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Foreword

The first three articles in this issue of *CTR* are revisions of papers given at the annual fall regional conference of the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association (CETA) held on October 18, 2014 at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto, Toronto, ON. The theme of the conference was "Towards an Evangelical Feminism." The first article is a lightly revised version of the keynote address given by Marion Ann Taylor, Professor of Old Testament at Wycliffe College. The second article, by Marina Hofman, won CETA's Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award, an annual competition that awards graduate students for a paper demonstrating excellence in the field of Theology. In addition to the three articles from the CETA conference are two in the area of Pauline Theology, and a third concerning Missiology.

Christopher Zoccali, editor-in-chief.

The Gospel of Ruth: an Evangelical Feminist Reading[1]

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Abstract

This paper presents an evangelical feminist reading of selected portions of Ruth 2 and 4. It also suggests that while the identifier "evangelical feminist hermeneutics" has a relatively short history, it has a much longer past. It calls attention to the proto-evangelical feminist hermeneutic found in the writings of three women (Christine de Pizan, Marie Dentière and Mary Astell) who found the book of Ruth life-giving to women. It concludes that the book of Ruth truly can be called the gospel of Ruth—a gospel that proclaims good new to women and men and calls us to bring the good news it to the world.

In keeping with the theme of this conference, "Toward an Evangelical Feminism: Scripture, Theology, Gender," I am going to present an evangelical feminist reading of selected portions of the book of Ruth. I have been writing a commentary on Ruth for the Zondervan's Story of God series this year. Although I was not consciously reading Ruth as an "evangelical feminist," preparing for this conference has helped me to reflect more self-consciously on two important interpretive lenses that I bring to my work as an evangelical feminist Old Testament scholar. We all know that the terms "evangelical" and "feminist" are highly emotive and mean different things to different people in different parts of the global church. They are terms that divide or unite depending on the context in which they are used. My interests in presenting an evangelical feminist reading of Ruth are uniting rather than dividing and in this paper, I am using CETA's wide and generous ecumenical understanding of "evangelical" and a wide and generous definition of "feminism" which proclaims the full humanity and equality of all persons. I am very aware that some Christians believe that evangelical and feminist hermeneutics are incompat-

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1 This paper was first given at the fall regional theological conference of the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association (CETA) on October 18, 2014 at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto. Carolyn Curtis James also refers to the book of Ruth as the gospel of Ruth in her work, *The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

ible approaches to interpreting Scripture. In his essay in *Tamar's Tears: Evangelical Engagements with Feminist Old Testament Hermeneutics,* Todd Pokrifka asks the critical question, "Can our Hermeneutics be both Evangelical and Feminist?" Like Pokrifka, I answer a strong YES! I affirm with him that "we can have a hermeneutic that is feminist because it is evangelical."[2]

Although the identifier "evangelical feminist hermeneutics" has a relatively short history, it is important to recognize that this hermeneutical approach has a longer though forgotten past. Recent efforts to recover the forgotten voices of women interpreters throughout history have uncovered precursors to an evangelical feminist approach to interpreting Scripture.[3] I am going to briefly mention the writings of three early women who used the book of Ruth to be speak into contemporary debates about women.

The first example of a precursor to an evangelical feminist approach is found in the writings of fourteenth-century professional European writer, Christine de Pizan (ca.1364-ca.1430). In her renowned *Le Livre de la cité des dames* (1405), Christine enters into the debate over the nature and status of women known as *Querelle des Femmes*. To counter the misogyny of the men in her day who were claiming that there were few virtuous and chaste women in the world, she Christine calls attention to exemplary women in Scripture such as Ruth. She concludes on the basis of Naomi's and Boaz's praise for Ruth's *ḥesed* (lovingkindness) (Ruth 1:18; 3:10) that Ruth modeled chastity "during her marriage as well as her widowhood."[4] Christine also recognized Ruth's importance in the longstanding interpretive tradition that exalted Ruth as type of Christ.[5]

A second example of a proto-evangelical feminist approach is found in the writings of Genevan reformer Marie Dentière (1495-ca.1561).[6] Like Christine de

2 Pokrifka also advocates "a hermeneutic that appropriately handles the patriarchal and androcentric features of the biblical text as an expression of reverent submission to the authority of the Bible." Todd Pokrifka, "Can our Hermeneutics be both Evangelical and Feminist? Insights from the Theory and Practice of Theological Interpretation," in *Tamar's Tears: Evangelical Engagements with Feminist Old Testament Hermeneutics,* ed. Andrew Sloane (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 315.

3 Some representative publications from this corner of the field of reception history include the following works: Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir, eds., *Let Her Speak For Herself: Nineteenth-century Women Writing on Women in Genesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006); Joy A. Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament: the Biblical Legacy of Sexual Violence in Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

4 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies.* Translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards. 2nd ed. (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 157.

5 Josette A. Wiseman, "Christine de Pizan (ca.1364-ca.1430)," in Taylor, *Handbook*, 129.

6 Dentière's importance in the reformation was only more fully recognized in 2002 when her name was added to the Wall of the Reformers in Geneva. Mary B. McKinley, "Dentière, Marie (1495-ca.1561)" Taylor, *Handbook*, 158.

Pizan, Dentière was empowered by Scripture's models of courageous women. In her 1539 publication "*Épître très utile, faicte et composée par une femme chrestienne de Torney . . .* (*A Very Useful Epistle Composed by a Christian Woman of Tournai . . .*), Dentière enters into the debate over the Woman Question. In her defense of women, she counters those who used the commonplace notion of Eve's responsibility for the fall to support their misogynist argument that women are inherently evil. Like Christine, she generates a long list of examples of named and praiseworthy women in Scripture, including Sarah, Rebecca, Deborah, the Queen of Sheba, Mary, mother of Jesus, Elizabeth and Mary Magdalene. She asks rather tongue in cheek, "Must we condemn Ruth, who even though she was of the female sex, had her story told in the book that bears her name?"[7] Dentière certainly recognized the importance of Ruth's role in salvation history. Her approach like that of Christine de Pizan's was both life-giving to women and gospel centered.

The third example of an early witness to an evangelical feminist hermeneutic, which finds Ruth the woman and Ruth the book life-giving to women, is found in the work of biblical English writer Mary Astell (1666-1731).[8] In *Reflections upon Marriage* published in 1700, Astell lists Ruth as one of the many women in Scripture who exemplify Paul's proclamation, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).[9] Moreover, the examples of both Ruth and Esther who have books named after them counter what Astell regards as the World's very low esteem of the words of women:

> The World will hardly allow a Woman to say anything well, unless as she borrows it from Men, or is assisted by them; But GOD Himself allows that the Daughters of *Zelophehad spake right*, and passes their Request into a Law. Considering how much the Tyranny shall I say, or the superior Force of Men, keeps Women from Acting in the World, or doing anything considerable, and remembering withal the conciseness of the Sacred Story, no small part of it bestow'd in transmitting the History of Women famous in their Generation's: Two of the Canonical Books bearing the Names of those great Women whose Vertues and Actions are there recorded. Ruth being call'd from among the *Gentiles* to be an Ancestor of the

7 Dentière, *A Very Useful Epistle Composed by a Christian Woman of Tournai*, 54 as cited by McKinley, "Dentière, Marie (1495-ca.1561)" in Taylor, *Handbook*, 156.

8 Michal Michelson, "Astell, Mary, (1666-1731)," 44-49.

9 Mary Astell, *Reflections on Marriage*, in *Astell: Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springboard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23.

> Messiah, and Esther being rais'd up by GOD to be the great Instrument of the Deliverance and Prosperity of the Jewish Church.[10]

Like Christine de Pizan and Marie Dentière, Astell and countless other early women interpreters of Scripture found in Ruth and in the book that bears her name a compelling counter example to prevailing negative views about women.

At this point I want to present a feminist and evangelical reading of selected parts of the canonical book that as Astell claims records the virtues and actions of that great woman Ruth who was "call'd from among the *Gentiles* to be an Ancestor of the Messiah."[11] The book of Ruth as many early interpreters recognized is woman-centered or to use Richard Bauckhaum's terminology, the book of Ruth is "a gynocentric text" that allows us a window into women's culture and women's concerns.[12] Some scholars have even proposed that Ruth was written by a woman, perhaps David's daughter Tamar; others posit that Ruth was either written by a group of women or that women first told the story as it uniquely features the words, perspectives, and traditions of women.[13] As such, the book of Ruth challenges the many widely-held negative stereotypes and judgments about the relationships between women and men in ancient Israel that Carol Meyers calls us to put aside in her recent study of ancient Israelite women in context.[14] Indeed Meyers suggests that we should replace the term patriarchy with its associations of general male domination and the oppression of women with the term "heterarchy" to describe the complexity of gender dynamics books such as Ruth.[15]

The power dynamics between the women in the book of Ruth are highly complex: when Naomi commands her daughters-in-law to return to Moab, Orpah obeys Naomi, Ruth does not (Ruth 1:11-12); Ruth asks Naomi's permission to glean and later agrees to follow Naomi's dangerous plan to propose to Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 2:2; 3:5); Ruth selectively reports on what happens on the threshing floor, only to have Naomi declare that her plan is out of their hands

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 My comments on introductory issues related to the book of Ruth and on Ruth chapters 2 and 4 are adapted from my forthcoming commentary on Ruth in Zondervan's Story of God Commentary series.

13 K. Lawson Michal Michelson *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2002) 389. See R. Bauckham "The Book of Ruth and the Possibility of a Feminist Canonical Hermeneutic" *Bib Int* 5 (1997) 29-45; A. J. Bledstein argues for Tamar as author, "Female Companionships: If the Book of Ruth Were Written by a Woman . . . ," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. A. Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 116-35.

14 Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27.

15 Heterarchy is a word anthropologists use to describe societies that have hierarchies that are not necessarily linear; it acknowledges that different power structures can exist simultaneously in any given society, with each structure having its own hierarchical arrangements that may cross-cut each other laterally. Ibid.

and in the hands of men (Ruth 3:16-18). Another set of female hierarchies is present in the informal network of women who witness Naomi's declaration of emptiness when she arrives in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19), and later speak words of hope, encouragement and truth as they remind Naomi that Ruth the Moabite is of more value to her than the seven sons (Ruth 4:14-15) — in the ancient world, seven sons in the ancient world constituted the ideal family. We also witness a variety of hierarchies at work in Boaz's field and at the city gate and in the book's concluding genealogies related to ethnicity, gender, age and socio-economic status. All this is to say that while book of Ruth is a woman-centered text that allows us a window into women's culture and women's concerns, it also bears witness to the complex culture of ancient Israelite society which is patrilineal, (kinship was traced through the male line); patrilocal (a woman left her family to join her husband's family when they married) and heterarchal (a society containing multiple and cross-cutting hierarchicies).[16]

At this point I want to turn to Ruth chapter 2 which reminds us of the challenges Ruth faced as an unattached Moabite widow gleaning in the fields on the one hand and of the unexpected treatment she received by Boaz on the other. When the destitute widows arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest, Ruth devised a plan for survival. Naomi, an older woman, was perhaps unable to do hard physical labour; Ruth, a poor and childless Moabite widow, had few honorable options open to her for employment. She chose the hot, backbreaking job of gathering up grain left behind by those working the fields from dawn to dusk. Ruth recognized she was at risk of abuse and exploitation and needed to find a person to glean behind "in whose eyes [she found] favor" (Ruth 2:2). The theme of Ruth's vulnerability as a widow working in the fields is mentioned three times in chapter 2 (twice by Boaz Ruth 2:8-9,15-16, and once by Naomi who in verse 22 advises Ruth to pick up grain alongside the women working in Boaz's field: "Who knows what might happen to you in someone else's field!" (Ruth 2:22 CEV).[17]

"It just happened" or "as it turned out" (Ruth 2:3), Ruth chose to glean in the field of Elimelech's relative—a detail that is so important that the narrator mentions it twice (Ruth 2:1, 3). According to the kinship structures of ancient Israel,

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16 Heterachy seems to more accurately describe the complexity of relational dynamics in the book of Ruth reveal than the traditional descriptor patriarchy.

17 The threat of sexual abuse in the field was not just one faced by Ruth in this particular story; it is also addressed in other ancient Near Eastern texts, such as The Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope from the Ramesside period (1292-1069 BC), which commands "Do not expose a widow if you have caught her in the fields, Nor fail to give way if she is accused. Do not turn a stranger away [from] your oil jar that it may be made double for your family.

God loves him who cares for the poor, more than him who respects the wealthy. From Instruction of Amenemope chapter 28:1-6. http://www.touregypt.net/instructionofamenemope.htm#ixzz37vew5boy

relatives were responsible for caring for family members. But as we find out later in the story when we meet Naomi's relative *peloni 'almoni*, a rhyming wordplay likened to the English, "Joe Schmoe," relatives did not always come through for vulnerable family members (Ruth 4:6).[18] But for his refusal, to act as Ruth's redeemer and preserve the name of the dead, Joe Schmoe's real name was not preserved.

Boaz is introduced as a socially and economically well-positioned, *gibor hayil* "a man of standing" (Ruth 2:1). Was this chance or was it God's providence that brought Ruth to Boaz's field? Although the narrator does not tell us that God explicitly directed Ruth to Boaz's field, such a conclusion is implied. Boaz's question, "Who does that young woman belong to?" reminds us again that this story is set in a time and place where there were many different kinds of hierarchies—women, as well as male servants and slaves, for example, lacked autonomy. A woman's identity was associated with that of her father, husband, or in the case of a widow, her sons or distant male relatives. Male servants and slaves were similarly identified with the person they served.[19] But Ruth belongs to no man—she has committed herself to Naomi, Naomi's people, and Naomi's God (1:16-17).

Boaz's initial words to Ruth concern her personal welfare as he knew she was at risk of physical and/or sexual abuse by his men whom he directs not "to lay a hand on" or "touch" her (Ruth 2:9). Boaz advises Ruth to "cling" (NIV "stay") to the women who were likely binding the stalks cut by the men. Boaz continues to anticipate Ruth's needs when he invites her to drink from the jars filled with the water drawn for his regular workers. As Daniel Block suggests, Boaz's "extraordinary" invitation breaks with ancient convention and inverts two interlocking hierarchies- as foreigners would normally draw water for Israelites and women for men.[20]

The high point of chapter 2 is Boaz's testimony to Ruth's character. He calls attention to Ruth's exceptional care for Naomi and her courageous Abraham-like decision to leave family and country to accompany Naomi (Ruth 2:11). He believes that Ruth's *ḥesed*-like actions and her decisions had placed her under Yahweh's protective wings. He prays that Yahweh will repay and reward Ruth. And as the story unfolds, we watch Boaz become part of the larger divine plan of rewarding Ruth for her decision to leave behind the gods of Moab to take refuge under the Yahweh's wings (Ruth 2:12). Boaz's favor includes extravagant and generous acts of *ḥesed* that offer Ruth protection, provision, and inclusion. He

18 Ellen F. Davis, *Who are You, My Daughter?: Reading Ruth Through Image and Text* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 97; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 401.

19 Isaac, for example, expects Esau to ask the men who were bringing him gifts, "Who do you belong to?" (Gen 32:17); likewise, David's men ask an unidentified Egyptian slave in the open country who he belonged to (1 Sam 30:11).

20 Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 660.

invites Ruth to leave her place of separateness as a foreign gleaner to join the community for a meal. He offers her bread for dipping in either wine vinegar (NIV) or some kind of sour sauce for moistening and flavoring the bread.[21]

Boaz continues to break with custom when as the male head of the community *he serves the Moabite outsider* enough roasted grain to satisfy her hunger and have leftovers for Naomi. Boaz's remarkable hospitality to the Moabite gleaner as Block suggests is not just about "feeding the hungry." Instead it "shows how Boaz took an ordinary occasion and transformed it into a glorious demonstration of compassion, generosity, and acceptance- in short the biblical understanding of *ḥesed*."[22] Boaz continues to demonstrate *ḥesed* with his instructions that his men make Ruth's gleaning easier by pulling out some of the stalks from the bundles. In addition, he adds to his earlier directive that the men not lay a hand on Ruth (Ruth 2:9), with his orders that they not harass her (Ruth 2:16).

While Ruth 2 is very rich in terms of meaning, an evangelical feminist approach calls us to focus on Ruth, the destitute foreign woman at risk of physical and psychological abuse who courageously seeks to provide food for her family. It also calls us to focus on Boaz, an extraordinary Israelite who exceeds the requirements of the Mosaic Law regarding the provision, protection, and inclusion of at-risk women. Boaz's care for Ruth reminds us of many of Jesus's encounters with women in the gospels; for example, the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years (Mark 5:25-34); the widow of Nain whose desperate situation provoked Jesus's compassion (Luke 7:11-17); the crippled woman healed by Jesus (Luke 13:10-17). Boaz, like Jesus, models a life of *ḥesed* for Christians who are reminded by James that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (Jas 1:27).

Christ calls us to be involved with the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor, and the suffering. In her theological response to the problem of violence against women and girls, *The Cross and Gendercide,* Elizabeth Gerhardt calls the church to take up Jesus's mission of freedom and healing:

> The time for ministering to abused women and girls is now. The time to work for structural change that will improve the lives of women and girls is now. The time to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves because of oppressive systems that deny their human dignity is now. Gendercide is a confessional issue . . . [Jesus demands] 'Come, follow me.'[23]

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21 Ellen F. Davis, *Who are You, My Daughter?,* 55.
22 Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 667.
23 Elizabeth Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence against Women and Girls* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 171.

Focusing on Ruth's initiative and courage rather than her vulnerability, Joan Chittister offers another feminist take on Ruth chapter 2. She sees Ruth as the ideal Christian woman whose courage, strength, and independence calls women of faith to step outside their comfort zones to take risks for the higher good, as Ruth did in providing food for Naomi and herself. According to Chittister, "Ruth calls women to be everything they can be, whatever the odds, whatever the world thinks otherwise. Ruth goes out into strange fields alone—and takes all the women of the world with her, not simply for their sakes alone, but for the sake of the whole world."[24] It is this very call for courage and risk-taking initiative that proto-feminist interpreters Christine de Pizan, Marie Dentière, and Mary Astell recognized in the gospel of Ruth.

The history of the interpretation of Ruth chapter 2 reveals that Christian readers throughout history have explored its fuller or spiritual senses as they looked for what the book teaches about Christ, and about how to live in this life and in preparation for the next. Like Christine de Pizan and Mary Astell, many theological interpreters found great significance in the relationships between Ruth, Boaz, Obed and David's greater son Jesus. Typological interpretations of characters in the book of Ruth abound: Ruth is seen a type of the Gentile believers described in Eph 2:19 who were "no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household" and of believers who delivered out of afflictions and blessed with fruitfulness; Boaz, Ruth's redeemer and husband, is commonly regarded as a type of Christ; and Naomi and Ruth the Moabite are thought to foreshadow the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church.

Other Christian readers have interpreted this image-laden chapter 2 of the book of Ruth allegorically. In his three-point sermon entitled, "Spiritual Gleaning," nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) presents a mini-course on the Christian life using the metaphor of "the heavenly art of spiritual gleaning."[25] Boaz is a type of God, "the great husbandman," who encourages believers to glean in his various fields—God's doctrine field with its sheaves of election and final perseverance; God's overflowing promise field; the field of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the most excellent hedged and sheltered field on a hill, called "Fellowship and Communion with Christ." Spurgeon's Ruth, the humble gleaner, is the hard working and tired believer who has to glean the soul's food ear by ear and then thresh and winnow it. Finally, Boaz, Ruth's secret lover and redeemer is our lover and redeemer, Jesus, the husband of the church. Spurgeon concludes his sermon with the striking exhortation: "Glean

24 Joan Chittister, *The Story of Ruth: Twelve Moments in Every Woman's Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 43.

25 http://www.spurgeon.org/misc/glean.htm

on with humble industry and hopeful confidence, and know that he who owns both fields and sheaves is looking upon you with eyes of love, and will one day espouse you to himself in glory everlasting. Happy gleaner who finds eternal love and eternal life in the fields in which he gleans!"[26]

The anonymous Anglican writer M.G. (fl. 1893) offers yet another allegorical reading of chapter 2. M. G.'s Boaz is Christ who offers Ruth inclusion in the mystical body of Christ, and the bread and wine vinegar Boaz offers Ruth are types of the body and blood of Christ:

> The whole history of Ruth's work in the field, her meeting with Boaz, her being numbered among his maidens, unworthy though she considered herself of the honour, and his blessing her, is a beautiful allegory of the Holy Communion, where we meet our Elder Brother, though at first we scarcely realize it, and where with His Blessing we are assured of our membership with 'the blessed company of all faithful people,'[27] and where we receive heavenly Food from the hands of His servants as often as we will come for it. The morsel of bread, and the vinegar (a sort of common wine), which she might drink, is a plain type of the Bread and Wine given to us in the Holy Eucharist.[28]

Most modern and post-modern interpreters are uncomfortable with full-blown typological and allegorical readings of the book of Ruth. Peter Hawkins describes the downside of traditional Christian interpretations of Ruth, which he says "tend to drain the biblical text of particularity—despite their relevance as examples for us. With a kind of plodding predictability, characters become ideas, and individual stories are subsumed into a theological master plan that offers few surprises."[29] Still I have come to believe that reading Scripture with the great clouds of witnesses that have come before us with critical discernment can have great value: like a beautiful glass prism, our forebears can open our eyes to theological truths we have not seen in the text, or that we might not even be able to see.

At this point, I want to leave the theologically rich chapter 2 and move to the book's conclusion. Ruth 4 moves us away from the very private threshing floor to the city gate, away from a world negotiated by women to a world where men control land and female sexuality. We see Boaz take the lead to move Naomi's

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26 Ibid.

27 Here M.G. is quoting the prayer used after communion in the Anglican service of Holy Communion.

28 M. G., *Women like Ourselves: Short Addresses for Mothers' Meetings, Bible Classes, etc.* (London: SPCK, 1893), 77.

29 Peter S. Hawkins, "Ruth Amid the Gentiles," in *Scrolls of Love: Reading Ruth and the Song of Songs,* ed. Peter S. Hawkins (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 80.

plan for Ruth to marry Boaz forward. When Joe Schmoe changes his mind about redeeming Naomi's land and marrying Ruth, Boaz buys the land and marries Ruth who conceives and gives birth to a son. The women respond with praise and blessings. They name Ruth and Boaz's son Obed and present him to Naomi. The book closes with a short and then longer genealogy which draws this story into the larger story of God.

An evangelical feminist reading of this chapter needs to respond to the concerns of contemporary readers who find the focus on men in the closing chapter of a book focused on women jarring and off-putting. Sakenfeld speaks for many when she writes:

> A story with such promising beginnings, as women seek to make their own way, ends very conventionally (albeit through unconventional behavior along the way) with the women's security achieved by reintegrating themselves completely into the existing traditional economic and family structure. And it is the men who arrange the details of the reintegration."[30]

And to top it off, the women are not included in the final ten-member genealogy.

But is there a way to read the genealogies in the final chapter of Ruth that promotes life instead annoyance or even rejection? I think a consideration of the canonical and theological functions of the two genealogies in Ruth 4 is a good place to begin. Ancient genealogies, of course, served a number of purposes. Horizontal or segmented genealogies, such as the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 show how families, clans, and nations are related by means of their common ancestry. Vertical or linear genealogies trace a line of descent from the first person named to the last and often legitimate the rights and privileges of last person named in a particular political or religious office.[31] Like the genealogies in Genesis, the genealogy that closes Ruth begins with the formulaic expression, "these are the generations of" or as the NIV puts it, "This then is the family line of Perez" (Ruth 4:18; cf. Gen 2:4; 5:1, 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).

The closing genealogy begins with Judah and Tamar's son, Perez, whose birth story in Genesis 38 has many important connections to the book of Ruth, including the prayer in Ruth 4:12 that Boaz and Ruth's family would be like that of Perez. With Judah's strong connections to royalty (49:8-12), we might expect Judah to begin this second genealogy that ends with David (Ruth 4:17). But in this genealogy, like those ten-member genealogies of Noah (Gen 5) and Abraham (Gen 11), the tenth person enters into a new covenant with God that marks as El-

30 Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1999), 86-87.

31 P. E. Satterwaithe, "Genealogy in the Old Testament," *NIDOTTE* 4. 654-63.

len Davis suggests, "a fresh and redemptive beginning after a long period of history marked by human violence."[32] The placement of Boaz, husband of Ruth, the woman who has just been lauded as better than seven sons (Ruth 4:15), in the significant seventh place (4:21) also signals the importance of this story of God's blessing of ordinary people who make extraordinary decisions and live extraordinary lives of *ḥesed* —ordinary people who God providentially uses to bring forth his greater purposes. The prominence of Perez, the son of the Canaanite mother, and of Boaz, husband of Ruth the Moabite in this genealogy, also signals an openness to foreigners, an acceptance of David's "foreign blood," and perhaps even the end of the ten generation ban of Ammonites and Moabites and their descendants from the assembly of the Lord (Deut 23:3).[33] The mention of David in the tenth place in the genealogy also ties the book's conclusion to its beginning, as Elimelek's family were Ephrathite from Bethlehem, Judah (1:2) and David was introduced as "the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah (1 Sam 17:12).

The closing ten-member male genealogy arches back and connects to Israel's history and arches forward to the kingship of David. It also anticipates "the Lord's anointed, Great David's greater son" who as the hymn writer, James Montgomery recognized, "comes to break oppression, To set the captive free, To take away transgression, And rule in equity."[34] The book's anticipatory links to the messiah are made explicit in Mathew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5-6, 17). The story of Ruth then is a bridge to the future story of God—it looks forward to David's greater son Jesus and the blessings that his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection brought to the world (Gen 12:1-3).

But what of the short genealogy in Ruth 4:17 that is introduced by the declaration "Naomi has a son!" The placement of Naomi at the beginning of this short genealogy of David brings the world of women into the world of men as Bethlehem's women redefine kinship based on genealogical lineage. This short genealogy was strictly speaking neither legal nor biological as Ruth not Naomi is Obed's biological mother.[35]

But there is more to be said about the women's genealogy which reads as the climax of the section that begins in 4:13 with "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife and the Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son." Here we are reminded that of what has been called the "arduous (if often elsewhere

32 Davis, *Who are You, My Daughter?,* 121.

33 Ibid.

34 James Montgomery (1771-1854) wrote this paraphrase of Psalm 72 in 1821; it was first published in 1822 and continues to be sung in many churches.

35 Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011), 91.

unacknowledged) work of women" and of Ruth and Naomi's active involvement in the planning and processes that led up to the marriage that eventuated in Obed's birth.[36] This focus on women's involvement in producing the males in typical patrilineal genealogies Eshkenazi suggests "actually transforms the patriarchal focus of the male genealogies so prevalent in the Bible. . . .[It] weaves a story of women back into the larger fabric of Israel's history, thus augmenting and fleshing out both the world of women and the world of men."[37] It reminds us that women as well as men were integral to the story of God, even though women's roles in that story are not usually given the attention that they are given in the book of Ruth. Women's inclusion in this short genealogy and in this story as a whole reminds us to look for women's hidden footprints in other stories where women are less visible.

I want to close with words of one of my favorite nineteenth-century women commentators, Elizabeth Rundle Charles who like many women throughout history was particularly drawn to the stories of women in Scripture. In her 1884 retelling of the book of Ruth, *An Old Story of Bethlehem: One Link in the Great Pedigree*, Charles calls attention to the "eternal" significance of Ruth and Naomi. She writes:

> And so this old story of Bethlehem ends, with sweet and sacred joy in a birth, and the name of Ruth, daughter of the outcast nation, and of Naomi, widowed and childless, are engraven in the pedigree of the Son of Man, of Him through whom none are outcasts, and in whom are not desolate hearts."[38]

Here Charles recognizes the theological importance of the two genealogies that close the book of Ruth. Their significance does not lie in their exclusion of women, but rather in women's inclusion in the story of salvation. Charles reminds us that Ruth and Naomi are engraven in the lineage of the one who embraced outcasts such as Ruth the Moabite widow and reached out to the desolate, and broken such as Naomi bringing healing, restoration, and new life. The book of Ruth truly can be called the gospel of Ruth- a gospel that proclaims good new to women and men and calls us all to bring the good news it to the world.

36 Ibid., 93.
37 Ibid.
38 Elizabeth Rundle Charles, *An Old Story of Bethlehem: One Link in the Great Pedigree* (London: SPCK, 1884), 31.

Portrayal of the Female Figure in the Twelve: A Fresh Perspective[1]

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Abstract

Many scholars have argued that the Book of the Twelve presents a negative, oppressive portrayal of female figures. This article responds to some of the major accusations against the Twelve by highlighting examples therein of: (a) equality in female and male relationships; (b) models of female leadership; (c) representations of female power; (d) condemnation of violence that occurs against females as well as males; (e) interdependence between females and males; (f) the sacredness of the female; and (g) the counter perspective of the abused male. Through a close examination of the text this article demonstrates that while negative portrayals of the female figure are present in the Book of the Twelve these are often counterbalanced by both equally negative portrayals of the male, and positive portrayals of the female. A variety of texts are highlighted, encouraging the discussion to reach beyond the commonly pointed to passages in Hosea and Zechariah, in order to reveal the more favorable perspective of the female demonstrated throughout the Twelve.

Some biblical scholars have a strongly negative view of the portrayal of the female in biblical prophetic literature. Eryl Davies, a self-proclaimed non-feminist, provides this summary statement on the use of female imagery:

> The prophets contributed to some of the most vividly misogynist material encountered in the Hebrew Bible. It is striking that the prophets, so often regarded as the great champions of justice in ancient Israel, did so little to challenge the sexual oppression, and

1 This article won the Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Theology, awarded to the best graduate student paper presented at the CETA annual regional fall conference held on October 18, 2014 at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.

> that those who seemed most concerned about the exploitation of the poor by the rich should have been so oblivious to the exploitation of women.[2]

Athalya Brenner writes, "When the prophets use the marriage metaphor to depict the nature of the relationship between God and his people, the husband (God) is always viewed in a positive light whereas the wife (Israel) is almost invariably viewed negatively."[3] Gale Yee discusses the impact of the prophetic portrayal of women as evil: "Privileging gender blinds one to the fact that sexism interlocks with other social forms of oppression and exploitation, which are then encoded in the biblical text."[4]

Accordingly, critics discuss the negative impact of the prophetic literature on contemporary Western society. It is argued that the sexual violence against women and negative portrayal of women in the prophetic literature have contributed to the history of violence and abuses against women throughout the history of Western culture. For example, Brenner states,

> [B]y emphasizing how grossly illicit and unreasonable had been the wife's behaviour, and how patient and long-suffering had been her husband, the prophets were able to justify the punishment which was to be inflicted upon her. Just as the husband was legally within his rights in retaliating against his wayward wife, so God was justified in retaliating against his unfaithful people.[5]

Some "feminists who are also Jewish or Christian scholars find themselves in the frustrating position of having to accept as binding and authoritative texts that appear to be incompatible with some of their fundamental beliefs and principles,"[6] and to read the text through a male perspective. Because of the negative portrayal of women in the Old Testament and literary sources, some scholars think that the biblical text cannot be used to reconstruct gender relationships and recover women's lives in ancient Israel.[7] These are serious issues, and they highlight the

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2 Eryl W. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 7.

3 Athalya Brenner, *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26.

4 Gale Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 7.

5 Eryl W. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader*, 6.

6 Ibid., 10.

7 Gale Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 29. See also Phyllis Bird, "Women's Religion in Ancient Israel," in *Women's Earliest Records from Ancient Egypt and Western Asia*, ed. Barbara S. Lesko (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 283–98; Phyllis Bird, "The Place of Women in the Israelite Culture," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honour of Frank Moore Cross*, eds. Patrick D. Miller Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 397-419; Carol Meyers,

importance of evaluating the arguments to see if there might be other conclusions one can legitimately draw from the text. This essay takes into account the views of such scholars who hold that the Twelve portray the female negatively.

The Presence of Equality in Relationships in the Twelve

The argument that the Twelve present a solely negative portrayal of females is often grounded in the perception of how the power structure between the husband and wife is portrayed in the Twelve. Were such relationships demonstrative of inequality, as is commonly assumed? Renita Weems states:

> The husband's love was fueled by some very definite notions about the rights and privileges of the husband. Having as he did the power to divorce his wife, the authority to haul her before the cult on charges of infidelity, and the right to his wife's exclusive sexuality, the husband clearly had the upper hand in the relationship.[8]

The Twelve does not often address marriage, but there are three key passages to consider. A line from Zechariah states, "If anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, 'You shall not live . . . .' And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies" (13:3).[9] This verse demonstrates a level of equality between husband and wife—both mutually decide to take action and carry out punishment against a wayward son. Malachi 2:13-16 commands the husband not to divorce his wife. It says nothing to the wife; however, the husband is bound to be faithful to the marriage regardless of the wife's actions. This is demonstrated by Hosea, who is mistreated by his wife but must remain in the marital relationship and show unconditional love and compassion to this wife. God commands Hosea to be faithful to his adulterous wife (3:1).

Equality between male and female is present throughout the Twelve. For example, they are both sinful; a son dishonors his father and a daughter dishonors her mother (Mic 7:6). Both the young men and young women faint because of thirst (Amos 8:13). Bridegroom and bride are to assemble before YHWH (Joel 2:16). One day "old men and old women . . . . Boys and girls" will be blessed (Zech 8:4-5), and God's goodness will be extended to young men and young women alike (Zech 9:17). God's Spirit will be poured out on men and women, and sons and daughters will prophesy (Joel 2:28).

Thus, although the Twelve does not discuss marriage often, there is an example

Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11-23.

8 Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 31-32.

9 English Standard Version used throughout.

of equality between husband and wife in Zechariah 13:3, and both Malachi 2:14–16 and Hosea suggest a lack of freedom for the husband even in the face of spousal mistreatment.

Models of Female Leadership in the Twelve

Athalya Brenner discusses the lack of female leadership roles. First, "women are neither acknowledged public leaders nor prophets," and this stands in contrast to numerous male characters that have leadership and prophetic roles.[10] Brenner further notes: "professional women, women of vocation, do not feature largely."[11] Another claim is that "women are described as active in the cult, albeit not in YHWH's cult."[12] Indeed, "their membership in the 'prophetic,' Yahwistic world is largely denied."[13] It is thought that the women are condemned for leading men astray by their seduction, but there is not a balanced view whereby they are praised for their good influence or initiative.

Though females do not feature largely in the Twelve, we may note that the Twelve promotes the status of the female figure to one of leadership in several places. Joel makes it clear that in the rule of the Spirit, women have a place of authority and leadership: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . . . on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit" (2:28-29). The people who are to assemble before YHWH include the women (Joel 2:16). An unspecified female will usher in the reign of the promised ruler from Bethlehem when she gives birth (Mic 5:3). Miriam is acknowledged as a leader of Israel (Mic 6:4). Gomer has a son and a daughter, and they both represent YHWH's prophetic message to Israel (Hos 1:4-6). In teaching that mourning is a fundament aspect of repentance and returning to YHWH Joel calls the people's attention to the example of a female: "Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth" (1:8). This image of a mourning virgin establishes the model of repentance that the leadership are to follow.

