

IS CHRIST'S RETURN IMMINENT?*

John F. MacArthur, Jr.
President and Professor of Pastoral Ministries

The NT is consistent in its anticipation that the return of Christ might occur at any moment. That pervading perspective of imminence prompts three questions. The first question pertains to whether the Tribulation will precede Christ's coming for the church. The answer to that question is that it will not because the church is never asked to look forward to the tribulation, but they are asked to look forward to Christ's coming. The second question revolves around how the return of Christ could have been imminent in the early church. The answer here is that no one but the Father knows when the coming will occur, so that Christians including the early church must always be ready. The third question asks why Christ's imminent return is so important. This answer relates to the motivation it supplies for believers to purify their lives and thereby progress toward the goal of sanctification and Christlikeness. The threefold call of the imminence doctrine is to wake up and obey right now, to throw off the works of darkness, and to put on the garments of holy living.

* * * * *

Christ could come at any moment. I believe that with all my heart—not because of what I read in the newspapers, but because of what I read in Scripture.

From the very earliest days of the church, the apostles and first-generation Christians nurtured an earnest expectation and fervent hope that Christ might suddenly return at any time to gather His church to heaven. James, writing what was probably the earliest of the New Testament epistles, expressly told his readers that the Lord's return was imminent:

Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for *the coming of the Lord is at hand*. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, *the Judge is*

*The source of this essay is the recently released volume entitled *The Second Coming*, copyright © 1999 by John MacArthur (Crossway, 1999).

standing at the door! (5:7-9, emphasis added).¹

Peter echoed that same expectation when he wrote, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (1 Pet 4:7). The writer of Hebrews cited the imminent return of Christ as a reason to remain faithful: “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:24-25). He wrote, “Yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry” (v. 37). And the apostle John made the most confident pronouncement of all: “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). When John recorded his vision in the book of Revelation, he prefaced it by saying these things “must shortly take place” (Rev 1:1).

The New Testament writers often wrote of Christ’s “appearing,” and they never failed to convey the sense that this could happen imminently. “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28; cf. 3:2; Col 3:4; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4).

All those texts suggest that in the early church expectation of Christ’s imminent return ran high. A solid conviction that Christ could return at any time permeates the whole NT. When the apostle Paul described the Lord’s coming for the church, he used personal pronouns that show he clearly was convinced he himself might be among those who would be caught up alive to meet the Lord: “*We* who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord . . . *we* who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:15, 17, emphasis added). He obviously looked for Christ to return in his lifetime. He furthermore made it plain that a watchful, hopeful expectancy about Christ’s Second Coming is one of the godly attitudes divine grace teaches all believers: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, *looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:11-13, emphasis added).

Will the Tribulation Precede Christ’s Coming for the Church?

Nonetheless, some students of Bible prophecy today insist Christians should not have any immediate expectation of Christ’s return. Instead, they say, we should be looking for the beginning of the seven-year *Tribulation* period, the fulfillment of certain judgments and preliminary signs, the rise of the Antichrist—or

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

all of the above. When they talk about future things, the emphasis is heavily weighted toward dread and disaster for the people of God. As far as they are concerned, “the blessed hope” becomes relevant only *after* the church has gone through the Tribulation.

At first glance, this position seems not altogether devoid of biblical support. After all, when Christ outlined the events of the last days, He included many prophecies about tribulation and hardship, and He said these signs would precede and point to His return (Matt 24:21, 30).

The epistles also contain prophecies about apostasy and persecution in the last days preceding Christ's return. For example, the apostle Paul forewarned Timothy of perilous times that would come (2 Tim 3:1-3). He told the younger pastor, “The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith” (1 Tim 4:1)—and he went on to describe an apostasy that would precede and signify Christ's return to earth.

Those who believe the church must suffer through the hardships of the Tribulation period invariably cite 2 Thess 2:1-3 as proof:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first*, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (emphasis added).

So on the one hand, the NT is permeated with an eager sense of expectancy and conviction that the blessed hope of Christ's return is imminent. On the other hand, we are warned about trouble and affliction that will precede Christ's return. How can we reconcile these two threads of prophecy? How can we cultivate a daily expectation of Christ's return if these preliminary signs must yet be fulfilled before He returns?

Several points must be borne in mind. First, all the general “signs of the times” given in the NT *have* been fulfilled—and *are being* fulfilled before our eyes. They are, in fact, characteristics of the entire church age. Apostasy and unbelief, self-love and sin, wars, rumors of wars, and natural disasters have all been common throughout the church age. Practically every generation of Christians since the time of Christ has believed they were seeing the end-times signs fulfilled before their very eyes. So how are *we* to know whether our own time is the true “last days” of Bible prophecy—or just more of the same general apostasy and calamity that have characterized the entire Christian era?

The apostle John settled that question under the Holy Spirit's inspiration when he wrote, “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). The church was *already* in “the last days” even before the apostolic era ended. In fact, “last days” is a biblical term for the Christian era itself (Heb 1:1-2). This entire age is a prelude to the final culmination of human

history. These *are* the last days—and so was the early church era.

