and that I cannot inhabit intellectually or emotionally. The question with regard to liturgy then becomes how “people [can] sing from the heart that which they do not understand?”⁵⁹ This kind of distance between sign (language) and the thing signified (the interiority of the person) undermines genuine worship and, instead of worship resulting in the empowerment of the human person through the worship of God it instead undermines the human person as a creature made in the image of God. Similar sensibilities are shared by David Pearson when he notes that “the average Jamaican evangelical church today trumpets its praise through the strains and strings of North America. That which is local is often ridiculed as being at least inferior and as best demonic.”⁶⁰

“That which is local is often ridiculed as being at least inferior and at best demonic.” Why is that? And can this posture toward the local, whether in language, music, art, or other cultural forms, be sustained given the argument presented in this essay? I think not.

The stigmatization of the “local” in the Christian church is, I believe, rooted in an inadequate doctrine of the Holy Spirit (among other things) and a dualistic doctrine of creation and culture that understands the church as a clean and pure space that can be contaminated by unclean or worldly forms.⁶¹ Patois, reggae, calypso, and the steel drum are seen as contaminants according to this categorization, such that allowing even small experiments with these local forms will pol-

58 Garnett Roper, “The Caribbean as the City of God: Prophetic Possibilities for an Exilic People,” in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Roper and Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 7.

59 Erica Campbell, “Language and Identity in Caribbean Theology,” in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Roper and Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 28.

60 David Pearson, “Jesus’ Healing of the Paralytic: Luke 5:17–26 and the Jamaican Church,” in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Roper and Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 107.

61 A similar diagnosis, with reference to the hymnody used in the Jamaican church, is offered by J. Richard Middleton in his essay “Islands in the Sun: Overtures to a Caribbean Creation Theology,” in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Roper and Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 90–93.

lute a service of worship.⁶² The contamination principles of negativity dominance, permanence, and dose insensitivity seem operative here. Resistance to these forms in the church suggests that welcoming them into the church is to violate a moral boundary established by God and, as such, a boundary that must be upheld by those who worship that God. If not, sociomoral contamination will take place and the worship offered will not be acceptable to God. I'm not sure I see the difference between this logic and that of Peter in Acts *before* he is presented with his heavenly vision.

If God has in fact made all things clean, and that includes both animals and gentiles, then why would cultural forms be excluded from this sanctifying work?

In addition, resisting and stigmatizing the local causes the Spirit to groan and creation along with it, if that Spirit has been sent to translucently incorporate the particularities of the created world for the worship of God. It seems clear that this was the primary mission of the Spirit in Acts 10. What Peter may have viewed as syncretism (joining together the particularities of the Jew and the gentile into a single story) the Spirit instead presents as a necessary step in the sanctification of creation that generates shalom, flourishing, and the kingdom of God.

Local particularities, and a variety of them, seem to align with the fact that God reveals himself through the particularities of a first-century Palestinian Jew named Jesus, and through the interaction of the human creature with the created order. These interactions ought to produce plurality, not homogeneity; and plurality, whether racial, ethnic, economic, or musical, is not what one experiences in many Christian churches, wherever one goes. One has to ask then whether the Spirit sent by the Father through the Son is always the one leading us in worship if local cultural forms and particularities of language, music, food, etc. are not employed in the worship of the God who sent this Spirit.

The Poor as Vulnerable Witness to a Vulnerable God

A second, and connected, observation relates to the fact that local forms are stigmatized because they are *associated with particular groups of people*—the poor, uneducated, weak, and vulnerable. That is a significant theological problem for the church, and evidence of its captivity to a moral order that cannot be justified by recourse the Gospel of Christ. Whereas in the previous point we were dealing primarily with the Sociomoral Disgust domain, I think here we enter the Animal-Reminder domain. Why?

Recall that Animal-Reminder Disgust is triggered when specific stimuli re-

62 A Jamaican friend who works with a number of Jamaican churches commented that patios and reggae are stigmatized primarily because they are associated with the poor, marginalized, and uneducated, and that patois in particular ought not be encouraged because it there is no place for it in the broader power structures of a global culture. Neither one of these arguments is theological in nature.

mind us of our fragility, mortality, and death. Human persons tend to structure their moral worlds in such a way where these reminders are minimized or strictly controlled, if not rendered completely invisible. This can be done in terms of the physical spaces we regularly occupy, the ritual behaviors we engage in, and the worldview assumptions we hold. Peter would never have gone into Cornelius's house, shared food with him, or entertained the notion that Cornelius was a co-participant in the mission of God if not for the angelic visitation he received and the Spirit-baptism of the gentiles he witnessed. He was insulated, and in that insulation, he occupied a moral order where he was secure and significant, not vulnerable, weak, or fragile, and certainly not in danger of death—whether physical or symbolic. He was a circumcised Jew with a history, identity, and destiny unlike anyone else, and as such someone who could negotiate the world with a great sense of security and significance.

Until he fell into a trance. Until he heard a voice declaring “clean” that which he found disgusting. Until he went to Cornelius's house. Until the Spirit baptized a room full of gentiles without asking him first. When Peter returned to Jerusalem the circumcised believers demanded an explanation because their history, identity, and destiny were directly threatened by these happenings. They had to face their own vulnerability, fragility, and symbolic mortality in order to acknowledge this unfolding of God's work, work that folded the histories, identities, practices and sensibilities of the gentiles into the story of Israel's election.

David Pearson notes the foothold that the message of prosperity theology has taken in some branches of the Jamaican church, particularly the Charismatic and Pentecostal traditions.⁶³ Such a message generates a moral world where reminders of vulnerability, weakness, and brokenness are seen, not as a witness to the vulnerable God of Jesus Christ nor the humanity made in his image, but as threats to an ecclesial order structured around power, invulnerability, and social prestige. What room could there possibly be in a moral order like this for the destitute, disadvantaged, and stigmatized? The very community that is to embrace them in the name of Christ, and care for them as if caring for Christ himself, is instead disgusted and threatened by their vulnerability, expelling them from the community until their souls are saved, their habits are changed, and they are otherwise cleaned-up and made respectable.

Jesus came to overcome death, not to deny it. He did this by going through death, and by so doing grounding the security and significance of human persons in a story where creatureliness, vulnerability, and mortality are features of a good creation. There has to be room in the moral order of the church, and the world at large, for those who bear witness to the vulnerability of God through the vulner-

63 Pearson, “Jesus' Healing of the Paralytic,” 104.

ability of the humanity God gave them. When the church is disgusted by such persons, they not only have no room for the poor in their moral worlds, but no room for the God who so intimately bound himself to them. And when the church finds itself disgusted by the God they call holy (because of this God's intimate identification with the poor) it cannot bear the witness required of it, and instead only bears witness to its own fears and cultural idolatries.

Pastoral Priorities for Biblical Interpretation in the Caribbean¹

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Abstract

This essay proposes five pastoral priorities for biblical interpretation in the Caribbean. They are: 1) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be contextual before universalistic; 2) biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be communitarian before individualistic; 3) biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be popular, not rarefied; 4) biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be ecologically sensitive; 5) biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be activist, not quietist. But before outlining these proposed priorities, the essay will trace the history of biblical interpretation in the Caribbean and justify the importance of having particular hermeneutical emphases.

One of the forces that gave rise to the Reformation was that there was a growing scepticism toward the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages. Many yearned for “spiritual” food and simple devotion to the church.² They wanted a reading of Scripture that would inspire them, direct them, compel them to act, and clarify their existence. Five hundred years later, Protestants in a context far removed from the one previously mentioned are asking the same questions. How do we approach Scripture to benefit from it the most? How do we read it to effect a Caribbean renewal?

This paper attempts to answer these questions, but it does so especially with the pastor in mind. How might the pastor approach the text in order that her or his laypeople might receive the best of the text? I propose that he or she should have particular emphases; this paper proposes five pastoral priorities for biblical interpretation in the Caribbean. They are: 1) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be contextual before universalistic. 2) Biblical interpretation in the Carib-

1 This essay is based on a presentation given at the conference on “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, Kingston, Jamaica, September 9, 2017.

2 William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004), 45–46.

bean should be communitarian before individualistic. 3) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be populistic, not rarefied. 4) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be ecologically sensitive, especially environmentalist. 5) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be activist, not quietist. But before I delineate these proposed priorities, I will trace the history of biblical interpretation in the Caribbean and justify the importance of having hermeneutical emphases.

History of Biblical Interpretation in the Caribbean

Biblical Interpretation in the Colonial Period

Nathaniel S. Murrell asserts that the role that Christian theology and the Bible played in the colonial Caribbean experience was not the result of an afterthought, but rather predetermination.³ Indeed, Elsa Tamez, a Latin American liberation theologian, would agree with him. She claims that there was a triumphalistic spirit in Europe in this period, which was in part a result of the defeat of the Moors and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. These and other events led European Christians to believe that “God was leading the battle.” Columbus brought this triumphalistic spirit with him to the would-be New World and considered himself to be a missionary of the Christian gospel.⁴

Biblical interpretation in the colonial period cannot be separated from the European expansionist project, nor can it be localized to the church; it was used in the service of furthering the interests of the imperial powers. It was imperialistically Eurocentric in a number of senses. First, it sanctioned the domination of local peoples by Europeans. Murrell avers that the use of “European Christian expansionist” hermeneutics allowed the church to sanction a series of activities, events, and philosophies that created a haunting memory and an oppressive miasma for the first Caribbean peoples and, subsequently, for those Africans who eventually joined them in their wretched fate.⁵ Tamez, speaking more broadly as regards the context of Abya Yala (or the Americas), offers an example of the hermeneutics that was employed in the service of their conquest: a Doctor Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, of Costa Rica, used themes such as the flood (Gen 6–8) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19) to justify war against and con-

3 Nathaniel S. Murrell, “Wresting the Message from the Messenger: The Rastafari as a Case Study in the Caribbean Indigenization of the Bible,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible from the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (rev. ed.; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 169.

4 Elsa Tamez, “The Bible and the Five Hundred Years of Conquest,” in *Voices from the Margin*, 14.

5 Murrell, “Wresting the Message,” 170.

quest of the indigenous people. According to Sepúlveda, God sent the flood because of the blasphemous barbarians.⁶

Although a certain reading of the Bible was used to justify conquest of the Americas, William Watty suggests that perhaps the closest and most obvious connection between theology and colonialism can be seen in the post-Emancipation era. Having arrogated the wealth of the so-called New World, Europeans thought it their duty to improve, protect, and govern the supposedly less enlightened races of the world, as evidenced by the last stanza in the missionary hymn of the famous missionary, Reginald Heber: “Can we whose souls are lighted / With wisdom from on high— / Can we to men benighted / The lamp of life, deny?”⁷ Beyond this duty to improve, the hymn also reveals the contempt that the Europeans had of the cultures of non-Europeans, a contempt that also characterized European hermeneutics. Therefore, the second way in which European biblical interpretation was imperialistically Eurocentric was that it promoted the European culture as superior.

Lewin Williams asserts that evangelization, with its attendant missionary theology, has largely been a foreign imposition on the Caribbean culture. In fact, the theology itself was the medium through which foreign cultural values were imposed in the region because the content of the theology represented foreign values. Williams puts it this way: “the vehicle *became* the message, so that with Christianity the Caribbean received a large dose of European culture.” He continues: “Furthermore, the colonizing culture cannot avoid presenting itself as superior to the host culture. Colonization is the presumption of superiority.”⁸ The gospel message, therefore, promoted European culture as superior in the Caribbean—indeed, to all cultures. In this way, it merely expressed the zeitgeist of of racial superiority characteristic of Europe and its church at the time.⁹ Moreover, it occasioned the deepening of the self-doubt of Afro-Caribbean peoples and the hatred for all things African, along with the embrace of all things European.¹⁰

The third way that biblical interpretation was imperialistically Eurocentric was its perpetuation of the status quo it had created. Murrell contends that because the Bible, along with its interpreters and their message, was at the forefront of the European expansionist project, a special hermeneutics had to be developed to suit its purpose. It inevitably had to be one that favored the good fortune and success

6 Tamez, “Five Hundred Years,” 15. There is a typological error on page 15 that provides as the reference for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah Gen 6:19 instead of Gen 19. Abya Yala was the name given to the Americas in pre-Columbian times by the Native American Kuna people.

7 Quoted in William Watty, “The De-Colonization of Theology,” in *Troubling the Waters*, ed. Idris Hamid (San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahaman Printery Ltd., 1973), 63–64.

8 Lewin Williams, *Caribbean Theology* (Black Perspectives: Research in Religion and Family 2; New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 19; emphasis original.

9 Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 19–22.