Furthermore, Zion is presented as a powerful female figure. It will be out of Zion, often personified in female terms, that the law of YHWH will go forth, and out of the city Jerusalem that the word of YHWH will be sent (Mic 4). Following an oracle against male leaders, Micah says, "And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem . . . . Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs bronze" (Mic 4:8, 13). Zion will be a place of fellowship and without fear. She will be established as a

10 Athalya Brenner, *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, 21.
11 Ibid., 26.
12 Ibid., 27.
13 Ibid., 28.

place for the lame, the afflicted, and those cast off. The people will run to her for safety. In these passages, the female figure of Zion in the Twelve has a public leadership role in the kingdom of God, and the females, young and old, will prophesy along with the males.

Nevertheless, even though these examples of female leadership are present in the Twelve, leadership in the Twelve is predominantly fulfilled by male characters. It may be noted that male leaders are harshly condemned and held responsible for their shortcomings. Haggai's oracle criticizes the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua. They suffer the consequences of their failure (Hag 1:1-11). Numerous other passages pronounce condemnation or indicate punishment for corrupt male leaders (Zech 10:3; Zech 13:4-7; Mal 1:6). The prideful notable men who lord over others will be the first to go into exile (Amos 6:1-7). In Hosea 10:15, the punishment for the king of Israel's bad leadership is complete destruction. Micah 3 is an oracle against the rulers, priests and prophets who "detest justice . . . build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity . . . . Give judgment for a bribe . . . teach for a price . . . practice divination for money" (vv. 9-11). Evil prophets and diviners face grave punishment (Mal 3:5). The destruction that will come to Zion is blamed on their corruption. Because they exhibited poor leadership, the people will turn to YHWH instead. Indeed, it is because of this failure to fulfill their role that males, like females, are in need of deliverance.

Thus, there are numerous examples of female leadership in the Twelve. While male leadership is dominant, the failures of the male leaders are severely condemned. The audience of the Twelve is encouraged to look toward a day when both male and female will prophesy and be filled with the Spirit, and when the daughter of Zion is an ideal leader among all nations.

Condemnation of Violence, which Occurs Against Both Female and Male in the Twelve

Scholars are understandably troubled by the presence of violence in the Twelve. Oracles of violence against the female or female personification raise moral questions. Most alarming is the problem that arises in Hosea with the perceived condoning of violent actions against the female.[14] The assumption is that Hosea suggests that a husband may legitimately act violently and sexually abusively to his wife. To further complicate this, the husband is representative of God, and this can lead scholars to suggest that the text affirms God's violence against women. No matter how we approach the Twelve, "one can perhaps mitigate the damage for

14 Hosea states: "Lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born . . . and kill her with thirst . . . . I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths . . . . I will take away my wool and flax, which were to cover her nakedness" (2:3, 6, 9).

women by pointing to the presumed motivations underlying the text . . . however, the textual anger and verbal violence are undeniable."[15] It is worth noting that although YHWH *threatens* to bring punishment to Hosea's wife, YHWH does not instruct Hosea to act abusively to his wife, nor do we see YHWH's threats materializing. Rather, he is to go and love his wife, despite her actions (Hos 3:1). The presence of violence, though, demands consideration.

Another troublesome passage often used to support the view that the Twelve condone violence against the female is in Zechariah. YHWH declares: "For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped" (Zech 14:2). It should be noted that this passage foretells of violence against males as well (Zech 14:12-25), and that YHWH's response is to go out and fight against the nations that will commit this violence against the women (Zech 14:3). Thus, a violent future is prophesied for both male and female, and YHWH does not condone the violence, but attacks the guilty nations in retribution.[16]

In terms of equality in the Twelve, sexual violence is also associated with males. Forced stripping occurs against the high priest in Zechariah: "The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Remove the filthy garments from him'" (3:4). Similar to passages of sexual violence against women, YHWH condemns the man who makes his neighbors drunk "in order to gaze at their nakedness" for they will be exposed and filled with shame (Hab 2:15-16). YHWH "crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck" (Hab 3:13). These passages counterbalance the stripping of the female figure in Hosea 2.

Violence is not specifically directed against women, either. Both male and female face violence in Nahum: Thebes "became an exile; she went into captivity; her infants were dashed in pieces … for her honored men lots were cast, and all her great men were bound in chains" (3:10; see also Hos 13:16). In Amos, "the lovely virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst" (8:13).

Further, violence is directed specifically toward males. Habakkuk 2 contains an oracle against a male figure. Because of his corruption, violence, and drunkenness, he will be plundered, scorned, and exposed. Amos declares that the day of YHWH will be "as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him" (Amos 5:19). YHWH declares that Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will be exiled (Amos 7:11). Violence against males is also noted in Obadiah 8-9, Malachi 2:12; Zechariah 5:3-4, 13:3, 7; Zephaniah 1:3, 4, 8; Amos 7:17.

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15 Athalya Brenner, *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, 34.

16 This passage is similar to Nahum 3:5 where YHWH declares to Nineveh, "I . . . will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame."

In cases where violence against a female character is suggested, it is set in terms of consequences. This is made explicit several times. Micah states, "All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces, all her wages shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste, for from the fee of a prostitute she gathered them, and to the fee of a prostitute they shall return" (1:7). Later, the enemy is personified as female, and the violence against her is a result of her mocking: "Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, 'Where is the LORD your God?' My eyes will look upon her; now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets" (Mic 7:10). In Zephaniah, it is the arrogance of the female-personified city that leads to her desolation (but it is not from YHWH) and the refusal to accept correction and corruption (2:15, 3:7). This is the case even in Hosea, where the female figure has rejected provision and has acted shamefully. As a result, her provisions are removed and she is shamed (Hos 2).[17]

Importantly, throughout the Book of the Twelve, those who act violently are condemned. For example, in Obadiah, "because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever" (v. 10). People are condemned for driving women from their homes (Mic 2:9). Habakkuk complains about and condemns general violence (1:3). YHWH also condemns violence and warns that the violent will be punished (Hab 2:8; note also Zeph 1:9).[18] In the fullness of time, those who bring violence to Judah will also be violently punished. After violence is used as punishment for great evil, a time of peace will be established. Sexual abuse is also condemned. Amos declares that sexual abuse (when a father and son use the same girl) profanes God's holy name (2:7), and he condemns and announces punishment on Ammon for ripping open the pregnant women of Gilead (1:13). Joel announces judgment for those who sold girls for wine (3:3). Zechariah gives specific instructions against oppressing widows (7:10).

The Twelve condemn violence against the female specifically through lament. Amos takes up the lament: "Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel; forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up" (5:1-2). Micah laments and wails, "stripped and naked . . . . For her wound is incurable" (1:8-9). In Zephaniah 3, there is an oracle of lament for the sad state of the city that ends with a great declaration of gladness, for the violence against her by her enemies will be ended. In addition to lamenting violence against the daughter of Zion, Micah announces her redemption by YHWH (4:10). These laments provide a response of compassion toward victims of violence.

17 Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes,* trans. Herbert Danby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 294, states, "She laid herself bare for transgression—the Almighty likewise laid her bare." Other verses more generally address this theme of violence as a consequence of sin, such as Zech 7:13.

18 Note also Zephaniah 1:9.

Thus, the Book of the Twelve does not single out women for abuse; females and males are presented as victims of general and sexual violence. Although the Twelve threatens violence, the Twelve does not condone violence toward women; violence and violent oppressors are condemned. The condemnation of violence is also given voice through lament for the victims of violence.

The Female as Powerful in the Twelve

The biblical text is viewed by some scholars as reinforcing patriarchal dominance and "women's inferiority and submissiveness."[19] The assumption that women were powerless—legally or socially or both—has a dominant influence on how some scholars view the portrayal of the female in the Twelve. Several feminists are combating this view and recognize the power of the female in the biblical text. In a section titled "Weapons of the Weak: Women's Informal Power," Gail Yee acknowledges that even though a woman in ancient Israel may lack legalized authority, she has power in the society.[20] Carol Meyers argues that in the ancient Israelite society, where family structure is foundational, "female power will be as significant as male power and perhaps even greater."[21] Despite the lack of authority in her society, she nevertheless exerts influence and control over events. For Yee, this is a "strategy of resistance/power to male authority and control."[22] These perspectives challenge the assumption that females did not have power.

I would like to highlight examples of powerful female characterizations in the Twelve. First, the seductress woman is not a follower. She goes after her lovers and exerts her seductive powers over them (Hos 3). She is successful. Hosea must go to great lengths to return his wife and redeem the marriage relationship. Indeed, because he does not have power over his wife, he must coerce her through love.[23] Nahum states that the Ninevites have gone to great lengths for the charms of the prostitute (3:1-4), indicating the power of the prostitutes over the Ninevites. In Micah 7:5, the female is a threat because she has power: "guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms." Importantly, the display of power and the female's exertion of power over the male are not condemned. An exception is Amos 4:1, where women are judged for the abuse of their power. The women oppress the poor and crush the needy. Rather than being powerless, these women are powerful, and Amos condemns them for using their power to oppress the dis-

19 Eryl W. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader*, 4.
20 Gale Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 48ff.
21 Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 176.
22 Gale Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 49. Yee notes, "They can exploit their men sexually, by refusing sexual intercourse with them or by threatening and actually pursuing sexually unacceptable behaviour with other men," 50.
23 A. A. MacIntosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 69.

advantaged. When punishment is declared, as stated earlier, it is a direct consequence of sin and not intended to strip the woman of her power.

While the above examples are generally negative, the female characterization of Zion exhibits elements of power in a positive sense.[24] Micah 4:8, for example, declares dominion and leadership for her: "And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem." Micah depicts the daughter of Zion as strong: "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples; and shall devote their gain to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth" (4:13). And again, in language of power and strength, Micah calls the daughter to rise up militarily: "Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek" (5:1). "The LORD roars from Zion" (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2). Because Zion will give refuge to all, it is a place of strength (Joel 3:16). In Hosea 13:8, YHWH is presented by strong and protective female imagery, "like a bear robbed of her cubs" who attacks. Throughout the Twelve, there is a close association between the presence and work of YHWH and the female personification of Zion, depicted in positive imagery and often idealized.

Moreover, the type of power that is physical and military and that is associated with male figures is condemned. Nahum condemns Nineveh for its rumbling wheels, galloping horses, bounding chariots, charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears (Nah 3:2-3). Joel teaches that the one who executes YHWH's word is powerful (2:11). This type of power is not gender-specific. YHWH models a power that is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13). Indeed, God's work is accomplished not by power, but by the Spirit, who is poured out on male and female alike (Zech 4:5 and Joel 2:28). In this sense, females who act in accordance with YHWH's word and by the Spirit are powerful.

The Female and Male as Mutually Dependent in the Twelve

According to Athalya Brenner, the latter prophets confine the roles of women to specific functions, and females are seldom imaged as independent, self-supporting figures.[25] Davies argues that the prophets affirm the traditional gender stereotyping of women as dependent on men for protection and support.[26]

24 Even, Tyre, personified as a woman, is assumed to have power such that "the Lord will strip her of her possessions and strike down her power" (Zech 9:4).

25 Athalya Brenner, *Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* 28.

26 Eryl W. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader*, 6. Ibn Ezra and Kimchi state, "the girl, being the weaker sex, signifies and represents the weakness of the kings and the kingdom" (A. A. MacIntosh, *Hosea*, 23).

One response is to accept the vulnerability of the female and find value in this portrayal. For example, Christl Maier seeks to redeem the imagery of the female-personified Zion as vulnerable and in need of male protection. In the Zion passages, Maier observes how the metaphor of the female in need of protection positively emphasizes the caring fatherly role of YHWH in defending the vulnerable city space of Zion.[27]

If a lack of independence is perceived as negative, it applies to both female and male. Females depended on males for protection in the same way that males depended on females to provide certain contributions to family and society. Both roles had risks, and no doubt the role of protector was at times fatal.

Though males are generally portrayed in the role of protector, it should be noted that the concomitant military roles often assumed for males in the OT is not presented as superior in the Twelve. Throughout the Twelve, YHWH condemns the men who used violence. In fact, a rule of peace is the ideal. The day of YHWH is marked by peace (Mic 4:3-4), as is the rule of YHWH (Zech 8:4), and peace marks the return of the glory of YHWH (Hag 2:9). Peace will accompany the coming of the King of Zion (Zech 9:8). Indeed, it is "not by might, nor by power" but by the Spirit of YHWH that the plan of YHWH is fulfilled (Zech 4:6). The desired future reign of peace is specifically associated with the female figure in Zech 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey."

Once again we find that though the portrayal of the female as dependent in the Twelve may be perceived as negative, there is mutual dependency between female and male. The role of the male as a militant protector is condemned whereas the reign of peace associated with the female ideal and superior.

The Female as Sacred in the Twelve

Gale Yee comments on the biblical depiction of woman as evil, drawing attention to this theme in the prophetic literature. She argues the prophets portray women's sexuality as dominantly "deviant, evil, and dangerous."[28] For example, a list of atrocities in the city of Nineveh includes "the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms" (Nah 3:4).[29] Additionally, Gomer is negatively portrayed in Hosea.

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27 Christl Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 213.

28 Renita Weems, *Battered Love*, 5. She refers predominantly to Gomer.

29 Also, Zechariah has a vision of a woman about whom some argue the angel says, "This is Wickedness" (5:7-8). This vision is understood variously. Carol Meyers and Eric Meyers, *Zechariah 1–8*, AB 25 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987), 313, states, "The woman . . . is a complicated figure

One must ask if these portrayals are intended to portray normative female behavior or exceptional situations. Weems argues that the prophets hoped to arouse disgust, contempt, terror and shame by portraying the women as the sexually promiscuous wife, the brazen whore, and the mutilated paramour.[30] If indeed such metaphors evoke disgust, contempt, terror, and shame, it is not because of their normalcy but because they were *not* accepted behavior. The element of shock is caused because such things were *not* acceptable in society. Hosea chose to use a situation that was not normal and acceptable in society to shame and horrify his audience. This perspective sets the message in a more positive light—such a thing should not happen in Israel.

Though the female is portrayed as a prostitute in Hosea, God's response is not always to punish or condemn. Hosea 4:14 states, "I will not punish your daughters when they [turn to prostitution], nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes." YHWH declares that the priests have led the people astray and casts blame solely on them. Though the daughters have also committed sexual sins of prostitution, YHWH shows them compassion, understanding and grace to the point of not holding them responsible or punishing them.[31]

Despite these hopefully more positive perspectives, one cannot deny that the negative portrayals of female characters in the Twelve. To be fair, the prophets exhibit balance in the portrayal of female and male in that there are many equally negative depictions of male characters. Male figures, like female figures, are faithless and abandon their relationship with God. In Malachi, an accusation is made against male characters and personifications: "Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god" (2:11). In Zephaniah, males profane what is holy (3:4), which is contrasted to Jerusalem. Violent punishment comes equally to both males and females in an oracle against the nations (Joel 3:8). Zechariah uses worthless shepherds as symbols in a negative metaphor (v. 11). Jonah can be perceived as a parallel to Gomer. Initially, he failed at his mission from God, just as Gomer failed at her divinely commanded marriage relationship (see Jon 1:3). Like Gomer, who ran away from Hosea, her provider and protector, Jonah ran away from YHWH. Both were rescued by the very one from whom each ran away. Neither

representing both idolatry and . . . wickedness." With others, Meyers argues that the female "fanciful winged creatures who transport the idolatrous symbol from Yehud to Babylon must also be agents of YHWH rather than attendants of the woman/goddess" (*Zechariah 1–8*, 313). Many scholars agree that it is not the woman that represents wickedness, but the basket.

30 Renita Weems, *Battered Love*, 2.

31 This is a powerful statement that can speak to contemporary prostitution issues and the push to punish buyers, not prostitutes.

one was discerning enough to recognize the gracious act of rescue. And, just like Gomer, Jonah did not show appreciation for being rescued. Thus, one may argue that the negative images of female figures are balanced by the negative images of male figures in the Twelve.

Finally, in contrast to negative images of the female as evil, many passages in the Twelve depict positive portrayals of the female figure as one who is sacred—devoted to YHWH, regarded with reverence and secured against violation. Zion is to be the holy place where YHWH dwells and will receive the protection of God. Through a rule of peace God will secure it. Maier comments that the prophetic literature tries "to counterbalance the image of the battered consort with Zion as the beloved wife and queen."[32] Zion is also represented as a mother-city. The function of the city "to provide food, shelter, and secure habitations, overlap most expansively with common assumptions of motherhood."[33] Here, Zion is "a symbol of peace and salvation and marks the starting point for the idea of a purified or heavenly Jerusalem as the ultimate sacred space."[34] The Twelve also states that God is very jealous for Zion (Zech 1:14, 8:2). Throughout, there are beautiful, eloquent passages of Zion's restored state. Indeed, some of the most positive language in the Twelve describes the daughter of Zion. One of the most beautiful is this declaration of the daughter of Zion, who is characterized as exonerated, victorious, fearless and adored by YHWH:

> Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
> shout, O Israel!
> Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
> O daughter of Jerusalem!
> The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
> he has cleared away your enemies.
> The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
> you shall never again fear evil ….
> The LORD your God is in your midst,
> a mighty one who will save;
> he will rejoice over you with gladness;
> he will quiet you by his love;
> he will exult over you with loud singing.
> I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,
> so that you will no longer suffer reproach. (Zeph 3:14-18)

The daughter of Zion will be renowned and praised (Zeph 3:20). She can sing and rejoice for YHWH will dwell in her midst. Gomer will be betrothed in righteous-

32 Christl Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 215.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.

ness, justice, steadfast love and mercy (Hos 2:19).[35] Such positive passages bring balance to the negative portrayals of female figures in the Twelve by using positive language to present the female as sacred and highly valued.

The Counter Perspective of the Abused Male

The Twelve is read by some feminists from the perspective of the battered wife. A fair and legitimate response to those who perceive abuse against the female in prophetic literature is to examine the perspective of abuse against the male. The threat of violence against male characters as a form of divine punishment is discussed above. Here let us consider the characters of Israel (represented by Gomer) and YHWH (represented by Hosea) with the purpose of observing the treatment of YHWH as a male character.

Deuteronomy provides a foundation for this perspective of the Twelve in that it establishes the most fundamental principle that the biblical writers emphasize repeatedly: YHWH demands exclusive worship and complete obedience. In exchange, YHWH will bless, protect and prosper the people of Israel. From the opening chapters, Joshua reveals the stubborn waywardness of the people, who immediately disobey YHWH's commands. In Judges, the people continue the downward spiral of disobedience. By 2 Kings, the people are consumed by idolatry and completely forsake YHWH. Time and again, YHWH shows mercy and forgiveness to Israel, rescuing Israel repeatedly. If anything, YHWH relents on his threat to punish Israel for disobedience. Though Deuteronomy states the promises of YHWH to bring hardship and captivity to disobedient Israel, the actions of YHWH consistently lean toward undeserved mercy and protection.

There are a number of metaphors that could be used to describe the relationship between YHWH and Israel, but it is clear that in the relationship, one partner is perpetually unfaithful. Despite the many kindnesses of YHWH, Israel refuses to return the loving kindness she receives. YHWH is continually taken advantage of, betrayed, rejected. Yet, YHWH shows mercy to Israel to the point where we might say YHWH acts like an abused victim who perpetually tries to restore the relationship. Israel gets in trouble with her enemies to whose gods it flocks, yet YHWH eventually rescues Israel every time. Though Israel seeks little relationship with God, YHWH speaks to her often through the mouth of prophets. Israel's affections are given to many, but YHWH remains committed to Israel.

What example does this set for how a man or husband should treat a woman? Some scholars attack the Twelve for setting a terrible example of abuse of women for men to follow. However, a closer look at the Twelve demonstrates the call to

35 Indeed, Hosea 2:16-25 "transforms the message of doom in 2:4-15 into the message of salvation" (Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24 [Garden City: Doubleday, 1980], 220).

men to be faithful and forgiving no matter what offense a woman/wife commits. No such command is given to the woman. Most feminists would likely say that a husband should leave a wife who acts like Gomer. Yet YHWH remains committed. Similarly, throughout the Twelve, God works to redeem the female-personified Zion. It is clear that men and women have failed, but passages that use the most powerful language to describe the redemption of Israel/Judah are those that describe the daughter of Zion. Indeed, no passages speak to the redemption of the people as those addressed to the daughter of Zion.

Summary

This article set out to address the negative perspectives of the characterization of the female figure in the Twelve by highlighting the positive elements in the text that counterbalance the negative portrayals. There are passages that indicate equality between male and female in the Twelve, and when inequality is present, it is not always the female who suffers in the balance. While male leadership is more prominently displayed in the Twelve than female leadership, there are examples of female leadership. Further, male leadership is often harshly condemned. The Twelve is accused of promoting violence, even sexual violence, against the female. In the Twelve, however, general violence and sexual violence in particular are declared against both male and female. Importantly, violence is set in the context of a consequence for a corresponding sin for people who seem determined to disobey. Even so, violence is condemned. The prophets respond compassionately to violence against females through lament.

It is stated that the Twelve reinforces the depiction of females as powerless. Examples of powerful female characterizations in the Twelve are highlighted here, including the female personification of Zion, which exhibits positive elements of power. Some feminist scholars perceive gender stereotyping in the Twelve; the female is supposedly depicted as weak and dependent on the male for protection and support. While there is truth in these statements, dependence is mutual. Further, the concomitant military role that males in the text assume is not presented as superior It is the rule of peace associated with female-personified Zion and the day of YHWH that is esteemed.

Some feminists note the portrayal of the female as evil in the Twelve. Male figures are also negatively portrayed and accused of unfaithfulness. The presentation of the female figure as sacred in the Twelve serves as a contrast to the portrayal of the female as evil.

In a statement of irony, this article ends on the note of the counter-perspective of the male. Using the approach of some feminists to project a particular set of assumptions upon the text, this article has made clear that just as one may per-

ceive the abused female in the Twelve, so one may perceive the abused male in the text.

This article defends the point that the female in the Twelve is not characterized as purely negative. When examined as a whole, one may conclude that there are negative portrayals of *both* male and female. Further, and more importantly, there are many positive portrayals of the female in the Twelve—portrayals that present the strength and power of the female. At her most shameful moment, the female character is a wayward seductress worthy of redemption and unconditional love; at her most glorified moment, she is a rejoicing, redeemed daughter of Zion—a place of refuge, a provider and a sacred dwelling of YHWH.

"If Her Father Had but Spit in Her Face . . ." Rethinking the Portrayal of Miriam in Numbers 12

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Abstract

Most feminist biblical scholarship typically combines a hermeneutic of suspicion with a hermeneutic of retrieval. Thus in addition to exposing what is perceived to be a text's patriarchal bias, attention is also given to ways in which the same text may point to values that run counter to its "dominant" agenda. In the case of Num 12, however, suspicion runs so deep that there is little positive meaning to retrieve. Here Miriam seems to be singled out by YHWH for the disrespect that she and Aaron have shown to Moses. Having afflicted her with a skin disease from which she is healed due to Aaron's repentance and Moses's intercession, YHWH then seems to add insult to injury by associating her subsequent banishment outside the camp with a "father . . . spit[ting] in her face." Given what they see as the text's sustained attempt to minimize her, most feminist interpreters infer that Miriam's true status must have been formidable. But here, such a retrieval of meaning presupposes a rejection of the biblical witness. What is an "evangelical feminism" to make of this, given its desire to approach Scripture with trust rather than suspicion? This essay argues that the intertextual clues that tie this episode to the wider Pentateuchal narrative, coupled with an awareness of the way the issue of Moses's "Cushite" wife is interwoven with, but is not identical to, the questioning of Moses's unique relationship with YHWH, shed new light on why Miriam is made the centre of attention.

Introduction

A small table with a bell, a candle, and a Bible are assembled in the center of the group. A series of texts with clearly oppressive inten-

> tions are read. After each reading, the bell is rung as the reader raises up the book. The community in unison cries out "Out demons, out!" . . . . *At the end of the exorcism, someone says, "These texts and all oppressive texts have lost their power over our lives. We no longer need to apologize for them or try to interpret them as words of truth, but we cast out their oppressive message as expressions of evil and justifications of evil."*[1]

Thus reads the first of a series of "liturgies of word and sacrament" proposed by feminist theologian, Rosemary Ruether in order to address the "linguistic deprivation and eucharistic famine" she believed women of faith were enduring in the Catholic and Protestant churches of the mid-1980s.[2] Texts from the Hebrew Bible singled out for exorcism include Lev 12:1-5 (for its position on "the uncleanliness of women after childbirth"); Exod 19:1, 7-9, 14-15 (for sanctioning the "shunning" of women during the giving of the Law); and Judg 19 (for the way it portrays the "rape, torture, and dismemberment of the concubine"). As is clear from her comments earlier in the same work,[3] she believes that "oppressive intentions" can also be detected in the portrayal of Miriam found in Num 12.

This essay will explore how we may read Num 12 as a narrative that is animated by a very different spirit. After some opening comments about the role of trust and suspicion in biblical interpretation, I will introduce the *intra*textual, *inter*textual reading of Num 12 that follows by showing how closer attention to implicit gender symbolism can sensitize us to dynamics of meaning that have been suppressed or neglected in standard approaches to the HB/OT. One advantage to looking at the portrayal of Miriam in this way will be new insight into the childbirth imagery of 12:12 that links her to Moses in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated. Provided that we are willing to follow the text through the "apocalyptic transition" that it discloses, I will argue, Num 12 may help us develop a biblical and feminist vision beyond the gender-inflected hierarchy that this chapter is often thought to endorse.

Trust and Suspicion

Although Ruether's liturgy may resonate with many who are (rightly) concerned about the religious legitimation of sexism, "Out demons, out!" is not the only way that feminist interpreters have responded to problematic or offensive biblical material. Thus, in her slightly earlier engagement with the final HB/OT text on Ruether's list, Phyllis Trible speaks not of "*cast[ing] out*" demons, but of "*wrestl[ing]*

1 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 137. Emphasis original.
2 Ruether, *Women-Church*, 4.
3 See Ruether, *Women-Church*, 43-44, as discussed below.

demons in the night" so that even the worst biblical "texts of terror" might become occasions for a hermeneutic of retrieval.[4] Rejecting the "ex(or)cision" of offensive material from the canon for feminist (as well as Christian) reasons, Trible's concern is that we see how the Word of Life may come to us *through* Scripture *in spite of* Scripture.[5] Viewed in this light, Ruether's liturgical (re)solution, though understandable, is not to be taken as the last word.

While the difference between them is telling,[6] Ruether's strikingly clear-cut pronouncement and Trible's more "im/patient" hermeneutical wrestling can each serve to illuminate what has distinguished an evangelical feminist hermeneutic from other approaches. For in their emphasis on the positive side of Trible's "through Scripture/in spite of Scripture" dialectic,[7] evangelical feminists have, to borrow Ruether's words, "tr[ied] to interpret [problematic biblical texts] as words of truth" long after other Christian feminists have given up. In this respect, evangelical feminism has been characterized by what we might call a hermeneutic of trust rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion.

"Trust" and "suspicion" are terms that will have different connotations depending not only on the issue at hand but also on where one situates oneself in the theological spectrum of the day. Although in practice, *all* interpreters engage in both trust and suspicion, albeit in different ways, those interpreters who *trust suspicion* as a privileged way to discern truth and who—in overlooking the young child's ability to see through the "Emperor's New Clothes"—regard suspicion as the only effective way to expose ideology, are likely to characterize a hermeneutic that *trusts the text* as naïve, narrow, and defensive. For example, Ruether's claim that women are "shunn[ed]" during the giving of the Law at Sinai rests, in part, on her interpretation of the account we find in Exod 19:14-15:

> So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman."[8]

Read in isolation from the wider narrative, and against the backdrop of a long history of gender symbolism that sees the male-female distinction as "a primary

4 Phyllis Trible, *Texts Of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 4.

5 Cf. the opening section to Nicholas Ansell, "This Is Her Body . . . : Judges 19 as Call to Discernment," in *Tamar's Tears: Evangelical Engagements with Feminist Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Andrew Sloane (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 112-70.

6 For more on the difference, see n. 18 below.

7 Evangelical feminists do not deny the "in spite of" side of Trible's dialectic/correlation, but typically see the Word of Life as coming "through" to us today "in spite of" the patriarchal culture in which the text has taken shape rather than "in spite of" the patriarchal shape or message of the text itself. Some evangelical feminists might further distinguish a patriarchal shape to the text from its non-patriarchal message. See the various essays in Sloane, *Tamar's Tears*.

8 Scripture quotations will be from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

symbol for the dualism of transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter,"[9] it may seem obvious that Moses is associating the male with the sacred and the female with the profane. Here, feminist suspicion leads to a reading that makes a hermeneutic of *trust* look like an act of *denial*.

So what might an "evangelical" feminist alternative look like in this instance? And is such a reading destined to trade what we might call a *feminist edge* for an *evangelical apologetic*? As an interpreter who sees a hermeneutic that is attuned to the dynamics of *trust* and *hope* as an alternative to reading strategies that are rooted in *suspicion or* in *denial*,[10] my own inclination would be to explore whether the warning against "go[ing] near" a woman in 19:15 and against "touch[ing]" even the edge of the mountain a few verses earlier in 19:12 might not be interpreted as parallel prohibitions against a premature contact with the sacred.

On this reading, it is telling that the Hebrew verb found in v. 12 (*nāga'*) and the phonetically similar verb found in v. 15 (*nāgaš*) are close enough semantically that they can be translated the same way—as "touch"—in the NJB.[11] The parallel between the two prohibitions is further underlined by the way each is framed by the two-fold double-call to the Israelites to wash their clothes (vv. 10, 14) and "prepare for the third day" (vv. 11, 15), at which time "YHWH will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people" (v. 11). Although—or we might say, precisely *because*—the second prohibition (v. 15) can be read as indicating that the "people" who are addressed throughout are actually *male*, the trumpet blast (vv. 16, 19) that announces it is now safe for them to "go up on [literally: in] the mountain [*ya'ălû bāhār*]"[12] (v. 13, cf. v. 12), can be heard as a challenge to, rather than an endorsement of, an androcentric mentality. For if the thematic parallel between vv. 12 and 15 is discerned here also, then interpretations that assume the women are being "shunn[ed]" while the mountain is being revered have fundamentally misconstrued the gender symbolism that is at work here and throughout the narrative.

Because the prohibition against touching the mountain is overcome in v. 13, this raises the question as to why the narrative is not more explicit about the pro-

9 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1983), 54.

10 For hermeneutical attunement to biblical discourse as the discourse of faith and hope, see James H. Olthuis et al., *A Hermeneutics of Ultimacy: Peril or Promise?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987) and Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 2000), 125-33.

11 For a rare but clear example of *nāgaš* (v. 15) as meaning "touch" (rather than approach/come near to), see Job 41:8 NJB; JPS (= 41:16 NRSV).

12 For this combination of verb and preposition in a male-female context, see Song 7:9 (ET: 7:8). It is worth noting that the early writers/hearers of biblical Hebrew could more easily pick up on a thematic parallel than those who read in translation because of the potential wordplay between *har*, mountain, and *hārâ*, to conceive. Such an interplay of meaning need not be construed as supporting the kind of forthright identification found in fertility religion (cf. Jer 2:26-28).

hibition against male-female contact also coming to an end. In this respect, we should not underestimate the knock-on effect of the people's fearful desire to keep their distance from the divine presence, as this results in Moses meeting with YHWH alone for an extended period (19:16-25; 20:18-21), which, in turn, becomes part of the backstory to the (implied) sexual unions of the Golden Calf narrative (32:1, 6, 18, 23).[13] Given the narrative delay that the people's fear of YHWH introduces, a male-centred reading tradition, like its overly suspicious feminist counterpart, can all-too-easily miss the initially positive parallel between the holy mountain and the women of Israel by either assuming that Moses is equating the women with the profane or by seeing the second prohibition as little more than the narrator's way of warning against "pagan" attitudes towards female sexuality in anticipation of Exod 32.[14]

If we are open to a "premature contact with the sacred" reading, however, it is most interesting that in the six places where *nāga'* occurs in the book of Exodus, the double-warning against touching the mountain (19:12, 13) is not only preceded by two occurrences of a touch that averts death (4:25 and 12:22) but is followed by two instances in which touching the holy makes one holy (29:37; 30:29). Furthermore, it is surely significant the verb that the NRSV translates as to "go near" a woman in v. 15 refers to a coming close to either God, the holy, or (what are perceived as) their representatives in all twelve of its other occurrences.[15] Again, it is the meaning of key terms as they function in the book of Exodus itself (read synchronically in its final form) rather than as they may be presented in a standard Hebrew lexicon that allows us to see the thematic coherence. Thus it is hardly a coincidence that just before the last occurrence of *nāgaš*, in Exod 34:32, when the people finally approach Moses as YHWH's representative, the theme of their fear is reiterated, here in relation to the human manifestation of divine glory (cf. 2 Cor

13 For an excellent synchronic reading of the narrative, see John H. Sailhamer, "Appendix B: Compositional Strategies in the Pentateuch," in *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 272-89.

14 Ruether exemplifies the former in *Women-Church*, 44. Noting that the "people" are actually male, she writes, "Women are not only invisible, but they are seen as sources of pollution inimical to the receiving of divine revelation. Male sacrality is defined by the negation of the female sexual body." In my earlier study, *The Woman Will Overcome the Warrior: A Dialogue with the Christian/Feminist Theology of Rosemary Radford Ruether* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 118-19, I took the latter approach.

15 Exod 19:15 contains the first occurrence of *nāgaš*. The twelve occurrences that follow are: 19:22; 20:21; 21:6 [x 2]; 24:2 [x 2], 14; 28:43; 30:20; 32:6; 34:30, 32. The door in the second occurrence in 21:6, in parallel with the first instance, is probably the door to the sanctuary. The occurrence in 32:6, in which the people are said to have "brought" sacrifices of well-being, involves the pseudo-sacred character of the golden calf, this occurring (in part) because of the *premature* conclusion that Moses will not be returning from the mountain (32:1, 23). This observation allows us to set the connection between 19:15 and 32:6 that some readings will hone in on, within a wider, richer context.

3:11-18; 1 Cor 11:13-16[16]), before the "premature contact with the sacred" motif is resolved in a positive way.

Such an approach to Exod 19 coheres with a number of (largely overlooked) instances in the HB/OT in which the female and the sacred are not opposed but are deliberately aligned, some of which I have explored elsewhere.[17] Although this reading would not necessarily be seen as persuasive by the majority of evangelical interpreters—not least because it sees Scripture as being at odds with the gender symbolism at work in most evangelical theology!—nevertheless, this way of insisting that the prohibition of v. 15 ultimately conveys the Word of Life, and is thus neither inherently nor irredeemably oppressive,[18] should be clearly recognizable as an "evangelical" emphasis. This example also serves to illustrate that, contrary to what some might initially suspect, a hermeneutic of trust need not come to traditional conclusions.