10 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* (Kingston, Jamaica: Jugaro, 2012), 84.

of the European at the expense of the African. The Bible was recruited by the Europeans to buttress the imperial project and to give legitimacy to the institution of slavery. Murrell further states that the church also found in the Bible a defense for the class structure it had created. This is perfectly encapsulated in the infamous hymn by Cecil Francis Alexander:

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small;
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

The rich man at his castle,
The poor man at his gate;
God made them high and lowly,
And ordered their estate.¹¹

Murrell notes that, with few exceptions, British missionaries were not concerned with the plight of the enslaved. Thus, the hermeneutics that they employed in the colonial context only served to promote the “Euro-Christian culture,” buttress the class structure, maintain the status quo, perpetuate the business of slavery, and insure the means of production.¹²

Notwithstanding, it must be highlighted that there was another, disparate strain of interpretation in the colonial period. It comprised interpretations that emerged later but that countered the claims and pretensions of the theology that obtained in the region, and especially in Jamaica, during that period. One example of this counter-interpretation was that of the Native Baptists. Devon Dick reveals that whereas the Europeans of the missionary church considered the African as inferior in intellect, character, and culture, the Native Baptists employed a hermeneutic that was based on a different understanding of themselves and the Scripture. They understood that they were fundamentally equal as human beings to their oppressors, even if the latter were unaware themselves. They employed a hermeneutic that rejected interpretations of the biblical text that denied them an equal status, underscored with a divine subscription. Instead, theirs was a hermeneutic that had as its point of departure the axioms of equality and justice—a liberation hermeneutic. This liberation hermeneutic, Dick contends, led to the 1865 Native Baptist War.¹³

Mention must also be made of an extra-ecclesiastical hermeneutical group that

11 Cecil Frances Alexander, “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” in *African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal* (Nashville: A.M.E. Church, 1984), hymn 434.

12 Murrell, “Wresting the Message,” 171–72.

13 Devon Dick, *The Cross and the Machete: Native Baptists of Jamaica; Identity, Ministry and Legacy* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2009), 142–43, 163–66.

emerged in the late political colonial period: the Rastafari group. According to Murrell, “Rastafarians strategically read the Bible to discommodate the messenger and oppressor, and secure liberation for the oppressed through Rasta biblical ‘reasonings’ and reggae chants against the Babylon system.” He calls the movement remarkable, especially because the views and readings of the group are marked by heterogeneity. Nevertheless, the hermeneutics of Rastafari can be characterized as suspicious and Afro-centric. In a word, their hermeneutics distrusts the traditional interpretations of the text and is used to affirm the identity and worth of Africans. Rastafari hermeneutics also eschews strict interpretations of the text.¹⁴ In the words of Jamaican Rastafarian artiste Chronixx, Rastas “read between the lines.”¹⁵

Biblical Interpretation in the Neo-colonial Period

Despite the exception of the Native Baptists, the hermeneutics of the neo-colonial church has also been found wanting. According to Williams, in the neo-colonial period, while the faces have changed, the theology has not shifted significantly. The neo-colonial church has been found to be conservative in its ideological stance, seeking to preserve and maintain present structures until new forms become acceptable.¹⁶ Garnett Roper would concur, saying that the reading strategies of the postcolonial (or neo-colonial) Caribbean space are those inherited from the previous period: those that support the *status quo ante* and that promote a deferred gratification and justification in the afterlife.¹⁷ Ashley Smith comments that the religion in the region has been charged with “softening up” the masses in preparation for their economic exploitation by foreign bodies.¹⁸ Indeed, Watty laments: “There is an opium in popular religion far more stupefying and soul-destroying than the marijuana prohibited by law, and by its effects upon the minds and wills and souls and values of people”; indeed, he notes that “religion could easily be ranked as the greatest single obstacle to meaningful progress in the Caribbean.”¹⁹

Smith points especially to the irruption and influence of non-pietistic North American groups on religious and social thinking leading up to the 1980 general election.²⁰ In fact, Williams highlights the fact that past president of the United

14 Murrell, “Wresting the Message,” 173–78.

15 Chronixx mentions this in his song, “Selassie Children,” on his 2017 debut album, *Chronology*. The lyrics run: “Soon they will realise / we’ve been reading between the lines [emphasis mine] / Remember we foretold the War / You never forget who we are / *Tel dem* we’re Selassie children!” See Chronixx, “Selassie Children” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuQVcn5yReo>).

16 Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 14–16.

17 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 83.

18 Ashley Smith, *Real Roots and Potted Plants: Reflections on the Caribbean Church* (Mandeville, Jamaica: Eureka, 1984), 10–11.

19 Watty, “De-Colonization,” 67.

20 Smith, *Real Roots and Potted Plants*, 18.

States of America Gerald Ford not only admitted to the involvement of CIA in the Two-Thirds World to sway religious and political opinion, but that operatives also came as missionaries in the region, the number of which increased under the successive Jimmy Carter administration.²¹ Further, Watty states, the Caribbean has been bombarded with North American propaganda. It has co-opted the middle class, “defiled the sanctuary,” and dominated the entertainment space. It is marked by rabid individualism and consumerism and has given rise to a spate of social problems. It has not contributed positively to the living conditions of the people. And Christianity’s complicity with it will surely be judged harshly by history. In the words of Watty, “It cannot expire too soon.”²²

Closer to the present, the post-independence Caribbean church has been characterized by a dependence on and mimicry of the reading strategies and conclusions of American, especially Pentecostal, and European theologies.²³ These theologies tend to be primarily systematic, with a focus on soteriology and eschatology. Similarly, the reading strategies in this period also tend to mine the texts for doctrinal proofs, which is the definition of proof-texting. I would argue that the interpretations have become more Christocentric as well (perhaps even Christ-obsessive), probably more resembling that of the Patristic period, with the intent of finding in any verse or passage an allusion to the person or work of Christ.²⁴ These allusions are most often used to allow the preacher to climax to an evangelistic call to the altar, that persons might be converted. But since this call is often to persons whose only religious tradition is Christian, one has to wonder from what and to what are persons being called to *convert*.

The Importance of Hermeneutical Emphases

The objective of this paper begs the question: Why should the pastor have priorities for biblical interpretation? Should she or he not merely speak “the whole truth of Scripture” to the best of her or his ability? Why should the preacher have hermeneutical emphases? This question need delay us only briefly.

First, to suggest that a pastor or that biblical interpretation might have emphases is not a novel concept. The church has always struggled to interpret the Bible in ways that would address moral and existential issues; that is to say, interpretation has always been employed for particular circumstances or ends. In fact, in the so-called Middle Ages, it was believed that any given text had four possible

21 Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 24.

22 Watty, “De-Colonization,” 67. All quotations are from the source.

23 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 84.

24 Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr, *Biblical Interpretation*, 35–36. To be sure, Martin Luther himself had a hermeneutical approach that—echoing tendencies of the Church Fathers—also read Scripture through a Christocentric lens. See Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr, *Biblical Interpretation*, 47.

meanings: the literal, the moral, the anagogical (or eschatological), and the allegorical.²⁵ Therefore, one could interpret a text for its teaching concerning Israel, for example, or for what it might teach concerning the end time. Consequently, to suggest that parsons should have hermeneutical emphases is in hermeneutical continuity with hermeneutical history. The relevant question is *which* hermeneutical emphases?

Second, it is necessary to have hermeneutical emphases because the interpretation proffered should benefit people, and people have particular concerns and needs. They have questions they want answered, issues to be resolved, and a desire for direction. Faith Linton, for example, devotes an entire book, *What the Preacher Forgot to Tell Me*, to address what she believes that preachers in Jamaica and the Caribbean had missed, ignored, or neglected about the gospel message in their teaching and sermonizing—that it starts at Genesis 1 (with creation), not Genesis 3 (the fall).²⁶ People are not objects into which we input block information that has little or no value for their lives. They have desires, concerns, and needs. Interpretation is most useful, then—perhaps, even, only useful—when it addresses them.

Third, I would argue that the pastor invariably has hermeneutical emphases anyway, that having hermeneutical emphases is inevitable. These emphases might be doctrinal or, more specifically, Christological. Therefore, one might consider the proposals in this essay to be merely proffering a priority of hermeneutical emphases for the consideration of the biblical interpreter.

Pastoral Priorities of Biblical Interpretation

With the above considerations in mind, I offer the following pastoral priorities for biblical interpretation.

Contextuality vis-à-vis Universality

First of all, biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be contextual before it is universalistic. Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean church tends to be universalistic in that it tends to interpret the biblical text as relating to all contexts and for all time. The biblical text is read in a way that treats the peoples of the world as belonging to one nondescript category: humanity. Consequently, these peoples are rid of their lived realities, cultures, and worldviews—save one, that must define them all—and, so, are deracinated from their worlds in each instance that the biblical text is interpreted for them.

Garnett Roper acknowledges that Christian theology, as it emerged in the late

25 Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr, *Biblical Interpretation*, 42–43.

26 Faith Linton, *What the Preacher Forgot to Tell Me: Identity and Gospel in Jamaica* (Pickering, ON: Bay Ridge Books, 2009).

first century BCE and the early second century CE, had universalistic assumptions. For example, the Apostle Paul speaks of all human beings when he says, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Christian theology continued with these universalistic assumptions through the major theologians of history, including Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Karl Barth, all of whom spoke in theological terms that considered no cultural or historical distinctions within the human race.²⁷ Tim Gorringer notes that even contemporary theologies, such as North American Black theology and Korean Minjung theology, though employing liberationist hermeneutics, still largely neglect the contexts within which they are found and to which they respond.²⁸

The Scriptures, however, are a collection of writings that were made for specific audiences at specific times in history. In this way, the Bible is inherently contextual—wherein lies its value. This is not to say that the text never treats humanity as one people. The apocalyptic texts especially tend to describe the grand movement of the history of the cosmos and humanity’s participation in it. But the Bible is largely a contextual document. Its creation was inspired by concrete circumstances. This fact does not imprison the biblical text to a bygone age but, instead, ensures its continued relevance by tethering its messages to concrete situations.

It is therefore important that the pastor prioritizes a contextual interpretation over a universalistic one in order that the text might be found helpful for the unique challenges of his or her context. In this way, the interpretation of the text might serve to clarify aspects of the lived experiences and reality of those for whom the text is being interpreted. Biblical interpretation would thus supply tools for the hearers, with which they might navigate and analyze their space.

The universalistic way of thinking assumes that context is not important. This is one of its greatest weaknesses. In fact, according to Roper, in practice, it has amounted to a status-quo theology, as it has failed to reckon with the plight of the peoples of the Two-Third’s World. Its main achievement is to have pacified and insulated the citizens of the First World against the misery and abjection of the Two-Third’s World.²⁹ In regard to the Caribbean context, in particular, Roper asserts, “the preaching and thinking about God in these churches do not take into account, except anecdotally, the matters that are part of the lived experience of the Caribbean context.”³⁰

By way of illustration, the Law Reform Act was passed by the Jamaican Parliament on July 11, 2017. This Act, which goes by the unwieldy name of the “Law

27 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 19–20.

28 Tim Gorringer, foreword to Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 8.

29 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 22.

30 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 26.

Reform (Zones of Special Operations) (Special Security and Community Development Measures) Act,” empowers the Prime Minister in Council (which comprises the Prime Minister as chairman, along with the Minister of National Security, Minister of Justice, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Attorney General, the Chief of Defense Staff, the Commissioner of Police, and the National Security Advisor), on the written advice of the Chief of Defense Staff and the Commissioner of Police, to declare a zone of special operations for a period not exceeding sixty days if an area is found to have “escalating violence,” “rampant criminality,” “gang warfare,” and “murder,” and if it is a threat to the “rule of law and public order.”³¹ The zone allows security personnel to search a person, premises, or property without a warrant,³² to cordon off an area for a period of twenty-four hours, and to establish a curfew for a period of seventy-two hours.³³ On September 1, 2017, the first zone of special operations (ZOSO) was declared: Mount Salem in the parish of St. James.³⁴

The following Sunday, September 3, 2017, one church, with probably one of the larger populations in Portmore,³⁵ was given a sermon from Phil 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” There was no mention of ZOSO.³⁶ This crime bill follows within a decade of the Tivoli Garden incursion³⁷ and has the potential to incur loss of life and damage to property, if abused, but this fact did not figure into the sermon of that Sunday. Instead, the sermon concerned “doing all things through Christ who strengthens,” and, more specifically, to be “empowered” to commit to activities within the church.³⁸ A culturally literate pastor—that is, a pastor who, among other things, is aware of the “dominating and

31 Ian Boyne, “Important Provisions in the ‘Zones of Special Operations’ Law,” Jamaica Information Service, July 13, 2017 (<http://jis.gov.jm/important-provisions-zones-special-operations-law/>).

32 Latonya Linton, “All Clear for Zones of Special Operations Legislation,” Jamaica Information Service, July 12, 2017 (<http://jis.gov.jm/clear-zones-special-operations-legislation/>).

33 Boyne, “Important Provisions.”

34 “PM Declares Mount Salem First Zone of Special Operations,” Jamaica Information Service, September 1, 2017 (<http://jis.gov.jm/pm-declares-mount-salem-first-zone-special-operations/>).

35 There are more than 500 persons on the roll at this church.

36 Spencer Colquhoun, “The Source of Our Strength,” sermon, Portmore Missionary Church, Portmore, Jamaica, September 3, 2017 (<http://portmoremissionarychurch.org/multimedia-archive/the-source-of-our-strength/>).

37 See “Tivoli incursion anniversary must be the last without justice for victims -- Amnesty,” *Jamaica Observer*, May 22, 2014 (<http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Tivoli-incursion-anniversary-must-be-the-last-without-justice-for-victims---Amnesty>).