Numbers 12 in Intratextual, Intertextual Perspective

If this is true—if, in principle, an evangelical hermeneutic need not be defensively apologetic or theologically conservative—what might it make of a text such as Num 12? For here, as Ruether puts it, "Miriam, the great priestess and prophet of the Exodus, is remembered as one who was turned into a leper and spat upon because of her assertion of autonomy against Moses."[19] Lest we think that the narrative is simply recording her act of rebellion irrespective of her gender, Ruether notes that Aaron is also portrayed as criticizing Moses, yet escapes punishment. This is no mere oversight in her judgment: "Clearly, it is Miriam's authority [that] the writer of the tradition wished to marginalize."[20]

If evangelical feminists might hope to offer a different explanation for why Miriam alone is afflicted with a "leprous" skin condition following her encounter with YHWH, what are they (we) to make of the fact that she also suffers the in-

16 For a discussion of glory in relation to gender in 1 Cor 11 and elsewhere, see Nicholas Ansell, "Creational Man/Eschatological Woman: A Future for Theology." An inaugural address (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 2006), available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10756/320796.

17 See, e.g., Ansell, "This Is Her Body . . ." and Nicholas Ansell, "For the Love of Wisdom: Scripture, Philosophy, and the Relativisation of Order," in *The Future of Creation Order*, ed. Gerrit Glas, Jeroen de Ridder, Govert Buijs, and Annette Mosher (Dordrecht: Springer, forthcoming). As Zipporah's return is just prior to Exod 19:15, it is natural to understand Moses's words to "not go near a woman" as a directive that he also intends to follow. Because in Zipporah's relationship with Moses in 4:24-26, we see the coming together of the marital (female-male) and Abrahamic (divine-human) understandings of both circumcision and covenant—a theme I intend to explore in a future essay—this supports the gender symbolism and the connection between 19:15 and 19:12 explored above.

18 If, for Ruether, the biblical text is *inherently and irredeemably* sexist at certain points, Trible's position is that it is *inherently yet not irredeemably* sexist. Hence what she refers to as "The Challenge to Redeem Scripture," on which see Ansell, "This Is Her Body . . . ," 116-19.

19 Ruether, *Women-Church*, 43.

20 Ruether, *Women-Church*, 44.

dignity of being "spat upon" as she is banished from the camp—this being Ruether's allusion to YHWH's words in 12:14: "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days?" Given that Jacob Milgrom, the author of one of the finest commentaries on Numbers, can say of this analogy, "If a *human father's* rebuke by spitting entails seven days of banishment, should not the leprosy rebuke of the *Heavenly Father* at least require the same banishment?,"[21] can we really blame feminist interpreters for taking offense?

In the alternative interpretation that follows, I will argue that the human father/Heavenly Father parallel that is proposed by Milgrom, and that would seem to be assumed by several feminist interpreters,[22] is fundamentally mistaken. In parallel with the brief discussion of Exod 19:12-15 above, I will be arguing that an inter-textual/intra-textual reading of the narrative within the book of Numbers and within the Pentateuch and wider HB/OT will allow us to appreciate a very different gender symbolism at work. Such a reading strategy will also lead to a different way of understanding why, of the three leaders of Israel who are called to the tent of meeting in Num 12:4, it is Miriam who becomes the centre of attention.

An Apocalyptic Birth?

One reason why we should not simply assume that God is aligned with the spitting father of Num 12:14 is that "father" is rare as a metaphor for God in the HB/OT.[23] Furthermore, when it comes to parental imagery, the divine presence in this part of the book of Numbers is surprisingly maternal. Thus in Num 11:12, Moses's complaint that he has not given birth to the people and therefore should not be landed with the work of carrying and nursing them clearly implies that it is YHWH who is the Mother of Israel[24]—a point that is rhetorically reinforced by the (overlooked) feminine pronoun Moses uses to addresses YHWH in Num 11:15.[25]

This strikingly maternal imagery continues into Num 12. Here Aaron's words

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21 Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 98. Emphases added. Cf. Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers*, IBC (Louisville KY: John Knox Press, 1996), 74.

22 Phyllis Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," in *Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 1/6 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 178, seems to accept this, along with a softening of the original judgment here. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Numbers," in *WBC*, 84, speaks more generally of the father as representing the "male authority" that has been "heinously disrespected."

23 See Johanna W.H. van Wijk-Bos, *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 42-45.

24 See Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, trans. James D. Martin, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), 86. I will return to Num 11:12 presently.

25 See Nicholas Ansell, "Too Good to Be True? The Female Pronoun for God in Numbers 11:15," in *Gender Agenda Matters: Papers of the "Feminist Section" of the International Meetings of The Society of Biblical Literature; Amsterdam 2012 – St. Andrews 2013 – Vienna 2014*, ed. Imtraud Fischer (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 12-41.

upon being confronted with Miriam's white skin condition in 12:10-12 indicate that her encounter with the divine presence at the tent of meeting has led to what looks like a potentially fatal premature birth.[26] Read intertextually, the "apocalyptic" connotations of the account may come to the fore.[27] For it is most interesting that when Paul says that the risen Jesus "appeared to me" "as to one untimely born [*hōsperei tō ektrōmati*]"—this being the only occurrence of *ektrōma* in the NT—his self-description here in 1 Cor 15:8 clearly echoes Aaron's description of Miriam in Num 12:12 LXX: *hōsei ektrōma ekporeuomenon ek mētras mētros*.[28]

The natural connection between birth and apocalyptic that is present elsewhere in the HB/OT becomes especially clear in the NT.[29] As the "pillar of cloud" in Num 12:5 represents a meeting point between heaven and earth, we might even

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26 Many translations (NRSV, REB, NLT^2) refer to a "stillborn" child here. Although Aaron is afraid that Miriam will die, the Hebrew differs from the clear references to stillbirth found in Job 3:16; Ps 58:9 [ET: 58:8]; Eccl 6:3 and to miscarriage in Gen 31:38 and Exod 23:26. The closest parallel is with the "giv[ing] birth prematurely" (not miscarriage) of Exod 21:22 (NKJV, NIV, NLT^2, cf. NET; *contra* NRSV, JPS, REB). This is no doubt why George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1903), 127, understands Aaron as referring to "an untimely birth" here.

27 I take "apocalyptic" to be a helpful term for identifying those biblical narratives in which we see (i) the *transition between the two Ages* (the old Age and the Age to come) and (ii) the *(re-) connection of heaven and earth* coming to the fore. These two (interrelated) foci approximate to the "temporal" and "spatial" aspects of the oft-cited definition proposed by Collins et al:

> "Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.

See John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins, *Semeia* 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). Quotation from p. 9. If the absence of such *mediated* disclosure in Num 12 is seen as disqualifying it as (proto-)apocalyptic (notwithstanding its theophany and the presence of Moses as supreme mediator), we should note that such mediation is also absent in the "synoptic apocalypse"! Cf. n. 38 below.

28 According to Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint in English* (London: Samuel Baxter and Sons, 1851), we may translate: "Let her not be as it were like death*, as an abortion* [better: premature birth] *coming out of its* [better: the] *mother's womb*." Although Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1210, in following J. Munck, "*Paulus tanquam abortivus*, 1 Cor 15:8," in *NT Essays: Studies in Memory of T.W. Manson*, ed. A.J.B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 180-95, does observe a linguistic link between 1 Cor 15:8 and Num 12:12 LXX, the intertextual connection is richer that his discussion suggests. In the LXX, apart from Num 12:12, *ektrōma* occurs only in Job 3:16 and Eccl 6:3. Unlike the Hebrew, the Greek of Num 12:12 LXX and Job 3:16 LXX is very close. But it is the former that is echoed in 1 Cor 15:8 as Job 3:16 refers to a child who has been buried. On the allusion to Num 12:8 in 1 Cor 13:12, see n. 72 below.

29 There is a natural connection between childbirth and the two ages of apocalyptic because of the transition from pain in labour to the joy of new life. For one striking HB/OT example, see the birthing attributed to YHWH in Isa 42:14-16 in the context of that chapter's vision of a new age beyond exile. On the NT, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), Pt. 2; and Nicholas Ansell, *The Annihilation of Hell: Universal Salvation and the Redemption of Time in the Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 391-423.

say that, in the language of John 3:3, Miriam has been "born [again/] from above"[30]—a motif to which we will return. But like Paul's birth, which is apocalyptic because the new age dawns in a way that is at odds with the self–enclosed nature of the present age, Miriam's emergence from the womb of present existence is dangerously premature. Although the birth imagery in Num 12:12 is often treated as secondary to Miriam's "leprous" skin condition, we should not overlook the fact that the theme of premature birth is also present only a few chapters earlier in Num 5, where there is a description of an ordeal that seems designed to induce early labour in a woman accused of adultery (see 5:27, NRSV).[31] While probing the nature of the relationship between this passage and Num 12 falls beyond the scope of the present study, the likelihood that there is a connection indicates that the birth imagery in Num 12 is not incidental but is thematically present in this part of the book.

For the interpreter who is alert to possible intra- and inter-textual echoes and allusions, it is also significant that apart from the description of Miriam in Num 12:10, there are only two other instances in the entire HB/OT of a skin condition that is said to be "as leprous as snow" (*mᵉṣōraʿaṯ kaššāleg*), the first of which occurs, in an identically worded phrase, in Moses's encounter with YHWH in Exod 4:6.[32] Here it helps describe the second of three signs that are given to Moses so that he may persuade the people (4:8-9), and later the Pharaoh (4:21), that he truly represents the God of Israel. Like the other signs, which point back to the God of the ancestors (see 4:5) and forward to the future, this one has multiple dimensions of meaning. Of particular interest here is how these serve to connect Exod 4:6-7 to Num 12.

While Moses's experience of and release from the white skin condition differs from the other signs in that it does not feature elsewhere in the book of Exodus, a

30 Here the two facets of apocalyptic, outlined in n. 27 above, come together. Naturally, for the column/pillar of cloud to connote a birth canal, it would have to be seen as hollow. That Num 12:5 might be understood in the light of the Temple pillar singled out for description in Jer 52:21, therefore, merits further investigation. Is it a coincidence that the architectural term *beṯen*—the "rounded projection" (NRSV) that is closely associated with the two pillars at the entrance to the Temple in 1 Kgs 7:20—is a regular Hebrew term for "womb"?

31 Here the NRSV catches a meaning that other translations miss. See the discussion in Richard Briggs, "Hermeneutics by Numbers? Case Studies in Feminist and Evangelical Interpretation of the Book of Numbers," in Sloane, *Tamar's Tears,* 65-83, especially 74-77. While this passage has certainly received feminist attention (see, e.g., Ursula Rapp, "Numbers: On Boundaries," trans. Linda M. Maloney, in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 68-83, especially 69-70), its connection to Num 12 has been overlooked.

32 The NRSV has "leprous, as white as snow" in Exod 4:6 and Num 12:10. Although I have supplied a more literal translation (cf. KJV, NET, NIV), I accept that the colour and not (just) the texture of snow is implied (cf. NJB, NLT², REB) *contra* Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 21, and possibly JPS. The remaining reference, in 2 Kgs 5:27, is explored below.

careful comparison with the first sign suggests that it is not out of place. For although the turning of Moses's staff into a serpent in Exod 4:2-4 is partly repeated in the encounter with the magicians of Egypt in Exod 7:9-12, a full manifestation of the sign, which also involves turning the serpent back into a staff, does not find its narrative expression and counterpart until the healing narrative of Num 21:8-9, thus forming a close structural parallel to Exod 4:6-7 which looks ahead to the healing of Miriam in Num 12:10-13.

Although the signs are said to reassure the people of Moses's calling in Exod 4:29-31, there is little doubt that initially Moses finds them highly alarming as their full meaning is only disclosed in time. Once it is read as a precursor to what I have called the "apocalyptic birth" of Num 12, however, the second sign in particular can be understood as assuring Moses that, unlike his fellow Israelites at this stage of the narrative (see Exod 20:18-21 in the light of 3:6), he can endure the kind of face-to-face encounter with YHWH that is referred to in Num 12:8.

That it is Moses's "hand" that is afflicted in the second sign is also significant given the intimate association that exists between the hand and staff of Moses and the hand and staff of God (compare Exod 4:2 with 4:20; 7:5 with 14:16; and 31:18 with 34:28). This suggests that Moses is participating in God's power over life and death. In fact the only time the phrase that the NRSV translates as to "put [one's] hand back into [one's] cloak" is used in the HB/OT apart from Exod 4:7, it refers to the withholding of God's power in Ps 74:11.[33]

Because of its association with Num 12, the second sign is often seen as a demonstration of divine judgment.[34] But it is important to read the connection between Exod 4 and Num 12 forwards as well as backwards so that we do not restrict its potential meaning. Read canonically, this is the first time anyone is said to be *mᵉṣōraʿaṯ* or "leprous"—an imprecise translation for a condition that, even in the levitical legislation, does not render a person "unclean" if it affects the entire body (see Lev 13:13). While on this occasion, it is clear that the rest of Moses is unaffected (Exod 4:7b), we should not rule out the possibility that his "hand" (which is also the hand of God) may represent the whole of his body (*pars pro toto*) beginning to enter a new state.[35] Furthermore, the fact that his hand is said to be "as snow" (*kaššāleg*) may suggest a positive significance that distinguishes it from the "white" (*lāḇān*) skin and hair that will come under investigation, repeat-

33 See E. John Hamlin, "The Liberator's Ordeal: A Study of Exodus 4:1-9," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1974), 33-42.

34 See, e.g., Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 227.

35 Cf. Exod 34:29-35. Although the *head* most commonly represents the whole person, the *hand* plays this role in Gen 38:28, as discussed below.

edly, in the discussion of "leprosy" in Lev 13,[36] not least because elsewhere in the HB/OT, "snow" is usually associated with (its origin in) the heavens.

For those who are prepared to read intertextually beyond the Pentateuch here, this association with the heavens might even allow us to see a relationship between Moses's appearance and the clothing of the Ancient of Days, which is said to be as white "as snow" (*kiṯlag*) in Dan 7:9.[37] That the sign of Exod 4:6-7 is not just the "negation of a negative" (i.e., the overcoming of a common disease) but may say something positive about Moses's unique status within the HB/OT is borne out by the fact that the snow-like appearance of the Ancient of Days is shared by other mediators between heaven and earth later in the biblical narrative (see Matt 28:3 and Rev 1:14).[38]

In addition to its apocalyptic connotations, the second sign is also connected to Num 12 via the theme of birth. This becomes evident in Exod 4:6a when YHWH tells Moses to "put your hand inside your cloak." Although the NRSV provides a perfectly acceptable idiomatic translation here, we would do better to go with the NJPS's more literal: "put your hand into your bosom [*bᵉḥêqeḵā*]," as the next time we see this phrase in the Pentateuch is in Num 11:12, where Moses complains to YHWH:

> "Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom [*bᵉḥêqeḵā*],[39] as a nurse carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?"

Given this striking parallel, we should also note that when Moses is described as taking his hand out (*wayyôṣi'âh*) from his bosom in Exod 4:6b, and again in 4:7, and when Miriam is described as coming out (*bᵉṣēṯ ṯô*) of the womb in Num 12:12, the Hebrew verb *yāṣā'* is used here of both hand and child.

36 While *lāḇān* (white) appears 20 times in Lev 13, *šāleg* (snow) is absent. In relation to skin, the latter appears only in Exod 4:6, Num 12:10, and 2 Kgs 5:27. See the following note.

37 The Aramaic word for snow (*ṯᵉlag*), which occurs only here, is very close to the Hebrew *šāleg*. Apart from the thematically related Exod 4:6; Num 12:10; and 2 Kgs 5:27 (all discussed in this essay) and Ps 51:9 (ET: 51:7) (below), *šāleg* is not associated with human appearance. As a metaphor, or figure of speech, it occurs only in Isa 1:18; Ps 51:9 (ET: 51:7); Lam 4:7 (all images of purity); Isa 55:10 (the Word of God as life-giving); Prov 25:13 (snow at harvest time as image of refreshment); and Prov 26:1 (snow in summer as image of something unfitting). My discussion above connects snow in Exod 4:6-7, Num 12:12, and Dan 7:9 primarily via its "from the heavens" associations. For the apocalyptic development of these associations beyond Dan 7, see also 1 Enoch 14:8-24.

38 In support of my (proto-)apocalyptic reading of Num 12, it may be significant that later (intertestamental) apocalypses see Moses's ascent up the mountain in Exod 19 as a heavenly ascent. As "angel" in the biblical tradition refers to the office of messenger between heaven and earth, this explains the later "angelomorphic" portrayal of Moses, on which see Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology, and Soteriology*, WUNT 94 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997), 173-83.

39 Often a term for the male breast, *ḥêq* indicates the female breast in 1 Kgs 3:20 and Ruth 4:16.

Arguably, this "emergence from the womb" theme can be picked up, at least subliminally, as early as Exod 4:6-7 if we consider how the portrayal of Moses withdrawing and extending his hand may call to mind the equally striking image of the hand that emerges from the birth canal before being drawn back inside the womb in Gen 38:28-29. In addition to there being verbal parallels between the second sign of Moses and the way the child that "put out" (v. 28a) and then "drew back his hand [*kᵉmēšîḇ yāḏô*]" (v. 29, cf. Exod 4:7) is established as the twin/sibling that "came out [*yāṣā'*] first" (v. 28b, cf. Exod 4:6b; Num 12:12), Zerah (*zāraḥ*), the name given to Tamar's child in v. 30, not only connotes the "shin[ing]" of divine glory (see Isa 60:1; Dan 12:3) but sounds very like *ṣāra'*, the verb used to indicate the "leprous" hand of Exod 4:6.[40]

The four-fold progression that this helps to establish may be set out as follows:

(i) the *hand* representing the *child (/sibling) emerging from the womb* (Gen 38:28)
(ii) the *snow-white hand in the bosom* (Exod 4:6a)
(iii) the *child in the bosom* (Num 11:12)
(iv) the *snow-white child (/sibling) emerging from the womb* (Num 12:12)

This is clearly intentional. And it is highly significant for how we are to interpret the birth of Num 12. As I have argued elsewhere, the issue of Moses's attempt to resist his maternal calling is an ongoing theme in the Pentateuch.[41] And divine anger in this section of Numbers is, as Milgrom has noted, often YHWH's attempt to provoke Moses into playing the role of mediator.[42] When we put these together, our reading of Num 12:9 is transformed as YHWH does not simply take off in anger, abandoning a newly born (and prematurely ancient?) Miriam in the process, but leaves her in the presence of Moses whose role as mediator includes imaging the maternal side of YHWH's care for Israel.[43]

If an apocalyptic birth motif connects Exod 4 and Num 11-12 and if a premature birth motif connects Num 5 and 12, it is noteworthy that the danger associated with a premature encounter with the sacred that comes to the fore for Miriam and Aaron in this latter text is also known elsewhere in the Pentateuch. I have already referred to the warning against ascending the mountain prior to the three days in Exod 19:10-13. A plausible case can also be made for understanding the prohibition against eating from the tree of "the knowledge of good and evil"

40 Cf. 2 Chr 26:19: "[and] a leprous disease [*wᵉhaṣṣāra'aṯ*] broke out [*zārᵉḥâ*] on [Uzziah's] forehead."
41 See Ansell, "Too Good to Be True?," 17, 21.
42 See a helpful discussion of Num 14:12 in Milgrom, *Numbers*, 109-10.
43 Moses as midwife post-birth would link Num 12 to Exod 1:19.

(*hadda'at ṭôḇ wārā'*) in Gen 2:17 as a prohibition against a premature exposure to wisdom, as this kind of knowledge is later given to Solomon in 1 Kgs 3.[44] In this context, intertextual meaning points the way once more, as Adam and Eve may be compared to the children who, in the words of Deut 1:39, "do not yet know good from evil [literally: "good and evil]" [*lō'-yāḏ^{e}'û hayyôm ṭôḇ wārā'*]—this being the only other passage in the Pentateuch, outside Gen 2-3, in which the Hebrew terms for "know" or "knowledge" and "good and evil" occur together.[45]

If we read the account of the tree of the knowledge in Gen 3 in the light of Num 12, therefore, bearing the theme of the danger of premature contact in mind, this opens up the possibility that the death that is first mentioned in Gen 2:17, the nature of which has challenged interpreters for millennia, is the death of still-birth caused by the age to come, and the wisdom and maturity that it calls for, arriving too soon.[46]

Who's the Father? Whose Father?

Explorations thus far suggest that there is far more going on in Num 12 than has been realized. Even so, the question of what Miriam has done to prompt such an "apocalyptic" encounter with YHWH remains. To make progress here, we need to inquire about YHWH's reference to the "spitting father."

If, with respect to parental imagery, YHWH is a maternal presence in Num 11-12, and is not to be identified with or aligned with the "father" of 12:14, then who is? On one level, the text is referring to Miriam's own Israelite father. But as the account begins with her insulting Moses's "Cushite" wife, the spitting-in-the-face reaction also refers to the kind of response Miriam might incur from the father of the woman in question.

So who is she? Most interpreters are agnostic about whether the "Cushite" wife is Zipporah or is otherwise unknown in the biblical traditions. That Zipporah could be a "Cushite" is clearly recognized in contemporary scholarship due to the close ties between Midian and Cushan that are evident in the parallel phrasing of Hab 3:7.[47] But what really takes us beyond mere possibility to probability here is an important "catchword" that illustrates how the close connection between Num

44 See Nicholas Ansell, "The Call of Wisdom/The Voice of the Serpent: A Canonical Approach to the Tree of Knowledge," *Christian Scholar's Review* 31 (2001): 31-58.

45 Here I am citing the fairly literal NJB, REB. An even more literal translation of Deut 1:39, "do not *this day* know good and evil," is revealing as the Hebrew word for "day" is also found in Gen 2:17. Coupled with the fact that the children of Deut 1:39 have just escaped death, the connection between these two verses is unmistakeable. The Hebrew terms for "knowledge," "good," and "evil" also occur in the thematically related Gen 2:9; 3:5; and 3:22. Cf. the wise discernment of "good and evil" in 1 Kgs 3:9.

46 That Gen 2–3 is sapiential in character is widely recognized. For evidence that the biblical wisdom literature knows and alludes to the (apocalyptic) transition between the two ages, see Ansell, "For the Love of Wisdom."

47 See Rodney S. Sadler, Jr., "Cush, Cushite," in *NIDB* 1:813-14.

and Exod, as observed above, may once again hold the key to an exegetical breakthrough.[48] For not only is Zipporah's father explicitly mentioned a little earlier in the narrative at Num 10:29, but the way he is referred to there, as "Reuel," directs the reader back to Exod 2:18 and to Reuel's only other named occurrence in the Pentateuch, where we are introduced to the Midianite priest better known to us as "Jethro."

Although the dual naming has, predictably, been explained as the presence of two unmodified literary sources,[49] the way the two names are presented in the Pentateuch in its final form is a deliberate arrangement as "Jethro" occurs precisely 10 times (Exod 3:1; 4:18 [x 2, once with alternate spelling]; 18:1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12), these being framed by the two references to "Reuel" in Exod 2:18 and Num 10:29. Not only does this reflect the biblical interest in the numbers 10 and 12, but it also provides us with a natural link between Num 10:29/12:14 and Exod 2:16-22, which introduces Reuel's daughter, Zipporah, and refers to her marriage to Moses. This would also serve to remind the early recipients of the Pentateuch of her incisive, life-saving wisdom in Exod 4:24-26—a narrative I hope to explore in a follow-up to the present study. Although this happens just two chapters after the "Reuel" reference in 2:18, this "circumcision" episode is even more closely tied to the account of her marriage in 2:21 via her reference to Moses as a "bridegroom of blood" in 4:26.[50]

As for the second "Reuel" reference in Num 10:29, this serves to emphasize his ongoing influence on the history of Israel as on this occasion, it is his son who serves as Israel's guide in the wilderness, upon Moses's request.[51] This is then followed in Num 11:16-17, 23-25 with a re-iteration of Jethro's leadership-structure advice that we first encounter in Exod 18,[52] though it here leads to a new

48 On the prevalence of catchwords, see David Marcus, "Doublet Catchwords in the Leningrad Codex," *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 12 (2007), available at: http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol12/Marcus2007.pdf. Although his initial use of "catchword" differs from mine, his discussion in his final section brings out the "intertextual connection" meaning that I intend by the term.

49 See, e.g., Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, AB 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 335. Even if such scholarly speculation is correct, it does not provide us with an explanation of the (synchronic) meaning of the text that we now have. For a classic defence of canonical order as a carrier of meaning that cannot be reduced to (or determined by) questions of compositional order, see Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). Cf. Ansell. "The Call of Wisdom."

50 See the helpful discussion of this difficult passage in John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 56-59.

51 For Hobab as Reuel's son and not another name for Jethro, see C. Mark McCormick, "Hobab," in *NIDB* 2:844.

52 For the way in which the revelation to Moses on the mountain in Exod 3:1—4:17 is framed by his encounters with Reuel/Jethro and his daughter (2:15-22; 4:18-26), while the parallel revelation to Moses and Israel in Exod 19-34 is framed by their encounters with Jethro and Reuel's son (18:1-27; Num 10:29-32), see Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2009), 151.

emphasis on the divine spirit and phenomenon of prophecy in 11:25-29. As Miriam and Aaron are passed over in this context, almost immediately prior to Num 12, we should see this incident, with its backstory in the book of Exodus, as what prompts Miriam's complaint in 12:1.

Read in this light, the editorial remark that the NRSV puts in parentheses immediately after Miriam's insult—"(for he had indeed married a Cushite woman)"—is the equivalent of saying, "Zipporah actually was a Cushite." This is consistent with the fact that she is never referred to as a "Midianite" in Exod 2:16, 21 but is introduced as a daughter of "the priest of Midian." If she was a "Cushite" because of her mother—that is, if she was a Cushite because Jethro/Reuel *married* a Cushite, which I think is exactly what Num 12:1 would have us infer—then Miriam's insult against Zipporah is, at the same time, an insult against her father. This provides a natural link between the slur of 12:1 and the spitting of 12:14.

Although, it is not conveyed in our translations, I take it that the shift from feminine singular to masculine plural in the verbs at the beginning of 12:1 (*watt^{e}-dabbēr*, literally: "and she spoke" [against Moses's wife]) and 12:2 (*wayyō'mr*û, "and they said" [in challenging Moses's prophetic uniqueness]) indicates that in their speaking against Moses, it is Miriam who takes the lead in criticizing the "Cushite" woman while Aaron becomes equally involved only in their joint-assertion of their prophetic insight. This means that the reason Miriam, and not Aaron, is afflicted with the white skin condition is connected not to her being seen as instigating the joint protest, with Aaron cast in a merely supportive role, but to her specific objection to Midianite-Cushite influence on Moses.

The Minimizing of Miriam?

Before investigating the significance in more detail, it will be helpful to first look at Phyllis Trible's approach to this passage as it provides an instructive contrast with what I will be proposing. Like Ruether, Trible believes that a patriarchal determination to minimize Miriam has had a formative influence on this part of the book of Numbers even though, canonically speaking, those responsible for undermining her status do not have the last word. Three particular elements in the final form of the narrative that work to counter this (earlier, yet still present) biblical "vendetta" against Miriam, are: (i) the theme of her profound connection with water, revealed not only via her central role on the bank of the Nile and at the shore of the Red Sea, but also in the way her death is linked to the drying up of the wells in the wilderness (Exod 2; Exod 15; and Num 20:1-2); (ii) the narrative recognition of her enduring popularity with the people, evident in their refusal to move on until her time of banishment is over (Num 12:15); and (iii) the critical turn that the narrative takes immediately after her death towards Aaron and Moses

(20:12, 24)—i.e., against a male leadership that the penultimate shapers of the canon had attempted to champion at Miriam's expense.[53]

Integral to the patriarchal agenda that remains embedded in the narrative in its final form, however, is the character of YHWH, not least his encounter with Moses, Aaron, and Miriam in Num 12. Commenting on God's words in 12:6-8, which she sees as also containing a response to Moses's desire in 11:29, that all of YHWH's people might receive the divine spirit and become prophets, she writes,

> The divine speech requires little commentary. It answers the issue of leadership and authority by declaring a hierarchy of prophecy. Moses stands peerless at the top. While not denying a prophetic role to Miriam, it undercuts her in gender and point of view. It also undermines Moses' wish for egalitarian prophecy. As if the declaration were not itself sufficient, the deity rebuffs Aaron and Miriam: "Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num. 12.8 RSV). . . . Concluding with an intimidating question, the Lord speaks to Miriam for the first and only time. She has no opportunity to reply.[54]

While Trible's essay contains a number of telling insights, at this point, I would argue that she misconstrues YHWH'S response to Miriam and Aaron because she does not distinguish Miriam's objection to the Midianite-Cushite influence on Moses from Miriam and Aaron's questioning of the unique nature of Moses's relationship with YHWH. What is at stake in Miriam's specific objection is not a divinely underwritten hierarchy with Moses at the top, but the reception of a revelation that comes from *beyond Israel* and *beyond Moses*. Yet this wisdom that comes from Midianite, indeed Cushite, sources is to be trusted as divine wisdom! Indeed, it is Moses's openness to this revelation, I suggest, that explains the otherwise puzzling remark at Num 12:3 that almost immediately follows Miriam and Aaron's question,

> 12:2"Has [YHWH] spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" . . . . 12:3Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth."

The point here (if we read Miriam and Aaron's words in context) is not only that YHWH has also spoken through Reuel and Zipporah (12:2), but that Moses has been able to receive their words as the words of YHWH (12:3).55

Interpreters have long wondered about this reference to Moses's humility,

53 See Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," 179-81.
54 Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," 176.
55 Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 3.4.2, where Moses is praised for his openness to Reuel's direction.

which on most readings seems like a *non sequitur*.[56] In the narratives of the HB/OT, the clearest way in which one character shows deference to, or respect for, another is by bowing down to them. We see this in the case of Abraham (Gen 18:2; 23:7, 12) and Lot (Gen 19:1), and in the respect that is shown to Esau (Gen 33:3, 6-7), to Joseph (Gen 42:6; 43:26, 28), and finally to Jacob (Gen 48:12). Apart from an angry prophecy in Exod 11:8 that Pharaoh's officials will bow down to Moses when they beg the Israelites to leave Egypt—an act of obeisance that apparently does not take place (see 12:31; 14:5)—all other references to this way of showing deference and respect in the remaining books of the Pentateuch involve either bowing down to God or to false gods, with only one exception. As this involves Moses bowing down to another human being, it is reasonable to suppose that if the narrator wanted to provide us with a revealing example of Moses's humility, then this is where we might find it. And we do. For it is surely no coincidence that when Moses goes into the wilderness in Exod 18:7 to be re-united with Zipporah and her two sons, the person he bows down to is none other than Jethro.

Once the issue of revelation coming to Israel from beyond Israel is recognized (and Exod 18:8-27 plays an important role in this context), the force of YHWH's words in Num 12:14—"If [Miriam's] father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days?"—can be heard, *not* as: "if her *human father* spat in her face, how much more so her *Heavenly Father*?," but as the far more probing question: "if Miriam had insulted her own *Israelite father* and he had spat in her face, why is there any less shame in her insult uttered against *Zipporah and her father*, *Reuel and his daughter*?"

In this context, the subsequent portrayal of Miriam's clear popularity with the people (Num 12:15) emerges not as a counter-tradition that offsets a male-hierarchical vendetta again her, but as a narrative underlining of what is as stake. The seven-day banishment of Miriam follows, I suggest, with the knock-on effect that the people must wait for her exile to be over, because if the people support Miriam in her rejection of Cushite wisdom, then the misconstrual of Israel's election, and the refusal of Israel's calling to be a blessing to the nations, will not be far behind.

That it is the true nature of Israel's relationship to the nations that is the central issue here is also supported by the way Miriam's "as leprous as snow" appearance is alluded to later in the biblical narrative. Although there are more than 50 references in the HB/OT to what the English translations (somewhat misleadingly) call "leprosy" or a "leprous" skin condition, it is highly significant that apart from Exod 4:6 (as discussed above), the Hebrew phrase used to describe Miriam's ap-

56 See the survey of solutions in Richard S. Briggs, *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 45-69.

pearance in Num 12:10 occurs elsewhere in just one other text: 2 Kgs 5:27. Here Elisha's servant, Gehazi, attempts to get payment from Naaman, a non-Israelite who has been healed by the prophet and has come to faith in YHWH, on the grounds that "my master has let *that Aramean* . . . off too lightly" (2 Kgs 5:20). Although many interpreters see Gehazi's subsequent affliction as a punishment for deception and greed, the narrator is, arguably, far more interested in exposing how his behaviour runs counter to YHWH's desire to bless the nations through Israel. On this reading, it is indeed telling that, later in the biblical tradition, the account of the markedly non-Israelite healings of Elijah and Elisha in Luke 4:25-27 that is said to be so offensive to Jesus's contemporaries, concludes with a pointed reference to the healing of "Naaman the Syrian".[57] If the narrative at 2 Kgs 5 portrays not just selfish opportunism but also resentment towards a Gentile warrior who is blessed during a time when Israel is undergoing hardship, therefore, the fact that Gehazi is said to have left Elisha's presence "leprous . . . as snow" (*mᵉṣōrā' ka*ššā-*leg*) strongly suggests that the narrator is alluding to Num 12:10 in the conviction that the misconstrual of Israel's election is a theme that both passages share.[58]

If the intertextual relationship that I am arguing for is the result of deliberate "inner biblical exegesis" in which the author of 2 Kgs 5 is looking back to the portrayal of Miriam in Num 12, then it would be natural to assume that this same author (or editor) would also recall her thematically related appearance in Deut 24:8-9. Here, in what is the final reference to Miriam in the Pentateuch, Moses warns the generation about to enter the Promised Land:

> Guard against an outbreak of a leprous skin disease by being very careful; you shall carefully observe whatever the levitical priests instruct you, just as I have commanded them. Remember what [YHWH] your God did to Miriam on your journey out of Egypt.

In this context, it is telling that almost all interpreters not only assume that v. 9 is referring to the affliction rather than the healing of Miriam, but also proceed to link the warning of v. 8 to her critical or rebellious stance towards Moses, even though this is to go beyond what the text itself specifies.[59] If, however, we accept Tigay's suggestion that "what [YHWH] your God did to Miriam" is, "most naturally understood as referring to the affliction itself, not the period of isolation that fol-

57 This has much to do with the fact that Jesus's contemporaries would resist associating Naaman's (God-given!) military success over Israel in 2 Kgs 5:1 with the military dominance of their Roman overlords.

58 There is only a one consonant difference between the Hebrew phrase in 2 Kgs 5:27 and Num 12:10.

59 One exception is Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 225, who suggests that if someone of Miriam's stature can be afflicted, then no one should "assume 'it can't happen to me' and fail to consult a priest."

lowed,"[60] and then allow the way the "affliction" is described in Num 12 to point the way, then we may see a link not only between the condition of Miriam and Gehazi but also between the call to "remember . . ." in Deut 24:9 and what we might call the "visual reminder" of 2 Kgs 5:27, where we are told that the striking condition that had afflicted Naaman will now "cling to [Gehazi] and to [his] descendents forever." Though judgment has occurred, the ongoing activity of Elisha's servant indicates that his appearance (like Miriam's, presumably) would have been declared "clean" according to Lev 13:13. Read intertextually, therefore, what happens to Gehazi highlights the mercy shown to Miriam ("what [YHWH] your God did" includes healing her) while also suggesting that the skin condition to be "guard[ed] against" in Deut 24:8 receives the attention that it does because it is symptomatic of a deeper issue in which Israel's ongoing identity is at stake.[61]

This way of interpreting Num 12:12 and Deut 24:8-9 is also supported by reading the latter passage within the book of Deuteronomy as a whole. For as Moses is at pains to point out in Deut 4:5-6, the Israel that is about to enter the promised land (cf. 23:20, 27:3, and 30:18) is exhorted to keep all the "statutes and ordinances" that follow—including those found in Deut 24—because "this will show your wisdom and discernment *to the peoples*."