38 Colquhoun, “Our Strength.” This was his thesis.

exploitative influences and agenda at work in a given context³⁹—would know to read the new “text”⁴⁰ that has emerged through ZOSO with the lens of Scripture.

On the other hand, Roper asserts that universalist theology—and, therefore, universalistic hermeneutics—has a great strength: it refuses to give allegiance to one class, race, or group of people at the expense of another. It potentially critiques all cultures and peoples.⁴¹ I would add another: it is also useful in how it places peoples within the ebb and flow of history and in the broader context of the people of the world. It can be used to elucidate the fact that there are connecting forces between a people and their context and the peoples and contexts of the rest of the world. It can be used to relate and clarify the overarching system and spirit of the world and the grand movement of people in history. But this should be secondary. Interpretation should move from the specific context to the universal system and spirit of the world and the flow of history.

One should not, however, underestimate the utility of this hermeneutical emphasis on universality, for there is indeed a comprehensive system of power that bears upon the entire creation and has imposed itself upon it with sovereignty. This universal system, which affects all contexts, can be summed up in the word *empire*. The Accra Confession of the World Communion of Reformed Churches defines *empire* as follows: “In using the term ‘empire’ we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.”⁴² The empire that is current in the world today defends the system of neoliberal globalization that sacrifices the poor and the non-human creation itself in its unquenchable lust and interminable quest for profit. Even more, this empire propagates the ideology that there is no alternative to its status quo.⁴³

The hermeneutics of the pastor should respond to this. The very narrative of

39 Oral A. W. Thomas, “Ashley Smith, Carnival, and Hermeneutics: Reflections on Caribbean Biblical Interpretation,” in *A Kairos Moment for the Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Garnett Roper and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 75. For a fuller treatment, see Oral Thomas, *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context* (London: Equinox, 2010), esp. 146.

40 Thomas claims that culture is a “text,” along with the text of Scripture. See Thomas, *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics*, 155.

41 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 22.

42 “The Accra Confession,” World Communion of Reformed Churches (<http://wcrch.ch/accra/the-accra-confession>).

43 “The Accra Confession.” The expression “there is no alternative,” coined by the nineteenth-century thinker Herbert Spencer, was widely used as slogan of UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher in the nineteen-eighties in support of her policies, and has since become common in certain political and economic circles. Christian economist Bob Goudzwaard has commented personally that in based on his encounter with the acronym TINA (“there is no alternative”) in his dealings with the World Bank, he has challenged this with TATA (“there are thousands of alternatives”). See Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen, and David Van Heemst, *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); foreword by Desmond M. Tutu.

Jesus of Nazareth should make plain the threat that empire has always had. Indeed, the 2010 theology statement of the Council for World Mission notes that Jesus was born in the context of empire and his teachings threatened this empire. In fact, it even cautions that to say that Jesus died on the cross for our sins neglects the fact that he was a threat to power in his society. Jesus died on the cross for his beliefs and teachings and for his solidarity with the outcast.⁴⁴ Might our hermeneutics bear this out?

Communitarianism vis-à-vis Individualism

My second proposal is that biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be communitarian before individualistic. As previously alluded to, the missionary theology of the neo-colonial period brought with it the promotion of capitalism and a concomitant individualism, with its message of “personal salvation.”⁴⁵ Anna Kasafi Perkins asserts, however, that genuine morality must be seen in communal terms, as much as in the personal. She insists that community is shaped by characters and choices and also shapes characters and choices. She laments the fact, however, that the communal factor is often neglected in conversations regarding morality. Instead, the forest is neglected for the trees. Human beings are not only personal beings, but social ones. They live and move and have their being in community.

Perkins cites a Jamaican adage that encapsulates the idea of the influence of community on the personal: “*Bord kyaahn flai an im pikni waak*,”⁴⁶ which she translates, “If birds can’t fly their offspring will also lack the ability to fly.” Another is “Show me your company and I’ll tell you who you are.” She remarks that, even in business ethics, it is clear that the culture of the organization influences the person in some way, especially through signals of reward and punishment. The organization’s moral norms and values certainly influence the moral reasoning of its members. She concludes that one cannot reasonably assess, then, the morality of an action (or choice), or the person (or character) who performs it, without considering the community that is being shaped by the person and that is shaping him or her.⁴⁷ The individual, then, including his or her actions, is only properly understood in the light of the community.

With this in mind, should not hermeneutics prioritize the community over the individual in order that the individual within community, as well as the collective person, might benefit? Indeed, Craig L. Nesson recalls Dietrich Bonhoeffer to

44 Council for World Mission, *Mission in the Context of Empire: Theology Statement 2010* (Singapore: Council for World Mission, 2010), 4.

45 Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 25–27.

46 The spelling system used is the Cassidy-JLU system for writing Jamaican.

47 Anna Kasafi Perkins, *Moral Dis-Ease Making Jamaica III? Re-Engaging the Conversation On Morality* (GraceKennedy Foundation Lecture 28; Kingston, Jamaica: GraceKennedy Foundation, 2013), 32.

have called the church “the collective person.”⁴⁸ Further, Daniel J. Ott notes that the church is *ekklēsia*, the basic meaning of which is “assembly.” On the other hand, Ott declares that the church is not only *ekklēsia*, but *ekklēsia tou theou* (assembly of God).⁴⁹ But this, in my opinion, smacks of equivocation, making synonymous the institutional church or the congregational church and the “called-out” church. Yet the church is not simply a community; it is a community within community. I suppose this needs to be said because, at times, the church speaks of itself not so much as *holy* but *wholly* other. The church community should not be an insular community. Neither should the member consider herself or himself apart from community. The hermeneutical emphasis should join the church with the larger community within which it witnesses, just as it joins the individual to the greater body.

Perhaps an illustration might be helpful here. José Míguez-Bonino narrates the tale of Columbian priest Camilo Torres concerning the following passage in the Gospel of Matthew: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23–24). When Torres read this passage he naturally asked himself the question, “Who is my brother [or sister] who has something against me?” In answering, though, he resisted framing this question in personal terms: “Who has something against *me*, personally?” Instead, he asked the question in a way that accounted for his belonging to a community: a priest who belongs to a particular religious and political body, an intellectual who has influence on history, and a member of the power class.

When he framed the question in this way, the answer became clear. The brother or sister who has something against him is not a colleague or family member; it is the poor, the peasant, the underclass. He began to view his person in community and discerned that his brother or sister has something against him because he is aligned with the institutions, group, and class that is against him or her. One might question his resolution to move into political action and then to guerrilla action.⁵⁰ But his reading was ultimately beneficial in that it allowed him to see that his own personality had public connotations. This is the criticism Williams had of neo-missionary theology, that since sin was defined only in personal and private terms it

48 Craig L. Nesson, “What If the Church Really is the Body of Christ?” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51.1 (Spring 2012): 44.

49 Daniel J. Ott, “Church, Community, and Democracy,” *Political Theology* 12.3 (July 2011): 347.

50 José Míguez-Bonino, “Marxist Critical Tools: Are They Helpful in Breaking the Stronghold of Idealist Hermeneutics?,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible from the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (3rd ed.; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 45–46.

never challenged the institutional and communal sins of the context; that is, it never moved into public dimensions.⁵¹

It would be remiss of me to neglect the fact that Jamaica's very own national hero Sam Sharpe illustrates reading in *public* terms. When he read the verse of Scripture, "No one can serve two masters" (Matt 6:24a), he was not moved to act in his own interest, but instead set in motion a series of events that led to the 1831 Native Baptist rebellion.⁵² I would argue that biblical interpretation is most useful when it is read for its communal implications before its individual application, for the former has implications for the latter.

Populism vis-à-vis Rarefication

My third proposal is that biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be populist,⁵³ never rarefied. By populist I mean that interpretation should be done in solidarity with, for the benefit of, and in response to, the concerns of the ordinary person. Ultimately, this hermeneutical approach utilizes a reader-centered reading strategy. Tamez remarks that the readings of Bartolomé de Las Casas and Indigenous Christian Guamán Poma represent popular readings at the time of the conquest and colonization of the Americas; these were readings from the perspective of the impoverished and oppressed peoples and marginalized cultures.

She continues to note that in contemporary Abya Yala (specifically, Latin America), the popular reading of the Bible has empowered the indigenous people (who were once oppressed by its elitist reading) to "discern the present times," "struggle for life with dignity," and hope that the current circumstances will change because God is a God of justice, love, and peace who identifies with the plight of the poor. For this reason, she calls the popular reading a militant reading. It is also a purposive reading. The reading is done with the lived reality in mind and in response to the daily struggles of the people.⁵⁴ This is congruent with Roper's understanding of a reader-centered reading strategy. Speaking specifically about liberation hermeneutics, he comments: "The interaction between text and reader responds to the quest for meaning, clarification and understanding of presuppositions, as well as to questions, challenges and expectations arising out of the experience of and engagement with the day to day realities of life."⁵⁵

In contrast, Tamez compares this reading strategy with a scholarly one. She comments that the scholarly reading of the Bible was a practice bequeathed to

51 Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 31.

52 Delroy A. Reid-Salmon, *Burnin' for Freedom: A Theology for the Black Atlantic Struggle for Liberation* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2012), 71.

53 What Elsa Tamez might refer to as a "popular reading of the text"; see Tamez, "Five Hundred Years," 19.

54 Tamez, "Five Hundred Years," 19.

55 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 85.

Latin American and Caribbean scholars by Europeans and was naturally distant from the lives of ordinary people.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Roper does offer a caveat to a popular reading of the Bible in the Caribbean when he says that a reader-centered hermeneutic “is facilitated by the role of a trained scholar.”⁵⁷ Tamez further states that rigorous exegesis is not unwelcome by the popular reading community. Rigorous exegesis can systematize the intuitions and aspirations of popular reading.⁵⁸ According to Roper, with the focus on the reading community it is the monopoly of expertise that is broken, not the scientific posture.⁵⁹

There is actually historical precedent for a reader-centered, populist reading of the Bible in the Caribbean—that of the Native Baptists. Dick explains that the hermeneutical approach of the Native Baptists was reader-centered. Their reading strategy was not so much focused on what was meant by the author or the text in his (or her) and its original context, as on its significations and implications for the interpretive community. They perceived an unobstructed continuity between the world *in the text* and *in front of the text*. They were particularly attracted to texts that related to themes of justice and equality. As previously mentioned, their hermeneutics ultimately led to the public and populist rebellion of 1865.⁶⁰

Oral Thomas illustrates the use of this hermeneutical approach in his *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics* when he describes the story of a Bible Study with a Father Leslie Lett and some members of his congregation. Earlier that day, a peaceful protest was violently subdued. The members of the Bible study were urging the priest to publicly denounce the violence in Sunday Mass. As they reflected on Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 4:7–17a, they came to identify with the abused protestors who were “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies” (4:8–10).

For this reason, they concluded that Mass was, in fact, truly celebrated in the protest. They interpreted the event as identifying with the elements of Mass, where the tear gas was seen as “incense,” the streets as “Sanctuary,” and the bodies and blood of the suffering people as “bread and wine.”⁶¹ This reading was populist in that it identified with the protestors—though the protestors them-

56 Tamez, “Five Hundred Years,” 20. Yet it might be useful to ask: Is the Bible inherently scholarly in contexts like Latin America and the Caribbean? Is not the language formal and scholarly? Are not the concepts of the language and the background of the world *behind the text* foreign to the ordinary reader?

57 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 86. Roper was, of course, referring to the liberation hermeneutic, but his treatment was of its use by the reading community.

58 Tamez, “Five Hundred Years,” 21.

59 Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, 86.

60 Dick, *Cross and Machete*, 163–65.

61 Thomas, *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics*, 156–57.

selves were not in the Bible study—and allowed even a priest to see how their struggle related to his own faith-experience.

As a corollary of the fact that biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should relate to, identify with, and be in response to the challenges of the lived reality and the struggles of the lived experiences of ordinary people, there is the necessity that it also be existential. David Pearson suggests that what tends to concern the contemporary church is orthodoxy (or “right doctrine”), not orthopraxy (or “right action”).⁶² This means that the church is more likely to focus on doctrinal matters than on existential matters—matters concerning belief rather than life and living. Pearson further suggests that the Jamaican church’s current lack of relevance to the community is born out of this mistaken way of reading the gospel, where it stresses a need for right doctrine (orthodoxy) and downplays the importance of right action in society (orthopraxy).

In a similar vein, Roper states that Caribbean theology is not interested in an armchair discussion about metaphysics and ontology. It is concerned about the lived reality and the lived experience of persons. The main difference, he highlights, between traditional European theology and Caribbean theology is that the interlocutor changes (the one asking the questions). The Caribbean person is not so much interested in questions related to the existence of God; she or he is more interested in the *character* of this God. Is God a just God? Is God on the side of those who are victims of injustice? In other words, he or she poses ethical and existential questions.⁶³ A populist reading strategy is also an existential one. These reading strategies are not interested in expert or abstract theological formulations or the *question* of God, but the *character* of God and how God relates to humanity. The pastor’s hermeneutics, therefore, should, in solidarity with these people, seek to answer those questions.

Environmentalism

Four, biblical interpretation should be ecologically sensitive, especially environmentalist. James S. Wesley warns that the greatest health issue that humanity and creation currently face is the ecological deterioration of the earth. The issue of climate change has become a foremost issue of deliberation in various forums and gatherings all around the world.⁶⁴ Indeed, Wesley S. notes a quip by Barbara R. Rossing that the prediction of the effects of global warming—“higher sea levels,

62 David Pearson, “Jesus’ Healing of the Paralytic: Luke 5:17–26 and the Jamaican Church,” in *A Kairos Moment for the Caribbean Theology*, 98.

63 Garnett Roper, “The Caribbean as the City of God: Prophetic Possibilities for an Exilic People,” in *A Kairos Moment for the Caribbean Theology*, 3–4.

64 James Wesley S., “Climate Change: Issues and Challenges to Christian Witness,” in *Good News to the Whole Creation: A Festschrift to the Rev. Dr. V. J. John*, ed. Limatula Longkumer, Philip Vinod Peacock, and Rodinmawia Ralte (Delhi, India: ISPCK & Bishop’s College, 2016), 228–29.

more acidic oceans, fiercer storms, deadlier forest fires, more heat-related deaths, longer dry seasons, declining water supplies, catastrophic floods, and increasing infectious diseases”⁶⁵—sounds more like a chapter out of the Book of Revelation.⁶⁶

Yet Wesley S. asserts that it is the most vulnerable communities that will be affected most by climate change. Speaking from an Indian context, he notes that farming and fishing communities around the world are already being affected by climate change. Effects of the incipient new climate regime, such as drought and incessant rain and the destruction of corals, which is an essential food for fish, affects farming and fishing communities respectively. Ultimately, Wesley S. argues, climate change is an issue of *justice* because it does not stand to affect everyone the same way.⁶⁷

Another example of this fact is that evacuations can be made in larger countries for residents to move more inland,⁶⁸ as in the case of Floridians recently,⁶⁹ when category-four Hurricane Irma made landfall on 10 September 2017.⁷⁰ But citizens of smaller countries, such as Barbuda in the northern end of the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean, had to bear the brunt of the storm.⁷¹ Moreover, climate change is a matter of justice because it itself is related to, if not a direct result of, the disproportionate distribution of wealth and consumption of resources in the global economy. In fact, it reveals to us that nature is also victim of the *status quo*, of domination, along with the poor.

In the light of the imminent crisis of climate change, Wesley S. offers suggestions for Christian witness and, especially, for pastoral care. *He highlights that the theologizing of the pastor must take into account the environment.* He also mentions that the role of the pastor will have to involve the conscientization of those

65 Barbara R. Rossing, “Hastening the Day; When the Earth will Burn? Global Warming, Revelation and 2 Peter 3,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35.5 (2008): 363, quoted in Wesley, “Climate Change,” 228.

66 Wesley S., “Climate Change,” 228.

67 Wesley S., “Climate Change,” 230–32, 234.

68 Erin Brodwin and Matt Johnston, “The Countries Most Likely to Survive Climate Change in One Infographic,” *Independent (UK)*, August 27, 2017 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/the-countries-most-likely-to-survive-climate-change-in-one-infographic-a7915166.html>). Originally published in: Erin Brodwin and Matt Johnston, “The Countries Most Likely to Survive Climate Change in One Infographic,” *The Business Insider*, November 30, 2015.

69 Douglas Hanks and Patricia Mazzei, “Miami-Dade expands Irma evacuation orders,” *Miami Herald*, September 7, 2017 (<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/weather/hurricane/article171780902.html>).

70 Perry Stein, Mark Berman, and Wesley Lowery, “Hurricane Irma Makes Second Landfall in Florida and Will Roar up the State’s Gulf Coast,” *Washington Post*, September 10, 2017 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/09/10/hurricane-irma-makes-landfall-in-florida-keys-targets-gulf-coast/>).

71 “Hurricane Irma Survivors in Caribbean Fear They Will Be Forgotten after ‘Apocalyptic’ Storm,” NCB News, September 13, 2017 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/hurricane-irma/hurricane-irma-survivors-caribbean-fear-they-will-be-forgotten-after-n800806>).

under his or her influence.⁷² The pastor, therefore, will have to be careful that her or his hermeneutics engenders or awakens an awareness of the issues related to the environment, in general, and to climate change, in particular, in the laity. Finally, the pastor will also have to assume an advocacy role as he or she seeks to shape public opinion and policy on the behalf of the *voiceless* environment in fulfillment of his or her prophetic responsibility in and to the world.⁷³

On the other hand, R. Zolawma argues that environmentalism is an issue of contention among Christians. He avers that often the subject of the environment is politicized. This is not surprising since the environment has been “put to use by people and is divided up by governments.” Notwithstanding, he poses this question: “Apart from politics, however, might there be a Christian approach to environmentalism?”

He argues that the church’s response to environmental issues will be most effective and fruitful if its premise comes out of the very core of the Christian faith. He suggests that for this to happen, the subject and significance of environmentalism must be shown to be related to the very core of the gospel message: the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. He begins in (the) Genesis. He argues that the very act of creation was an expression of the love of God that overflowed out of the Trinity. The creation itself, then, is an expression of love and is where the Gospel begins. The account of Genesis is foundational to a Christian understanding of creation because it is in God’s creative act that God’s posture in relation to creation can be discerned.

Nevertheless, the account of creation also describes the consequence of the disruption of interpersonal relationships within humanity and the extra-communal relationship of humanity with the rest of creation after the committance of sin. The latter is especially seen in Gen 3:17b–19:

^{17b} Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return. (NIVUK)

⁷² Wesley S., “Climate Change,” 229–38.

⁷³ Wesley S., “Climate Change,” 229–38.

But the creation was originally declared “very good.” Zolawma argues that God’s declaration of creation was not revoked simply because humans sinned. In the beginning, God created out of love and would not jettison God’s beloved creation, including the earth itself, because of sin. But, Zolawma continues, the Messiah eventually came “to rescue all who were affected by sin’s curse.” He cites Rom 5:18–19 as describing the impact of Jesus’s coming:

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (NIVUK)

These verses describe the fact that humankind is being redeemed and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. However, further in the book of Romans, it can be seen how salvation is related to the whole creation. Romans 8:19–21 reads:

¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

These verses highlight the fact that the rest of creation will share with the children of God in the freedom of redemption.⁷⁴ This conclusion is congruent with Jewish thought, which affirmed that the entire creative order would be transformed in the end.⁷⁵ Therefore, Zolawma contends that, through Christ, it is not just human beings who are being restored to life but also creation.⁷⁶

Indeed, J. Richard Middleton traces in other New Testament texts a cosmic vision of salvation, such as in Matt 19:28, when Jesus predicts a “renewal of all things” in the end; in Peter’s proclamation in Acts 3:21, where he says that “heaven must receive him [Jesus] until the time comes for God to *restore everything*”; and in Col 1:19–20, which expresses God’s desire to “reconcile *all things*” to Godself through Christ. This cosmic vision of salvation can also be found in the phrases, “We await a new heaven and a new earth” and “I saw a new heaven and a new earth,” in 2 Pet 3:13 and Rev 21:1, respectively. The phrase, “a new heaven and a new earth,” Middleton explains, has its origin in Isa 65:17–25, which envis-

74 R. Zolawma, “Eco-theology: The Redemption of the Earth,” in *Good News to the Whole Creation*, 189–92.

75 Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 430.

76 Zolawma, “Eco-theology,” 192.

ages “a redeemed community in rebuilt Jerusalem” and a restored world: a vision of a life that flourishes “after the devastation of the Babylonian exile.” This vision “is then universalized to the entire cosmos . . . in late Second Temple Judaism and in the New Testament.”⁷⁷

As a corollary, Zolawma charges that the church has a duty to be steward of the earth. A concern for creation should be implicit in the songs that we sing, the sermons that we preach, and the prayers that we pray. Moreover, disciples of Christ should also become involved with environmentalist advocacy in some way and otherwise live in a way that respects the environment.⁷⁸

Finally, Roper, in his treatise of the subject of Jubilee in relation to the Jamaican context and in the light of its fiftieth anniversary of political independence, enunciates the import of the Jubilee principle for humanity and the rest of creation. Reflecting on Lev 25:8–11 and especially its proposal of observing Sabbath years, he remarks that the first lesson of Jubilee was the importance of life, itself. He explains that Jubilee was a time when human, animal, and plant life were allowed to just be.

In fact, life is increasingly challenging humanity to give value to the rest of creation. Roper reminds the reader that when God made humanity, God placed the first human in a garden, not a grocery shop. Some things exist for their own sakes and not for ours. He warns that it is progressively becoming more apparent that the destinies of humanity and the planet are bound up together. This realization betrays the interconnectedness of life. Each thing is made to be in its place, preserved, protected, and cared for.⁷⁹ It might then serve the community well if the pastor’s hermeneutics highlighted this thought.

Activism vis-à-vis Quietism

Finally, biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be activist, not quietist. Churches have a tendency to be uninterested in matters of justice. Mention was made earlier of one pastor who thought it appropriate to preach from Phil 4:13 on the Sunday following the declaration of the first zone of operation.⁸⁰ One wonders if one should read the verse as a code: “I can do all things through the government that empowers me.” In any case, this apathy towards matters of justice does beg the question, “Why is this the case?” Perhaps it is the way the Gospel is read. Míguez-Bonino asks an important question about the character of God’s Word:

77 J. Richard Middleton, “Islands in the Sun: Overtures to a Caribbean Creation Theology,” in *A Kairos Moment for the Caribbean Theology*, 85. This theme is more fully developed in Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

78 Zolawma, “Eco-theology,” 192–93.

79 Garnett Roper, *This is the Year of Jubilee* (Kingston, Jamaica: Jugaro, 2012), 9–12.

80 Colquhoun, “Our Strength.”

If it is [to be] understood as a *statement* of what God is or does, then the mythical or utopian frameworks ... has the last word. But, if the biblical word is a *call, an announcement-proclamation (kerygma)* which is given in order to put in motion certain actions or produce certain situations, then God is not the content of the message but the *wherfrom* and the *whereto*, the originator and the impulse of this course of action and these conditions.... [*H*]earing the message [then] can mean nothing other than becoming involved in this action and this creation of conditions and situations.⁸¹

The biblical text is therefore to be read to inspire a prophetic voice and engender prophetic action, that is, for prophetic activism.

Helene Slessarev-Jamir, a professor of urban ministry, describes progressive prophetic activism, in the context of the American *ecclesio-political* space, as concern for the *other*, the marginalized. It envisions an alternative future where interpersonal relationships and humanity's relationship with nature are repaired. It is an inclusivist prophetic stance. She contrasts this with "exclusivist" prophetic activism, which is the activism of fundamentalist Christians. She was especially referring to those fundamentalist Christians who were in support of the 2003 Iraqi invasion by the United States.⁸² This contrast, however, brings to light a crucial point: that the church has been observed to have different strains of activism: one tends to be inclusivist and the other exclusivist.

It is important then that pastoral hermeneutics, as activist hermeneutics, is carefully guided and buttressed by the foregoing hermeneutical emphases proposed in this paper. It must be contextual, populist, communitarian, and environmentalist. It must be on the side of the oppressed within community contexts. This hermeneutics should be employed to stir conscience and promote action. Roper notes that the church in the Caribbean, because of its numbers, has a unique opportunity to provide moral and ethical guidance in its prophetic protest. Nevertheless, he warns that the church's duty is not to use its numbers to influence, but to speak truth to power.⁸³ That said, an activist reading of the text in the Caribbean, and especially Jamaica, also has historical precedence: Daddy Sharpe's reading of Matthew 6:24b.⁸⁴ He read that text with an activist hermeneutic that later led him to *respond* and set in motion the 1831 Christmas Rebellion. A pastoral priority is to be activist in his or her reading, not quietist.

81 Míguez-Bonino, "Marxist Critical Tools," 44–45.

82 Helene Slessarev-Jamir, "Prophetic Activism in Age of Empire," *Political Theology* 11.5 (November 2010): 676.

83 Roper, "The Caribbean as the City of God," 15–16.

84 Reid-Salmon, *Burnin' for Freedom*, 71.

I end with an exhortation of Adolfo Ham. He concludes his essay “Caribbean Theology: The Challenge of the Twenty-first Century” with a note on Joel 2:28:

And afterwards,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions. (NIVUK)

Ham explains that he is especially fond of the verse for its psychological implications. The “dreams” and “visions” relate to the struggle of freedom, as they evoke the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel. With this in mind, he concluded with a beatitude (and a warning): “Blessed are those who still can see visions and dream dreams! Woe be upon those who want to destroy our ability to dream dreams and see visions!”⁸⁵

Conclusion

The pulpit is invariably where biblical interpretation is most impactful and far-reaching. It is where theology meets its most impressionable, and the largest number of, students. The pulpit has the power to shape thoughts and lives for good or for ill. It is for this reason that careful consideration must be made for that which is proclaimed from its rostrum, including the emphases of the proclamations. Biblical interpretation in a not-so-bygone period was used to dominate peoples, demonize and delegitimize cultures, and maintain the *status quo ante*.