Miriam's failing, on this reading, is not that she fails *to submit to* a leader, as so many interpreters assume, but that she fails *as* a leader. In this respect, Num 12 is parallel to the exposure of Aaron's failure in Exod 32 and Moses's failure in Num 20 and thus coheres with the status Miriam clearly shares with them as one of the three leaders of the exodus period according to Mic 6:4. In other words, Miriam is subject to critique at this pivotal point in the narrative not because "it is Miriam's authority [and not Aaron's that] the writer of the tradition wished to marginalize,"[62] but because the biblical tradition, here as elsewhere, takes her utterly seriously as the leader she is.

Beyond Hierarchy, Beyond Fear

In light of the preceding discussion, the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion that finds in Num 12 a critique of female insubordination and the endorsement of a gender-inflected hierarchy may have projected its own (understandable) fears onto the text. Far from seeing it as an "undermin[ing of] Moses's wish for egalitarian prophecy," as Trible claims, I see no reason why we shouldn't accept YHWH's description of YHWH's *peh 'el-peh* (literally: "mouth to mouth") relationship with Moses in Num 12:8 as an invitation to expand Moses's "egalitarian" vision in

60 Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 225.

61 Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, WBC 6B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 577, sees the skin condition as symptomatic but misidentifies the underlying issue as (the danger of recapitulating) Miriam's "sin of hubris."

62 Ruether, *Women-Church*, 44.

Num 11:29, so that it now reads: "Would that all [YHWH's] people" might come to "speak [with YHWH] face to face." In my view, this is a deeply biblical aspiration that Num 12 would support—provided we also take into account its warning that a *premature* apocalyptic encounter can be deadly.[63]

Feminist interpreters have often been concerned about the agenda at work in YHWH's defence of Moses in Num 12. But what is unique about Moses in Exodus and elsewhere is not that he is second only to YHWH in a static hierarchy, but that he moves beyond the "fear" of his initial encounter with YHWH (Exod 3:6) to ascend the mountain that connects heaven and earth in Exod 19, while his fellow Israelites remain trapped in their fear and desperate for a go-between who can protect them (Exod 20:19; Deut 5:27). In this light, the claim of Prov 9:10 and Ps 111:10 (cf. Prov 1:7; 15:33) that "The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom" means that wisdom begins by *facing* our fear of YHWH. The correlative claim would then be that a mature wisdom is found in a face-to-face relationship with YHWH that moves *beyond* fear.[64]

Moses is not the only person in the HB/OT who experiences the covenantal intimacy of such a face-to-face relationship,[65] for here we need only think of Abraham (Isa 41:8; James 2:23). The surprise of the later part of the Pentateuch, however, is that when it comes to the issue of an unusually close relationship with YHWH, Moses is not only preceded by Abraham but is accompanied by Reuel, a non-Israelite whose name, in Hebrew, means "friend of God."

The role played by Miriam in accompanying Moses and in guiding Israel towards its future is different, but no less striking. As reference has already been made to her last appearance in the Pentateuch (Deut 24:9) and in the canon of the OT (Mic 6:4), it is perhaps only fitting that we should bring this discussion of the movement beyond hierarchy and beyond fear to a close by referring to her last appearance in the HB (1 Chr 5:29; ET: 6:3) and in the book of Numbers (Num 26:59).

The final reference to Miriam in Num 26 forms a far more fitting epitaph than the brief account of her death in Num 20:1. In this context, it is instructive to

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63 If we read Exod 33:20 in the light of 33:11, we can see that there are dimensions of closeness that remain dangerous for Moses. The language of Num 12:8, however, suggests that by this stage, he experiences greater intimacy than he did in Exod 33:11.

64 This fear of God is routinely understood as an awe that must stay in place. But on this point, see David J.A. Clines, " 'The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom' (Job 28:28): A Semantic and Contextual Study," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen Van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 57-92. I accept Clines' argument that while awe may well be a connotation of *yir'â*, the emotion of being afraid (including the fear of consequences) remains central to the fear of YHWH references in the HB/OT. Being cavalier (Num 12:8) *or* petrified (Exod 20:18-20) is to refuse to face one's fear of YHWH.

65 The "face-to-face" of Num 12 is often read as denoting direct communication. But as YHWH speaks directly to Aaron in Num 18:1, 8, 20, this suggests two-way covenant *intimacy* is central to the face-to-face. The first instance of *covenant* language in Scripture (Gen 2:23, cf. 2 Sam 5:1) is creational and intimate, not redemptive or hierarchical.

compare the *androcentric* focus of Exod 6:20: "Amram married Jochebed his father's sister and she bore him Aaron and Moses, and the length of Amram's life was one hundred thirty-seven years" with the more *gynocentric* focus we find here in Num 26:59: "The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram: Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam."

While most readers of the Pentateuch today take it for granted that Miriam is the "sister" who intervenes to ensure that Moses is nursed by his biological mother in Exod 2:4-9, it is noteworthy that although this might be inferred from combining what is said about Moses and Aaron in Exod 4:14 and Exod 7:1-2 with what is said about Aaron and Miriam in Exod 15:20, the fact that Miriam is Moses's sister is nowhere explicitly indicated until we reach Num 26:59. The reason for this, I suggest, is the skilful use of the literary device known as *analepsis*, which J. Gerald Janzen has described as "the temporary withholding of vital information in favor of its belated introduction later for one effect or another."[66] As Janzen himself demonstrates in his brilliant discussion of Miriam's role in the song of Exod 15, this "temporary withholding/"belated introduction" technique, when recognized, can have a major impact on our earlier exegetical assumptions. In this case, one intended effect is that the reader of Num 26 may realize, or appreciate anew, just what a crucial role Miriam has played in Moses's life and in Israel's life from Exod 2:4 onwards. Her last appearance in the canon of the HB, in 1 Chr 5:29 (ET: 6:3), in which she appears as a sibling to Moses and Aaron in an otherwise all-male list of the "sons" of Levi (see 5:27-41; ET: 6:1-15), makes the same point.[67]

In addition to emphasizing the vital role that Miriam plays from the very beginning of the exodus-wilderness narrative, the delayed revelation of Num 26:59 delivers even more of an "analeptic shock"[68] as it prompts the reader who now revisits Num 12:12 to recognize the parallel between Aaron, Moses, and Miriam emerging from the *womb of Jochebed*—a name that means: "YHWH is power" or "YHWH is glory"—and the same three siblings emerging from the *womb of YHWH*. As with any theologically controversial proposal, the question of whether the text itself truly *sustains* (rather than merely tolerates) such a reading is important. In this context, therefore, we should note that if the Hebrew of the received text of

66 J. Gerald Janzen, "Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?" in *Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Brenner, 190. This volume's placement of Janzen's essay immediately after Trible's "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," nicely illustrates a shift from a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion to an equally feminist hermeneutic of trust.

67 For the NT's recognition of Miriam's status, see the deliberate shift (in Greek) from *Maria* in John 20:11 to *Mariam* (cf. LXX: Exod 6:20; 15:20-21; Num 12:1, 4, 5, 10, 15; 20:1; 26:59; Deut 24:9; 1 Chr 5:29; Mic 6:4) in John 20:16.

68 In a medical context, analeptic (as an adjective) refers to something restorative and/or awakening.

Num 12:12, in which Aaron says to Moses: "Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb [*mēreḥem 'immô*]," is re-evaluated in the light of the *Tiqqune Sopherim*—the "emendations of the scribes" noted at this point in the Masorah—then the Masoretic tradition itself suggests that what Aaron actually says here is: "Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of *our* mother's womb."[69]

If we read Num 12:12 and Num 26:59 together in the way I am suggesting, then it is natural for those who are open to a divine womb interpretation, and who also situate these texts within the wider Christian canon, to be reminded of the words of Nicodemus in John 3:4, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" If this "teacher of Israel" (3:10) is thinking of Moses's strong statement at the end of the Pentateuch about not forgetting that YHWH has birthed Israel into being (Deut 32:18), then he is less foolish (and less individualistic) than commentators have given him credit for. Even so, the second birth here, like the apocalyptic birth of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam, looks forwards not backwards. The best way to capture the radical, yet still Israel-embracing and creation-affirming, nature of biblical apocalyptic today, I suggest, whether we are considering the birth of Num 12:12 or of John 3:4, is to see the being "born from above [*gennēthē anōthen*]" of John 3:3[70] as the beginning of what Rev 21:5 calls "the new creation of all things."[71]

The eschatological vision at the end of the Christian canon is instructive in

69 According to the Mp of the Leningrad Codex, there are actually two alleged emendations in this verse (both of which have been shifted to the critical apparatus in *BHS*). Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament*, OBO 36 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 1981), 126, translates the proposed original as: "Let her not be as a still-born child, with the half of *our* flesh eaten away on coming from *our* mother's womb." Her emphases. Cf. the earlier discussion of Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1897), 353-54.

Ginsburg and McCarthy differ over whether the "our flesh/our mother" reading is likely to reflect an early Hebrew text. However both see the *tiqqunim* traditions as suggesting that an apparent insult to Moses or his mother has been covered over. But as Aaron, Moses, and Miriam were not in Jochebed's womb at the same time, this does not really make sense of an assumed "our flesh" original (despite Gen 37:27). If "our mother" refers, primarily, to YHWH, however, this better explains how Aaron can be alarmed about what is happening to part of "our flesh." Consequently, what appeared to be—and, arguably, was—a reference to YHWH's womb could easily have provoked a piously motivated "correction/clarification."

If the *tiqqunim* traditions witness to an original text here (a text that predates the *Vorlage* to the LXX), this may be sharply distinguished from their understanding of why that original was modified. McCarthy's influential study (cf. E.J. Revell, "Scribal Emendations," *ABD* 5:1011-12) may not sufficiently take this into account.

70 Although I favour "born from above" (NRSV) over "born again" (NIV), "born again from above" may capture the nuances best.

71 Here I borrow the free translation of Rev 21:5 (cf. 2 Cor 5:17) found in Jürgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise! God's Future for Humanity and the Earth*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 127-48.

other ways, too. Earlier I suggested that a deepened egalitarian reading of Num 11:29 and 12:8 in which we might look forward to the day when "all [YHWH's] people" might "speak [with YHWH] face to face" would find support in Num 12, provided that we also paid attention to its warning that a *premature* apocalyptic encounter can be deadly. What is remarkable about the portrayal of this face-to-face relationship in Rev 22:4 is that with the arrival of the New Heavens and New Earth, the danger of premature apocalyptic birth is gone.

The same shift can be observed if we read Num 12:6-8 in the light of 1 Cor 13:12:

> 12:6And [YHWH] said, "Hear my words:
> When there are prophets among you,
> I [YHWH] make myself known to them in visions;
> I speak to them in dreams.
> 12:7Not so with my servant Moses;
> he is entrusted with all my house.
> 12:8With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles
> [LXX: *en eidei kai ou di' ainigmatōn;* in a form and not through riddles/enigmas]; and he beholds the form of [YHWH].
>
> 13:12For now we see in a mirror dimly [*di' esoptrou en ainigmati;* through a mirror, in a riddle/an enigma], but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.[72]

Here Paul clearly sees the face-to-face relationship once experienced so uniquely by Moses as being extended to the whole Christian community and beyond: "For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (15:22). Indeed, "the entire creation [that] is groaning together, and going through labour pains together, up until the present time" will "enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified" (Rom 8:21-22).[73] Though "we too are groaning within ourselves" (v. 23) in this context, nevertheless, as "children of God" who are "heirs of God and joint heirs with the Messiah" (v. 17), we need not "go back again into a state of fear" (v. 15).

In this strikingly cosmic apocalyptic image, creation is giving birth and also being reborn. As creation's "groaning" (v. 22) is connected to our own (v. 23, cf. Gal 4:19), while our "groaning" is connected to our "having the first fruits of the Spirit's life" (v. 23), it is natural to take Paul's subsequent reference to the Spirit's

72 See the discussion in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1068-70.

73 I have reversed vv. 21 and 22. Apart from my reference to "enigma," and the capitalization of Spirit, the translation here, and for the rest of this and the following paragraph, is from N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament: A Contemporary Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2011).

own "groaning" within us (v. 26) as indicating that God (as mother) is intimately involved in creation's (re-)birthing (cf. Gal 4:28-29 and Isa 42:14-16). In the fullness of time, therefore, the apocalyptic birth trauma of 1 Cor 15:8, and thus Num 12:10-16, is revealed as part of the new creation of all things. Meanwhile, in the "enigma" and the "glory" of the face-to-face (1 Cor 13:12 and 2 Cor 3:7-18), there is no cause for fear.

Similarly, the exhortation to "fear YHWH" is so pervasive in the HB/OT, that its almost complete absence in the NT as an exhortation to those living in the new covenant is nothing less than remarkable.[74] This suggests that the wisdom that begins in facing our fear of YHWH and the path that takes us beyond hierarchy under YHWH to human equality before YHWH both involve going through the apocalyptic birth that marks the transition between the old age and the new.

Given that a world beyond hierarchy has been so important in feminist theology and biblical interpretation, one of the central aims of this essay is to ask what would it mean for our theologies to go through the apocalyptic transition in pursuit of such a world? This apocalyptic angle is important, I have been arguing, because of the connection between wisdom, fear, and a non-hierarchical view of covenant. Simply making demands in the name of Justice, therefore, will not suffice.

In this light, one way in which an evangelical feminism can make a contribution within and beyond its own circles is to reflect on how an expanded emphasis on the second birth—expanded because it is now viewed as part of "the new creation of all things"—might foster a "face-to-face" hermeneutic of trust and expectation that enables us to face our fears and suspicions ("Out demons, out") as we move beyond the womb, beyond the beginning of wisdom, and into the life of the age to come.

74 Fear (now awe? cf. n. 64 above; see 2 Cor 5:11; 7:1, 15) and heightened responsibility (Phil 2:12-13) are experienced. But contrast Acts 13:16, 26 with 9:31. On fear and the two ages, see also Rom 8:15 and 1 John 4:18.

The Jerusalem Collection, Economic Inequality, and Human Flourishing: Is Paul's Concern the Redistribution of Wealth, or a Relationship of Mutuality (or Both)?

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Abstract

Recent research into Paul and the economy has brought clarity to some longstanding debates concerning the Jerusalem Collection while raising a new series of questions. Larry Welborn contends that the Jerusalem Collection's focus on equality (*isotēs*) and the redistribution of possessions highlights the idea that Paul contributed to the emergence of a new category of thinking, namely the economic. Julien Ogereau, through a focus on *koinōnia*, further grounds historically an economic and eschatological perspective on the collection by arguing that it represents a new socio-economic order that crosses cultural and ethnic differences as part of the movement's global identity. Both of these scholars, along with a group of other empire-critical ones, assert that the collection was designed to address the rampant economic inequality in the Roman empire and, in some cases, that it represents an example of a call for the redistribution of wealth between the "haves" and the "have-nots." This article evaluates and builds on this interpretive trajectory and, by drawing on the resources of George Akerlog and Rachel Kranton's *Identity Economics*, suggests that the collection also brings to the fore a discourse of mutuality, revealing it as a concrete example of Paul's vision of the Christ-movement as an alternative community with a distinct ethos, one in which existing identities remain salient and integrated into local expressions of the economic structure embedded in the eastern Mediterranean. Thus, Paul is not seen as thoroughly subversive nor co-opted by imperial ideology; rather, he draws on Israel's concept of the inclusive economy in order

to invent an embedded kinship structure for his non-Jewish communities that provides for a transformed understanding of human flourishing while critiquing the economic backbone of the ancient economy—patronage and benefaction.

I. Introduction

Economic equality remains a controversial topic. Its very mention functions as a Tajfelian ingroup/outgroup experiment with all the requisite outgroup stereotyping, ingroup bias, and intergroup conflict that made Muzafer Sherif's Robbers Cave study such a classic for understanding group prejudice and conflict. For some, society has a responsibility to extend an equality of economic opportunities to everyone, while others go one step further and argue that this entails not just economic opportunities but results. So, public policy solutions such as a graduated tax scale or other income-leveling practices have been attempted, though without significant results. Thus, economic equality remains an elusive ideal.[1]

In light of the recent financial crises and the lack of success with regard to economic equality, a few economists have started turning to ancient sources for wisdom. Michael Thompson points out that economic inequalities mask political relations, relations that reveal social power.[2] This starts to sound quite a bit like the embedded economy of the first century Roman era. Ancient economic values do not exactly overlap with contemporary ones; there were significant differences. Peter Liddel reminds us that even though the term equality was used there was little done to minimize the effects of socioeconomic inequality, especially as it emerged from gender and ethnic differences.[3] Pericles (Thucydides 2.37.1-2) proclaimed that a man is not "barred from a public career" based on his "poverty." In this framework, equality of political privilege is said to not be adversely impacted by poverty, though undoubtedly this idealistic sentiment disagreed with a Greek's daily experiences.[4]

Pauline scholars have turned to their corpus of expertise in order to see if there is anything distinct about Paul's approach to the regulation of financial practices as they impinge upon economic inequality. After discussing the social interaction between the rich and poor at the communal meal, J. Christian Beker concludes, "The love principle that regulates the life of the church does not question or upset

1 See Kenneth Dautrich and David Alistair Yalof, *The Enduring Democracy* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), 108.

2 Michael Thompson, *The Politics of Inequality: A Political History of the Idea of Economic Inequality in America; with a New Preface* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1.

3 Peter Liddel, "Democracy Ancient and Modern," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. Ryan K. Balot (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 136.

4 Ibid., 126.

basic economic issues, that is, a redistribution of wealth between rich and poor."[5] While he recognizes equality discourse in Paul's letters, he asserts, "This equality in Christ does not lead to an economic equality."[6] For Beker, Paul has relatively nothing to say with regard to what Garnsey and Saller refer to as "the Roman system of inequality."[7] On the other hand, Steven Friesen sees Paul as one who was actively seeking to overcome the economic inequalities of the empire; in referring to the collection he asserts, "Paul's gospel called for a network of horizontal sharing among the Mediterranean assemblies (2 Cor. 8:13-15), not an exploitive vertical flow of resources, which characterized the imperial system."[8]

Friesen highlights a key passage, namely 2 Cor 8:13-15, that may allow us to uncover Paul's perspective on economic equality. This passage was the focus of a recent article by Larry Welborn entitled, "'That There May Be Equality': The Contexts and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal."[9] The article argues that Paul's understanding of "equality" (ἰσότης) seeks the reversal of certain cultural expectations with regard to equality and by virtue of the collection, establishes a new economic structure that seeks to promote equality between individuals of different classes through a process of redistribution. Welborn and Friesen are close in their estimation of Paul's attempt, though Welborn sees more economic diversity within the Christ-movement than Friesen's more horizontal understanding.

Welborn begins by claiming that the LXX is not helpful in framing Paul's understanding of "equality" (ἰσότης), since the word "appears only twice (Job 36:29; Zech 4:7) and without a Hebrew equivalent."[10] Thus, the Greek context of friendship, polis, and cosmos will serve to provide "clarity about Paul's notion of 'equality' as the ground and goal of Christian relations."[11] After highlighting the tendency among Pauline scholars to avoid issues of economic inequality, Welborn brings the contemporary horizon back into focus and notes that a "danger" in "our present moment in late capitalism is that the Judeo-Christian sense of social obligation will be entirely swept away by a resurgence of that structured inequality

5 J. Christian Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1980), 323.

6 Ibid.

7 Peter Garnsey and Richard P. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 125.

8 Steven J. Friesen, "Injustice or God's Will? Early Christian Explanations of Poverty," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society,* ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 28.

9 Larry Welborn, "'That There May Be Equality': The Contexts and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal," *NTS* 59, no. 1 (2013): 73-90.

10 Ibid.,73; Julien Ogereau, "The Jerusalem Collection as κοινωνία: Paul's Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity." *NTS* 58, no. 3 (2012): 364-65. Both scholars list Job 36:29; Zech 4:7; *Letter of Aristeas* 1.263; *Ps.-Phoc.* 1.137; *Ps. Sol.* 17.41; Col 4:1. Further, Ogereau highlights some usage in Philo (*Opif.* 1.51, 106; *Cher.* 1.105; *Sacr*. 1.27; *Plant.* 1.122), and that the adjective ἴσος does occur (Exod 30:34; Lev 7:10; 2 Macc 9:15) (365 n. 23).

11 Welborn, "'That There May Be Equality,'" 74.

which was the basis of the political system of the Roman Empire."[12] Thus, Welborn and Christoph Stenschke[13] agree that there are likely biblical resources drawn from the Jerusalem collection and good stewardship that need to be brought to bear on the current/recent financial crises.[14]

However, this raises an important issue: can one draw such economic insights from Paul's collection or is his focus elsewhere, e.g., "equity" or "fairness" as noted by Blomberg, in which case Paul's use of ἰσότης provides guidance for treating "others how you would want to be treated if the shoe were on the other foot"?[15] Or, to take this a bit further, is Paul's concern to show the way non-Jews are part of a relationship of mutuality with Jews? If this should prove to be the case, then the exchange of material for non-material resources (a hallmark of Bourdieu's symbolic economy) would enter the economic discourse within the Christ-movement, or at least, Paul can be understood to believe that it should.[16] While these approaches may not be mutually exclusive, the question remains: is Paul establishing a framework of economic redistribution through his use of ἰσότης in 2 Cor 8:13-14?

In order to answer that question we will subdivide the remainder of this article into three headings: (II) The Jerusalem collection as poverty alleviation and mutual partnership; (III) The formation of an economic social identity; and (IV) The manna economy and equality of sufficiency and divine provision.

II. The Jerusalem Collection as Poverty Alleviation and Mutual Partnership

The collection has been understood in several different ways, some of which are not mutually exclusive: almsgiving, eschatological pilgrimage, taxation, expres-

12 Ibid., 74

13 Christoph Stenschke, "The current financial crises of Europe, Paul's collection for Jerusalem and good stewardship," *EJT* 21, no. 2 (Oct 2012): 97

14 Longenecker is less convinced; he writes "One further issue cannot be addressed within the covers of this book: that is, how its findings pertain to contemporary Christian theological reflection on issues of poverty and wealth in a globalized context of the twenty-first century." Nevertheless, he later concedes that "Paul probably would imagine that contemporary Christian theology is legitimate to the extent that it includes such issues within its central remit, and not peripherally so." Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 301.

15 Craig Blomberg, *Christians in an Age of Wealth: A Biblical Theology of Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 114.

16 Thomas Blanton, "Symbolic Goods as Media of Exchange in Paul's Gift Economy" (unpublished paper), 8, refers to Jerusalem collection as an exchange "between material and symbolic goods" in Paul's developing "gift economy." See here Rom 15:27, and also 2 Cor 9:6-15, esp. v. 14, which describes the way those in Jerusalem "long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God on you." Thus, in 2 Cor 8:14 we are not dealing with strict economic reciprocity, but are viewing the collection within the gift economy in such a way that "non-material, discursive products . . . may be accorded a material exchange" Blanton, "Symbolic Goods as Media of Exchange in Paul's Gift Economy," 14.

sion of solidarity, polemic, and reconciliation. Downs organizes these as (a) an eschatological event (which he rejects), (b) an obligation placed by the leaders in Jerusalem, (c) an ecumenical offering, (d) material relief, and, (e) his preferred perspective based on the cultic language employed throughout the relevant passages, worship, so that the collection represents a non-Jewish offering to God.[17] Welborn, our chosen dialogue partner, fits squarely into the material relief category but extends it so that the redistribution of the resources was to be an ongoing and permanent structure within the Christ-movement.[18]

The economic framework approaches, in differing ways, see the collection as Paul's attempt to relieve poverty in Jerusalem (and often beyond that), and generally describe it as a subset of almsgiving. This is evident in the work of Welborn and Friesen as mentioned above but also in the work of David Horrell, Petros Vassiliadis, and Justin Meggitt. These three undergird Welborn's (and Friesen's) arguments and thus provide a broader basis to understand and evaluate the material relief approach.[19] For Horrell, Paul's work was fundamentally "materialist," a social implication of his "theology."[20] Thus, it was more than poverty alleviation or charity; he was concerned with equality and based this on the example of Christ (2 Cor 8:9, 13). Further, for Horrell, Paul's collection sought structural changes to existing socially-embedded economic practices, ones that would bring about the goal of equality. Vassiliadias sees the collection as an alternative model of economic and social justice to that evident in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44ff.; 5:1ff.), one that allowed for private property rights, rejected voluntary poverty, but still aimed for the perpetual redistribution of surplus resources.[21] Meggitt sees the collection as an economic survival tactic, what he calls "economic mutualism."[22] The local assemblies within the Pauline Christ-movement were making a calculated attempt to secure their own future financial assistance from the Jerusalem Christ-movement should the need arise in the future. Thus, there is reciprocity anticipated, and the collection should not be seen as a one-time event but a key part of the ongoing structure of the Christ-movement.

How should we assess these economically focused approaches to the collection? First, an interpretive caution is required, and this relates to the broader way

17 David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 9; see also Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 312 n. 33.

18 Welborn, "'That There May Be Equality,'" 89.

19 David G. Horrell, "Paul's Collection: Resources for a Materialist Theology." *ERJ* 22, no. 2 (1995): 74-83; Petros Vassiliadis, "Equality and Justice in Classical Antiquity and in Paul: The Social Implications of the Pauline Collection." *SVTQ* 36, no. 1-2 (1992): 51-59; Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

20 Horrell, "Paul's Collection," 76, 79.

21 Vassiliadis, "Equality and Justice," 57.

22 Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival,* 158, 164.

in which Paul's discourse is used for developing economic insights or practices. Gotis and Dodd, after a keen survey of economic ideas in Paul, remind interpreters of the "dangers of selecting apparently-appropriate New Testament passages to support modern economic work without paying due regard to context."[23] It seems that mining the collection for proto-economic structural policies may come close to this. For example, it is not clear that the collection was to be more than a one-time event, and thus it is difficult to attach normative (or permanent) expectations to such an undefined project. Furthermore, the notion of "equality" is central to these approaches, and while drawing on the cultural encyclopedia of ἰσότης is crucial for understanding how Paul's discourse may have been heard, it is not clear that "equality" is the essence of the project. At least there is a need to clarify more precisely Paul's notion of equality based on his broader identity-discourse. The approaches we are evaluating interpret the collection through the lens of 2 Cor 8-9; yet the purpose of these chapters was to renew the Corinthians' motivation to give, not to establish a structural purpose for the collection. Additionally, the nature and presence of reciprocity is uncertain. There may be an ethnic or mission focus to the intimations of social exchange evident in the text, which would then provide a better context for understanding the socially-embedded nature of the collection.[24] Thus, while the economic focus of Welborn and others is an important component of this discussion it is likely only one part. Julien Ogereau's work helps us in two ways: first, by connecting other empire-critical approaches to the collection; second, by bringing into the discussion a missing element, the emphasis on partnership, solidarity, mutuality, and unity, in short κοινωνία.[25]

Julien Ogereau argues concerning the Jerusalem collection, "the whole enterprise was rooted in the conviction that the advent of the eschatological kingdom of God had inaugurated a new socio-economic order, which was to become distinctive of the emergent Christ-believing communities on a global scale."[26] In this he builds on the earlier approaches of Horsley and Wan who view Paul's financial

23 G. N. Gotsis, and S. Dodd, "Economic Ideas in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament," *HER* 35 (Winter 2002): 30.

24 Some of these critiques, though with different emphases and implications, are similar to those found in Yohannes Baheru Faye, *The Nature and Theological Import of Paul's Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem*, PhD Diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2013.

25 Ogereau, "The Jerusalem Collection," 360-78.

26 Ibid., 362-63; Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1954); Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); and Keith Nickle, *The Collection: A Study of Paul's Strategy* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), in different ways, contend that the eschatological pilgrimage tradition influenced Paul's collection project. This has not been widely accepted since there seems to be little textual basis for the connection. However, Paul's Jewish interpretive-context, its provocative nature among the broader Jewish community, and its potential reconciliatory impulse are important contributions from the work of these scholars. See more on this below.

practice as a direct confrontation of the inequitable tributary financial structures within the Roman Empire.[27] Thus, the collection was to become a permanent parallel economic structure that was global and trans-local in orientation, and did not rely on the flow of resources (taxes, etc.) from the low-status majority to the elites centered in Rome. Wan puts this more into a colonial context, where Paul is challenging the power structures of the elites by emphasizing the equitable distribution of resources among a group in solidarity with one another, a distribution not structured around or reliant on patronage structures or other social discourses that continue to facilitate inequality. Ogereau, however, recognizes that Paul's understanding of "equality" (ἰσότης) is not primarily informed by Greek and Roman thought (*contra* Welborn, Horsley, and Wan) but is clarified by his manna narrative citation from Exod 16:18 in 2 Cor 8:15. There Paul's "edited citation suggests that the goal was to achieve a relative, proportional equality by restoring a certain balance between need and surplus."[28] This approach, then, offers a corrective to Horsley and Wan, and places certain constraints on the application of the principle of "equality" (ἰσότης). It should not be understood as a normative principle of Paul's economic policy. Rather, its focus is on the sufficiency of needs being met (see below).

Ogereau rightly brings to the fore an often missed component of these discussions, the use of κοινωνία as "partnership" in 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; and Rom 15:26 to describe the collection.[29] After providing ample documentary and literary evidence, he points out that in these instances κοινωνία did not refer to "monetary contribution," but to "some kind of partnership or association with socio-political ramifications, which Paul envisioned between the Gentile churches and their Judean counterparts, and which would ultimately manifest itself in the form of a concrete monetary gift."[30] If what Ogereau suggests is accurate, then the connection of "equality" (ἰσότης) and "partnership" (κοινωνία) is indeed significant and highlights the existence of both political and economic links between the predominantly non-Jewish members of the Pauline Christ movement and the "holy ones" in Jerusalem.[31] So what at first sight appears to be a one-time project may in fact be an ongoing relationship-based movement.

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27 Ibid. 364; Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 251; Sze-kar Wan, "Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act: Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction," in *Paul and Politics*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 192.

28 Ibid., 366; see similarly on this point in Blomberg, *Christians in an Age of Wealth.*

29 Ibid., 366. "Begging us with much urging for the favor of partnership (κοινωνίαν) in the support of the saints" (2 Cor 8:4). "Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your partnership (κοινωνίας) with them and to all" (2 Cor 9:13). "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a partnership (κοινωνίαν) for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Rom 15:26).

30 Ibid., 371.

31 John M. G. Barclay, in an important article entitled, "Money and Meetings: Group Formation among Diaspora Jews and Early Christians," argues that more attention should be paid to "associations" in antiquity in order to understand the social dynamics involved in the formation of

At the same time, in seeking to redress socioeconomic inequalities with regard to sufficiency—at least as they are manifested within the broader Christ-movement—the project offers a secondary critique of the broader practices of patronage and benefaction that was the backbone of the Roman system of economic inequality. So was Paul concerned about economic inequality? A qualified yes may be offered with regard to the way patronage functioned within the Christ-movement though, generally speaking, inequalities of sufficiency were deemed to be unacceptable within the congregation.

One example of such Christ-movement socioeconomic inequality that is often noted and mentioned above, although discounted by Beker,[32] is found in 1 Cor 11:17-34. There Paul highlights divisions that have their basis in socioeconomic disparity: "For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (1 Cor 11:21 NRSV). From Paul's perspective this deviant behavior has its basis in practices that reinforce inequality: "What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (1 Cor 11:22). The phrase "those who have nothing" is particularly probative; it has those, according to Longenecker's revised economic scale, in the ES6-ES7 categories in view; a group that would make up around 65% of urban Christ-followers.[33] Paul's concern is with the non-elite, middling group (Longenecker's ES4), who were not properly discerning the mutual relationship between the various parts of Christ's body (1 Cor 11:29). Carter is more explicit and sees the problems associated with the supper as an "act of dishonoring, humiliating, and shaming the poor".[34] He believes that Paul, who identifies with the lower group, thought that within the Christ-movement there was to be a "preferential option for the poor and the practice of sharing of economic resources."[35]

Summary

So, the collection does alleviate poverty and economic inequalities to a degree (thus contributing to an improved well-being or flourishing of its recipients) but that is not enough. It also forms a superordinate social identity between non-Jews and those living in Jerusalem through the practical outworking of their relational

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the earliest Christ-movement (Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 106-21). In particular, Paul's collection should be considered in the context of these "associations." In *The Offering of the Gentiles* (118), Downs does just that; he offers an extensive discussion of monetary practices among Greek and Roman voluntary associations and concludes that these data offer evidence of both similarity and difference with regard to Paul's efforts to organize the collection for Jerusalem.

32 Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 323.

33 Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 295

34 Warren Carter, "Helen Rhee, Tertullian, and Paul on the Wealth of Christians: A Response," in *Tertullian and Paul,* ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 223.

35 Ibid.

(and financial) partnership, one characterized by mutuality and equality (but more on that anon).

III. The Formation of an Economic Social Identity

What I'm suggesting is that what we see in the instructions concerning the collection, the supper, and other economic guidance (e.g., 1 Cor 7:30) in the Corinthian correspondence is the formation of the economic aspects of an "in Christ" social identity (see esp. 2 Cor 8:9, 13, where Christ is put forth as the ingroup prototype), which is a superordinate identity that reprioritizes existing identities. Indeed, they *all* belong to Christ, who in turn belongs to God (1 Cor 3:23). Or, in a Bourdieu-ian way of describing it, they are undergoing the conversion of bodily practices.[36]

Longenecker's work has made a significant contribution to our understanding of economics and the formation of identity in Paul as an integral social implication of his gospel.[37] At the same time, in the broader field of economics, Akerlof and Kranton provide theoretical grounding for our understanding of the way identity informs economic choices, namely the way non-economic motivations have a significant influence on people's work, wages, and well-being (i.e., their flourishing).[38] By the use of Tajfel and Turner's social identity approaches they bring to the fore the idea that what appear to be economic challenges are often identity ones.[39] The way non-economic indicators influence economic choices sounds very much like the socially embedded economy of the first century. With that in mind, we should consider the way patronage and benefaction (as social identity ordering principles[40]) may have misinformed the economic practices of some in Corinth.[41] To do this, we need to look first at one of Paul's earlier comments on the collection in 1 Cor 16:1-4.

Paul's earliest reference to the collection is in 1 Cor 16:1-4; he begins "Now concerning the collection" (περὶ δὲ τῆς λογείας). The presence of περὶ δὲ suggests this is a topic that was raised by the Corinthians, likely asking for clarification, as

36 See W. Coppins, "To Eat or Not to Eat Meat?: Conversion, Bodily Practice, and the Relationship between Formal Worship and Everyday Life in the Anthropology of Religion and 1 Corinthians 8:7." *BTB* 41, no. 2 (2011): 84-91. As a former pastor, I can attest to the "wallet" being the last part to be converted.