The question is: How might the Bible be interpreted for the renewal of the contemporary Caribbean? I propose that the pastor must approach the text with hermeneutical priorities. Pastoral hermeneutics should be contextual before universalistic, the latter especially considering *empire* as a universal threat; communitarian before individualistic, for the former subsumes the latter; populist—and as a corollary, existential—but never rarefied; ecologically sensitive, especially environmentalist; and activist, not quietist. It is my hope that this proposal of priorities will be received by pastoral interpreters and that its practice will be found to be fruitful as it enriches the lives of ordinary people and inspires them to participate in the ongoing project of Caribbean development and renewal.

85 Adolfo Ham, “Caribbean Theology: The Challenge of the Twenty-first Century,” in *Caribbean Theology: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead*, ed. Howard Gregory (Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press, 1995), 6.

The Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Bible and Theology

Adapted from remarks given by J. Richard Middleton at the close of the Jamaica Theological Seminary conference on “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” September 9, 2017.

The award is given in memory of my parents Jack and Phyllis Middleton.

My father was born in 1918 in Nassau, Bahamas, to Jamaican parents (they moved back to Jamaica when he was an infant), and he died in Canada at the age of 93 in January 2012. My mother was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1924 and died at the age of 86 in December 2010 in Canada.

Jack Middleton was a police officer in Jamaica from 1948 through 1973. He was the first non-expatriate Commissioner of Police and served under Prime Minister Michael Manley (from 1970–1973).

He was a committed Christian, a quiet and unassuming man, with a particularly strong moral sense. As a police officer, he was non-partisan in the execution of his duties. In his role as head of Special Branch (in charge of security for the island), and later as Commissioner of Police, he was trusted by Prime Ministers from both major political parties—including Norman Washington Manley (Premier, pre-independence), Alexander Bustamante, Donald Sangster, Hugh Shearer, and Michael Manley.

Here are some interesting episodes in my father’s police career.

- In 1956 as head of Special Branch, he chased paparazzi, James Bond style, in a speedboat off the beach at Ian Fleming’s Goldeneye retreat at Oracabessa (he had been assigned to guard British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, who was recovering from a mental breakdown over the Suez crisis). I have often wondered if that gave Ian Fleming some of his plot ideas.
- A few years before, in 1953, he chauffeured Winston Churchill across the island, stopping for his frequent pees in the bush (too many drinks from the backseat bar, my father laughed).
- He first introduced U-Thant, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to rum and coke when he was visiting Jamaica; and then had to bring him one every afternoon at the Liguanea Club.

- In 1966 he deputized Mortimo Planno (senior elder of the Rastafari movement) to organize the crowd of thousands of Rastafarians on the tarmac at the Palisadoes Airport into orderly groups, to let H.I.M. Haile Selassie I deplane for his historic visit.
- Perhaps most importantly, he received the M.B.E. for averting a little-known coup attempt in 1960 pre-independence Jamaica, his name coming fourth after the Premier, Norman Washington Manley, destined for execution on a list discovered in the raided Red Hills camp.

I instituted this award in honor of my parents (while they were still alive) back in 2009, offered in an essay competition for undergraduate students I was teaching at Roberts Wesleyan College.

In 2011 I transitioned to full-time teaching at Northeastern Seminary at Roberts Wesleyan College and also became the president of the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association, the predecessor to the Canadian-American Theological Association.

Beginning in 2012, the award was offered in the context of theology conferences in Canada and the USA, co-sponsored by the Canadian-American Theological Association and various theological institutions. The award is intended to encourage theological thinking about the Bible among theological students and new and relatively unpublished faculty.

Previous winners of the award, with essay titles and conference information, are:

- Anthony R. Pyles, “Drowning in the Depths of Darkness: A Consideration of Psalm 88 with a New Translation” (2012 conference co-sponsored with McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON).
- Mary L. Conway, “‘The Wisest Might Err’: A Re-evaluation of Solomon’s Character as Revealed by His Prayer for Wisdom in 1 Kings 3:1–15” (Runner up: 2012 conference co-sponsored with McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON).
- Andrew Van’t Land, “(Im)Peccability amid the Powers: Christological Sinlessness and Systemic Evil” (2013 conference co-sponsored with Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, NY).
- Marina Hofman Willard, “Portrayal of the Female Figure in the Twelve: A Fresh Perspective” (2014 conference co-sponsored with the Institute for Christian Studies and Wycliffe College, Toronto, ON),
- Alexander Coe Stewart, “Heaven Has No Sorrow that Earth Cannot Feel: The Ethics of Empathy and Ecological Suffering in the Old Testament” (2015 conference co-sponsored with Tyndale University College and Seminary, Toronto, ON).

- Justin Mandela Roberts, “The Grotesque Will Save the World” (2016 conference co-sponsored with the Associated Canadian Theological Schools, at Trinity Western University, Langley, BC).
- Allison M. Quient, “Eve Christology: Embodiment, Gender, and Salvation” (2017 conference co-sponsored with Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, NY).

The winning essay at each conference receives a cash award and is published in the *Canadian-American Theological Review*, the academic journal of the Canadian-American Theological Association.

I am happy to announce that the Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Bible and Theology for this conference in Kingston, Jamaica is given to Erica Campbell for her paper “The Parable of the Good Samaritan: A Political Reading from a Caribbean Perspective.”

This is the first time the award has been given at a theology conference outside of Canada and the USA. But it won’t be the last. Stay tuned for news about future theology conferences in the Caribbean, at which this award will be offered again.

BOOK REVIEWS

Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King. Matthew Bates. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. ISBN: 978080109793. Pp. xvi + 234. \$24.99 (USD).

Far too many theological books approach salvation with an uncritical eye: some historical background there, a semi-original suggestion here, and reiterations of tradition throughout. What if the meaning of “faith” and “being saved” was re-examined from an uncompromisingly New Testament perspective—a perspective that didn’t pay lip-service to Catholicism, Protestantism, or any other popular theological orientation?

Matthew Bates attempts to do this (and more) in *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* through the following argument: (1) The true climax of the gospel—Jesus’ enthronement—has generally been deemphasized or omitted; (2) Consequently, *pistis* has been misapprehended as “trust” in Jesus’s righteousness alone, or “faith” that covers sins, rather than “allegiance” to Jesus as king; (3) Salvation is not about attaining heaven but participating in the new creation, which reframes terms such as “faith,” “works,” and “the gospel”; (4) From an allegiance-alone standpoint, theological divisions between Catholics and Protestants—“the essence of the gospel, faith alone versus works, declared righteousness versus infused righteousness—are reconfigured in ways that may prove helpful for reconciliation” (9, from which the preceding points are abbreviated). Bates then carefully and consistently establishes these theses through theological argument and biblical exegesis.

The Introduction explores some of the ways in which tradition and traditional language blind Christians into dismissing various texts regarding salvation and moral action. For example, when the rich person/ruler approaches Jesus and asks him what he must do “to inherit eternal life,” Jesus says, “go sell all you have”—not “just believe” (or something similar). The focus is on *performance*; “Jesus says nothing here about faith, trust, or belief. . . . [but] asserts that it is necessary to do certain ‘works’ to attain eternal life” (10). This example is not some exception only made for an isolated point; it’s consistent throughout the life and teachings of Jesus. Correct action, not mere profession, is what he’s looking for—and what surrounds the very heart of “eternal life.”

In confronting this reality, it is not enough to simply wave a dismissive hand

and quote from a Protestant creed or a Reformed reading of Romans, as if this is a needed or adequate response. We must, Bates contends, let the text take us beyond sixteenth-century questions, back to *first-century* questions, where our attention rightly belongs—whether or not we’re comfortable with the dissonance this creates.

In turn, the first chapter untangles some of the subject matter by identifying what “faith is not.” Biblical faith is not “the opposite of evidence assessment” (evidence-less belief), a “leap in the dark,” “the opposite of works” (as so typically framed), an “It’s all good attitude” (because “it is rooted in *a concrete object toward which it is directed*,” 23; italics original), nor “reducible to intellectual assent.” What is it, then? It is probably best described as “allegiance,” though “faithfulness” and “loyalty” are also good options.

The next chapter (and especially chapter 4) plugs this term into the popular texts about faith in the New Testament, which brilliantly reveals the plausibility of the argument. There are many cases where “allegiance” is undoubtedly the best (and perhaps, the *only* accurate) option out of the traditional terms scholars have used for *pistis* (“faith,” “obedience,” “trust,” etc.). This is largely due to the inevitable theological context of the kingship of Jesus, which is thoroughly addressed in the following chapter. The “one gospel,” we read, consists of the “transformative story of how Jesus, who preexisted as Son of God, came to be enthroned as the universal king” (47). Thus, Jesus comes preaching the gospel—the *Kingdom* of God.

Building off this framework and the gospel as summarized in 1 Cor 15, Bates is unafraid to explore immediate, disruptive implications. The focus on imputation as “the gospel” in such figures as Sproul, Piper, and Schreiner may be “promoting confusion” (53). Their theologically-forced reading of Rom 2:6 is also highly “problematic” (108). The *fiducia* (trust) component of the classic, trifold, Reformed understanding of faith—*noticia* (content) and *assensus* (intellectual agreement) being the others—is also “misaimed” for three reasons: (1) a central aspect of the gospel is not simply forgiveness, but acknowledgement of kingship that *leads* to forgiveness; (2) it suggests too much about the psychological state of the person; (3) it does no justice to *embodied fidelity* (92). In a modified version of this theology, Bates suggests that true allegiance has (1) intellectual agreement; (2) confession of loyalty; and (3) embodied fidelity (98).

Chapter 5 addresses “questions about allegiance.” Getting to the heart of popular debate, Bates says, “We are still saved by grace through *pistis*; salvation comes from outside ourselves as the Christ gift. Yet we must respond to that gift by giving allegiance to Jesus as *Lord*. The offer of salvation is free, but it absolutely *does* come with strings attached. Obedient loyalty to the king is required as a condition of acceptance” (103–104; italics original). When this perspective ap-

plies to Rom 2:5–8, we are “eternally judged, just as Paul indicates, in part on the basis of our works, but these works are part of *pistis* as embodied allegiance or enacted loyalty. *Pistis* is not the polar opposite of works; rather *pistis* as ongoing allegiance is the fundamental framework into which works must fit as part of our salvation” (109). Bates then dives into the nitty-gritties of this debate in various other NT contexts, also addressing the New Perspective on Paul, “treason” in his proposal, and the meaning of law.

The following chapter addresses salvation in eschatology—one of the most concise, biblically honest, and beautiful summaries of Christian eschatology I’ve ever read. The next chapter then addresses theological anthropology (sin, salvation, renewal, etc.), giving special attention to idolatry in relation to human beings as God’s images and worship of Jesus, the true “idol of God” (160) and original “image of God.”

Chapter 8 focuses exclusively on issues of justification and “allegiance,” addressing “infused” versus “imputed” righteousness, the order of salvation, and union with Christ—which Bates contends should be a more dominant concept than traditionally assumed. The final chapter is on “Practicing Allegiance,” which provides encouraging direction for the Christian’s journey of discipleship.

Salvation by Allegiance Alone contains what anyone should look for in a theological work: updated scholarship, a concern for the church, a boldness unenslaved by traditional paradigms or loaded theological language, precision that cuts through foggy terms, and level-headed exegesis and discourse analysis. As far as its contemporary context is concerned, the book is essentially an extension of Wright’s ideas in *When God Became King* and *What Saint Paul Really Said*, McKnight’s *The King Jesus Gospel*, and Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift*. The result is a twist of unusual clarity and cleverness by the simple use of the phrase “salvation by allegiance.” I commend this project—and the tone in which it is made, which noticeably involves genuine effort at healing scars that go all the way back to Luther and Trent.

Most of all, I commend its incisive approach—especially its ability to expose the use (and abuse) of theological and biblical terms. It is impossible to overstate the amount of damage done (unintentionally) by theologians over the centuries by using biblical (especially NT) terms to establish a larger, theological idea or category. (In many cases, it would have just been better to pull a Nicaea and create words anew!) Bates masterfully addresses this problem (see especially p. 34 and virtually all of chapter 8) and like other biblical scholars, spends substantial energy de-programming his readership just so sound conversation can occur.

This did at times, however, bury the audience in qualifiers, perhaps because so many concerns were being addressed at once. For instance, readers are told about “enacted fidelity” and “enacted loyalty” (98–99), “enacted allegiance” and “em-

bodied” allegiance (86). Sometimes this is for emphasis, but elsewhere these terms have specific theological meanings that Bates intends to convey. This created some potential for misunderstanding and distraction.

A more significant concern is overstress on the allegiance concept in soteriology, at least to the point of hegemonic reductionism. It is important that Jesus Christ is not only King, but the Prince of Peace, the Lamb of God, the true Vine, the Light of the World, Temple, and so forth. Kingship was stressed in the NT because of the contemporary context of the Roman emperor and Jewish Messiah (a perfect backdrop, by the way, to show Jesus’s divinity). This should not overpower Christ as the *logos* or other, non-Jewish and non-nationalist titles, images, and metaphors. The Western world in particular needs this diversity of images, as it continues to recover from oppressive regimes and tyrants, colonialism, racism, sexism, charismatic cult leaders, etc. There are good reasons, in other words, why the “relational” Jesus and Jesus as “our friend” are so popular today—though this should not collapse into some kind of a “teddy-bear love”; here Christ’s lordship/kingship may balance things. But we must be careful not to let the prominence of politics determine the theological and linguistic domains within which Christians relate to Christ and proclaim the gospel.

My biggest complaint is the failure to follow through with the most obvious ethical implications—namely, the church’s ongoing relationship with the state. “Allegiance,” “kingdom,” “enthronement,” and other terms are explicitly civic and political. They are used in the NT precisely to (1) work from a cultural platform that Palestinian residents understood and to (2) draw the contrast between the state and its authority on one hand and Jesus and his authority/Kingdom on the other, as glimpsed in the multiple royal titles ascribed to Jesus, e.g., or Paul’s spin on “citizenship” in Phil 3:20. Bates addresses this in passing but doesn’t quite seem to “get it,” providing little more than the dull conclusion that faith as allegiance simply “fits contextually into Paul’s Letters and makes excellent sense within the larger Greco-Roman imperial world” (89). (Of course, allegiance “fits” a civil, socio-political context—that’s the term’s primary semantic domain.) Somehow Bates missed that first-century Christians who pledged allegiance to Caesar (or to anyone or anything else) would have been diametrically opposed to the very heart of the gospel. *Christians cannot serve two masters*. That was Jesus’ point over and over again—whether the other master was money, possessions, power, regional overlords, or otherwise. That’s why the topic of taxation kept coming up in Jesus’ life (a classic sign of allegiance and authority—oddly, not once addressed in Bates’ book). That’s why Jesus was killed as an enemy of the state on charges of sedition and/or insurrection. *The Kingdom of God was on a collision course with the structures, ideologies, and authorities of the world*.

Consequently, it is tragically missed that for Christians to pledge allegiance

today to anyone or anything other than Christ and Christ's Kingdom is likewise anti-Christian. Millions of children and adults, every day in multiple countries, are compelled *by* the empire to "pledge allegiance" *to* the empire. Whether the empire is ancient Rome, a Chinese dynasty, an Islamic regime, a British monarchy, present-day North Korea, or the American empire is irrelevant—as is whether the empire is democratic or totalitarian, religious or secular, tolerant of Christianity or not. The state is the state and violence is violence.¹ When Jesus was offered the equivalent of the American presidency and IMF chair during his temptations, he did not say, "I must decline because of the current evil administrations and because these kingdoms aren't yet religiously-neutral democracies." He declined because political power *in toto* is a problem. A consistent application of Bates's thesis (and a NT theology as whole) requires that Christians cannot participate in any such pro-empire ritual in good conscience—any more than Christians can commit violence, initiate war, or murder others (whether as individuals or as paid soldiers).² Yes, the prime ministers and presidents of today's world don't claim to be "Son of God" as such and the administrations they oversee are not necessarily anti-Christian, so Christians can ethically participate in some isolated acts of "patriotism." But this is the exception, not the rule—especially as civic leaders intentionally blur love for one's land, people, and country for one's political establishment, often to motivate a population to enact or legitimize violence.³

How profoundly baffling, then, that this very issue explicitly comes up in the chapter on "practicing allegiance"—but then goes ignored:

Each week children in the United States place their right hands over their hearts, face the flag, and pledge allegiance. Other countries

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- 1 A few classic definitions as reminders: "The State, completely in its genesis, essentially and almost completely during the first stages of its existence, is a social institution, forced by a victorious group of men on a defeated group, with the sole purpose of regulating the dominion of the victorious group over the vanquished, and securing itself against revolt from within and attacks from abroad. Ideologically, this dominion had no other purpose than the economic exploitation of the vanquished by the victors." So Franz Oppenheimer, *The State*, trans. John Gitterman (Black Rose, 2007, originally published New York: Huebsch, 1908), 15. "The nation-state . . . is a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence." So Anthony Giddens, *Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985), 121. "[The state is] that organization in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in a given territorial area; in particular, it is the only organization in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by coercion." So Murray Rothbard, *Anatomy of the State* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 2009, originally published in 1974), 11.
 - 2 Cf. Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017) and Ronald Sider, *The Early Church on Killing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).
 - 3 See Murray Rothbard, *For a New Liberty* (Auburn: Von Mises Institute, 2006), 58–73.

have similar allegiance ceremonies—and all of us who participated in such ceremonies as children (or who still do as adults) can attest to their power for creating and maintaining loyalty. The Apostle’s Creed needs to be mobilized so it functions like a flag pledge—to become the Christian pledge of allegiance for the universal church. (210)

This is written as if there is nothing morally questionable about pledging allegiance to something other than Christ. Imagine Paul writing to his churches: “Every morning you collectively pledge allegiance to an icon of the Roman government and the Republic for which it stands. As Christians, this is fine; there’s no conflict between your faith and the demands of the government. (And perhaps we should also add some kind of Christian equivalent, perhaps the recitation of some scriptural verses on Sunday morning.)” This would be absurd—regardless of the current administrations. Similarly, a national flag juxtaposed in the sanctuary of a Christian church today is probably no less theologically treasonous than hanging a national flag in the sanctuary of a church in the first, second or third century.

Again, Jesus’ kingdom wasn’t a moral, *parallel addition* to the empire, and it certainly wasn’t a revision. *It was an entirely new, alternative society*,⁴ which would eventually absorb the world. Today’s retreats to “Two Kingdom” theology, “sphere sovereignty,” a “God-and-country” neoconservative patriotism, or contemporary “church and state” dualism simply do not mitigate this tension—nor should they. To mix metaphors, perhaps we should just let the lion out of the cage and show that the emperor has no clothes.

All of this is to say that the biblical-theological discussion in *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* could have used a Caesar-sized dose of John Yoder,⁵ Stanley

4 “The new world we see being brought into being in the Gospels is one in which the whole grand cosmic architecture of prerogative, power, and eminence has been shaken and even superseded by a new, positively ‘anarchic’ order: an order, that is, in which we see the glory of God revealed in a crucified slave, and in which (consequently) we are enjoined to see the forsaken of the earth as the very children of heaven. In this shockingly, ludicrously disordered order (so to speak), even the mockery visited on Christ—the burlesque crown and robe—acquires a kind of ironic opulence: in the light cast backward upon the scene by the empty tomb, it becomes all at once clear that it is not Christ’s ‘ambitions’ that are laughable, but those emblems of earthly authority whose travesties have been draped over his shoulders and pressed into his scalp. We can now see with perfect poignancy the vanity of empires and kingdoms, and the absurdity of men who wrap themselves in rags and adorn themselves with glittering gauds and promote themselves with preposterous titles and thereby claim license to rule over others.” David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 174.

5 See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

Hauerwas,⁶ Jacques Ellul,⁷ and Greg Boyd.⁸ Because the book is otherwise excellent, this is an altogether regretful oversight. Fortunately, these issues do not affect the heart of the book's argument, which remains both sound and hopeful. One wonders if upcoming English translations will take up the offer and render "faith" as "allegiance" in various NT passages. Whatever the case, we can expect more books on the horizon exploring the full implications of the New Perspective and other advances in New Testament studies.

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Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith. Jack Levison. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. ISBN: 9780802867889. Pp. xiii + 246. \$24.00 (USD).

John R. Levison has devoted twenty years to research in pneumatology, in addition to his other teaching and writing interests. *Inspired* follows up on his earlier academic work, *Filled with the Spirit*, and focuses on implications for ecclesiology, yielding what he hopes is a "more straightforward message for the church" (xii). Levison methodically investigates pneumatology in Israelite, early Judaic, and early Christian literature, and suggests applications of his study. He includes personal anecdotes, which enhance his message. *Inspired* is indeed an inspired work, refreshing and readable.

Levison is concerned about the excessive emphasis on spiritual experience in contemporary charismatic Christianity, and about subsequent neglect or dismissal of intellectual activities. Instead, he believes these are interrelated. The Bible teaches a symbiosis between inspiration, virtue, and learning; between ecstasy and comprehension. His overall aim is to break down "dichotomies: the misguided breach between the breath of God and the spirit of God; the harmful rift between ecstasy and inspiration; and the pointless divide between preparation and inspiration" (126).

In his first chapter, Levison demonstrates that the spirit inspires virtue and learning, which together encompass a wide range of activities. He believes we all have "the spirit-breath of God within us from birth" (17), regardless of whether we have experienced spectacular charismatic gifts. Consequently, Levison does not capitalize "spirit," because he does not think we can distinguish between the human and divine spirit. He examines key terms that may be obscured in English translations. For example, in Ezek 37:1–14, Hebrew uses only one word, *ruach*,

6 See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000) and *War and the American Difference* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

7 See Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

8 See Gregory Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

to convey multiple meanings: breath (as in the creation of Adam), wind (as in a rush of vitality), and spirit (a promise of national integrity). Both *ruach* and *pneuma* have overlapping connotations of human spirit and divine spirit. English translation thus potentially limits understanding by adding an article or capitalizing words.

Furthermore, the Israelites emphasised the spirit's role in gaining understanding (e.g., Job 32:6–9). Those who were described as skilled, wise, and spirit-filled (Joseph, Bezalel, Daniel) were that way because of their spirit within, not because of a special impartation of the holy spirit. In the New Testament, John shows that the spirit of truth (4:23, 24; 14:17) is a teacher and revealer (14:26, 16:7–11), and Paul teaches that the holy spirit, the spirit within, is the locus of virtue (1 Cor 7:34, Gal 3:1–5). The spirit is associated with wisdom and learning in the early church (Acts 6:10, 11:26), and is eternal or lifelong (Heb 9:13, 14).

The spirit-breath as a reservoir of virtue and learning affects how Christians acknowledge the spirit in non-Christians, and how they pray and learn. Although God breathes the capacity for virtue into all, this spirit must be nurtured in order to be holy. Instead of praying for the holy spirit to “come upon” people, we can pray for the spirit that is already there. “The gift of the spirit is steady and continuous” (70).

Chapter two is titled “Putting Ecstasy in its Place.” Levison does not deny experiences of the spirit, but deemphasizes them, focusing instead on their purpose. A life well lived is more important. Ecstatic experiences are present in Old Testament passages, but in “small doses.” They are usually associated with prophecy. In the New Testament, *ekstasis* connotes amazement, rather than loss of mental control. The message, not the experience, is important. Visions “may be the sole source of ecstasy in the early church, and the product of these visions is . . . memorable, comprehensible, and communicable content” (87).

With respect to glossolalia, Levison argues that, contrary to what is often thought and taught, it is associated in the NT with intelligent speech: ecstasy and comprehension go hand in hand. In Acts, ecstatic experiences occur in people of sound mind and they are comprehensible. “The power of Pentecost may lie . . . not in either incomprehensibility or apprehension, but in the early believers' ability to straddle both worlds” (97). When Peter experiences his vision during prayer, he is not content with the experience alone but searches for its meaning. The church in Antioch, the start of the Gentile mission, prepared to receive and respond to prophecy through a year of intensive learning, not through multiple ecstatic experiences. Paul does not dismiss glossolalia but offers correctives. It is last in his list of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4–11), and he teaches that prophecy is more desirable than tongues (1 Cor 14:2–4). Maintaining a balance between ecstasy and comprehension has implications for Christian faith: we can cross

boundaries, prepare for the work of the holy spirit through learning and prayer, respond to the spirit with discernment and understanding, and spread the gospel.

In his third chapter, Levison turns to the work of the spirit in “inspired interpretation of scripture” (1). He notes the unhealthy dichotomy that has developed between study and spontaneity, between education and faith. Yet there is no such division in Scripture. Ezra’s prayer associates spirit and instruction (Neh 9:20). Simeon’s song (Luke 2:28–32) interrelates Scripture, which Simeon (and behind him, Luke) knew well, with spirit, to which he was receptive. John writes that the *paraclete* will teach Christ-followers primarily through reminding (John 14:26). Even the spectacular events in Acts are secondary to the inspired interpretation of Scripture. Peter, when filled with the spirit, quotes Scripture (Acts 4:11). The spirit inspires correct application of Scripture. In fact, texts are often rearranged to fit current circumstances. Although Paul claims that truth is revealed through the spirit (1 Cor 2:10), his emphasis is on the message of the cross. Levison suggests that the inspired interpretation of Scripture was the primary manner in which the holy spirit was expressed. In his view, spirit-inspired interpretation of Scripture is important for contemporary Christianity in terms of valuing the Old Testament, using an interpretive community, and diligently studying: “Preparation paves the way for inspiration” (182).

In his concluding chapter, Levison suggests “an agenda for the future of pneumatology.” This includes an understanding of the spirit in creation. God’s spirit is in all people, and one cannot distinguish between “earthly people” and “people of the spirit.” The dichotomy between divine revelation and human experience is not helpful. Levison cites Moltmann and Macchia with approval. The spirit of salvation is the same as the spirit of creation or life; the spirit operates outside as well as inside the realm of Christianity. The future also includes considering different starting points of study, other than the day of Pentecost, as well as comparing the understanding of pneumatology in Judaism with that in early Christianity. Levison believes that for a unified future for the church, we must overcome the unnecessary divide between the legacies of Azusa and the social gospel. We must consider both Scripture and spirit, both ecstasy and edification, both inspiration and investigation. The main “task of the holy spirit for Christians is to illuminate the person of Jesus” (227).