37 Longenecker, *Remember the* Poor, 198-99.

38 George A. Akerlof and Rachel E. Kranton, *Identity Economics: How Our Identities Shape Our Work, Wages, and Well-Being* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

39 H.Tajfel and J. C. Turner, 'An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict', in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33-47.

40 J. Brian Tucker, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1-4* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

41 On whether the whole group is in view or not compare Tucker, *You Belong to Christ*, 9; Andrew Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6* (Leiden: Brill). 130.

noted by Horsley, as to the practical details and future plans for the collection.[42] However, Witherington has suggested that their inquiry came from those who had heard of the collection and were interested in participating in this benefaction.[43] It is likely a combination of the two, and, as will become apparent, both the practical outworking of the collection and the entanglements with benefaction will become problematic for Paul's relationship with some of the Corinthian Christ-followers.

Paul uses the term λογεία to refer to "the collection" (τῆς λογείας). The word is used twice in the NT and only in this passage. It is found in business documents and could describe a general collection of money, e.g., taxes, but could also reference money collected for ritual purposes, e.g., "the collection (τὴν λογίαν) of Isis."[44] Two ideas are of interest here. First, this is the only place that Paul uses this term to refer to his financial project. Elsewhere he calls it "the service" (τῆς διακονίας; 2 Cor 9:1) or "the partnership" (τὴν κοινωνίαν; 2 Cor 8:4), terms more in keeping with Paul's general perspective on life within the Christ-movement. Thus, λογεία may reflect the Corinthian Christ-followers' (mis)understanding of the nature of the project, i.e., one drawn primarily from the socially embedded economic sphere, while Paul places the accent on another component, namely mutuality and relationality. Second, an ostracon referring to "the collection of Isis" may offer further insight into what some in Corinth thought Paul's collection involved, namely a continuation of existing benefaction duties and practices that previously had been directed to provincial deities. (Further, the cultic language may be a way to fill the empty sacred space now that these non-Jews can no longer participate in venerating these deities).[45]

Second Corinthians 8:14, with its focus on the way the Corinthians' current "abundance" might "supply" the "needs" of others, and the way in which this might be reversed in the future has led many to argue that 8:14 reflects Paul's involvement in and tacit approval of existing socioeconomic practices within the empire. Richard Ascough and Stephen Joubert illustratively argue that the presentation of the Jerusalem collection in Paul's letters amounts to his involvement in benefaction as it was practiced during the mid-first century; in this way Paul's

42 Horsley, *1 Corinthians,* 221.

43 Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 313. The phrase περὶ δέ occurs in 7:1, 25; 8:1; 21:1; and 16:12.

44 BDAG 597; *TDNT* 4.282-83; *MM* 377; Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated By Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (Grand Rapids: Baker , 1965).

45 On the empty sacred space see Kathy Ehrensperger, "The Ministry to Jerusalem (Rom 15:31): Paul's Hopes and Fears," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 69, n. 4 (2013): 338-52. I am not arguing that some of the Corinthians thought the collection was for Isis, though for the influence of Isis in Corinth see Laurent Bricault and M. J. Versluys, *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman world : Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Isis Studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11-14, 2005* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 412-13.

understanding would be similar to the Corinthians'. Based on Paul's use of "complete" (ἐπιτελέω) in 2 Cor 8:6, 11, Ascough rightly contends that this term is more than simply a financial one but one that intimates a religious duty, and thus may put the collection project within the practice of benefaction.[46] Joubert picks up on similar themes focusing on "agonistic rivalry" between the Corinthians and the Macedonians, a discourse that was also part of the practice of benefaction (2 Cor 8:1-6, 7-9; 9:1-5).[47] For both Ascough and Joubert, reciprocity and its concomitant obligation is a central component to Paul's collection project. However, reciprocity should be distinguished from mutuality, in that the mutuality seeks the welfare of the other partner. While this is not evident in Greek and Roman reciprocal exchanges, it is present in Paul's collection discourse.[48]

The various vertical exchange relationships are often broadly referred to as patronage, and the inherent asymmetry in these structures have led many to suggest that, in fact, Paul was working to transform these one-way approaches to communal and economic life rather than continuing to work within them.[49] Paul appears to allude to this general system when he refers to the Corinthians' contribution in 1 Cor 16:3 as "your gift to Jerusalem" (τὴν χάριν ὑμῶν εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ), though recently Briones has questioned whether patronage is an appropriate model for understanding Paul's financial policy.

For Ehrensperger, Paul's discourse of "grace" (χάρις) as God's gift transforms these one-way-oriented approaches to ones that highlight "mutual concern for each other and the well-being of all involved in the network of the Christ-movement."[50] While Harrison has clearly shown that "grace" (χάρις) is a key concept in the Greek and Roman reciprocity system and is important for issues of cultural translation, it is still unlikely that Paul so frequently chose this term when dealing with the collection because he was relying on or supporting an uncritical dependence on this system.[51] Rather, Paul's discourse of grace relies on a covenantal understanding of חסד/חן. Thus, I call into question the approaches that try to separate חסד/חן/χάρις/ἔλεος related terminology, and suggest, rather, that depending

46 Richard S. Ascough, "The Completion of a Religious Duty: The Background of 2 Cor 8.1–15," *NTS* 42, no. 4 (1996): 584.

47 Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul's Collection* (WUNT 124; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 199.

48 See Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 69.

49 But see for these terminological debates Stephan Joubert, "One Form of Social Exchange or Two? "Eurgetism," Patronage, and New Testament Studies," *BTB* 31, no. 1 (2001): 17-25; Longenecker, Bruce W. *Remember the Poor*, 67-74; Joshua Rice, *Paul and Patronage: The Dynamics of Power in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); David E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy: A Socio-Theological Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

50 Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, 70.

51 James R. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace in Its Graeco-Roman Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 63.

on the context the semantic fields of חן/חסד/χάρις/ἔλεος are similar. The use of חן/חסד, which I take generally to refer to "goodness or generosity in interpersonal relations," does not include within it the idea of reciprocity, but it does provoke a response based on a relationship.[52]

God's gracious favor is more than an attitude; it is an action, a social identification that emerges within a relationship and *not* some type of equity presupposed by the benefaction system, or a gift given to enhance one's social status. Rather, as noted by Ehrensperger, "it is . . . supposed to be a response which implies an affirmation of the relationship and which is appropriate to it in its emphasis on mutuality."[53] For example, this is seen in Israel's scriptural call for doing justice to those inside and outside the community, a key component of Israel's inclusive/manna/Sabbath economy (Mic 6:6, 8; Isa 58:6-14; Deut 24:17-18).[54] In that sense, Welborn's claim that "Paul contributes to the tentative emergence of a new category of thought—the economic" should be tempered.[55] Paul does challenge aspects of Roman policies as they hinder the attainment of the basic necessities of life, and he does offer an alternative ideological perspective to patronage and benefaction. But this is not properly new. It is the appropriation of Israel's manna economy with its ideology of God's provision for daily needs among the Pauline Christ-movement (see further below on 2 Cor 8:15).

I would suggest, then, that we should not see in Paul's use of benefaction-related terms when discussing the collection, as Ascough, Joubert, and Harrison do, as a reinforcement of the status quo or a move to bring the Jerusalem Christ-followers into a patron-client relationship with the Pauline Christ-movement. Rather, we should see his instruction in the context of חן/חסד/χάρις/ἔλεος discourse from Israel's scriptural tradition, which emphasizes mutuality and relationality, and not hierarchy and obligation. This, i.e., goodness and generosity in interpersonal relations, is what I suggest Paul means when he uses "equality" (ἰσότης) in 2 Cor 8:13-14. It represents a critique of the backbone of the ancient economy, with its reliance on patronage and benefaction. His primary concern is with mutuality and relationality within the broader Christ-movement. This socially-embedded "equality" in turn can "promote the empowerment and well-being [i.e., flourishing] of others within the network."[56] Paul's language here functions, then, as a kinship

52 However, see Josh 2:12; Judges 1:24.

53 Ibid., 76.

54 "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:6, 8). "You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this" (Deut 24:17-18).

55 Welborn, "'That There May Be Equality,'" 88.

56 Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, 79-80.

discourse contributing to the formation of an "in Christ" social identity, one concerned with human flourishing rather than an increase in or the accrual of honor and power.[57]

Summary

Paul uses the collection to contribute to the formation of a transformed economic social identity among non-Jewish Christ-followers. It is one that challenges the backbone of the Roman economy with its reliance on patronage and benefaction. Further, rather than relying on discourses of reciprocity or obligation, Paul wants to see among the Christ-followers an ethic of mutuality, generosity, and grace-filled-other-regard similar to that found in Israel's scriptural tradition in its use of חסד/חן/χάρις/ἔλεος. This renewed kinship discourse should contribute to the formation of a salient "in Christ" social identity with its concomitant (and contested) practices and social identifications. Let's turn finally to the focal point of Paul's rhetoric, 2 Cor 8:15. Before doing so, however, I will set the stage by revisiting some evidence concerning ἰσότης that may help us understand Paul's idea of equality of sufficiency and divine provision in the manna economy.

IV. The Manna Economy and Equality of Sufficiency and Divine Provision

> Because it is not our intention that others should have relief while you have affliction; it is rather a matter of equality. In the now time your surplus is for their insufficiency so that their surplus would be available for your insufficiency, in order that there may be equality. As it is written, "The one who gathered much had no excess, and the one who gathered little did not lack" (2 Cor 8:13-15).[58]

Two first-century Greek and Roman authors may assist us in correlating the way Paul's equality discourse might have been heard, and the way he may have been using it as a bi-cultural mediator. Dio Chrysostom, in *De Avaritia*, offers a few insights regarding equality in the context of a broader discussion on greed. First, Dio contends that greed is the enemy of equality; it causes communal difficulties while equality brings healing (*Avar*. 6b).[59] Second, equality binds people together

57 Mark T. Finney, *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World: 1 Corinthians in Its Greco-Roman Social Setting* (LNTS 460; London: T & T Clark, 2011) for the presence of this idea in other parts of 1 Corinthians.

58 οὐ γὰρ ἵνα ἄλλοις ἄνεσις, ὑμῖν θλῖψις, ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἰσότητος· ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ τὸ ὑμῶν περίσσευμα εἰς τὸ ἐκείνων ὑστέρημα, ἵνα καὶ τὸ ἐκείνων περίσσευμα γένηται εἰς τὸ ὑμῶν ὑστέρημα, ὅπως γένηται ἰσότης, καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ τὸ πολὺ οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν, καὶ ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον οὐκ ἠλαττόνησεν.

59 "My assertion also regarding greed, is that even though all know that it is neither expedient nor noble—but rather is a cause of the greatest of evils—yet no one person shuns it or is willing to have equality (of possessions) with one's neighbor."

even in differing socio-economic situations (*Avar.* 9).[60] Third, the principle of equality is a universally understood component of the human experience (*Avar.* 10b).[61] Plutarch thinks that proportional equality is to be a goal but not one that would extend to the masses (*Quaest. Conv.* 719 C).[62] Plutarch and Dio see the importance of equality for social cohesion, though their elite perspective on equality is rather asymmetrical, and not aligned with Paul's idea of mutuality.

In addition to these authors, also potentially instructive here is an early second-century non-literary papyri, *P.Mil.Vogl.* 1.23.7, which uses ἰσότης in regard to the way an inheritance is to be subdivided: "the things established by us in view of equality of the portion that each one has been allotted from the property." While one cannot be certain, it is likely that a sense of equality or fairness was to be maintained as the property was distributed among those involved. Another papyri, *SB* 14.11651.7, though dated in the early third-century, might likewise be helpful. In preparations for the arrival of the emperor, the provincial officials were to organize everything with all "equality" and "rightness." The juxtaposition of these two words brings to the fore a similar construction in Col 4:1, "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly." The papyri highlight a desire to maintain equality in ways that are contextually appropriate and can be seen to connect ideas of righteousness and equality at the societal level.

Nevertheless, Paul doesn't use ἰσότης enough to determine if these insights are probative. What he does do is use Exod 16:18 as a way to show the Corinthians what he has in mind by equality. Thus, building on the work of Cherian,[63] I wish to highlight the use of the manna narrative, and, as suggested above, demonstrate that what Paul is developing is a manna economy in which one's needs are met for the day. In doing so he addresses a pressing economic concern of the first-century.

Exodus 16 recounts the consistent supply of food for Israel in the wilderness. During their travels in the wilderness they were to go out and gather for their daily needs. But further, in Exod 16:4, God also intends to "test them, whether they will walk in my law or not." It seems, then, that the manna discourse is as much about

60 "Son, why do you long for Greed, the worst among the deities? Do not! She is an unjust goddess! She enters many prosperous homes and cities, and does not leave till her votaries are ruined. And you are mad for her! This is best for mortal ones, to reverence Equality and to be friends with friends, to bind cities to cities and allies to fellow allies. For Nature has granted humans equality as that which is lawful, such that whenever the lesser stands in opposition/war against the greater, that leads to the dawn of hate."

61 "And again, honor equality as a law for humans, for this produces solidarity of friendship and peace for all toward each other; whereas disagreements, internal wrangling, and external wars ensue from nothing other than the lust for more, so that each side is kept from sufficiency."

62 "The equality that the masses pursue, which actually is the greatest injustice of all, God removes as far as is possible. God preserves distinctions according to their worth, maintaining the proportional relation in geometric model, as the norm of lawfulness."

63 Jacob Cherian, *Toward a Commonwealth of Grace: A Plutocritical Reading of Grace and Equality in Second Corinthians 8:1-15*, PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2007.

faith as it is about food. They would collect the food each day, except on the day before the Sabbath. On that day, they would collect enough for two days since there would be no food on the ground on the Sabbath (Exod 16:5, 26), though some departed from the Lord's command (Exod 16:28).

Claassens rightly highlights the way the interruption of the delivery of fresh manna points to a Sabbath economy.[64] The idea of sufficiency is also brought to the fore in the miracle; each gathered an amount equal to their need. Claassens remarks that there is "a principle of total equality . . . the manna is distributed in such a way that everyone receives a portion that is exactly enough to satisfy their needs."[65] Thus, the idea of equality that emerges from the manna discourse is one in which neither scarcity nor over-abundance is present, and hoarding or greed is rendered ineffective since the leftover spoils anyway.[66]

The manna story is used several other times throughout Israel's scriptures to emphasize God's provision and the need to rely on him (see Num 11; Deut 8:2-6; Josh 5:12; Pss 78; 105; 4 Ezra 1:19-20; and Wisd 16:20-23). *Second Baruch* 29:8 should be particularly pointed out since it connects manna and the messianic time: "And it will happen in that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time" (see also *Sib Or.* 7.149). This messianic time may also be in view in 2 Cor 8:14, as Paul specifies, "in the now time" (ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ). While this phrase could only be a temporal marker,[67] based on a similar use in 2 Cor 6:2 "now is the acceptable time" (ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος), as well as the later use of the exact phrase in Rom 3:16; 8:18; and 11:5, it may be the case that Paul views the collection as an eschatological event, the so-called eschatological pilgrimage tradition, where the wealth of the nations flows into Zion (Isa 60:5), such as suggested by Munck, Georgi, and Nickle.[68]

Regardless, in 1 Cor 7:29-30 Paul does make it clear that one's view of the eschatological time will impact one's economic practice. He introduces the eschatological time framework in v. 29, noting that "the appointed time has grown very short" (ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος). In 7:29-32, Paul describes several identities that entangle one in the affairs of life, e.g., marriage and commerce. The presence of ὡς μή in these verses has led Schrage to argue that economics are

64 L. Juliana M. Claassens, *The God Who Provides: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 8. As noted in Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 89, the manna story also reinforces the importance of Sabbath observance.

65 Claassens, *The God Who Provides*, p. 13.

66 See Cherian, *Toward a Commonwealth*, 172.

67 Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 408.

68 Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind,* 299-305; Georgi, *Remembering the Poor,* 119; Nickle, *The Collection*, 136.

adiaphora for Paul.[69] However, this doesn't seem to align with his rule in all the churches in 1 Cor 7:17-24 that Christ-followers should remain in their calling. Paul is not calling the Corinthians to abandon their cultural identities and engagements; rather, they are to allow their awareness of the eschatological time to impact their perspective on consumption.

Hron puts 1 Cor 7:29-31 in his general mandate category and connects it with Jesus's possession-focused teaching.[70] So, for Paul (as well as Jesus, e.g., Matt 6:16-21, 24-34; 10:9-10; 19:21-25, 27-30), "those who buy" should act "as though they did not possess" (1 Cor 7:30). Further, Hron understands that "a practical sense of detachment is reaffirmed in the mandate to use the things of the world but not as one makes 'full use of' them (v. 31)."[71] Regardless of whether we see the eschatological pilgrimage tradition in the use of the "now time," Paul's eschatologically-oriented time perspective does challenge accepted possessions-focused social practices (cf. 1 Cor 13:3; Acts 2:44-46).[72]

Philo, as is often mentioned by commentators, also draws on Exod 16:18 in his equality discourse in *Her.* 191. He similarly points out the dangers of greed since it rejects a divinely ordered proportionality evident in equality (see *Leg.* 3.166).[73] With regard to *Her.* 191, Cherian provides an apt summary: "For Philo manna stands for wisdom; the divine word makes effectual the distribution . . . so equality is maintained; Moses witness[es] to divine equality; equality is achieved when measured in proportion; equality is predetermined."[74] Welborn rejects the idea that Paul's use of equality discourse resonates with that of Philo's in *Who is the Heir* 191, since Paul in 2 Cor 8:15 has confused human and divine action.[75] While it is accurate to state that Philo relies on the idea of "the divine **λόγος**" as that which ensures equitable distribution (in this case of wisdom), Philo earlier connects ἰσότης with the idea of proportionality (*Heir* 145). Since Paul does this as

69 W. Schrage,"Die Stellung zur Welt bei Paulus, Epiktet und in der Apokalyptik," *ZTK* 61 (1964): 131-32, 148.

70 Ondrej Hron, *The Mirage Shall Become a Pool: A New Testament Theology of Social Justice and Charity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 174.

71 Ibid.

72 It may further be worthwhile to consider 1 Cor 13:3 and the way Paul affirms giving away one's "possessions to feed the poor" in this light as well. It is not obligatory, and as such is a trajectory away from Acts 2:44-46, but it is still praiseworthy, and thus within plausible actions in the "now time." See Hron, *The Mirage Shall Become a Pool*, 177. I question whether the commonality in Acts 2 is not also non-obligatory in the sense that it is "free-willed," particularly in light of Acts 5:4-5.

73 "Therefore, in the case of manna as well as with every gift that God grants to our race, it is good to receive what is measured out and fixed and not to (reach for) what is beyond/above us; for this would be greed."

74 Cherian, *Toward a Commonwealth*, 181.

75 Welborn, "'That There May Be Equality,'" 88.

well in 2 Cor 8:13, there may be some reason to consider such a providential distribution understanding in Paul.[76]

In any case, we should pause and seriously consider Paul's use of the law to serve as a way of organizing the communal life of a primarily non-Jewish movement. Akerlof and Kranton have suggested the importance of focusing on social categories, norms, and utility gain and loss as a way to better understand economic motivations.[77] Their basic claim is that people care about what they should do, who they understand themselves to be, what groups they are part of, and what their beliefs are, and that these are integral to economic choices. In short, people's social identities shape their economic practice. It would seem to be the case that Akerlof and Kranton have again alerted us to one of Paul's economic motivations. What seems sufficiently clear is that Paul's economic policy, if we can call it that, reflects his continuing salient Jewish identity and encourages non-Jews to adjust their perspective on the way they should care for those that are not from their own ethnic or social group. The suggestion here, then, is that Paul's identity as a Jewish Christ-follower shaped his identity with regard to work, money, and human flourishing (well-being) even as he sought to invent non-Jewish identity in Christ.

Paul's purpose for the citation may be further highlighted through a brief comparison of 2 Cor 8:15 with Exod 16:18. First, Exod 16:18 opens with καὶ μετρήσαντες τῷ γομορ "but when they measured it with an omer." This is left off by Paul, who rather starts with the standard citation formula καθὼς γέγραπται "as it is written." Next, Paul moves ὁ τὸ πολὺ "the one who gathered much" before οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν "had nothing left over." Finally, Paul changes ὁ τὸ ἔλαττον "he who had less" from the LXX, to ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον "he who had little." The significance of these changes are minimal, though they may combine to focus the referent, emphasize the poverty of the collection's recipients, and, as suggested by Stanley, draw out the focal point, i.e., "the equality of Yahweh's provision for his people."[78] This does, however, raise another issue: the Exodus passage emphasizes God's provision while Paul's passage (notwithstanding any providential overtones) brings to the fore human agency. While the tension is there, the Exodus passage does not delineate the structures by which the material was distributed, so it is difficult to determine if there is any real inconsistency here.

In light of all the above, we are in a position to offer some insights into the rhetorical purpose for Paul's citation of Exod 16:18 in 2 Cor 8:15. First, it is a way to ask the Corinthians whether they have adequately considered the idea expressed in the passage in keeping with Paul's desire for an emergence of an ethic

76 However, Philo's cosmic orientation does not develop the discourse of mutuality as does Paul. See C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (A. & C. Black, 1973), 227.

77 Akerlof and Kranton, *Identity Economics,* 11-12.

78 Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 231.

of generosity among them. Second, the verse supports his claim concerning equality. Third, drawing on the way the manna tradition was used in other Jewish writings, Paul uses it to teach them about God's gracious provision. Fourth, he uses it to test their proper response to God's gracious provision by participating in the collection (2 Cor 8:8). Fifth, by drawing on the manna discourse and its connection to the Sabbath economy, he may be hinting at the way the traditions of Israel continue to be relevant within a non-Jewish Christ-movement (cf. esp. 1 Cor 10:11). Thus, it would seem overall that Paul cites Exod 16:18 in 2 Cor 8:15 to emphasize "God's gracious equality of sufficiency."[79] Indeed, for Paul, God is ultimately sufficient for the needs of each person in the community.

Hays suggests that what we have in 2 Cor 8:15 is an "economic parable."[80] Paul draws on the Mosaic tradition to instruct non-Jewish communities as to what a community of Christ-followers should do in response to the needs of others, which, generally speaking, would be the opposite of the way the broader Roman society responded to poverty. Verhey summarizes the import of this most effectively:

> The collection was gift answering gift . . . it was illustrative of a community of friends, not clients and patrons. And it was illustrative of what may be called 'a manna economy.' After Paul has reminded the Corinthians of Jesus and commended 'equality,' he corroborates his argument by reminding them of God's provision of manna. 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little' (2 Cor 8:15; Exod. 16:18). Manna was a familiar eschatological symbol . . . and Paul did not empty the story of its economic associations. In a 'manna economy' hoarding is futile, loafing is foolish, daily needs are met, and God is trusted to provide. Such a 'manna economy' illustrates and participates in God's good economic future.[81]

V. Conclusion

So, does Paul develop anything close to an economic policy in 2 Cor 8:13-15, as Welborn contends? It is unlikely that he sought economic equality through redistributive action since he did not address the equally dire economic situation of the Macedonians (2 Cor 8:1-5). However, it is likely that he does address the main economic question in antiquity: does each member of the household

79 Cherian, *Toward a Commonwealth*, 192.
80 Hays, *Echoes*, 90.
81 Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 296-97.

have enough to survive for the day? The citation from the manna story suggests Paul's economic policy did not seek to address the macro-level inequalities evident throughout the Roman Empire though he did seek to tweak the system inside the Christ-movement, and form an economic social identity among non-Jews through Jewish traditions and Christ's example. However, all is not lost; Paul did offer a solution to that burning economic question: "Will everyone in the household get what it takes to survive the day?"[82] If placed within that context, then Paul does indeed offer crucial economic insights for those within the Christ-movement, called to live as an alternative community with a distinct ethos.

82 M. Douglas Meeks, "Economics in the Christian Scriptures," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, ed. Paul Oslington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

Paul's "Robust Conscience" and His Thorn in the Flesh

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Abstract

On the nature of Paul's "thorn in the flesh," Ralph P. Martin concludes, " The possibilities . . . fall into two categories, . . . human opponents and physical ailments;" and he notes that, while we ourselves may never know the truth, "in all probability, the Corinthians knew of what Paul spoke." I propose that they knew "of what Paul spoke" from their own experience or observation of Satan in the latter's function as an agent of God (1 Cor 5:1-5; 2 Cor 2:1-11). On the basis of the Satan theme common to these passages and 2 Cor 12:7, I propose that Paul's thorn is the prick of conscience, his lingering remorse (*re-morsus*, "re-bite") over his collusion in the stoning of Stephen and his persecution of the church. Such an interpretation I take to be reinforced by (a) the imagery for pain of conscience as a "prick," or "bite," or "gnawing" pain attested in ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, as well as in modern Western textual traditions; and (b) the convergence in 1 Tim 1 of the thematic of conscience, Satan, and Paul's past persecutory activity. Such a diagnosis of Paul's thorn as lingering remorse suggests a revision of Krister Stendahl's diagnosis of Paul's post-Damascus Road conscience as "robust." Rather, his formerly, misleadingly robust conscience is now healthily "chastened," and informs his use of "conscience" language in, e.g., Romans and the Corinthian Correspondence.

Fifty years ago, Krister Stendahl challenged the view that Paul had found in Christ the solution to his introspective conscience, a conscience "crushed" by the judgments of a law whose demands he found impossible to fulfill.[1] To Stendahl, Paul

1 Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963), 199-215; repr. in the author's *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Phildelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 78-96.

enjoyed a "robust conscience" both as a Jew and as a Christian. His argument has been widely accepted among Pauline scholars.

I agree as to Paul's *earlier* conscience. I take at face value his own description of his earlier life in Gal 1:14, and his elaboration in Phil 3:5-6. But I believe Stendahl has misdiagnosed Paul's *Christian* conscience, which I would call *chastened*. Our difference is epitomized in our respective construals of Paul's thorn in the flesh: "a thorn [σκόλοψ] was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to *pummel me in the face* [ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ]" (2 Cor 12:7).[2] As for what that thorn signifies, R. P. Martin writes, "The possibilities . . . fall into two categories. . . . human opponents and physical ailments." He goes on to say, "In all probability, the Corinthians knew of what Paul spoke. We, however, are left on the outside of a two-way conversation. We will probably never know the truth"[3] I will argue a third diagnosis, with Adolf Schlatter who writes,

> [T]he blows to the face are above all a disgracing,[4] and this implies that the messenger assaults him as an apostle of the Accuser and holds up his sins before him. The blows of Satan's messenger suggest the sorrowful intensity with which Paul bore within himself the recollection of his misdeeds in Jerusalem, which left him with an inextinguishable feeling of unworthiness. (1 Cor 15:9)[5]

First, I shall briefly canvass allusions to these "misdeeds" in the Pauline tradition and elsewhere. Secondly, I shall adduce evidence for the "social imaginary" within which the Corinthians might naturally construe Paul's image of the thorn as connoting remorse or "pain of conscience." Third, I shall consider Paul's other references to Satan's activity in his Corinthian letters. Fourth, I shall identify a number of other thematic elements in Paul's letters more broadly that resonate with fresh import when taken in relation to his thorn as continuing pain over his former persecutory zeal. Finally, I shall return to assess the adequacy of Stendahl's assessment of Paul's conscience.

I. Paul's Persecutory Acts as Public Knowledge

Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15:9 that "I persecuted the church of God" appears again in Gal 1:13-14 and in Phil 3:6; it is echoed in Eph 3:8 ("less than the least of all the saints") and 1 Tim 1:12-16; and it becomes a leitmotif in the Book of Acts (7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1, 4; 22:7; 26:10, 14). These various epistolary confessions, and presumed counterparts in Paul's preaching and teaching, indicate three things: First, the

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the NRSV.
3 Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986), 415-16.
4 The verb κολαφίζῃ carries this connotation also in Matt 26:67//Mark14:65; 1 Cor 4:11; 1 Pet 2:20.
5 Adolf Schlatter, *Paulus der Bote Jesu* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1934), 667 (translation mine).

knowledge by others of these actions was widespread among nascent Christian groups. Second, Paul's actions did not lie dormant in his subconscious, but tinctured his consciousness, as part of his self-knowledge, such shared knowledge constituting a form of conscience—*conscientia* / συνείδησις—in its "weak" sense of "knowing-something-with-others-who-know." Third, in so far as this tinctured self-knowledge imbued Paul with a sense of his unworthiness, it constituted a "strong" form of conscience, where what one knows about oneself, and what one knows is known about oneself, impugns one's moral standing.

So, Paul writes, "I am the least of the apostles, unfit [ὃς οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς] to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am [εἰμι ὅ εἰμι]" (1 Cor 15:9-10). I note the contrasting relative clauses: ὃς οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς and εἰμι ὅ εἰμι. Paul's conscience of *unworthiness* to be an apostle is not obliterated, but it is assuaged, by his deeper sense of God's grace *enabling* him to be an apostle. This confession corresponds to Paul's confession in 2 Cor 12:7. On the one hand, the thorn; on the other hand, "My *grace* [χάρις] is sufficient for you."

In one line of interpretation,[6] this experience—of finding himself to be a sinner in his very striving to serve God according to the Torah—informs his most penetrating portrayal of the dynamics of sin, a deceptive dynamics leading to the cry, ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:7-24). At the same time, and more deeply, it is his experience of God's *grace* in the face of sin at such depths (Rom 5:8-11, 20) that grounds and in-forms his sense of his apostleship (Rom 1:5; 12:3; 15:15).[7]

II. Images of the Pain of Conscience in the Social Imaginary

I use the phrase, "social imaginary," in Charles Taylor's sense, as incorporating "a sense of the normal expectations that we have of each other; the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices which make up our social life." Prior to and deeper than formal conceptualizations, it operates at the level of ordinary people's imaginations, and is "carried in images, stories, legends, etc." As "both factual and 'normative,'" this sense assumes, even though

6 Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 444-45, 471-73. "The sentiment of hopeless misery resonates with Paul's admission in 1 Cor 15:9. 'For I am . . . unfit to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of Christ.'" See also J. Gerald Janzen, "Sin and the Deception of Devout Desire: Paul and the Commandment in Romans 7," *Encounter* 70 (2010), 29-61.

7 Granted, χάρις in these three passages carries the primary, more general connotation of a spiritual endowment for a specific commission; but given the circumstances in which Paul received this commission and endowment—his persecution of the very faith he was now to serve—the term in these three passages resonates also with the specific connotations it carries throughout Romans, most pointedly in 3:23-24. (See my remarks below on the connotations in Paul's use of the verb χαρίζομαι.)

it can never exhaustively grasp, "some notion of a moral or metaphysical order."[8] In this section, I offer evidence for my claim that imaging the pain of conscience as a sharp prick, or stab, or gnawing bite is a natural, pre-reflective part of the vocabulary of the social imaginary in biblical and surrounding, as well as succeeding, cultures. I shall trace such a usage backward in time.

(a) Our word "remorse" derives from *remorsus*, literally, "re-bite." Thus, Julian Barnes, in a recent novel, has a character observe, "Remorse, etymologically, is the action of biting again: that's what the feeling does to you. Imagine the strength of the bite when I reread my words. They seemed like some ancient curse I had forgotten even uttering."[9] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his play, *Remorse*, has a character, in the first scene, set the theme for the drama with the words, "REMORSE is as the heart, in which it grows. / If it be gentle it drops balmy dews / Of true repentance, but if proud and gloomy, / It is a poison-tree, that pierced to the inmost / Weeps only tears of poison."[10] In a familiar Western tale concerning The Fairy of Truth, this fairy, on the death of the king, furnishes his heir, Prince Darling, with a ring that is designed to prick the prince's finger whenever he does something wrong. And a medieval play is translated into English as *The Again-Bite of In-Wyt* (or conscience).

(b) The Hebrew Bible contains no term corresponding to *conscientia* / *συνείδησις*. James Dunn writes, "it is well known that . . . Paul draws the concept of *συνείδησις* ('conscience') from Greek usage." He goes on to note that "the concept (if not the experience) is almost wholly lacking in Jewish writings."[11] But the *experience* of conscience is most certainly articulated in "Jewish writings," expressed in *images* that are more deeply rooted in the social imaginary that I am here tracing. Psalms 38 and 7 provide rich examples.

Psalm 38 is a cry for divine help of one whose foot has slipped (v. 17) through foolish iniquities (vv. 5-6). The results are a pain felt deep in the body (v. 4); ostracism by friends and companions (v. 12); and gloating attacks by adversaries (vv. 13, 17, 20-21). This latter group, the psalmist says, "accuse me"[12] (v. 21); the

8 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2007), 171-72. I associate the "social imaginary" textually with John Hollander's notion of intertextuality imaged in his phrase, "the cave of resonant signification" (on which, see J. Gerald Janzen, "Toward a Hermeneutics of Resonance," in *When Prayer Takes Place: Forays into a Biblical World,* Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2012); and I associate it in an organic and evolutionary perspective with the "connectome" of current neuroscience.

9 Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 151.

10 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Remorse," in *Poetical Works* III, Part 2 (CC 16; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1075-76.

11 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 54, n. 16.

12 So translated in the ESV, NIV; "are my adversaries" in the RSV, NRSV. Ryan E. Stokes ("Satan, YHWH's Executioner," *JBL* 133 [2014], 251-70), takes the verb שטן to mean "execute," and not "accuse." I find his arguments unpersuasive.

verb being cognate with the noun שטן that figures in the Book of Job. But what the psalmist most deeply feels, and is most deeply exercised over, is God's disciplining rebuke (v. 2), experienced as piercing arrows (v. 3).

Psalm 7 opens with the plight of one under assault by pursuers (v. 1) and conscious only of having integrity (v. 8). Yet, aware of the possibility of having done wrong (vv. 3-4), the psalmist wishes success to those pursuers (v. 5). So the psalmist invokes God who tries the minds and "hearts" (v. 9).[13] For if one does not repent God has "prepared his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts" (vv. 12-13). Insofar as the wicked falsely accuse the psalmist, and their mischievous lies return on their own heads, God's "fiery shafts" will accuse their own "minds and hearts."

Job similarly experiences his friends' accusations as blows on the cheek (!) and the arrows of God's archers (Job 16:10, 12). Against the background of chapters 1-2, those human blows and divine arrows come as messengers of an accuser in whose understanding divine justice follows a remorseless logic of reward and punishment. But, while acknowledging he is not perfect, Job rejects accusations of a wrongdoing that would merit such overwhelming calamity, swearing, "My heart does not reproach me for any of my days" (27:6). The Septuagint, employing the Greek idiom for conscience, translates the verse, "I do not know [σύνοιδα] against myself any wicked action."

Further demonstrative of the experience of conscience are Isaiah and Sirach. Isaiah in the temple cries, "Woe is me, for I am pierced [κατανένυγμαι] through, for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5).[14] As Sirach has it, "happy are those who do not blunder with their lips and need not suffer remorse [κατενύγη] for sin"—literally, "is not pierced with pain for sin" (Sir 14:1).