I believe Levison successfully accomplishes his goals (if a little repetitively). His work potentially brings a needed balance to the charismatic emphasis on ecstasy, helps bridge the gap between charismatics and evangelicals, and demystifies many aspects of pneumatology. For example, Christians need neither idolize nor fear glossolalia, or worry, as Levison once did, that they are “lesser” Christians without ecstatic experiences. I appreciate that the author chooses an alternate point of entry to the topic, rather than the well-worn Acts 2 passage. And,

although I appreciate his corrective, perhaps Levison moves the pendulum a little too far. For example, he could be clearer with respect to how exactly to interpret ecstatic spiritual experiences, plentiful in the history of Christianity, and how to place those within his overall framework. Levison is also a little ambiguous regarding the personhood of the Holy Spirit (capitalization mine!). But overall, *Inspired* is insightful, provocative, and practical. It touches on larger theological issues such as the balance between divine inspiration and human responsibility, as well as creation, anthropology, and soteriology. The book's crossover genre makes it an easy read for seminary students, lay scholars, and pastors, although some of the extra-biblical material may be challenging for the non-specialist. *Inspired* is a welcome addition to the growing literature on pneumatology.

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Rethinking Holiness: A Theological Introduction. Bernie A. Van De Walle.
Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. ISBN: 9780801030673. Pp. xvi + 176.
\$22.99 (USD).

This book is Van De Walle's response to ongoing interest in the theology of holiness among evangelical Christians. Proceeding from the conviction that a prerequisite to pursuing holiness is a proper understanding of its nature, he lays aside the "how-to" questions that so often drive understanding and sets out instead to describe the nature of Christian holiness "as a divine, theological, or theocentric category" (xii). The book is divided into seven chapters followed by a brief conclusion.⁹

Van De Walle begins by discussing the desire and need for holiness in the evangelical church, evidenced in several recent trends such as the recovery of ancient worship practices or the effort to bring the church's practice more in line with Christ's character. He observes, too, that outside the church, there is a widespread "pursuit of spirituality" (10) and that the world continues to expect the church to demonstrate holiness. He concludes that holiness is essential for the church both to fulfill its purpose in the world and to "commune with God" (19).

Van De Walle develops a working description of Christian holiness beginning with a biblical investigation of the concept. After describing ancient Near Eastern conceptions of holiness (transcendence, otherness, distinctness), he observes that in the Old Testament, the God of Israel is seen as the only true God and in fact is "in a category by himself" (34). He follows the concept through Greco-Roman times as well as first-century Judaism before concluding with a survey of the New

9 In addition to the main content of the book, Van De Walle also includes excurses at the end of each chapter in which he addresses topics peripheral to his main argument, but for which his argument has important implications.

Testament, in which it is Christ who becomes “the measure and means of holiness” (40). He concludes that biblical holiness is not primarily about morality or ethics, but about the nature of the divine. All human expressions of holiness are thus derivative and “dependent on an ongoing relationship with God.”

Van De Walle then examines how this biblical view of holiness fits within a broader, theological discussion of the attributes of God. He outlines a theological description of holiness rooted in God’s transcendence and manifest in “unsurpassed and unsurpassable moral perfection” (55). He then describes several key attributes of God (Grandeur, Personality, Freedom, Love, and Eternality) in order to demonstrate that in each of them “God is transcendent; he is unique; he is unmatched; he is Holy” (57).¹⁰ Thus, holiness “thoroughly permeates the entirety of God’s being. None of the other divine attributes can be properly understood apart from holiness” (62). Van De Walle completes the discussion by highlighting how the holiness proper to God alone nevertheless extends to humanity through relationship with the divine. He concludes that “to know God in the way that God intends for us to know him does not have its ultimate expression in merely learning something about God. Its greater purpose is human relational and moral transformation—and ultimately human glorification in the new heavens and new earth” (68–69). With this foundation, he then devotes the remaining four chapters to investigating how “holiness relates to God’s purposes for humanity” (68).

Van De Walle begins this portion of his investigation with the relationship of holiness to human nature. He describes how through the *imago dei*, “holiness is a fundamental aspect of humanity” (85). That is, humanity transcends the rest of creation in our unique relationship to a holy God. He also shows that human beings hold the capacity for moral perfection—as seen “in the case of the fully human Jesus” (84). Of course, humanity as a whole has fallen short of this capacity. Thus, his investigation leads naturally into a discussion of sin in relation to holiness.

Van De Walle describes sin as “parasitic; it gains its identity and definition in relation to God, even if this relation is a strictly antagonistic one” (93). He then overviews five ways in which Scripture discusses behavior and attitudes that oppose God’s character and his purposes for humanity (missing the mark, irreligion, transgression, rebellion, and perversion). He concludes with a broader discussion of the nature of sin that places these various concepts in a “mosaic” (98), showing sin to be a willful attack on God in the relational context of humanity’s intended purpose.

Van De Walle then discusses the linkage between holiness and God’s plan to overcome sin and thus restore us to our proper way of being (i.e., salvation). He

10 Van De Walle deliberately repeats this refrain verbatim at the end of the subsection for each attribute throughout this section.

surveys several biblical descriptions of God's saving work (foreknowledge, election, regeneration, redemption, and justification). He spends considerable time dealing with justification, the better to unpack how it has become "the absolute king of the salvation metaphors" for evangelicals and to highlight the historical, biblical, and doctrinal problems with making this one metaphor fully and singularly synonymous with salvation. He concludes that salvation restores and gives new life to the *imago dei* and is thus "the process by which God makes humans holy" (125).

Finally, Van De Walle discusses the relationship between holiness and the church. He describes the church's holiness primarily in terms of distinctness/uniqueness and only secondarily in terms of morality/behavior. He continues to emphasize the derivative nature of "creaturely holiness" (133) given that the primary biblical metaphors for the church (the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit) all depend on the church's relationship to God. He concludes that moral holiness for the church should be the result of this reflective relationship.

Van De Walle ends the book with a summary of the key points in his argument: namely, that holiness is more about essence than behavior; that holiness is an exclusively divine characteristic; that creaturely holiness is inherently derived; and that Christian holiness is a result of our union with Christ. Thus, in the final analysis, holiness is neither a behavior, nor a commodity, but the very "manner of God's existence" (150) in whose image humanity has been formed and in whose nature we have been invited to participate.

Van De Walle is correct that many Christians desire to pursue holiness, but that pursuit must be grounded in a biblical and theological understanding of the object being pursued. Thus his study of Christian holiness is both relevant and timely. That said, the book could have been strengthened by deeper engagement with *critical, biblical* scholarship. In particular, the chapter on a biblical definition of holiness would have benefited from more critical engagement with original contributions from specialists in biblical studies. Additionally, the discussion of biblical salvation metaphors in chapter six drew exclusively from New Testament references and was framed more in systematic than in biblical-theological terms.¹¹ But given the audience that the book is trying to reach, too much explicit engagement with specialized and complex scholarship would probably compromise both the length of the work and its helpful simplicity.

Accordingly, perhaps the greatest strength of the book is its accessibility. Van

11 To be fair, Van De Walle did refer to the Old Testament conception of righteousness in his critique of the way justification has been understood in the church. However, all the explicit biblical citations were from the New Testament only and the metaphors themselves proceeded from New Testament origins.

De Walle has produced a work that truly teaches. He has taken something (theology in general, and the theology of holiness in particular) that so often intimidates the common Christian, and has made it not only comprehensible, but also palatable and engaging. The book will doubtless serve as a staple text in introductory theological courses, but it will also be of great benefit to Christians in the broader church, precisely where the Christian holiness described by Van De Walle should find its fullest earthly expression.

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Biblical Theology: The God of the Christian Scriptures. John Goldingay. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016. ISBN: 9780830851539. Pp. 608. \$60.00 (USD).

Some of the best theological works involve top-notch scholars who attempt to summarize what God and Christianity are about within a single monograph. This is such a book, and like many of Goldingay's works, it never fails in scholarship, literary lucidity, and above all, penetrating thoughtfulness and originality.

In one way, the book functions to provide necessary interfaces between biblical studies and systematics. Goldingay simply describes what he sees happening in the biblical narrative and lets it stand as is—no matter how odd, ugly, beautiful, strange, useful, prone to misunderstanding, or paradoxical. Yes, vital interconnections are made along the way—many irreplaceable for grasping the larger story. However, on the whole, the book is a masterful project of raw description. This endeavor invokes surprisingly new categories and ways of thinking about things Christians thought they knew about God, Jesus, and redemption. It involves re-interpreting texts that many may have thought “settled.” And it involves profound philosophizing about the meaning of life, the role of humanity, and what our Creator expects of us and hopes to accomplish in this world. As such, it is a deeply gratifying read, but not a single sentence can be read quickly or unattentively.

As a whole-Bible theology, it is sometimes necessary to “zoom out” as far as one can go and then reflect, as Goldingay does:

Indeed, it seems that God has put into the human mind a longing to understand the nature of reality as a whole but has not opened up a way to satisfy that longing. We cannot understand the rationale for the way human experience alternates between birth and death, war and peace, and so on (Eccles 3:1–11). From the world and from life we can get partial insights and some clues about living a happy life in the context of the family, but we can't get the big picture. There is enough in the way the created world embodies God's faith-

fulness and commitment, and God's capacity to hold back evil, to make it possible for us to live our lives on the basis of trust in God, but that trust also involves living with mystery. Part of our happiness and our peace lies in being willing and able to do so. (88)

In explaining some of these broader contours surrounding theology-proper and the Christian tradition, Goldingay frequently implements creative analogies:

So God was like a person who has been wronged but who determines that the act of betrayal will not terminate the relationship, and who wants to put the wrongdoer right them him or her as a gift, instead of taking redress. All that the offender has to do is believe that it is so and trust the other person. So it is with God (Rom 3:21–24). His letting his Son be executed by us and not insisting on redress for this act puts us right with him. God lets go of that right anger at our wrongdoing, so that there is peaceful relationship between us, and we stand in a relationship of grace with God (Rom 5:1–2). (314–15)

Human beings were indeed like children who ignored their mother's house rules and made her throw them out of the house. Yet a mother has a hard time stopping being a mother, and the development of such enmity does not make a mother bar the door; more likely it makes her go out and try to get the children back for dinner. Jesus' dying for us was and is an expression and demonstration of *God's* love (Rom 5:8). (320; italics original)

[On Christ "living in me"] My parents and my wife live in me in the sense that their character affects me. Although people may not realize it (and even I may not realize it), in certain respects when people meet me they meet my parents and my wife. Further, I think about my parents and about my wife, they are alive in my mind. (400–401)

Admittedly, there is an unpleasant aspect to the prospect of dying; it's like your tent being blown over so that you're exposed to the elements. But you know it will be okay, because God is going to provide you with another tent. (545)

This sampling provides a taste of the kind of tone and style in which the book draws out profound conclusions about life, death, and individuals' relationship to God.

This tenor continues with regard to specific biblical-theological issues of hermeneutics. In answer to the classic question of an authentic, divine coherence

behind the Christian story—opposed by the Nietzschean perspective, where the NT authors desperately fabricated meaning to vindicate their agendas—Goldingay invites another powerful metaphor:

It is in this way that the details of the Scriptures commonly go about interpreting Jesus, in taking the First Testament as of key importance to understanding him. The allusiveness of the link between revelation and event confounds our ways of thinking, but it opens up the question whether there is a bigger framework for what is going on than we can perceive, whether both are part of a bigger tapestry that God is weaving whose existence emerges as holes that appear in the curtain that surrounds the world. Paradoxically, when it is hard to identify the scripture referred to (as is so with Jn 19:36, and with Mt 2:23), this difficulty intensifies the point. We see only the edges of the tapestry. (100)

In other words, it's not that large-scale interpretations of history and redemption are convenient, self-referential, made-up theories. Rather, the biblical authors, in their theologizing and interpretation of the Christ event (among other things), are—much like us today—actually peeking into the world that stands behind this world, getting a brief glimpse of how reality is operating behind the curtain. This is a profound observation for those who are tempted to either discard the NT authors' interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures as hopelessly unprincipled and random, or try to duplicate the hermeneutic of the biblical authors (only to realize that doesn't work either).¹² The biblical authors are not unlike present-day Christians, catching a glimpse of “the edges of the tapestry” in our attempts to discern meaning.

Aside from these bird's-eye view discussions, the bulk of Goldingay's work explores the inner workings of covenant promises, how God deals with broken and needy people in different circumstances in history, and what really happened with the Christ event and the inauguration of the New Covenant, with dozens of little pockets of exegetical detail and theological dispute along the way.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of reading *Biblical Theology* is the freedom one senses from the author's pen. It's clear from one chapter to the next that Goldingay is at a phase in life where he could care less about stale doctrinal battles and terminology, charges of heresy, being “theologically correct,” and paying homage to ideological wars of the past—things that are, sadly, some of the primary factors behind many theological works. He cares only about honestly describing what he sees. No tricks. Take it or leave it. It's a startling freedom young-

12 See a degree of this interaction in Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde, eds., *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

er scholars would scarcely imagine, especially when the author so casually (and brilliantly) tips over all kinds of sacred cows.