(c) In the fifth century BCE, Euripides, in *Orestes*, dramatizes conscience as follows. When Menelaus finds Orestes sick and agitated, and pursued by "the furies," and asks after the nature of his sickness, Orestes answers, "my conscience, since I know[15] I've done a dreadful deed."[16] Quoting this line five centuries later, Plutarch goes on to say that such conscience,

> like an ulcer in the flesh, leaves behind it in the soul regret which ever continues to wound and prick it. For the other pangs reason does away with, but regret is caused by reason itself, since the soul,

13 The heart (כליה), literally "kidney," metaphorically connotes the "gut-feeling" of one's moral standing before God.

14 The "call" scenes of Isaiah and Saul/Paul are worth close comparison for the many elements they have in common, especially if we take the portrayals of Acts into account. It is intriguing, in such a comparison, to note the consonance between Isaiah's Septuagintal τάλας ἐγώ and Paul's ταλαίπωρος ἐγώ ἄνθρωπος in Rom 7:24.

15 Compare the same verb in Job 27:6.

16 Euripides, *Orestes*, (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), line 395 (pp. 156-57).

> together with its feeling of shame, is stung and chastised by itself. (*De tranq. anim.* 476) [17]

The images pile up—"wound," "prick," "pang," "sting/bite," "chastise" (the verb καλάζω, at the least, a resonant homophone of κολαφίζω in 2 Cor 12:7), and one's consciousness as suffused with shame—all without letup, since all this is in the way of *self*-accusation and *self*-reproach, from one's sense of the deep *logos* of things. Philo, too, repeatedly describes the convicted conscience with words for stinging or stabbing.[18]

When, then, the Corinthians read that Paul has been given a "thorn in the flesh" to "pummel him in disgrace" (κολαφίζῃ), they might naturally take this as referring to the pain of conscience. Such a reference would be reinforced by the figure of Satan in his familiar role as (over-zealous) accuser, especially in his other appearances in Paul's Corinthian letters.

III. Satan in Paul's Letters to the Corinthians

(a) In 1 Cor 5:1-5, a man's flagrant incest moves Paul to hand him over to Satan "for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of Jesus Christ." With Anthony Thiselton, I construe this as "judicial verdictive and directive illocutions which expel him from the congregation."[19] These "illocutions" would aim to evoke an answering sense of self-reproach,[20] so that "the offender, bereft of the approval and support of the community, will find his self-sufficiency and self-reliance eroded until he comes to reach a change of heart."[21]

The *organic* register, and *isolating* effect, of this reproach as "social pain," is illuminated by current neuroscientific findings that give images at the moral heart of a "social imaginary" even greater depth and force. Writing of "the painful sources of social bonds," Panksepp and Biven note that "[o]ur earliest social bonds, when firm and secure, nourish our psychological health for a lifetime," but that separation, or even the prospect of separation, gives rise (across mammalian species and even in young chicks) to distress and pain. Moreover, "[we] respond intensely to uncaring emotional gestures directed toward us; anything that hints at shunning or even milder forms of social exclusion is experienced as psychologically painful."[22] According to Naomi J. Eisenberger and Matthew D. Lieberman,

17 Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. VI (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 234-37.

18 E.g., *Philo* III (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 130), 100 (*Deus* 100); 101 (*Deus* 183); *Philo* VII, (LCL; 1937), 51 (*Decal.* 87).

19 Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 399.

20 Compare Philo's portrayal of conscience as self-reproach, in *Det* 23 (LCL II, 216-19); *Det* 58 (LCL II, 240-43); *Det* 146 (LCL II, 298-99); *Deus* 125-26 (LCL III, 72-73).

21 Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 85.

22 Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven, *The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human*

"Just as physical pain has evolved to alert us that something has gone wrong with our bodies, social pain is a similarly potent signal that alerts us when something has gone wrong with our social connections to others." They suggest that "social and physical pain share the same underlying system, and that this overlap has several consequences for the way these types of pain are detected, experienced and overcome."[23] With this we may compare Jacob Milgrom's remarks, in his aptly titled work, *Cult and Conscience*: "The ancients did not distinguish between emotional and physical suffering. The same language describes pangs of conscience and physical pains [among other texts Milgrom notes here Ps 38:2-11, 18-19]."[24] When, then, Paul can speak of a "thorn in the *flesh*, in Paul's "social imaginary" referencing one's organic self in integral relation to the organic selves of others in a psychosocial, symbolic nexus—the image may be taken to function both metaphorically and literally concerning the emotional and physical pain rendered by Satan's messenger.

How, then, would Thiselton's "judicial . . . illocutions," involving *reproach*, register on the offender? In the "social imaginary" of the day, as shaped by Scripture and ages-long social experience, it might well come as the fiery shafts of Ps 7 (cf. the "flaming arrows" of Eph 6:16). Such remorse, as a self-knowing consonant with the community's knowing, would already, *in that mode*, reconnect the penitent to the moral community.[25] But full "salvation" or restoration to utter wholeness of relations—including, perhaps, the full healing of the offender's painfully awakened conscience—apparently awaits "the day of the Lord."

(b) In 2 Cor 2:5-11, a penitent wrongdoer is in danger of being overwhelmed by excessive "pain" (λύπη), the pain of remorse (v. 7). The community has levied a severe punishment on him, probably some sort of "judicial verdictive and directive illocutions which expel him from the congregation." But now they are to *forgive* (χαρίσαςθαι) and *comfort* (παρακαλέσαι) him (v. 7). These verbs carry powerfully pointed connotations in Paul's own "cave of resonant signification."

The verb παρακαλέω makes its appearance, in this letter, with the stunningly powerful *berakhah* with which the letter opens (2 Cor 1:3-7); it and its cognate noun occurring no less than ten times. In the *berakah* this "admonition, exhortation, encouragement, comforting, consolation," abounds to counter the general human condition of affliction and sufferings. But insofar as it is grounded in

Emotions (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2012), 313-14.

23 Naomi J. Eisenberger and Matthew D. Lieberman, "Why it Hurts to Be Left Out: The Neurocognitive Overlap between Physical and Social Pain," (http://www.scn.ucla.edu/pdf/RT424X_C07-1.pdf), p. 110.

24 Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The ASHAM and the Priestly doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 7-8.

25 Compare Philo's characterization (*Somn* 1, 91 [LCL V 344-5]) of repentance as "younger brother of complete guiltlessness."

Christ's sufferings that abound "for us" (v 5), this παράκλησις implicitly embrag ces and counters the pains of awakened conscience. This is underscored by the opening characterization of God as "the Father of mercies [οἰκτιρμῶν] and the God of all consolation [παρακλήσεως]" (v. 3). These terms bracket, as it were, Israel's whole story, from its covenant foundations at Sinai, where God resolves the potentially fatal idolatry of the calf in God's self-disclosure as "a God merciful and gracious," to the prospect of its restoration after the exile, as Second Isaiah proclaims, "Comfort, comfort [παρακαλεῖτε, παρακαλεῖτε] my people, says your God," where these words, *speak to the heart* (so the Hebrew underlying "tenderly"), function in part to assuage Israel's conscience for the "sins" that incurred the exile. The importance of these foundationally and eschatologically loaded terms for Paul, as evidenced by their appearance in 2 Cor 1:3, is indicated also by the strategic rhetorical appeal, in Rom 12:1, to "the mercies of God," and, in Rom 15:4-5, by the way Paul summarizes the eschatological import of his Scriptures in the categories of "steadfastness" and "encouragement," these hope-inducing virtues coming as gifts from "the God of steadfastness [ὑπομονῆς] and encourageg ment [παρακλήσεως]." The way this last phrase echoes the *berakhah* in 2 Cor 1:3 further underscores how this whole complex of terms goes to the heart of Paul's theology—a theology grounded in his *experience* of God's mercy and παράκλησις in the face of his own grave sin.

What I am getting at is that the first person plural pronouns "we" and "us" in 1 Cor 1:3-7, like those in Rom 5:6-14, have Paul's own "I" at their heart. So, when Paul says in 2 Cor 2:11—identifying the root cause of the penitent's "overabundant pain" (περισσοτέρᾳ λύπῇ) in v. 7—that "*we* are not ignorant of [Satan's] designs, at the center of that "we" lies Paul's "I," an "I" who, plagued by the thorn, and praying that it be removed, received the Lord's answer, "my grace [χαρίς] is *sufficient* for you."

Given, then, how, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20), in the present instance Paul calls upon his addressees, in effect, to "abound all the more" in the *grace-of-forgiveness* toward this penitent sinner, as signaled in the fourfold reiteration of the verb χαρίζομαι, in 2:7-10 (NRSV supplies an implied fifth occurrence in v 10). But why—when the preferred word for forgiveness in the New Testament is ἀφίημι and cognates—does Paul choose the rare verb for forgiveness, χαρίζομαι? I suggest that, in dealing with the question of grave sin, and the "excessive pain" of a conscience awakened to its gravity, Paul works out of such a conscience that is nevertheless assuaged and sustained by divine χαρίς as embodied in "our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 13:13; 1 Cor 15:9; 2 Cor 12:9). Paul himself, I suggest, knows what it is to be overwhelmed by "excessive remorse;" and he knows that it is by God's χαρίς that one survives Satan's

excessive taunts and accusations. For him, the verb expressing forgiveness is, then, χαρίζομαι.[26]

For all Stendahl's misreading of Paul's Christian conscience, he has said something profound about conscience in general, in addressing the theme of "judgment and mercy" at a civil rights rally on Martin Luther King Day in 1972:

> The opportunity for repentance might seem to be a small thing to all except those who have even the slightest notion of the magnitude of their sin. Those who have a knowledge of the evil which they or their culture, or their country, or their wealth has caused—the consequences of which are irrevocable and are fed as poison into the world—they know the meaning of this mercy, this margin for repentance. . . . If the consequences last, is it really important that the individual or even the people repent? Yes, it is, for them, for God, and perhaps for the future. But *the guilt lies heavy*.[27]

The guilt lies heavy. Can one who has caused irreversible harm to others, in all conscience *want* to forget? The more sensitive such a conscience, the sharper the pain under the unsparing gaze of self-accusation, the implied or overt disapprobation of others, and the sense of heaven's just judgment. What would grace consist in? Forgetting what one had done? That would be immoral; a lie and a murdering of the truth. Grace, for Paul, is the ability to go on, despite the lingering pains of conscience, sustained by the grace of Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

(c) Finally, a cluster of items in 2 Cor 11 serve as a thematic run-up to the thorn. Paul has been dealing with opponents who challenge his apostolic credentials, compared with credentials of which they boast. He first mocks them in 2 Cor 11:5 as "super-apostles." Then in 2 Cor 11:13-15 he exposes them as "false apostles, deceitful workers,

> *posing* [μετασχηματιζόμενοι] as *apostles of Christ*.
> And no wonder, for even Satan
> *poses* [μετασχηματίζεται] as *an angel of light*.
> So it is not strange if his servants, also,
> *pose* [μετασχηματίζονται] as *servants of righteousness*."

The synonymous parallelism in the repeated verb suggests a similar synonymity in

26 Mindful of James Barr's strictures against overloading a word's given occurrence with connotations it legitimately carries elsewhere, I nevertheless follow Samuel Taylor Coleridge when he writes, "I include in the *meaning* of a word not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls. For language is framed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 115-16 (italics original).

27 Krister Stendahl, "Judgment and Mercy," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 104-105.

what Satan and these super-apostles pose as. Satan, in posing as an "angel [or messenger] of light," poses as a "servant of righteousness," while these super-apostles, posing as "servants of righteousness," operate as servants of Satan. This synonymity is analogous to Job's friends who, in their accusations, unwittingly serve the hermeneutics of suspicion of the Satan of the prologue. But what of the image here of Satan as an angel or messenger of light? The image of light appears also, in a context concerning conscience, in 1 Cor 4:1-5 where, not incidentally, Paul is defending his apostolic credentials against detractors:

> With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself [οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐμαυτῷ σύνοιδα[28]], *but I am not thereby acquitted.* [so much for the significance of a robust conscience!] *It is the Lord who judges me*. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will *bring to light* the things now hidden in darkness and will *disclose* the purposes of the heart. *Then* everyone will receive their commendation from God.

Paul's imagery of "light" here suggests what it means when Satan poses falsely as an angel of light. His proper, God-appointed office as awakener of conscience is penultimate and instrumental—to bring people to repentance so that they may be saved in the Day of the Lord. But in posing as an angel of light, and operating (as in Job) with a logic of strict and unrelenting judgment for sin, Satan presumes to speak with eschatological finality, pronouncing ultimate doom on the truly guilty, and, where he can, sowing seeds of false guilt. *For he is the ultimate hermeneut of suspicion*.

And I suspect that these "super-apostles" pose as servants of righteousness, in part, by pointing to Paul's moral stain, his moral "weakness," in having persecuted the church. He will shortly claim that stain as the very badge of his apostleship, bearing the stamp of the grace of God in Christ. Meanwhile, in thinking that their critique of Paul's moral stain makes them servants of righteousness, they show that they have not fathomed what the *gospel* means by God's righteousness as justifying the ungodly.

IV. Echoes of Conscience as Fire

Sandwiched between Paul's references to Satan in 2 Cor 11:14 and 12:7, Paul asserts a double-barreled rhetorical question containing an image that may in its own way signal Paul's lingering remorse. Concluding a catalog of things he ironically

28 This idiom, occurring only here in the New Testament, occurs in the LXX only in Job 27:6.

boasts about, he says in 2 Cor 11:29a, "who is weak, and I am not weak?" Then, as specifying the particular form of weakness that is coming to mind, he says in v. 29b, "Who is made to stumble [σκανδαλίζεται], and I do not burn (πυροῦμαι)?" It is often taken (e.g., in the RSV, NRSV, and ESV) that when others are made to stumble, Paul burns *with indignation*. But if so, I take it that he burns also with sympathetic *shame*, arising out of his own shame at having stumbled over the stone of stumbling that God had laid in Zion, a rock that would make people fall (πέτραν σκανδάλου), but a rock such that "whoever believes in him will not be put to shame" (Rom 9:33). That stone and rock is a crucified Messiah, which, Paul says (speaking out of personal experience), is "a σκάνδάλον to Jews" (1 Cor 1:23). So when he now says, "who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to *stumble*, and I do not *burn*?" I take him to speak in solidarity, out of his own experience of burning shame.

When we read this sentence that way, we suddenly hear fresh resonances in other Pauline references to fire. (a) In Rom 12:17 he counsels, "repay no one evil for evil," and again in 12:21, "do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." In saying that in this way they will heap "burning coals" (ἄνθρακας πυρὸς) on their persecutors' heads (12:20), he may intimate how the proverb (Prov 25:21-22) speaks to his own experience.

(b) In 1 Cor 3, addressing party rivalries oriented around supposedly competing apostles, Paul points out how he planted and Apollos built. Then he says:

> Each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. . . . If any one's work is burned up, he will suffer loss [ζημιωθήσεται] though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor 3:13-15)

In the verb ζημιωθήσεται I hear the ring of Paul's own experience. He had thought that in his zeal for God he was making such tremendous gains (Phil 3:7). But all he had thought to be doing for God, *especially* in his prosecution of the church (Phil 3:6), showed itself, in the light of his encounter with a crucified Christ, to be "loss" (ζημίαν) (Phil 3:7, 8). What, then, for Paul, is the *fire* of 1 Cor 3 but the purgative fire of a conscience that recognizes, in retrospect, that all his zeal for God had in fact accomplished nothing, for it had inflicted great harm on the very goals he was striving to serve? (c) And then, as echoed in Eph 6:16, there are the "flaming arrows" of the evil one, so named because he is a rogue accuser posing as ultimate judge.

V. Stendahl on Paul's Conscience: A Final Assessment

So I come back to Stendahl's blanket assertion as to Paul's robust conscience, not

only at the outset of his adult activity as a zealous Jew, but also as a Christian. In his comments on the thematics of sin in Paul, he writes,

> To be sure, no one could ever deny that *hamartia*, "sin," is a crucial word in Paul's terminology, especially in his epistle to the Romans. Rom 1–3 sets out to show that all—both Jews and Gentiles—have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. . . . Rom 3:21–8:39 demonstrates how and in what sense this tragic fact is changed by the arrival of the Messiah.

Then he turns to Paul's own case, as reflected in his references to his persecutory past:

> It is much harder to gage how Paul subjectively experienced the power of sin in his life and, more specifically, how and in what sense he was conscious of actual sins. One point is clear. The Sin with a capital S in Paul's past was that he had persecuted the Church of God. This climax of his dedicated obedience to his Jewish faith (Gal 1:13, Phil 3:6) was the shameful deed which made him the least worthy of apostleship (1 Cor 5:9). . . . [W]hen 1 Timothy states on Paul's account that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am number one [*hon protos ego eimi*]" (1:15), this is not an expression of contrition in the present tense, but refers to how Paul in his ignorance had been a blaspheming and violent persecutor . . . . Nevertheless, Paul knew that he had made up for this terrible Sin of persecuting the Church, as he says in so many words in 1 Cor 15:10: ". . . his grace toward me was not in vain; on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I but the grace of God which is with me."[29]

I find several elements in this assessment unpersuasive and, indeed, misleading. First, there is Stendahl's assertion as to the character of Paul's self-characterization in 1 Tim 1:15—that he is the foremost sinner whom Christ came to save. Paul's words there are not cast in the past tense, but in the present. Indeed, ὧν πρωτός εἰμι ἐγώ (of whom I am foremost) is striking for the way it parallels Paul's confession in 1 Cor 15:9: ὃς οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς. If Paul labors under a continuously present (εἰμι) sense of unworthiness to be an apostle, he labors, according to 1 Tim 1:15, under a similarly continuous present (εἰμι) sense of being a sinner. Secondly, Paul's repeated references to his past persecutions betray a conscience that seeks relief through public confession, a conscience on which, despite the

29 Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 88-89.

sense of God's grace in Christ, "the guilt lies heavy," to cite Stendahl's own more profound if general diagnosis. Third, there is almost a note of glibness in Stendahl's "Paul knew that he had made up for this terrible Sin." *Make up* for the harm one has caused? When their "consequences . . . are irrevocable and are fed as poison into the world"? If the energy Paul put into his apostolic labors was given further impetus by his sense of guilt for what he had done—by the thorn that acted as a spur—his own testimony is, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on (!)" (Phil 3:12). In any case, Paul's words in 1 Cor 15:10 do not refer primarily to what *Paul* has done, but to the *efficacy* of God's grace in and through such an unworthy apostle. It is this sense of his own human frailty as nevertheless undergirded by God's grace that enables him to extend the same sort of encouragement to his "beloved brothers and sisters" at the end of this chapter (1 Cor 15:58).

Conclusion

The thorn, stinging and burning under Paul's skin, is a chastening and salutary reminder that he is who he is by the grace of God. And that grace is sufficient. It is that sense of grace in his weakness that is the ground of his strength (2 Cor 12:9-10), and of his identification with all who are in any way weak (1 Cor 9:22), his sense of solidarity especially with the world's refuse and offscouring (1 Cor 4:13).

A robust conscience is an enviable state of soul. Or not. Saul of Tarsus found that it can be a deadly dangerous thing. His Torah-grounded persecution of the church and the church's Christ, in all the robustness of a clear conscience, stands as a warning to all religious zealotry, especially where it understands itself, like the early Paul, as a Scripturally-grounded servant of righteousness. Paul, we might say, spent the rest of his life as a "recovering zealot," graced by God and yet, as *one form of* that grace-in-operation, chastened in conscience. If we are to be "imitators" of Paul (Phil 3:17), the lesson may well be, "beware the person with a robust conscience!"

Tolkien and the Adventure of Discipleship: Imaginative Resources for a Missional Ecclesiology

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Abstract

Ecclesiology seems to be an area of perennial struggle for evangelicals. In the current Canadian context this struggle is intensified by the crumbling of Christendom and the pressures of late modernity. This essay argues that the Middle-earth literature of J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*) provides an important resource for imagining a missional ecclesiology that transcends the strictures of a Christendom mindset and faithfully resists the bifurcating logic of late-modernity. Leveraging the motif of the adventure of discipleship allows for the theological recovery of the unity of the identity and mission of the church and provides suggestive pathways towards the cultivation of a renewed evangelical ecclesiological vision.

"The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air. Much that once was, is lost, for none now live who remember it."[1] These words pronounced by Lady Galadriel at the beginning of Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* could also be appropriated as an expression of the uncertainty experienced by Canadian pastors and church leaders as they are confronted by the end of Christendom. This confounding set of circumstances has caused resignation and despair among some pastors and Christian leaders. Others have responded by frantically scrambling for the newest program or method that promises to reinvigorate their flagging congregations, while others have been driven back to the theological foundations of the church in order to re-consider questions surrounding ecclesial identity and mission. Out of this latter group has emerged a fruitful dialogue known as "the missional church conversation."[2] However, the conversation has encountered several formidable obstacles that have per-

1 *The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by Peter Jackson (Alliance Atlantis, 2001).
2 The seminal work being: Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

haps limited its impact upon local congregational life. While Christendom may be dying, the Christendom paradigm retains a voracious appetite for assimilating all thoughts and practices it encounters with the result that the term "missional" is now threatened with banality.[3] In some contexts the term "missional" has been separated from its theological underpinnings and simply serves as a sexy adjective connected to the latest fad in church programming. In other contexts the term "missional" is simply used as a synonym for "outreach" or initiatives aimed at societal well-being. In both of these cases the term has been domesticated by the bifurcating logic of modernity that unnaturally divides church life into compartments and then pits those compartments against one another. That the term "missional" should suffer such a fate should not be entirely surprising, for paradigm shifts, like the one envisioned in "the missional church conversation," require the transformation of the imagination. However, in its early years the "missional church" conversation has, in the assessment of one of the movement's founding voices, "remained a relatively theoretic and abstract academic conversation about the Church."[4] The academic and intellectual dialogue needs to be supported by proposals with imaginative purchase. This essay is intended to serve as a contribution towards that end. It is my contention that J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novels *The Hobbit* and the trilogy comprising *The Lord of the Rings* provide imaginative resources for developing a missional ecclesiology organized around the motif of the adventure of discipleship, which transcends the strictures of a Christendom mentality and the bifurcating pressures of modernity.[5]

The Bible presents to us the story of a people's journey with their God.[6] It is a journey made possible and continuously sustained by the God who comes to us in our weakness, bridging the gulf of our estrangement from Him and overcoming all of the roadblocks erected by our sin, in order to draw us into the Triune life of love. There is dynamism inherent to this life into which we have been drawn. Some of the earliest Christians referred to themselves as people of "the Way" (Acts 9:2).[7] In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul describes Chris-

3 In a recent interview, Darrell Guder, one the founding voices in "the missional church conversation," maintains, "I always say that the term 'missional' became a cliché with the speed of summer lightening." "A Conversation with Darrell Guder," *Missional Voice Newsletter* (Oct 2014): 12.

4 Allen Roxburgh, "The Missional Church," *Missional Voice* (Oct 2014): 8; previously published in *Theology Matters* (Sept/Oct 2004) and *Theological Digest and Outlook* (Mar 2005).

5 Those interested in engaging in extended theological reflection upon Tolkien's Middle-earth literature are encouraged to consult the following insightful and engaging works: Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle Earth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) and Fleming Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle-earth: Tolkien's Divine Design in the Lord of the Rings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

6 As a result, the use of the journey as a metaphor for the Christian life has had a long and distinguished history in the Christian theological tradition. Notable examples include references to Christians as *peregrini* (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.11), *viatores* (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.18.4) and pilgrims (John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*).

7 Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations will be from the NIV.

tians as being "led by the Spirit" (Rom 8:14). He also exhorts the Galatians to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16).[8] Paul's imagery resonates with the experience of the people of Israel who were led by the Lord through the wilderness to the Promised Land by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod 13:21-22). The Gospels themselves take the form of extended travelogues, as Jesus breathlessly leads his harried and bewildered disciples throughout Israel from one town to another, until they ultimately reach Jerusalem. In a sense the Gospels seem to be telling us that to be a disciple is to be on the road with Jesus. Or in the wonderfully provocative formulation of the theologian Stanley Hauerwas, "Christianity: it's not a religion, it's an adventure!"[9]

The adventure of discipleship begins with a call. Disciples do not appoint themselves. Dietrich Bonhoeffer goes to great lengths to emphasize this point in his treatment of Luke 9:57-62 in *Discipleship*.[10] This passage, in which Jesus turns away three potential disciples, is almost incomprehensible to us in our Canadian context where many churches are desperate for new blood in order to pay the bills and keep their doors open. Yet in this passage Jesus seems to be on some type of anti-membership campaign. Bonhoeffer highlights how the first potential new member sought to appoint himself as a disciple, the second heard the call of the Lord, but then attempted to set his own terms for discipleship, and finally the third attempted to both appoint himself as a disciple and set the terms for his discipleship. Of the latter Bonhoeffer says, "It is obvious at this moment that discipleship stops being discipleship. It becomes a human program, which I can organize according to my own judgment and can justify rationally and ethically."[11]

One chooses to go on a vacation, but one is summoned to participate in a quest. Christianity is an adventure, but as Hauerwas insightfully remarks, "it's an adventure we didn't know we wanted to be on."[12] This is quite apparent in rela-

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8 Translation mine. The pilgrimage motif inherent in the Greek phrase πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε is somewhat obscured by the translation, "live by the Spirit," offered by the NIV and NRSV.

9 Stanley Hauerwas, "Christianity: It's Not a Religion: It's an Adventure (1991)," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 522-35. The use of the language of "adventure" in connection with Christianity undoubtedly has a type of apologetic purpose for Hauerwas. In the de-storied context of modern Western society, people are languishing on account of having nothing to die, and hence, live for. This is perhaps accounts for part of the appeal of radical Islamic groups for young men in contemporary Western contexts. The apologetic potential of "adventure" for reaching men has been recognized by some popular Christian writers, but their construal of the Christian adventure seems to rest largely on culturally-conditioned accounts of gendered experience than on the material content of the Gospel itself. For example, see John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001).

10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 60-61.

11 Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 61.

12 Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 531.

tion to the hobbits that stand at the center of Tolkien's stories. Hobbits are by nature simple and unassuming people. They value stability and routine, and enjoy the simple pleasures of life. In fact, when the wizard Gandalf first encountered Bilbo and shared with him how much difficulty he was having finding someone in the Shire to go on an adventure, Bilbo replied, "I should think so—in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and I have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them."[13] Yet for some reason, Bilbo is appointed by Gandalf as the burglar who will steal the precious jewel, known as the Arkenstone, right out from under the nose of the terrifying dragon, Smaug. In a similar way, at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, it falls to Bilbo's nephew Frodo to carry the One Ring of Power to Mordor for the purpose of throwing it into the fires of Mount Doom—a fool's errand for which no sane person would ever volunteer.[14] However, we must remember that it was not Frodo's idea to volunteer for this dangerous mission, he had been called.

The intrusive call of God bursts onto the scene disrupting the lives of those who are called; setting them upon an adventure they didn't even know they wanted to be on. It has been this way since the beginning of the history of redemption. Old Abram was just minding his own business, sitting comfortably in his recliner reading the Chaldean Times, when all of a sudden the word of the Lord came to him. "Get up and go! Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Gen 12:1). Peter, Andrew, James and John were busy shining up their lures and mending their nets in anticipation of another ordinary day of work on the lake, when the Master appeared, saying, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:18-22). We can only imagine the dumbfounded look on old man Zebedee's face as he was left standing all by himself with nets in hand. Then there was the tax-collector Levi. Accountants are not generally known for their spontaneity or sense of adventure, but when the Lord walked by and issued the command, Levi leapt up and left his unbalanced ledgers behind (Mark 2:14).[15]

The adventure of discipleship begins with a call and, as it turns out, God does not seem to call the people that we might expect. Consider, for example, the biblical figures mentioned just a moment ago. Who would have pegged a senior citizen and his post-menopausal wife to be the parents of a mighty nation with descendents as numerous as the sand on the seashore? Or who would have figured that an unknown preacher from the backwoods of Galilee surrounded by an

13 J.R.R. Tokien, *The Hobbit* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 16.

14 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 60-61.

15 It has been brought to my attention that an influx of younger "adventurous accountants" is changing the face of the accounting profession. I hope they will excuse my playful employment of this old stereotype.

inner circle of twelve uneducated rednecks, outlaws, and a foreign collaborator for good measure, was the Messiah gathering around himself the reconstituted twelve tribes of Israel? The apostle Paul, himself a rather unusual choice for the office of apostle to the Gentiles, sheds light on God's peculiar *modus operandi* when he tells the Corinthians, "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him" (1 Cor 1:27-29).

By placing the humble, unassuming hobbits at the center of his stories, Tolkien signals that his imagination has been seized by this Gospel reality. Hobbits, often referred to as "Halflings" by the other inhabitants of Middle-earth on account of their diminutive stature, are the little ones of the world.[16] Hobbits are barely mentioned and hardly ever noticed by the great and the powerful of Middle-earth. These little ones are the last creatures that one would suspect to be called to participate in a quest of such importance. The hobbit Frodo seemed to recognize this himself. When the wizard Gandalf informed Frodo that he had been called to destroy the Ring, the hobbit protested, claiming, "I am not made for perilous quests."[17] Tolkien, himself, offers the following commentary on his work and the place of the hobbits within it: "And the world being after all full of strange creatures beyond count, these little people seemed of very little importance. But in the days of Bilbo, and of Frodo his heir, they suddenly became, by no wish of their own, both important and renowned, and troubled the counsels of the Wise and the Great."[18]

Reflecting upon the call of God which comes to the disciple, Bonhoeffer observes, "Everyone enters discipleship alone, but no one remains alone in discipleship. Those who dare to become single individuals trusting in the word are given the gift of church-community."[19] In other words, we could say that while each individual must respond to the call to discipleship, the proper subject of the quest is the company of disciples. While Frodo has his own particular responsibility as the bearer of the Ruling Ring, he is never left alone. The quest to destroy the Ring in the fires of Mount Doom is shared by a Fellowship composed of hobbits, humans, an elf, a dwarf, and a wizard. The success of their mission depends upon the members of this unlikely Fellowship learning to trust and depend

16 Ralph C. Wood preached a sermon entitled, "Christians as the Little Ones, the Hobbits of the World" at Good Shepherd Community Church in Toronto, Canada, where I was, at the time, serving as a pastor. It has subsequently been published in *Preaching and Professing: Sermons by a Teacher Seeking to Proclaim the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 92-99.

17 Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring*, 60.

18 Tolkien, prologue to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2.

19 Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 99.

on one another. This seems like a relatively tall order in light of the natural suspicion that elves and dwarves have for one another, yet by the end of the quest the graceful elf Legolas and the rough and rugged dwarf Gimli have become best of friends.[20] Here in Tolkien's presentation of the Fellowship, we hear echoes of Paul's great exclamation, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In Christ, the enmity which separates humanity from God and hence human beings from one another has been overcome. The work of Jesus, the friend of sinners, creates a community of friends. One of the identifying marks of the church in the New Testament is *koinōnia*, a Greek word meaning sharing, mutual participation, communion, which is sometimes even translated as fellowship. The fact that an accomplished linguist like Tolkien would choose the word Fellowship to describe the company of travelling companions is surely no coincidence. The *koinōnia* shared amongst members of the Fellowship is set in stark relief by the figure of Gollum, one of the most memorable and loathsome characters to appear in Tolkien's books. Gollum, whose name is derived from the sound of his disgusting, gurgling cough, was once a hobbit, but he was pulled into the orbit of the Ruling Ring.[21] Enslaved under the power of the Ring, Gollum suffered a deformation of heart and will, which was also reflected in the deformation of his appearance. He isolated himself from all personal contact, living in complete darkness inside of a cave deep within the Misty Mountains, where he "created a pseudo-community of Himself and the Ring,"[22] Gollum is as clear an illustration as one could ask for of the Protestant Reformers understanding of the fallen human being. The Reformers described the condition of the fallen human being as *cor curvum in se*—the heart turned in upon itself.[23] Under the power of sin, the human being resembles a black hole that in its egocentricity attempts to pull everything into its gravitational field.

When we recall the Protestant Reformers' understanding of the condition of sinful humanity, the important place of the church in the economy of salvation is thrown into sharp relief. The Church is the place where sinful human beings turned in upon themselves are turned inside out by the love of Christ so that they

20 Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien*, 130.

21 One of the most memorable aspects of Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* was the computer-generated figure of Gollum. Gollum's simultaneous enthrallment with and entrapment by the Ring produced some of the most memorable moments in the film, including Gollum's mantra-like address of the Ring as "my precious!"

22 Wood, "Christians as the Little Ones," 98.

23 The phrase seems to have come to prominence through Martin Luther's 1515-1516 lectures on Romans. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Ray A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 71. It is also one of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's favourite images for describing the plight of fallen humanity. See for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 137.

live for God and for one another in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The *koinōnia* shared between the members of the body of Christ is the fruit of the great reversal of Sin accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This means that the church is not simply an add-on or an afterthought to the Gospel, like the bonus paring knife thrown in when one purchases a set of indestructible scissors through a special television offer. Rather, the church is internal to the Gospel itself. As Bonhoeffer wrote in his doctoral dissertation at the astonishingly young age of twenty-one, "*the church is both a means to an end and at the same time an end in itself*."[24] Protestants of evangelical persuasion have generally done a good job of affirming the first part of Bonhoeffer's sentence, but the reality of the latter part has often been overlooked or neglected. In his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer later expanded upon his earlier assertion, insisting that the church is a means to an end in that the entirety of its corporate life is "oriented toward effectively proclaiming Christ to all the world."[25] However, as the church participates in the new humanity of Christ's being-for-others, Bonhoeffer adds, "the goal of the divine mandate of proclamation and the beginning of its fulfilment have already been reached."[26] The missiologist and patron-saint of "the missional church conversation" Lesslie Newbigin pointed in a similar direction when he wrote, "The church lives in the midst of history as a sign, instrument and foretaste of the reign of God."[27]

The church-community is a gift of God to the world, but the life of this company of disciples is dependent upon the grace of the gift-giving God. The Scriptures depict the Holy Spirit as the pre-eminent giver of gifts.[28] The Spirit lavishly bestows gifts upon the company of disciples so that they have everything they need to faithfully follow Jesus in every given context.[29] The reception of gifts is integral to the ongoing life and success of the Fellowship in the *Lord of the Rings*. This is obvious right from the beginning of the quest, for the thought that a fellowship of a mere nine people, including four hobbits, could overcome the vast and menacing war-machine of Mordor is rather ridiculous. In order to complete their quest the Fellowship must learn to rely on gifts beyond their own

24 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 261.

25 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 404.

26 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 404.

27 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 110.

28 For a theology of the Holy Spirit shaped around the motif of gift and gift-giver, see Tom Smail, *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

29 The statement "God gives his people everything they need to follow him" is a central contention of Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells in their essay "The Gift of the Church and the Gifts God Gives It," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 13.

fashioning. Although the members of the Fellowship are beneficiaries of numerous gifts over the course of their journey, for the purpose of our investigation we will narrow our focus to three types of gifts that are given to them.