For example, Christians are often taught the “conviction that love is the central message of the Scriptures” (130), but Goldingay suggests otherwise (cf. 231). Regarding the central category and terminology of “the fall,” Goldingay simply says, “the Scriptures do not speak of creation being fallen. It’s more like a pregnant woman who hasn’t yet given birth” (142). In line with the Nicene Creed, Christians have held to Christ’s virgin birth, yet Goldingay counters that “His being virgin-born is not something the New Testament puts great emphasis on, as if it were important enough to put in a creed” (79). Christians are habitually taught from the youngest age that sin separates humanity from God, but then again, “Sin does *not* separate humanity from God”—as clearly evidenced by God immediately (and still) pursuing the hearts of rebellious people one covenant after the next (175; italics mine). As for church leadership, “Authority in the church rests with the congregation as a whole, not with ‘leaders’ within it” (370). Death is often said to be “unnatural” and alien to creation, but, upon a further look, “Death is natural and inevitable; it’s innate in human existence. Life after death or new life or resurrection life is not innate in us or natural or inevitable. It’s purely God’s gift” (548). Atonement is supposedly central to sacrifice, “Yet, atonement is not the main point of sacrifice in the Torah. Sacrifice is more centrally an expression of commitment, praises, thanksgiving, and fellowship” (467). Jesus’ weeping at Lazarus’ death is typically said to display human grief and point to Jesus’ human nature, but Goldingay contends it actually displays *God’s* grief and Jesus’ *divine* nature (549). And my personal favorite, a hearty slap in the face to shallow, contemporary spirituality:

The point about prayer is to change God, not me; it is not to get me to assimilate to what God already intends. Prayer is designed to persuade God to take action in the world. The point about prayer is not therapeutic; it is not to make me feel better. It is not a veiled form of personal commitment (‘Lord, make us more concerned for justice’). It is not a means of personal formation. The point about prayer is to get God to act. (473)

Facing these types of reversals, readers are forced to go back and rediscover how Goldingay got there—and most of the time it makes perfect sense. He’s just reading the Bible, not forcing everything to “fit.” So for most audiences, the book will be a marvel to some degree; for unprepared (and doctrinally-steeped) audiences, the book will inevitably invoke criticism.

Indeed, the type of uniquely concise synthesis that Goldingay propounds requires conscious *unlearning*—at least for a Christian audience. It may make read-

ers sick much as a person gets sick by eating too much dessert. Everything is delicious and fresh, but it's just too rich. Because of the aforementioned provocative statements, and because Goldingay either uses much of the traditional terminology in new or innovative ways or just re-assigns new categories altogether, I often found myself re-reading the same page several times to figure out how it was different from what I've been taught. In this way, the book creates an almost paranoid readership, because one is never certain when something radical or original is going to pop out of the page.

That strength is also an unfortunate disadvantage of the book: it is difficult to imagine using it as any sort of textbook. Perhaps it could be used to challenge Christian graduate students or others to rediscover the biblical story anew. In any case, it boasts a high-level of sophistication, which can benefit most readers in some way, but it will benefit systematicians and biblical scholars the most.

Other than the chapter arrangement, some of *Biblical Theology's* interesting ideas and arrangements including “four forms of servanthood” from the New Testament (420ff.), an update/revision of the Ten Commandments for Christians today (447), and various little insights, such as the relationship between statism/imperialism and patriarchy (172).¹³ There are also other interesting one-line observations that might strike readers as noteworthy:

There is no purgatory after death, but there is purgatory before death. (208)

The heavens are a metaphor for Heaven, for a realm outside the physical realm. (353)

In what sense is everyone to say the same thing and have the same mind? It relates to a focus on Jesus. Paul talks about different gifts (1 Cor 12) and different vocations (Gal 2:1–10) but not about different insights. There is nothing postmodern about Paul. (375)

The book also includes a brief spar with N. T. Wright (230–31) about exile and kingship, and (in this reviewer's opinion) some uncritically Neo-Marxist assertions about employment (178) and capitalism (431).¹⁴

13 Note, however, that this was also (independently) observed by Jamin Hübner, “Christian Libertarianism: An Introduction and Signposts for the Road Ahead,” *Christian Libertarian Review* 1 (2018): 55, and has been broadly elaborated on in the works of Sharon Presley.

14 In one instance, Goldingay says, “In the Scriptures, work is our vocation. But we were not created for employment—that is, to work for someone else. Becoming someone else's ‘servant’ in this way is a life-saving possibility if one gets into a mess, but it is not the ideal. Still less is it the ideal that ‘each day men sell little pieces of themselves in order to try to buy them back each night and week end.’ In the Scriptures, work is part of the activity of the family” (178, with a quote from the work of C. Wright Mills). This is problematic for several reasons. First of all, it might cast a shadow over the positive servanthood themes in the New Testament. Second, not all “employment” situations

In conclusion, *Biblical Theology* is a theological wonderland. As a work in biblical theology, it offers readers participation in a constant temporal interplay of looking backward and forward to discover meaning (even as the book does generally move somewhat chronologically and in the spirit of traditional systematic loci). While more “messy” than systematians might prefer, one cannot fault Goldingay for not taking the biblical stories and texts seriously. As a theological work, the book boasts first rate “theology-proper”—but without all the Thomistic scholasticism, syllogistic reasoning, and outdated ruts about God’s “attributes.” (After all, if God is personal, then God should be addressed as personally and intimately as possible—without getting trapped by unnecessary loyalties to historic debates and trendy ideas.) Finally, as a work of personal scholarship, *Biblical Theology* implements profound insights from Isaiah and the prophets (one of Goldingay’s specialties) to the task of theological interpretation. It is also a testimony to a lifetime of scholarship with a vast library of different sources constantly being cited throughout. It is not a quick read compared to something like Desmond Alexander’s brief *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*.¹⁵ But *Biblical Theology* remains highly enjoyable, and it exhibits a level of insight and honesty rarely found in any kind of theological work.

Jamin Hübner

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Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology. Patrick S. Franklin. Paternoster Theological Monographs. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016. ISBN: 9781842278420 (e-book: 9781780780719).

are equal (e.g., it is possible to work for oneself in a corporate or cooperative arrangement where a “worker” is also a shareholder/co-owner; similarly, some “bosses” are actually servants in practice while only employers in title). Third, it is simply not the case that “in the Scriptures, work is [always] part of the activity of the family” (e.g., Paul didn’t exactly work in a nuclear-family context, nor did he exclusively sell his leather and tents to family members; we should assume that Jesus himself was a carpenter’s apprentice at one point, and that this person need not have been Joseph). Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, it ignores the utterly oppressive, desperate, and inhumane economic condition of those who did/do not have the option of being either an employer or an employee for most of human history. Without business—and with it, the creation of capital—the mass starvation and poor conditions characteristic of all pre-industrial societies would have continued to this day. (Few Marxists have considered why so many people chose the inhumane factory conditions of nineteenth-century industrialism: because the alternative—the supposedly “ideal” subsistence, agrarian, homesteading economy—was so much worse and undesirable.) See Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Thomas DiLorenzo, *The Problem with Socialism* (Washington: Regnery, 2016), which is more or less a popular version of Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951 [1922]).

- 15 T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Louisville: Kregel Academic, 2009). Nor is it entirely clear where Goldingay fits in the five-model scheme of Edward Klink III and Edward Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), though it would probably approximate the third view (“Biblical Theology as World-View Story”).

Pp. xviii + 325. \$49.99 (paperback), \$38.99 (e-book) (USD).¹⁶

Being Human, Being Church, the published form of Patrick Franklin's McMaster Divinity College doctoral dissertation, is divided into eight chapters (not counting the argument-situating introduction and an often-convicting conclusion) and three major divisions. Part one deals with defining the human person: simply put, to be human, one must decide what a human person looks like. An extensive look is offered of the many different approaches to being human. In this light, it is no overstatement to say that chapter one ends with nothing less than a summary of human nature, in anticipation of what the rest of the book will offer.

Chapter two explores being human in community and how respective views of being human interacts with the concomitant senses of community (as social contracts, or moral associations, e.g.). Franklin notes that many contemporary accounts of being human result in reductionism and/or polarization of key issues, resulting in false dichotomies between how we *understand* community and how we *practice* community. "What is needed," Franklin concludes, "is a holistically nuanced and theologically thick description of what it means to be human (uniting theory and praxis), one which clarifies and integrates the intrinsically social-personal and ethical-spiritual character of genuine, redeemed human existence." Wisely, Franklin provides some landmarks to look for as we follow his argument, noting that his proposal would necessarily address both "the church's inner sociality and its outward mission of partnering with God" in the work of redemptive transformation; thus, we are prepared to discover inward and outward/missional implications—though of course these are mutually informing—over the course of this journey.

The second section (chapters three through five) focuses on humanity in relationship, both with one another and in light of the Trinity—which can itself be expressed as a relationship, rooted and defined by love. Franklin's strength is his ability to clearly explain a given position's strengths and weaknesses, and how it responds (or does not respond) to the Trinitarian-centered view as he represents it. In his summary of how we develop as humans and as a church, "In the trinitarian interpretation of the *imago Dei* that I am espousing, the image of God belongs neither to the human being as an individual nor to human beings as a group, but to the intrinsic sociality of the human being, to the human person-in-relation who is bound to others 'in Christ' by the Spirit." True humanity and true community cannot take place without the presence and the anchor of the Trinity. Franklin argues for a personhood rooted in love, a love that will guide our ethics toward each other and toward creation. Christian community then focuses on developing people who are thus reflecting, individually-and-together, the image of Christ.

¹⁶ Quotations are taken from the e-book (no pagination). Italics, where quoted, are original.

This image of Christ in turn means that we will be people who are other-centered, led by the Spirit. Humanity's role in creation receives attention in chapter five, defined in terms of our sharing in the reign of God. Humanity's end is to be found in partnership with God, seeking to return creation to its original relationship to God. The hope is, of course, that a new creation will result in the end. Strong summaries are provided as to how the provided "rival and sometimes incommensurable accounts of being human" variously enhance and/or hinder the hope we have for participation in such a new creation.

Part three deals with the church as communities of the new humanity built from a strong trinitarian love, resulting in a global community with a clear mission in the world—unpacked in chapters on "The Church as Relational Communities of Love" and "of Faith," and "as Eschatological Communities of Hope." As the first of these three concludes, for example, the purpose of the church is to draw human beings to a life-giving relationship with God and other human beings. Those who are Spirit-led end up being other-centered persons, producing other-centered communities of faith. One of the biblical supports Franklin draws from here is Paul's image of being "ambassadors of reconciliation" in 2 Cor 5; while some might be disappointed not to see a deeper engagement on Franklin's part with the image's first-century sociopolitical context, I lingered over an apparent misprint that effectively furthered his discussion: "Consequently, God no longer counts peoples' sins against them." While "people's" may have been intended instead, Franklin is quite right: our ambassadorial, missional role applies to whole peoples, people-groups, not just "people" in general.

As for the chapter on "Communities of Hope" already noted, I was surprised to see Jacques Ellul's work on hope and despair left out of Franklin's text, but the omission did little to impoverish the overall argument. Necessarily broad strokes are painted about the church as a serving community, centered in Christ, so that the inner life of the church is pervaded by the Spirit. The church, the gathering of believers, becomes the temple of the Spirit in a unique and special way. The Spirit brings us together to worship and to encourage and then sends us out to through the power of the cross on mission.

As a pastor, the last two chapters are what really interested me, concerning what a church community should look like in the twenty-first century. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that this is a dissertation, these final chapters end up more theoretical than practical. Franklin's theology—as I read it, at least—calls us to establish churches (communities!) that begin with the Trinity's love. Such a community is a radically inclusive people of God, in a covenantal relationship with God. George Ladd's theology of community informs the author's understanding here; and I appreciated the growing emphasis on the ecclesial role of wisdom. A community of people who are filled with godly wisdom are consequently and

constantly oriented toward service to each other, those around us, and creation itself. Jesus embodies the mystery that was hidden but is now revealed for all to see. The church's job is to free humans to fully engage in a relationship of the mind, heart, and spirit with God. Such a community will be a wise one.

The church, then—assuming, again, that I am summarizing Franklin's view of the church fairly and accurately—is ultimately a place where the kingdom of God is real and operational. The values and the vision of the church conform to the kingdom of God as taught by Jesus. God's kingdom becomes our highest priority. Kingdom theology, centered in turn on what it means to be and to bear the *imago dei*, is what forms Christian character.

This book is strong in the analytical understanding of trends in the church today. For that reason alone it is worth reading. The foundations of any human being and any church are clearly delineated. But if I want to ask what the church looks like (or should look like) on the corner of John and Mary Streets here in Hamilton, there is no help in this book for that kind of pragmatism. This bothered me initially, but I have concluded that if we get the foundation and the structure right, then, in a sense, who cares what it *looks* like. Even if the Christ-centered humans involved look alike in how they treat one another and the world around them, a church grounded in the Trinity in Hamilton's east end will be vastly different than one in the west (to say nothing of differences between churches around the world). As Franklin remarks in his final pages, the church exists “to impact society by active engagement and involvement, not just by trying to bring people into its fold,” but this engagement must be communally, politically, and contextually strategic—and deliberately “concerned about global justice, in faithful response to the question: who is my neighbour *in a globalized context?*”

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