The first are the gifts given to the members of the Fellowship by Lady Galadriel, one of the fairest and most powerful of all the elves.[30] Upon departing from the magical forest of Lothlorien, each of the members of the Fellowship is given a unique gift by Lady Galadriel. Aragorn is presented with a scabbard and a brooch, Boromir receives a belt of gold, Merry and Pippen are given small silver belts, a bow and a quiver of arrows is bestowed upon Legolas, Sam is the recipient of earth from Galadriel's garden, and Gimli's wish for a strand of Galadriel's hair is graciously granted. Last, but not least, Frodo receives from Lady Galadriel the light of Eärendil, a vial of light from the star of Eärendil caught in the waters of Galadriel's fountain. Galadriel presents the light of Eärendil to Frodo with the following benediction, "May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out."[31] The gifts not only prove to be essential at various points for the continuation of the quest, they also serve as beacons of hope anticipating the day when the darkness which enshrouds Middle-earth will be lifted. These gifts of hope given to the Fellowship by Lady Galadriel are reminiscent of the whole new wardrobe given to the Church by the Spirit. Amongst the items waiting to be unwrapped and tried on are a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, shoes of peace, a shield of faith, a helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:14-17). It's all the company of disciples needs in order to stand firm against the forces of darkness, for they have already been defeated. Although they may rage and conspire against the community of disciples, they cannot ultimately triumph over them, for the victory belongs to the Lord.[32]

The second set of gifts we will consider are those that Frodo receives from his uncle Bilbo. Before setting off for Mordor, Bilbo presents Frodo with a mithril-coat. Mithril is a special type of chain-mail that is "as supple almost as linen, cold as ice, and harder than steel."[33] He also gives Frodo the elvish dagger known by the name of Sting, which glows blue when it is in the vicinity of orcs and goblins. These items, which Bilbo acquired over the course of his own adventures, as depicted in *The Hobbit*, proved to be invaluable to Frodo and on at least one occasion were instrumental in saving his life. These gifts, passed on from one generation of hobbits to another, provide the opportunity to reflect upon gifts that are passed onto disciples by those who have gone before them in the faith.

30 Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 364-67; Rutledge, *Battle for Middle-earth*, 134-37.
31 Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 367.
32 For an evocative treatment of the Christian call to resistance in the face of a culture determined by the moral reality of death, see William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 117-33.
33 Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 270.

The theological argument I would like to advance is rather straight forward: if Christ is risen from the dead and if he is faithful to his promise to never leave nor forsake his people, then the history of the church must be taken seriously as the theatre within which the Holy Spirit has lavished his gifts upon the faithful. The most obvious of these gifts of the Spirit mediated through ancestors in the faith are the Scriptures, but surely there is much that the contemporary company of disciples can learn from those who have walked before them in the way of the Lord. A form of evangelical *ressourcement* is needed.[34] However, it seems like the church today, having been caught up in our broader society's obsession with the new, may be in danger of neglecting or even forfeiting the great treasures that the Spirit has given to the church over the centuries. Like Frodo, the company of disciples can never know for certain when their future will depend upon a gift of God passed down from their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents in the faith.

The third gift given to the Fellowship that I would like to highlight is the gift of lembas. Lembas was a special gift given by the elves to the Fellowship as they were preparing to set out from Lothlorien.[35] Lembas is a type of thin wafer-like elvish bread that stays fresh for extraordinarily long periods of time. A single bite of lembas is enough to fill the stomach of a grown man. Lembas sustains Frodo and his friend Samwise Gamgee for the majority of their journey. Without it, Tolkien writes, "they would long ago have lain down to die . . . It fed the will, and it gave strength to endure, and to master sinew and limb beyond the measure of mortal kind."[36] In the elven dialect, lembas means waybread or journeybread.[37] This elven waybread is suggestive of the manna with which the Lord fed the people of the old covenant as they journeyed through the wilderness and also of the bread broken by the people of the new covenant in response to the command of their Lord (Exod16; Matt 26:26-30). Both of these meals point to the Lord's provision of bread for his pilgrim people as they journey toward the Promised Land. Both of these moveable feasts point towards the one who is the bread which "comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33).

In light of the gracious character of the God who lavishly bestows gifts on His people, even the gift of His very self, it becomes imperative that disciples learn to be the type of people who are able to receive and depend on the gifts of God. Talk of becoming a certain "type of person" directs us to the importance of char-

34 Productive work in this vein is being done by evangelical theologians in Canadian contexts. An example is Hans Boersma's recent book, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). The question of the reception of this type of theological work in evangelical congregations is not as easy to ascertain.

35 Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 360-61.

36 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 915.

37 Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 360; Rutledge, *Battle for Middle-earth*, 329-30.

acter. Character is the answer one gives to the question "What is Jonathan like?"or "Tell me about Jennifer, what is she like?" In order to speak about someone's character one must employ the language of the virtues. "Virtues," according to the helpful definition of Glen Stassen and David Gushee, "are character traits that are stable, consistent, and reliable."[38] The Christian theological tradition following the towering intellects of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas has spoken of both the cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, justice, and courage, and the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.[39] Aquinas offers an important theological qualification of the virtues by reminding us that charity or love is the form of the virtues.[40] In other words, without love the other virtues are nothing. Only as the other virtues are taken up *by* and directed *to* the love of God in Christ can we speak of them as being Christian virtues. Protestants have often worried that talk of the virtues reinforces a type of works-righteousness.[41] However, this is a misunderstanding of what Aquinas is saying. For by insisting that charity or love is the form of the virtues, Aquinas is not emphasizing works-righteousness, but rather he is insisting that the virtues are the result of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our lives in bringing forth the enduring fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit, however, does not work independent of us. While the virtues are not "works" in the sense of being meritorious achievements before God, the development of virtue does require work and effort. Athletic training metaphors appear in several places in the letters associated with the apostle Paul as a means of emphasizing the important place of discipline in the Christian life (1 Cor 9:24-27; 1 Tim 4:7-8). The disciplined training regimen of an athlete serves to prepare their minds and bodies to face the rigours of competition. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon helpfully expand upon the place of discipline in the adventure of discipleship. "Discipline isn't something like will power, to do things we do not want to do. Rather, discipline is the acquisition of habits through which we would not do anything other than what we are delightfully doing. Christian disciplines give us joy, because through discipline we acquire power that otherwise we would not have had."[42] In order to be a dis-

38 Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 60.

39 For a helpful introduction to the virtues from an evangelical Protestant perspective, see Jonathan R. Wilson, *Gospel Virtues: Practicing Faith, Hope and Love in Uncertain Times* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998).

40 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.23.8.

41 Bonhoeffer seems to have shared this concern about virtue-talk, even though his own construal of Christian discipleship as being drawn into conformity with Christ seemingly necessitates some sort of account of the virtues. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 114, 151-52, 279.

42 Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 112.

ciple, one must be disciplined by the story and practices of the Christian community. It is no coincidence that our English words disciple and discipline come from the same root. It is easy today to fall into the trap of thinking that discipline is contradictory to grace. However, the church is called to be both a gracious community and a disciplined community. It is, in fact, a gracious community only to the extent that it is a disciplined community. For grace without discipline, is not grace at all, but only mere tolerance—a form of what Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace."[43] Similarly discipline without grace, is not discipline but only lifeless legalism. The recovery of the church as a disciplined community of grace is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing Christians in our contemporary Western culture.

The Fellowship that sets out on their quest to take the Ring to the fires of Mordor quickly discovers that it too must be a disciplined community. Food must be rationed, the trappings and comforts of the Shire must be left behind, individual desires and courses of action must be submitted to the good of the Fellowship as a whole and to the goal of the quest itself. The success of the company depends on the development of virtues congruent to the nature of their quest. The members of the Fellowship must cultivate perseverance so that they are empowered to carry on in hope when all hope seems lost.[44] They must learn to rely on wisdom in discerning the good in the midst of confusing and difficult situations.[45] Perhaps most interestingly, the fate of Middle-earth turns out to have been bound up with the mercy that the members of the Fellowship have learned to show towards the despicable Gollum.[46]

Through their participation in the quest each member of the Fellowship is profoundly changed for the good. Perhaps the greatest transformation is seen in the character of Samwise Gamgee. As his name reflects, Samwise is a "simple" hobbit who, back in the Shire, served as Frodo's gardener. The wizard Gandalf appointed Sam to accompany Frodo on the quest when he discovered Sam eavesdropping on their conversation.[47] Sam is a plump hobbit who relishes his meals; a culinary craftsman who grieves at the prospect of missing out on his richly-prepared delicacies. The quest for Sam is an extended journey of renunciation, until he ultimately finds himself stripped of all the trappings of comfort, all alone with the exhausted ring-bearer Frodo on the desolate slopes of Mount Doom. In an

43 "Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of the community; it is the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ." Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 44.
44 Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien*, 104-107.
45 Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien*, 77-87.
46 Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien*, 148-55.
47 Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 60-63.

echo of Luke's description of Jesus setting his face towards Jerusalem, we are told that, "Sam's hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone or steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue."[48] And so, Sam lifted Frodo onto his back, and Tolkien tells us, because "some gift of final strength was given to him," Sam was able to carry Frodo up the daunting slopes of Mount Doom.[49] In doing so, Ralph Wood suggests that "Sam becomes almost a Christopher, a Christ-bearer in his portage of Frodo up the mountain."[50] This ultimately is what the formation of character and the development of the virtues is all about. Not that disciples might become better or more accomplished people, but that the Holy Spirit would conform them to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer clearly sounds this note at the beginning of his final chapter to *Discipleship:* "To those who have heard the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ is given the incomprehensibly great promise that they are to become like Christ. They are to bear his image as the brothers and sisters of the firstborn Son of God."[51]

All of these aspects of the adventure of discipleship—the call which the members of the Fellowship have received, the community they have been placed within, the gifts which they have been given, the character which has been formed in them—are not for their own sake, as if the members of the Fellowship were on some type of introspective journey of self-fulfillment. Rather the Fellowship has been propelled upon a quest that is undertaken for the sake of "the deliverance of the whole of Middle-earth from a ravenous Enemy."[52] On the other hand, the success of the quest itself is inseparable from the calling of this peculiar company and the development of their character as a people who have learned to rely on the gifts that come to them from beyond themselves. When this is translated into ecclesial terms it means that the identity and mission of the church are inseparable. It signals the end of the troubling binary logic of modernity that has so influentially infiltrated the contemporary church. This false logic divided church life up into internal and external dimensions and suggested that congregations must decide between focusing their energies on worship *or* mission, dis-

48 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 913. The allusion to Luke 9:51 becomes even more suggestive when one considers the historic tendency of preachers and exegetes to read the Lucan passage in conjunction with Isa 50:7: "Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame."

49 Tolkien, *Return of the* King, 920. In this case, and throughout her book, Rutledge does an excellent job of highlighting how Tolkien's use of the passive verbal construction points to the presence of divine activity. Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle-earth*, 333.

50 Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien*, 110.

51 Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 281.

52 Rutledge, *Battle for Middle-earth*, 24.

cipleship *or* evangelism, spiritual formation *or* outreach. This thinking is fatally flawed because it forgets that discipleship is an adventure and that the journey that the company of disciples is called to undertake is for the sake of the world. The adventure of discipleship is the spiritual location to which the church has been called within the unfolding drama of the *missio Dei*. Tolkien once commented that fantasy, at its best, can serve as "a far-off gleam or echo of the Gospel in the real world."[53] With respect to developing a missional ecclesiology, this is surely one instance where truth is stranger than fiction.[54]

53 J.R.R. Tolkien, "*The Monsters and the Critics" and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 155, quoted in Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien*, 107.

54 This essay originated in an address given to the national conference of the Congregational Christian Churches in Canada in the summer of 2014. I would like to thank those who attended the conference for their feedback and their encouragement to prepare the address for publication.

BOOK REVIEWS

The *Canadian Theological Review* gratefully accepts book review requests as well as book review submissions from potential contributors and publishers. All review submissions should be of academic quality and should conform to the standards laid out within the principal scholarly handbooks of style. We are also happy to provide publishers with prepublication reviews of their submitted material upon request. Review submissions, requests, and publisher volumes relating to the broader disciplines of Theology, Scripture, and Culture can be directed to the book review editor at the following address:

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Engaging with Keller: Thinking Through the Theology of an Influential Evangelical. Iain D. Campbell and William M. Schweitzer, eds. Darlington, England: EP Books, 2013. ISBN: 9780852349281. Pp. i + 240. $15.99 (USD).

"Unlike most suburban megachurches, much of Redeemer is remarkably traditional. What is not traditional is Dr. Keller's skill in speaking the language of his urbane audience."[1] This statement from the *New York Times* sums up the appeal of Timothy Keller[2] to modern-day Reformed preachers, as well as the reason why he is seen by some as a danger to Reformed theology and doctrine. *Engaging with Keller* is more concerned about the latter: "We think that…difficulty arises from the very challenging task that Keller has assigned himself—to communicate the old orthodoxy in 'relevant' ways to a contemporary, postmodern audience" (17).

In the General Introduction, ground rules are clearly laid out. The editors acknowledge Keller's intention to teach orthodox truth, but question whether his teachings are, biblically speaking, accurate expositions of Reformed faith (17). They want to elicit "fruitful public debate" and "to provoke one another to a great-

1 Michael Luo, "Preaching the Word and Quoting the Voice", *New York Times*, February 6, 2006, accessed January 28, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/26/nyregion/26evangelist.html?pagewanted=print.

2 Dr. Timothy (Tim) Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York.

er conformity to Christ and his word" (7). But do they succeed in proving Keller's failure to transmit Reformed truths? Does this publication help towards sanctification, or will it unnecessarily discredit an influential Reformed pastor?

Seven key areas receive attention. In chapter one, Iain Campbell examines sin, particularly Keller's rebranding thereof. Campbell points out the centrality of the doctrine of sin to the gospel, saying that it should be defined as breaking God's law and not merely as "that which replaces God in giving a person his or her identity" (36-37), making idolatry basic with all other sins resulting from it. Campbell says the nature of sin is not idol-making, but law-breaking, with the manufacturing of idols as a result; Keller's definition ignores the fact that man is "enslaved in a condition of implacable hostility to God" (45). Campbell concludes that this "rebranding of sin" leads to "a truncating of the gospel" (61).

Campbell's core question—whether breaking God's law is a result of idolatry/self-centeredness, or vice versa—is undermined when he himself describes sin as that which robs God of his glory. If God does not get the glory, who does? Defining sin as robbing God of his glory is in line with orthodox faith: Augustine,[3] Luther, and Calvin all subscribed to this definition, and Keller himself points out that he gets his view of sin as idolatry from Luther.[4] Campbell quotes Don Carson to show the importance of a full-orbed view of sin, but this quotation seems to strengthen Keller's view rather than his own, as Carson also describes sin as "rebellion against God" (61). Ultimately, law-breaking and self-centeredness are two sides of the same coin, namely rebellion. If Keller's view is one-sided, he may be guilty as charged, but care should be taken if it all just boils down to emphases. Campbell's hinting that Keller's view of sin as idolatry negates the necessity of penal substitution further harms his analysis: a genuine attempt to understand Keller's views from all his work reveals the contrary. If Keller truly negates penal substitution, why would it be named as one of the doctrines which he "hits very hard" in his preaching?[5]

In chapter two, William Schweitzer discusses the interrelated doctrines of judgment and hell (65). He acknowledges that these topics feature in Keller's preaching but questions the way in which Keller communicates them to postmodernists. Schweitzer worries that Keller is filling these doctrines with new content. He questions Keller's view that hell is self-chosen and consequently that

3 Augustine of Hippo, "A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter," in *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings* (ed. Philip Schaff; trans. Peter Holmes; *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 5; New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887).

4 Keller, "Preaching the gospel in a post-modern world" (D.Min program: Reformed Theological Seminary, 2002). Accessed February 1, 2010 at http://www.eucatastrophe.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2006/12/keller-on-preaching-syllabus.pdf (unpublished), 93.

5 Keller, "Preaching the Gospel," 140.

God does not condemn people to hell: Keller apparently assigns more force to the free will of man than to the power and sovereignty of God. Keller is at fault when he teaches that man stays in hell by his own choice, for it is God who sends people there and decides they must stay there. Keller ignores God's personal role and initiative in judicial sentencing or inflicting wrath. Schweitzer criticizes Keller for depicting the punishment of hell as "the absence of God." He uses the *Westminster Confession* to support his view that hell is rather God's awful and wrathful presence (82-84). In this way Schweitzer says Keller is wrong in using Jonathan Edwards' sermon on "The Importance of Hell" to support his views (84-89).

Schweitzer clearly outlines the doctrines of judgment and wrath. His main question is whether or not God's wrath and judgment are active or passive[6]—but must one choose between these two? Does the Bible not teach both? According to Schweitzer, Keller's use of Romans 1:24 does not soundly support the passive aspect of God's judgment and wrath, even though he himself has to admit to some sort of passive aspect from the same text (72-73). And Schweitzer's use of the *Westminster Confession* seems rather one-sided. A careful reading reveals that the *Confession* (5.6) could also support Keller's view of this passive aspect.[7] Schweitzer offers too little evidence to question Keller's orthodoxy on this matter. At most one might concede that Keller, in some of his publications, over-emphasizes this passive aspect. Deep engagement with Keller's sermons convincingly shows that he is not weak on wrath and subscribes to orthodox views.[8]

In chapter three, Kevin Bidwell focuses on Keller's use of the "divine dance" as a Trinitarian image. Bidwell is concerned that the introduction of new language to articulate the Trinity will lead to misunderstanding and feels that Keller's image "does not refer to the eternal movements of begetting and procession or of unity being based on consubstantiality" (103). He thinks there is little scriptural or historical support or support for the use of this image, calling it an "etymological fallacy" in reference to *perichoresis*, with six problematic implications (106, 109, 113-25).[9] Bidwell acknowledges Keller's commitment to the ortho-

6 The same argument applies to the critique that Keller represents hell as being removed from the presence of God. There are two sides to this concept as well. Being in hell indeed means to be in the wrathful presence of God as suggested by Schweitzer, but it also means being removed from the gracious presence of the Father. Is that not the reason why Jesus called out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46 ESV).

7 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 614.

8 See Tony Reinke, "Is Tim Keller weak on wrath?", March 1, 2014, accessed March 17, 2014, http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/is-tim-keller-weak-on-wrath. Also cf. the following sermons by Keller: "The wrath of God" (John 18:1-14); "The God of love and fury" (John 3:13-36); "The dark garden" (Matt 26:36-46); "Why life doesn't make sense?; His judgment" (Matt 11:20-30); "The parable of the beggar; On hell." (Luke 16:19-31); "Hell" (Luke 16:19-21); "Accepting the judge" (John 12:41-50); "The dangerous God" (1 Pet 3:1-13).

9 (1) It does not uphold the unity of the Godhead based on essence; (2) The 'divine dance' movements portray the wrong kind of motion within the Trinity; (3) It does not promote a balanced

doxy of this doctrine and his desire to convey it. It is therefore sometimes difficult to establish whether he is criticizing Keller's use of imagery or his belief in the Trinity itself.[10] The "divine dance" image indeed has limitations when trying to illustrate the Trinity, but this implies that every image ever used to explain it should also be critiqued, and these will all fall short of explaining the Trinity in its truest sense.

In chapter four, Peter Naylor examines Keller's view on the twofold mission of the church in the world, i.e. (1) to preach the gospel and (2) to do justice. In response, Naylor lays out five fundamental principles for mission.[11] He reckons Keller erred in assigning the work of governing bodies to the church. Keller further misses the fact that Old Testament law was not meant to impose the covenant culture and the law's justice upon other nations, as it was given to regulate the life of the covenant people: the New Testament church's support to the poor was directed towards its members in correspondence with the Old Testament phrase "within your gates," while the word "stranger" was used in the Old Testament not merely to depict immigrants (Keller's point of emphasis) to Israel, but those who enter the context of God's people (149-51). Keller's interpretation of jubilee traditions is also questioned. Naylor indicates that these laws were meant to preserve a person's property and not to relativize it or to redistribute wealth. The duties of church and state may not be confused. Naylor therefore emphasizes the principal task of the church, namely to preach the gospel, and suggests that Keller is diluting this task by focusing too much on social action (161).

Are these considerations indeed denied or even ignored by Keller? The real question seems to be whether Keller is so obsessed with social justice that it distorts his view of the most fundamental of human needs. From the same passage (Isa 42:1–7) Naylor uses to conclude that Keller's view of justice is horizontal and thus not truly biblical, Keller himself convincingly shows in a sermon that justice is to be understood vertically as a broken relationship with God which results in broken relationships with our fellow man.[12] Although a distinction should be made between the role of the church as an institution and as an organ, it is not

presentation of the Trinity as found in the Nicene Creed; (4) It undermines the divine order between the persons of the Godhead; (5) It has the danger of tri-theism; and (6) It undermines the authority structure that is directly related to redemption.

10 For Keller's views on the Trinity, confer the following sermons: "The triune God" (Matt 28:16-20); "The glory of the triune God" (John 17:1-6, 20-26); "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:9-13).

11 139-44: (1) The church may not act without a mandate; (2) There are three spheres: family, nation and church; (3) We must distinguish between the body and its members; (4) We must distinguish between members and office-bearers; and (5) We must distinguish between Jesus's mission and the church's mission.

12 Timothy J. Keller, "A bruised reed he will not break" in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

always clear-cut. Where Naylor accuses Keller of distorting the vocation of the church in these two aspects, he himself tends to overemphasize the distinction.

Next, Richard Holst evaluates Keller's hermeneutical practice. Holst starts by critiquing Keller's use of parables—especially that of the Prodigal Son—as interpretative tools to understand other parts of the Bible, thus reversing the principle of using clearer parts of Scripture to interpret less clear parts (180). Perhaps, he suggests, Keller could not find other scriptural support for his view on certain doctrines, so he reverted to using less clear passages such as parables. Holst then focuses on Keller's use of "secondary aspects of a text as the main warrant for what he wishes to teach" (182-86). He thinks some of Keller's implications drawn from certain texts are not "good and necessary consequences" but rather logical fallacies[13] (186-89).

Holst accuses Keller of depending upon certain suppositions in order to get to his desired interpretation, but fails to show convincingly why Keller's interpretations are based on suppositions; only his evaluation of Keller's interpretation of Numbers 12 is convincing enough. At one point Holst admits that Keller acknowledges the very point he is accused of ignoring. If he had evaluated Keller's hermeneutical principles by reference to his preaching syllabus, Holst might have come to a different conclusion, perhaps seeing a more consistent adherence to Reformed hermeneutical principles.[14]

Schweitzer, returning in chapter six, asks: "Does Tim Keller bridge the gap between creation and evolution?" Keller seems, to him, to be moving away from "the proper domain of faithful apologetics" by trying to accommodate evolutionism within the Christian faith; Keller does not sufficiently emphasize the difference between "objective findings of biology" and a "grand theory for everything" (195). He wants Keller to be clearer on the difference between "science" as objective data and as the consensus pronouncements of scientific authorities. Schweitzer accuses Keller of calling into question a literal reading of Scripture and shows why he thinks that Keller's (apparent) view that God created through evolutionary processes is not true to biblical teaching (202-204).

Schweitzer draws heavily here on Keller's paper, "Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople."[15] Even though Schweitzer's concerns about Keller's stand on evolution may be valid, he sometimes wrongly considers some of what is writ-

13 He feels for example that Keller's explanation of the older brothers' role in the parable of the Prodigal Son is not self-evident in the context of Luke 15 and could not therefore be exegetically defended.

14 Cf. Keller, "Preaching the Gospel," 16, 19, 26, 29, 189. See also Keller, "Creation, Evolution and Christian Laypeople" (*The Biologos Foundations*, 2009), 9, accessed May 14, 2014 at http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf.

15 Keller, "Creation, Evolution and Christian Laypeople," cited immediately above.

ten in this paper as Keller's personal views.[16] Schweitzer rightly points out the dangers evolution poses for certain doctrines.[17] He admits, however, that Keller is not ignorant of the impact evolution theory could have on these truths, though he describes himself as an "old age progressive creationist" who believes in a literal Adam and Eve (205). Keller knows the danger a non-literal Adam and Eve would pose on the teachings of Paul, for example.[18]

This essay fails to recognize Keller's own uncertainty on some aspects of this topic. In the "Creation" paper, Keller frequently uses phrases such as "it could be," "it is possible," and "there are many who…" From Keller's sermon on Genesis 1 it is clear that he is not at all comfortable with every aspect of evolution.[19] Even though Keller makes his views on the authority of the Bible very clear,[20] Schweitzer tries to discredit him in this regard (202 n. 18). Although some of Schweitzer's conclusions seem valid, others seem to be based on guesswork and unsubstantiated deductions.

In the final chapter, D. G. Hart examines Keller's Presbyterian ecclesiology. He says Keller is not well known "for practicing or defending a Presbyterian form of ministry" or restricting ecumenical ties to those who are of the same faith and practice (211-12). Hart also questions Keller's relationship with leaders of non-Reformed churches.[21] He tries to find out whether membership of the institutional church still matters for Keller and in what way, if any, his ministry is influenced by his ordination vows. Hart thinks Keller sees Presbyterian theology and ecclesiology as barriers to some of the work in his congregation; questions Keller's view on church ministry and kingdom territory as foreign to Reformed teaching; criticizes the pragmatism of his "urban theology";[22] questions Keller's involvement in an interdenominational organization such as The Gospel Coalition; and typifies Keller's overall ecclesiology as being "highly pragmatic and fluid" (225).

But these questions prompt counter-questions to Hart. For instance, Hart's proposal that a single church (or denomination) should be sufficient for the spiritual

16 When Schweitzer, for example, tries to show that Keller suggests a compromise between biological evolution and orthodox faith, he quotes from the *Biologos* paper as if it were entirely Keller's own words. A careful reading of the paper, however, shows that Keller starts the precise paragraph referred to with these words: "However, there are many who question . . . ." Although it may seem to be his view, it is unfair to ascribe these words exclusively to Keller and to deduce from it his ultimate viewpoint.

17 E.g., original sin, the justice of God, the basis of redemption, the identity of Christ, and the gospel itself.

18 Keller, "Creation, Evolution and Christian Laypeople," 10-12.

19 He says, for example, "If you would like to know my view on things, I'm very, very skeptical about the theory of evolution as a macro theory, as a theory that says everything evolved from the tiniest life forms."

20 Keller, "Creation, Evolution and Christian Laypeople," 7-9.

21 E.g., John Piper and Don Carson.

22 220: i.e., Keller's emphasis on the importance of cities for the spreading of the gospel.

renewal of all of New York City, might be seen as elevating the denomination—Presbyterianism—as the ultimate factor in renewing a city, rather than God himself. Keller's focus on cities as a more effective way of spreading the gospel may be called pragmatic, but also strategic. Is it unbiblical or even foreign to Presbyterianism to be strategic? Calvin employed the same kind of strategy when ministering in Geneva.[23] In critiquing Keller for working with people of a non-Presbyterian background, Hart appears to make the term "Reformed" something of a shibboleth. Keller's view on church governance is also questioned, but it seems as if Hart did not consult Keller's sermons on texts dealing with matters of ecclesiology.[24] "Being in competition with his denomination's own church-planting aims" (224) seems to be the biggest concern, not Keller's Presbyterianism.

In the end, one tends to question the title, *Engaging with Keller*. Would it not imply a greater effort to get him to explain himself on matters of such importance? One of the editors evidently confronted Keller on the main issues covered in this book, in a substantive 2008 email exchange (22). Even though this establishes that Keller declined the invitation to respond, it still begs the question as to why the editors did not make more use of these email correspondences in order to give Keller a better hearing.[25] One of the more severe critiques of this book is the lack of reference to a substantial and fair representation of Keller's sermons, as noted above, or even his preaching syllabus on the various topics here.[26] When dealing with such important matters, it is wise to verify one's statements more fully.

At times, readers may feel confused as it is not always clear whether it is only Keller's presentation of orthodox theology that is problematic, or whether more is at stake, as they are encouraged not to "emulate his teachings."[27] Engaging with Keller on the mentioned topics can easily be interpreted as actually not so irenic as was proposed, but rather a real attack on his integrity. This book might there-

23 Cf. Philip E. Hughes, "The Geneva of John Calvin", *Churchman*, 1964, accessed August 19, 2014, http://archive.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_078_4_Hughes.pdf.

24 Cf. for example his sermon on Eph 4:1-16, where he states: "What do you do, O Presbyterians (since we're a Presbyterian church), when you elect elders? What are you doing when you elect elders? You're only recognizing the gifts God has given. You're only recognizing the people God has appointed. That's all. If you understand that, if you end up getting elected you will have absolutely no pride about it, and if you are not elected or you're just one of the people who do the electing, then you'll say, 'This is God's appointment.'"

25 For example, when in chapter three Bidwell comes to the conclusion that Keller denies any ordering within the Godhead, he places the following footnote: "One of the editors raised this issue with Keller after *Reason for God* was published, and he specifically affirmed order within the Godhead: 'I do not subscribe to an egalitarian view of the Trinity at all'" (131 n. 49). If this book truly was an "engagement" with Keller, then surely this statement ought to be discussed in the main body of the text!

26 Keller, "Preaching the Gospel", 15-17, 69-146.

27 Cf. David Robertson, "*Engaging with Keller*: A Review", August 2013, accessed November 30, 2013, http://theweeflea.wordpress.com/2013/08/22/engaging-with-keller-a-review/.

fore not achieve its stated objective of a "fruitful public debate . . . to provoke one another to a greater conformity to Christ and a greater conformity to his word" (7).

Despite its weaknesses, the publication is the first real attempt on a scholarly level to explore and test the validity of the theological views of one of the most influential contemporary preachers within Reformed tradition. At times this publication does put forward valid questions on some of Keller's teachings and it should be appreciated for the way it clearly articulates the Bible's teaching on some of the topics. If one wishes, however, to find a truly balanced view on Keller's teachings as discussed, *Engaging with Keller* alone will not suffice.

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Marxist Criticism of the Hebrew Bible. Roland Boer. 2nd ed. London/New York: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2015. ISBN: 9780567228413. Pp. viii + 317. $39.95 (USD).

Roland Boer has provided a fresh edition of his *Marxist Criticism of the Bible*, which is now a dozen years old. In his preface, he notes that as compared to the previous volume, *Marxist Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* has chosen to eschew laborious summaries of the various theorists in favour of sustained interaction with the biblical text (vii). As a result, Hebrew Bible students will find that the book contains a sufficient amount of provocative exegesis, while still serving as an accessible avenue to the key ideas and fundamental works of a dozen seminal Western Marxist scholars.

Boer's introduction thoughtfully provides a preparatory glossary of several "touchstones" of the wide-ranging field of Marxist literary criticism. The concepts of dialectics, subjective and objective historical forces, base/superstructure, ideology, class conflict, and mode of production are all helpfully unpacked and given provisional definitions in a manner perfectly lucid to the non-specialist. After briefly summarizing each essay in the volume, he states his purpose for the book: "I want to argue for the viability of Marxist literary criticism in biblical studies across a range of texts. The result is a series of studies that form some of the pieces of what may be termed the ideological structures of the dominant modes of production under which the Hebrew Bible was written" (21-22).

The first chapter applies Louis Althusser's understanding of ideology to the emergence of Israel in Genesis. Boer extrapolates four key points regarding Althusser on ideology: its ahistorical character, its ability to interpellate (summon) a subject, its function of representing the "imaginary relationship of individuals

of their real conditions of existence" (27), and its concrete nature. The material foundation of ideology is provided by an "ideological state apparatus (ISA)," which can exist in various spheres of society as a contested site of the power of the ruling class. Moving to the text of Genesis, Boer identifies the key tension in the family ISA as being the continually delayed promised emergence of Abraham's line, in contrast to the rapid reproduction of other peoples. With a particular focus on Rebekah's barrenness in Genesis 25, he suggests the state ISA contains a contradiction in that its appearance seems unlikely. Meanwhile, the religious ISA involves Rebekah's subjection to Yahweh in the act of interpellation, but can be extended to cover the material circumstances of the narrative's composition, which Boer identifies as being the chronic shortage of workers for palace or temple estates.

Chapter two is entitled, "Antonio Gramsci: The emergence of the 'Prince' in Exodus," and it uses Gramsci's reading of Machiavelli's *The Prince* as a hermeneutic for Moses in Exodus 32. Working directly from Machiavelli, Boer notes the paradox of Moses's "cruelty" often being more loving than his "clemency" (59), as Aaron's acquiescence to their desire to make a golden calf ultimately leads to them being taxed and punished, but Moses's selective slaughter is the means of their salvation. Additional insights gleaned from Gramsci disclose Moses's hegemonic role as a religious reformer, and the complicated interdependence of Yahweh, Moses, and the people.

In the third chapter, Boer engages with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's interpretation of the scapegoat ritual. Focusing on the duo's concepts of resistance (particularly its virtuality, or its creation by the very act of state repression) and "the signifying regime of the despotic state" (76) which is always in conflict with an outside force, Boer first locates various features of resistance in the counter-signifying "nomadic war machine" organized by Moses in Exodus 18. Regarding Leviticus 16, Deleuze and Guattari find the state and the outside force blur together as the scapegoat symbolizes this "other" that the system necessarily both expels and requires to exist.

Boer utilizes Terry Eagleton to read Ruth in the fourth chapter. His alignment of the traditional critical questions of ethnicity, class, and gender serves to explain the ideological erasure of Ruth from the narrative: her alien, labourer, and female status renders her a mere "means to an end" (114) for the lineage of Israel. Chapter five, "Henri Lefebvre: The production of space in 1 Samuel," begins with a delineation of Lefebvre's categories of types of space, followed by his analysis of different conceptions of space linked to various modes of production throughout history. While the sanctuary acts as a central sacred space around which the other elements of the text are organized, Hannah's womb is invisible to Eli the priest, and thus is either a location of resistance or a feature that inevitably succumbs to

the larger system. On a larger scale, the conflict between the sacred economy of the cult at Shiloh (of which Samuel becomes a part) and the centralization of worship in Jerusalem in the Deuteronomistic History is also noted, as this conflict is a necessary part of the sacred economy.

Chapter six is entitled "George Lukács: The contradictory world of Kings," and utilizes Lukács's work on the nature of novels as reflecting "a world abandoned by God" (140) and containing clashes of genres that reflect real-world tensions. This theory is applied to the relationship between prophetic narratives and royal narratives in Kings. As compared to the amount of space devoted to most kings (except Solomon), Elijah and Elisha are given lengthy treatments (suggestive of blessing befitting their obedience), and they escape death, in contrast to the rulers. Boer links the tension between freedom and divine control to the tension between the economies of Israel and its more advanced neighbors.

Theodore Adorno's work on paradoxes in Kierkegaard is applied to Isaiah 5 in the volume's seventh chapter. One of the tensions it finds in the passage is that while the text uses general terms that would suggest it is addressing the entire population, the practices it condemns are only those performed by landowners, which suggests only the wealthy are responsible for enacting justice. Chapter eight applies Ernst Bloch's concept of protest atheism to Ezekiel, where Boer argues that anomalous portrayals of Yahweh are in fact utopian protests against the deity.

In the ninth chapter, "Antonio Negri: Job, or bending transcendence to immanence," Boer engages with Negri's own interpretation of Job, which involved both placing the dialogues of the biblical book in conversation with modern philosophy as well as relating it to the struggles of leftist activism. Most importantly, Negri's philosophical interest in the strain between measure and "immeasure" (214) can be correlated with the tension between order and chaos in Job. Somewhat more removed from the content of the text itself is the exploration of Frederic Jameson and Psalms in chapter ten. Applying Greimas's semiotic square to the Psalter leads Boer to emphasize the tension between the fluid and the concrete aspects of the Psalms with the final conclusion that this points to a further tension between divine presence and absence, but the end result is not quite convincing.

In chapter eleven, "Walter Benjamin: The unknowable apocalyptic of Daniel," Benjamin's work on allegory and his nonreferential understanding of language are put to work on the opaque prophecies of Daniel, with the conclusion that their meaning is ultimately elusive to modern readers because of a radical difference between ancient and modern economies. A concluding chapter summarizes some of Boer's thoughts on the sacred economy of ancient Southwest Asia.

In conclusion, Hebrew Bible scholars may profit from this book as a gateway to important Marxist thinkers. Their rich and diverse thought continues to exist as

a profitable set of conversation partners in biblical studies, particularly in the contemporary context where the problems of capitalism are as relevant as ever. As a collection of exegetical treatments, the book's greatest strength is perhaps the consistent format of each chapter. For those used to working with different theoretical frameworks, the essays will certainly isolate aspects of the texts that may have gone unnoticed before. Hopefully this will serve to inspire the innovative application of different theoretical frameworks, resulting in new, creative readings of the biblical text.

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The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context. Myron Bradley Penner. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. ISBN 9780801035982. Pp. x + 180. $19.99 (USD).

The task of defending the faith in Western Christianity has faced a number of challenges since the rise of modernism. Today, in our fragmented, postmodern world, the church questions not only what it means for Christianity to be "true" and "reasonable," but what role apologetics plays—if any role at all.

In *The End of Apologetics,* Myron Penner (an Anglican Priest in Edmonton, Alberta) sets out to revamp the apologetics enterprise for a new era. As the title indicates, Penner contends that Christian apologetics—at least as it has been traditionally defined and implemented—is ripe for rejection. This is largely due to faulty assumptions and the inability to effectively communicate in today's world. As the Introduction notes, "apologetic arguments and natural theology are linguistic survivals from the practices of classical Christianity that have lost the context that made them meaningful and relevant" (6).

In the first chapter, Penner carefully surveys the postmodern "condition" (13) and brings it to bear on the success of Christian witness. Using William Lane Craig as a backdrop, he argues that the classic approach to apologetics "can be told only by someone thoroughly immersed in the perspective of modernity" (26). This is problematic because much of the world is no longer communicating from such a perspective (note the chapter title, "Apologetic Amnesia"). Further, there are several epistemological problems inherent to modernism, giving rise to an "apologetic positivism," where "it is as if Christians have a moral duty to believe only those aspects of Christian doctrine that have a sufficient apologetic basis" (44). This, Penner contends, is an unrealistic expectation and an unprecedented attitude in the larger history of Christian apologetics.

The natures of truth claims, fideism, and modern thought are probed further in

the second chapter. "What counts as rational," Penner writes, "is always embedded within a set of power relations operative within a given social structure" (56). This undermines the popular claim to a "neutral" and/or "universal" set of abstract principles constituting the "rational." In a discussion of Kierkegaard's thought, we read that "nihilism is located right at the very heart of modernity as the result of its distinctive brand of secularity" (57). Thus, traditional apologetics is (ironically) operating from an anti-Christian basis to begin with. In Penner's words, "the problem with modern apologetics is that Christian thought has already given up far too much by merely acknowledging and responding to the modern challenges to Christian belief, as if these objections had some sort of claim on the legitimacy of the faith" (58). The result is that "modern apologetics really attacks Christian faith itself, subverting its own legitimacy" (76).

In chapters three ("Irony, Witness, and the Ethics of Belief") and four, criticism is toned down in order to explore a myriad of intersecting topics. Among the numerous talking points and contributions (e.g., from Rorty, Ricoeur, Barth, et al.), the bulk of the discussion involves Kierkegaardian thought on truth and how the OT prophets and NT apostles actually did their work of proclaiming the gospel (e.g., "Genuinely prophetic speech . . . does not first justify itself or its message according to the standards of human reason," 93). The controversial topic of truth is tackled in the next chapter. Penner boldly suggests that it is better to think of truth as "edifying" rather than the traditional notion of "correspondence" (110). Nevertheless, many readers will be reassured when Penner insists that he does "not believe we need to throw out the concept of truth simply because the modern concept is problematic and deeply troubling. My suggestion is that when we wish to talk about truth objectively, we do so in terms of a truth spelled with a lowercase t—which represents the kind of finite, fallible knowledge available to us humans." (115). In another balancing act, Penner states, "I do not deny there is a real world that exists independently of human minds or suggest we never encounter reality. I do not think, for example, that all we ever experience are our own thoughts" (121). After further elaboration on this point comes a discussion about how Christian witness depends on truth's "public performance" (126-27) more than "rational apologetic procedure" (128).

Finally, chapter five addresses a number of topics less commonly discussed in apologetics, such as its political aspects, "rational coercion" via argument and verbal persuasion (144-45), the depersonalizing language Christian apologists use in reference to "faceless unbelievers" (149-50), and the non-neutrality of the so-called "public square" (158). Readers may find this chapter particularly humbling, as it uncovers many of the hidden agendas involved in the larger arena of theological argumentation.

In my assessment, Penner's book is particularly effective in outlining the posi-

tive contributions postmodern thought can offer in formulating apologetic methodology, as well as the severe weaknesses of modernist-based, traditional apologetics. In this respect, the book reminds me of the well-tempered, critically-minded writing of others on this topic such as J. Richard Middleton, Brian Walsh, and Philip Kenneson in their contributions to *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*.[28] In contrast to other Christian theologians sympathetic to postmodernism (e.g., Grenz, Franke), Penner does not casually speak of the "demise of foundationalism" and generally retains a more balanced approach. Additionally, chapter five's discussion is particularly enjoyable since it draws attention to obscure—but important—issues.

Lack of originality is perhaps the book's principal weakness. This is true not only when compared to the aforementioned authors regarding postmodernism and apologetics, but with respect to several 20th-century theologians, too, regarding the problems of traditional apologetics. For instance, Penner's thesis that "In the name of defending the faith by attacking the so-called enemies of the faith, modern apologetics really attacks Christian faith itself, subverting its own legitimacy" (76) was made in Abraham Kuyper's popular 1898 *Lectures on Calvinism* ("apologetics have advanced us not one single step. Apologists have invariably begun by abandoning the assailed breastwork, in order to entrench themselves cowardly in a ravelin behind it"). This concern was further expanded in Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*.[29]

Additionally, Penner's claims that (a) traditional apologetics is "secular apologetics" (36) by virtue of its assumption of modern thought and (b) that religious neutrality is impossible, have been established innumerable times by Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, Greg Bahnsen, and K. Scott Oliphint. Yet presuppositionalism as a whole merited only a passing remark in a footnote (and a misleading one at that) on page 36. Nevertheless, those who have become disillusioned with the rationalist, disconnected feel of today's apologetic enterprise will find a number of helpful and necessary signposts in *The End of Apologetics*.

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28 Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm, eds., *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995).

29 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, John Vriend, trans.; John Bolt, ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 1:515: "Apologetics as it has often been practiced was mistaken, however, in that (1) it detached itself from the Christian faith and thus put itself outside of, above, and before theology; (2) it so separated believing from knowing that religious truth came to rest in part (in natural theology, in exegetical and historical theology, etc.) or in toto, on purely intellectual proofs; and (3) that, as a result, it began to foster exaggerated expectations from its scientific labor as though by the intellect it could change the human heart and by reasoning engender piety."

Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach. Hans Boersma. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780198728238. Pp. xviii + 284. $40.00 (USD).

In *Embodiment and Virtue*, Hans Boersma has produced a major contribution to historical theology. Specialists in patristics will find this an enjoyable read; non-specialists, a challenging but no less rewarding one. My own interest is perhaps a case in point. Focusing primarily on New Testament theology and imperial criticism, and lately on spiritual formation, I was drawn to this title as a counterpoint to my recent discovery of (and CETA conference paper on) Mechthild of Magdeburg, whose theology and discipleship—like Gregory's, some nine hundred years earlier (ca. 334-395)—were substantially shaped by virtue(s). So while I approached Boersma's book with only a casual acquaintance with Gregory, I've benefited enormously from it and am sure that others will too.

Boersma's thesis is simple enough, though it hints at the depth of the study that follows:

> The word ἀναγωγή has such a broad semantic range in Nyssen's thought that it reaches even beyond the realm of exegesis. Gregory's overall theology should be characterized as "anagogical." . . . [T]he purpose of life itself is anagogical in character. We are meant to go "upward" and "forward," both at the same time, so as to participate ever more thoroughly in the life of God. Anagogy, then, is not just an exegetical practice or hermeneutical approach for St. Gregory. Rather, anagogy is our own increasing participation in divine virtue and thus our own ascent into the life of God. (3)

Establishing that Gregory's anagogy is what leads us (and Boersma unapologetically speaks of "us" throughout, encompassing ancient and postmodern readers, including himself) ever deeper, and toward the spiritual, in exegesis and in the virtuous life, Boersma unpacks this thesis over the course of the book. But since embodiment has frequently taken centre stage in scholarship on Gregory, each of the seven chapters through which Boersma shrewdly guides us—in what might be seen as an imitative practice of anagogy!—pivots on a different sense of the "body," so that the interplay of embodiment and virtue accumulates further meaning and nuance as we progress.

Chapter one, "Measured Body," extends the introduction's argument that embodiment, though vital for Gregory, is not the best lens through which to see his writings. Rather, Boersma thinks Gregory "struggles with the limitations that time and space impose on human beings": does he ultimately "affirm the meas-

urements of created time and space—the extension (διάστημα) of created life—or does he insist that in some ways they are obstacles to be overcome?" (19) In Gregory's sermons, particularly the Eastertide *De tridui spatio,* the eschaton (inaugurated in Christ's resurrection) begins to undermine our subjection to measurement and "the chronological nature of time" (23). Even at this stage, the book's questions are complex, generating some promising statements about Gregory's Christology. Chapter two, "Textual Body," turns to exegesis, positing Gregory's interpretation of Abraham's story as anagogically iconic: as Boersma describes it earlier, "Abraham's journey from sensible knowledge via intellectual knowledge to faith finds its counterpart in the reader of Scripture, who is supposed to 'turn' from the historical or surface meaning of the text to its spiritual level. Thus, exegetical ascent mirrors the soteriological ascent from this-worldly diastemic time and space" toward Paradise; so an eschatological ascent occurs too (14). Boersma's study of Gregory's hermeneutic—transposing from the literal to the spiritual sense of texts by means of this "turn" (στροφή, 61), with simultaneous exegetical and moral facets—is absorbing, though when he examines Gregory's study of Psalms, the Psalms of Ascent are curiously absent.

Three subsequent chapters, "Gendered," "Dead," and "Oppressed Body," further diversify Boersma's argument in complementary ways. "Gendered Body" argues that Gregory's homilies on the Song of Songs engage us "in an anagogical transposition as the way to rid ourselves of our 'tunics of hide' in order to put on the 'holy garb' of Christ"—which Boersma cleverly terms a "dress reversal rather different than the gender instability" that some postmoderns have located in Gregory's thought (87). Again, the author skilfully traces the impact of Christology, with the resurrection foremost, upon Gregory's ontology; and the apparent instances of gender instability, he wryly argues, are "part of a larger body of reflection on anagogical entry into an angelic (and thus genderless) or virginal life" (111). With that in mind, it comes as less of a surprise that "Dead Body" actually concerns virginity as much as death. "Since death constitutes for Gregory the ultimate anagogical ascent into the virginal life of God, he sees grief as a passion that is problematic, even if great pastoral skill is required in dealing with it" (117)—and even as he himself struggled, theologically and emotionally, to come to grips with his grief over his sister Macrina's death. As with the previous chapter's examples from the Song of Songs, Boersma selects evocative illustrations from Gregory's work, highlighting Mary's virginity as putting an end to death, a victory recapitulated through ascetics' chastity (124). "Oppressed Body" addresses the treatment of those who are enslaved, sick, and/or poor: "the imitation of God's character serves as a practice of anagogical engagement" (147), a corrective to neglecting those who bear God's image and mistaking pleasure and well-being as ultimate, not temporal, ends.

Two final chapters broaden the argument's scope even more, detailing "the renewal of humanity by means of anagogical transposition," beginning, in "Ecclesial Body," with "what role embodiment plays for Gregory in his understanding of the ecclesial dimension of salvation" (178). Baptism, the Eucharist, and mutual submission (or more precisely, subjection, since Gregory works from 1 Corinthians 15) all receive consideration here, as does Gregory's interpretation of the Song of Songs again. Chapter seven, "Virtuous Body," will interest even non-patristic scholars for its discussion of divine grace and human effort, in the course of a larger argument on deification, the deeply participatory imitation of Christ, and the assistance of the Spirit. Here, Gregory's "impatience with the diastemic character of this-worldly existence" (215) comes through even more keenly than in the previous chapters, so much so that Boersma risks begging the question with it; but this seems intended only to help us empathize with Gregory, and ultimately it is an effective strategy.

Boersma's text is more academic than devotional, but there are points here that satisfy both purposes. One example is the accent he places on Gregory's interpretation, in *De vita Moysis* 121, of "God's permission for Moses to see his back (Exod 33:23) . . . as an injunction to follow God rather than to oppose him[:] 'virtue is not perceived in contrast to virtue. Therefore, Moses does not look God in the face, but looks at his back'" (237). What a profound lesson in virtue-driven discipleship! But I think Boersma may have missed an opportunity for critique here. Does Gregory not consider the significance of God's recitation of *his own imitable virtues*, in the theophany that follows in the next chapter of Exodus? If not, why not? And what are we to make of what Gregory *does* say, in the same portion of the *Life of Moses*, interpolating Jesus's commands to "follow" in Luke 9:23, 18:22? Such lingering questions as these are likely among the reasons why Boersma concludes his work with an "epilogue" that is deliberately both critical and inquisitive. If we agree with him, for instance, that "Gregory's theology of participation needs to be deepened so as to include more genuinely the material world as in some way participating in the life of God," then perhaps some among his readers will join him in fleshing out this "participatory ontology" (249) in future reflective scholarship.

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Citizenship: Paul on Peace and Politics. Gordon Mark Zerbe. Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780920718933. Pp. xii + 276. $19.00 (USD).

One upshot of postmodernity is that it encourages authors to disclose, for their readers' benefit as well as their own, those places where their autobiographical contexts and agendas may colour their interpretive lenses. Amid the ruins of Christendom, such disclosures may become almost obligatory for writers in biblical and theological studies. In my reading experience, Mennonite authors tend to model this practice of self-disclosure well; I first noticed it when I reviewed Thomas Yoder Neufeld's *Recovering Jesus* (Brazos/SPCK, 2007) for the *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, and I appreciated it again in this collection of articles from Gordon Zerbe. From the outset, Zerbe is frank about his own experience with the competing commitments of dual citizenship, and how this affects his reading of civic imagery in Paul. Then again, he shows that he can be constructively critical of his own background: while "discipleship (or 'following,' German 'Nachfolge') has been the core watchword in my own Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, I find that word easily susceptible to an individualist interpretation or practice" (2). So when he makes purposely provocative choices—for instance, translating *politeuesthe* (Phil 1:27) as "politicize," and "be a citizen body and practice your citizenship in a manner worthy of the good tidings of Messiah" (4, 20)—we can show a discerning appreciation for Zerbe's situation as an interpreter, Paul's situation as a writer, and our own situations as readers.

Of the twelve essays included, half are reprints, the other half newly published, but they have been synthesized into a largely coherent whole. Following the introduction, part one, "Loyalty," consists of three chapters. The first, "Citizenship and Politics according to Philippians," sets the book's themes in place, including an opening review of the developmental stages of scholarly discussion on Paul's politics. In addition to its insights into Philippians, the chapter affords comparisons with Romans and (less explicitly) with the Thessalonian correspondence, too. Chapter two, "Believers as Loyalists," probes the "anatomy" of Paul's use of *pistis*, in multiple layers: lexical, sociopolitical, juridical/commercial, and a combination of philosophical, theological, historical, and rhetorical senses. Noting the deficiencies in English that complicate translation—the verb "trust" lacks "a corresponding participle 'truster'. . . . But we do have a word for people who are loyal, 'loyalists'"—Zerbe finds this "in most instances…a far better rendering of Paul's meaning than the translation 'believers,'" and in "fidelity," or "loyal trust," a suitable replacement for the prototypical "faith" of Christ (34, 37). This emphasis on confessed allegiance gives way to chapter three, on Paul's politics of wor-

ship. Here, Zerbe builds on the "loyalist" language of the previous chapter, showing loyalists' gatherings to be simultaneously personal, commensal, political, and liturgical acts.

Four chapters comprise part two, "Mutuality." Chapters four and five schematize unity and diversity in Paul's messianic body politic, and partnership and equality inferred from his economic theory and practice. Again, consistent language helps to unify these chapters with those preceding: "the Messianic community is that body politic patriotically loyal only to Lord Messiah Jesus. Incorporation into this global political community (*ekklēsia*) is by an act of 'loyalty' (a pledging allegiance which includes conviction/belief and trust)" (67). Moving from letter to letter, Zerbe's analysis of Paul's redistributive economics effectively conveys its visionary, participationist, and survivalist aspects. Chapter six, "(Modest) Challenges to Patriarchy and Slavery in Paul," marshals evidence that will be familiar to Pauline scholars, but Zerbe wisely adds that Paul's concern for such sources of division is *pastoral*, and that he "seems to have chosen his battles," working hardest on the Jew/Gentile divide and somewhat less rigorously on male/female and slave/free divisions (107). Chapter seven correlates Paul's "eschatological ecclesiology" and ecumenical associations. I particularly appreciated the connections Zerbe drew here between 1 Corinthians 15 and a universal rule more radically welcoming than Rome's *oikoumenē*—and not just because his translation of *katargein* ("de-activate," not "destroy," 112) agrees with my dissertation (though that certainly didn't hurt).

Part three, "Security," begins with the function of Paul's military imagery (chapter eight) and his "Ethic of Nonretaliation and Peace" (chapter nine). Zerbe engages questions on multiple fronts concerning military imagery, seeking its rhetorical purpose, the context(s) that may have inspired it, the attitude behind it, its relationship to Paul's "peace-promoting ethic," and the possibility that its apparent endorsement of violence might undermine the "validity or usability" of Paul's rhetoric today (124). Readers must judge for themselves whether they support all of Zerbe's (unsurprisingly but often convincingly pacifist) conclusions; the same applies to the following chapter, its extended exegesis of Romans 12:14-21, and Zerbe's conclusions regarding God's vindicating agency.

In this section's last chapter, Zerbe assesses further interactions of peace and textual violence. Bravely expanding from his 2009 work (reprinted here as chapter one), Zerbe argues that Paul's warning against "Judaizing" elements in Philippians reveals a veiled deconstruction of the value of Roman citizenship:

> a good case can be made that the referent of Paul's verbal outburst and warning is the . . . Roman imperium and elite Roman culture in general, not "judaizing" nor "Judaic" rivals . . . Recent scholar-

> ship has increasingly recognized that there are no "judaizing" elements in the city of Philippi. . . . [W]hat is astonishing is the glee with which the anti-Judaic or anti-judaizing interpretation is often propounded in mainstream Christian commentaries, with hardly a nod as to how this might affect contemporary social dynamics . . . [U]ncritically repeated is the notion that Paul is . . . throwing back the cursing invective of "dogs" from its (supposed Judaic) source, thereby somehow exonerating it, but not admitting that this very retaliatory verbal assault would not measure up against Paul's own ethical standards (Rom 12:14; 1 Cor 4:13).[30]

As Zerbe observes, even if the invective's target is left an open question, *the question itself still matters*—as does that of how (if this interpretation is correct) Paul masks his critique of imperial and/or elitist powers-that-be, perhaps helping the powers to remain masked. Here, Zerbe might have said more about the *response* Paul could have expected from his congregants. By only *partially* unmasking the powers in question, was he perhaps engaging in some distance education, teaching a theopolitical form of discernment against imperial and cultural hegemonies, as well as what Zerbe rightly calls the "preoccupation" that these produce (172)? Answers to such questions would be speculative, but if carefully posed, they would have been welcome here.

Part four, "Affinities," connects Paul with conversation partners "beyond the fields of biblical and theological studies" (7). This section's first chapter takes up Paul's anthropological vocabulary, dwelling on the imagery of the "psychic body" (1 Cor 15:44), among other loci, in dialogue with Nancey Murphy. Zerbe acknowledges dualist and monist emphases in Paul but observes that the apostle's apocalyptic dualism "puts the stress on human living, not human being" (194). The second chapter here, and the book's last, is "On the Exigency of a Messianic Ecclesia: An Engagement with Philosophical Readers of Paul"—namely Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Jacob Taubes. Zerbe carefully notes that he addresses these figures not just because their appropriations of Paul are "interesting or provocative," but for their "considerable potential for Christian theological reflection" (196). Rather than attacking any of them, Zerbe finds in their work an affinity—true to the section title—with Christian theology, post-Christendom. Already somewhat familiar with Žižek, I expected to be drawn to Zerbe's interaction with him; but I was pleasantly surprised at the theological

30 Zerbe, *Citizenship*, 22-24 and 171-74, particularly 172-73 (from which this excerpt is taken) and nn. 15-21; as he indicates in 172 n. 15, his forthcoming commentary on Philippians (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Herald Press) expands this argument. I engage this excerpt in greater depth in an essay in *Is the Gospel Good News?*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Hughson Ong (McMaster New Testament Studies; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, forthcoming).

depth of Zerbe's engagement with Agamben, creatively drawing in much that he had discussed in previous chapters. Some readers may find these final two chapters unnecessary, but if they diverge from what comes before, they do so with a keen purpose: striking up conversations with partners whom Paul himself, if suddenly translated to our day, might choose.

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The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology. Scott R. Swain. Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013. ISBN: 0830839046. Pp. 258. $34.00 (USD).

The theology of Robert Jenson has long been neglected. However, Jenson is just now beginning to receive the attention his work deserves. *The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology* is a revision of Scott Swain's doctoral dissertation, the intention of which is to engage Jenson's work "by rendering a critical exposition of his account of 'God according to the Gospel.' The intention is not merely descriptive" (16), as will be noted below.

Before beginning to describe and critically engage Jenson's theological proposals, Swain spends the first two chapters on the historical background needed to understand the significance of the theological moves made by Jenson. Swain tells the tale of the resurgence of the doctrine of the Trinity in modern theology, led by Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. In telling this tale of doctrinal resurgence, Swain also puts forth some of the questions he believes Barth's theology raises, culminating with this: "What must the church say about the being of 'God' if she is to speak 'according to the gospel'? These are the questions that modern trinitarian theology raises and that trinitarian theology after Barth seeks to address" (24-25). According to Swain, Jenson's theology is connected to Barth not only because Jenson attempts to tackle these questions, but also because "Jenson's quest for a theological ontology appropriate to the gospel's God belongs to the historicizing family of approaches to the doctrine of God that have emerged in the wake of Barth's theology" (63).

After these first two chapters, Swain devotes part one to a description of Jenson on the Gospel's God. He accurately describes the essential impulse behind Jenson's theology: "the relationship between God's triune being and God's triune self-determination is a relationship of strict identity: The triune God is identified *by and with* the evangelical events whereby he becomes our God" (73, italics his, here and in all quotations below). Swain is not only able to depict accurately the heart of Jenson's theology, but also the concerns that guide Jenson's consequent

theological decisions. According to Swain, a concern to guard the reliability of revelation leads Jenson to the idea that "if God is identified only *by* the events that name him and not *with* those events, then the doctrine of God's connection to biblical revelation is severed" (82). The manner in which Jenson guards biblical revelation has ontological implications in God's being. Swain picks up on this and writes, "In other words, the events that unfold between the Father and Jesus do not merely *reveal* who and what God is (epistemology). They *determine* who and what God is (ontology)" (99). More specifically, Swain concentrates on how this leads to Jenson's decisions in his Christology. Because Jesus's being is constituted by the events that unfold between him and the Father, the preexistence of Christ is put into question. This leads Swain to comment that for Jenson, "the Word's preexistence to himself as the son of Mary is not a *pretemporal* preexistence. It is rather his *historical* preexistence *as witnessed in Israel's Scriptures*" (103). Thus, Swain writes that for Jenson, "Jesus's divine sonship ontologically *precedes* his birth in the line of David in that his human birth dramatically *anticipates* his divine birth from God in the resurrection event" (104).

Swain accurately portrays the heart of Jenson's historicist impulse. Hence, later, Swain can comment that for Jenson, "God is not constituted triune by timeless relations of *origin*; God is constituted triune by temporal, narrative relations of *outcome*" (137). Swain brings some heavy criticism to bear on Jenson's methodology, as when Jenson replaces a persistent preexistent being with the notion of eschatological categories such as "anticipation" or "determination," or as Swain finds fault with Jenson's attempt to address the concerns of adoptionism in his Christology. Thus, Swain concludes, "A God who must anticipate the fullness of his being is simply the inverse image of a God whose being persists. Neither is truly infinite…He must *actually* possess the fullness of his life all at once" (187). The criticism Swain applies is valid concerning a Christology that applies eschatological notions such as "anticipation": because the fullness of God's life is not in God's possession all at once, the adoptionistic overtones found in a historicist Christology seem inescapable.

In "Part 2: Toward a Catholic and Evangelical Account of the Gospel's God," Swain further engages Jenson's concerns and ideas. Swain writes that "Jenson fears that the 'externality' of such a relationship between God and the world, requires a theology illumined by the gospel to sacrifice too much" (151). In other words, according to Swain, Jenson fears that "A God whose being remains unaltered by his relationship to the world…must also remain distant from the world and thus unable to move in history forward to its blessed consummation in God" (151). As Swain addresses this concern, "The fact that God's being remains unaltered in his relationship to his people does not necessarily mean that God is distant from his people or that he is unable to change his people" (151). Further-

more, he writes, "The economy of salvation is one that flows from the all-sufficient, unchanging triune God of grace for the sake of the changeable creature's growth and enrichment through union and communion with God" (153-54). Swain is not only able to respond to Jenson's concerns, he is also able to show that the options Jenson puts forth are not the only viable ones. A God whose being is not constituted by his interactions with us is still able to be our God, and present with us (i.e., not a God "far off" only, but near as well; 181). So, Swain writes, "The covenant of grace, wherein God swears, 'I will be a father to you' (2 Cor 6:18), is the free *and* fitting overflow of God's eternal fatherly love for the Son, the end of which is to include his elect children in God's eternal fatherly love for Son" (162). God binds himself to us not in the sense that he will have his being determined by his relationship with humanity, but God binds himself to a covenant which he has made with us. This does not constitute his being, but the covenant made with us is a reflection, an image, or the overflow of God's loving being in eternity.

Throughout the book, Swain is able to lay out Jenson's concerns and the theological moves that he has made to address these concerns. Furthermore, as was noted above, Swain capably reveals the weaknesses in Jenson's historicist and "historicizing" framework. This book is to be recommended not only as an engagement of Robert Jenson's theology, but more generally for students of the doctrine of the Trinity. My only major critique of this book lies in the fact that a full chapter was devoted to the proposals of Bruce McCormack. Though there are many similar impulses shared between Jenson and McCormack, the chapter on McCormack might have been better condensed into one of Swain's first two chapters, where he introduces Barth's theology.

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Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott, eds. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. ISBN: 9780801037764. Pp. xiii + 812. $44.99 (USD).

Textbooks that introduce religious traditions and how to study them are plentiful. But there is none quite like the *Handbook of Religion*, and the editors are to be commended for this well-conceived and fine-tuned textbook. What sets apart the *Handbook of Religion* from other introductory texts are, first, its religious methodology, and, second, its explicitly Christian framework (albeit not in the manner many people might expect). The result is a textbook that provides an

embracing catalog of religions, with fifty-five contributors—many of them top scholars—covering topics from "a-religions" to "Zen," and guides students (specifically Christian students) on how to study religion in a manner both rigorous and respectful.

Unlike in many other introductory texts, there is no scheme employed by the *Handbook* to distinguish "higher" religions from "lower" religions or to prioritize world religions over local beliefs. Rather, a triadic model is proposed to help students understand the universal presence of religion among people—in all its bewildering diversity. Religions like Islam or Christianity can be classified as "world religions," which connotes ancient roots, global constituency, and a significant social and cultural legacy. Or religions may be "indigenous," bound to particular cultures or ethnicities, and typically exclusivist and world-affirming. Entries in the *Handbook* that handle indigenous religions are geographic in scope, considering continents or large regions (e.g., "Meso- and South America," "Oceania"). Or, taking into account the shifting nature of religious commitment, religions might be outgrowths or reactions to established world or indigenous religions. Fully one third of the volume is given over to accounts of such "New Religious Movements" (NRM) like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and Baha'i, but with some unexpected choices also included: "Atheism," "Christian Identity" [white supremacy], "Satanism," and a deft essay by Calvin DeWitt on the new faith of environmentalism. The editors of the *Handbook* make clear that religions of any one category (world, indigenous, or NRM) can be understood only in their messy interaction with religions of the other two categories. So, for example, if we want to understand an NRM like Soka Gakkai, we need to assess it within the social and cultural *Hintergrund* of north Asian indigenous religions, as well as a reaction to the prevailing world religion in that area, Buddhism. This method of triangulation is well described as providing a "religious audit" of any particular religion, and is modeled for students by the *Handbook*, where each article describes the history, beliefs, and practices of a religion, then identifies some of the issues arising from its interaction with indigenous culture and traditions, as well as global religious factors. Students are not the only ones who will find this "religious audit" helpful: Christian scholars in North America who still assume western Christianity as normative will certainly be challenged as they read Sebastian Kim on "North Asia," or Irving Hexham on "Africa," to realize that emerging Christianities in other regions are drawing deeply on indigenous traditions and local socio-political realities to express the gospel—a phenomenon that was, of course, also the case for western Christianity, as Richard Shaw demonstrates in his article "Europe."

The *Handbook of Religion*'s commitment to a comprehensive understanding of religion is further evidenced by its firm rejection of those influential modern

theories that have posited a compartmentalization of religion in regard to human experience (sometimes to such a radical extent that secularization is insisted upon). On the contrary, the *Handbook* understands religion as not only universal to humankind but also intrinsic to everyday experience, and the volume appropriately concludes with a series of articles mapping how religion has impacted science (Mark Heim), gender (Ursula King), politics (Richard Pierard), and more. This final feature of the volume is valuable. While students are often told that religion has an undeniably important place and role in global affairs and human cultures, it can be difficult for them to grasp this, raised as many are to think of religion as a private matter or of merely historic importance. These essays on the positive and negative legacy of religion in various aspects of human culture and history, along with the maps, charts, timelines, questionnaires, and learning activities provided throughout the book, confirm the *Handbook* as an ideal classroom resource.

The other defining feature of the *Handbook of Religion* is its explicitly Christian approach to the study of religion. The editors wholeheartedly endorse the inductive and fair-handed study of religion that is the ideal of religious phenomenology, i.e., "the religious studies approach," but reject as impossible the pretension of the religious studies guild to an objective study of religious phenomena. And yet to admit a partisan Christian framework for studying religion is not exactly the same thing as to interpret religion from the starting point of classically Christian orthodoxy or piety, as if to mark points of divergence or similarity between "us" and "them." There is a place for a theology of religions, of course, and the *Handbook* includes a brief one by Harold Netland. But a Christian approach to the study of religion should be something more. It is to acknowledge, first, that Christians encounter other religions from within a particular framework of understanding, one that presupposes the biblical narrative and so understands humankind as both created in God's image and alienated from him, which establishes the plethora of human religions as expressions of both our longing for God and our fleeing from him. This framework determines in part the questions Christians will inevitably ask of another religion as we study it. Accordingly, the contributors to the *Handbook* were commissioned to write essays as "answers to questions that Christians ask." And yet, second, a Christian framework for studying religions should not become an interpretive straitjacket. Preliminary essays by Terry Muck and Paul Louis Metzger appeal to Jonathan Edwards' belief in the religious primacy of the affections to encourage Christians to study other religions with genuine affection for the religious "other," giving them room to express their beliefs apart from our pre-judgments, and seeking ways to encourage them and be encouraged by them in our pursuit of a common good. The editors of the *Handbook* are self-professed evangelicals (though many of the contributors are not), firmly

committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of humankind, and do not believe a commitment to religious dialogue precludes evangelism. Indeed, against the supposed neutrality of the discipline of religious studies, they argue that every kind of religious dialogue is a form of evangelism, in the sense of being an attempt at persuasion to a particular viewpoint or approach. For Christians, religious dialogue is an affective "mood" rather than a method, namely, meeting the religious other first of all as our neighbour rather than a potential convert. The *Handbook* appropriately concludes almost every article on a given religion with an "adherent's essay," which grants space to adherents of (for example) Hinduism, Christian Science, and even Satanism to describe their faith and how they personally relate to the questions Christians pose to their religion. The editors—to their credit—have let these adherent essays stand as they are, even when they jar at times with the preceding scholarly interpretation of their respective faiths.

As a conceptually Christian framing of religion that is both coherent and sophisticated in method, the *Handbook of Religion* is a significant achievement. This, and the fact of its pedagogical value, recommends it to Christian colleges, seminaries, theology faculties, congregations and study groups.

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CANADIAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

CTR Scope

The *CTR* gratefully accepts articles, books review requests, and book review submissions from potential contributors and publishers. Contributions to the *CTR* are especially welcomed in areas such as theological exegesis of selected biblical texts; concerns of theological method and the role of Scripture in theology and ethics; the history of reception or history of interpretation of biblical texts; hermeneutical challenges in theological exegesis; and major review essays interacting with key books, contemporary or classical. We are also happy to provide publishers with prepublication reviews of their submitted material upon request.

Submissions should be of academic quality and should generally conform to the standards laid out within *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody; Hendrickson, 1999), supplemented by the *Chicago Manual of Style: Sixteenth Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). All submissions will be evaluated through blind review, edited, and potentially shortened for suitability for *CTR* publication. Although the *CTR* editor makes every effort to promptly acknowledge all submissions, it is important to note that the initial review process generally takes a minimum of three months.

Submission Requirements

- Only typed English language submissions will be accepted for publication.
- Article submissions should be made by e-mail attachment in either *.doc or *.rtf format, and can be sent to the *CTR* Editor-in-Chief, Christopher Zoccali: czoccali@gmail.com. Book review submissions should be made in the same fashion, and can be sent to the *CTR* Book Review Editor, Matthew Forrest Lowe: lowe.matthew.forrest@gmail.com.
- Essays should generally not exceed 10,000 words, including notes. The preference of book reviews is 800-1200 words.
- Submissions should include a cover page that includes the title of the essay and the author's name, an abstract of no more than 250 words, and a list of no more than ten key words.
- Essays should be double spaced and in 12 point font, including notes. Indented quotations may be single spaced. Margins of at least 1 in. are to be left on all edges of the paper.
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CANADIAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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