Second, nothing in the NT ever suggests we should defer our expectation of Christ's appearing until other preliminary events can occur. The one apparent exception is 2 Thess 2:1-3 (quoted in full above), which says, "that Day [the day of the Lord] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed." That is obviously a key text for those who believe the Tribulation is next on the prophetic agenda, and that the church should be expecting the reign of Antichrist rather than the return of Christ. Indeed, if 2 Thess 2:1-3 actually means Christ's coming for the church cannot occur until after seven years of Tribulation, it nullifies everything the NT teaches about the imminence of Christ's return.

But look carefully at the context of 2 Thessalonians 2. The Thessalonian Christians had been confused and upset by some false teachers (possibly people pretending to speak for the apostle) who were teaching that the persecutions and sufferings they were currently experiencing were the very judgments associated with *the day of the Lord*. (The expression always refers to judgment and usually to a time of apocalyptic judgment—cf. Isaiah 13:9-11; Amos 5:18-20; 1 Thess 5:2-3; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 6:17; 16:14.) Many in the Thessalonian church, in the midst of their own severe hardship and distress, had evidently believed that lie, and they believed it meant they themselves had become objects of God's final apocalyptic wrath. Obviously, they were deeply troubled by this, for in his earlier epistle, Paul had encouraged them by telling them of the *rapture* (1 Thess 4:14-17)—the coming of Christ for his church. Paul had even instructed them to comfort one another with the promise of Christ's coming for them (v. 18).

But now, in a time of severe persecution and trial, the Christians at Thessalonica had fallen prey to the false idea that God was already pouring out His final wrath—and *they* were among the objects of that wrath. They obviously feared they had missed the rapture and were about to be swept away in the final and epochal judgments of the Day of the Lord.

So Paul wrote, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come" (1 Thess 2:1-2). "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him" is a clear reference to the *rapture*. "The day of Christ" is *the day of the Lord* (in fact, the older manuscripts use the expression "day of the Lord" in this verse).

There were two aspects of the error troubling the Thessalonian church: one was the notion that they had missed the rapture. The other was the accompanying fear that they had already entered into the apocalyptic judgment that signaled the day of the Lord had arrived already.

And so when Paul says, "*that Day* will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thess 2:3, emphasis added)—he is talking about the day of the Lord and its apocalyptic judgment, not the rapture. He was not suggesting that the coming of Christ for the church would be delayed until after the Tribulation events had all played out. He was

certainly not suggesting that the Thessalonians should defer their hope of Christ's coming for them until the end of the Tribulation. He had spent his entire first epistle urging them to be watchful and expectant and to encourage one another with the news of Christ's imminent return (cf. 1 Thess 1:19; 4:15-18; 5:6, 9, 11). If the apostle now meant to teach them that all the events of the Tribulation must be fulfilled *before* Christ could return for them, that would be scant "comfort" indeed. In fact, it would overturn everything the NT has to say about Christ's return being imminent, comforting, and hopeful.

So the consistent teaching of the NT is that Christians should be looking for the imminent coming of Christ for His church, and 2 Thess 2:1-4 is no exception.

How Could Christ's Coming Have Been Imminent in the Early Church?

Some argue that Christ's coming could not possibly have been imminent for the early church, given the obvious fact that two thousand years later, He has still not returned. Skeptics often ridicule Christianity or challenge the inerrancy of Scripture on that very ground. After all, the verses cited at the beginning of this chapter do prove that James, Peter, John, Paul, and the writer of Hebrews all believed Christ's return was very near—"at the door" (Jas 5:9); "at hand" (Phil 4:5; 1 Pet 4:7); "approaching" (Heb 10:25); "com[ing] quickly" (Rev 3:11; 22:7).

How can it be, then, that two thousand years later Christ still has not returned? Could the apostles have been in error about the timing? That is precisely what some skeptics claim. Here's a typical excerpt from a newsletter whose sole aim is to attack the inerrancy of Scripture:

Paul, himself, showed . . . that he was among those who awaited the imminent return of Christ. Yet, as the history of that era clearly shows, all was for naught. No messiah appeared. . . . The NT repeatedly says the messiah was to return in a very short time. Yet, mankind has waited for nearly 2,000 years and nothing has occurred. By no stretch of the imagination can that be considered "coming quickly." . . . It is, indeed, unfortunate that millions of people still cling to the forlorn hope that somehow a messiah will arise to extract them from their predicament. How many years (2,000, 10,000, 100,000) will it take for them to finally say, "We can only conclude that we are the victims of a cruel hoax"?"²

What shall we make of this charge against the truthfulness of Scripture? Does the passing of two thousand years indeed prove that Christ's coming was not imminent in the early church era, and that the apostles were mistaken?

Certainly not. Remember the clear statement of Christ in Matt 24:42: "You do not know what hour your Lord is coming." The exact time remains hidden from us, as it was from the apostles. But Christ could nonetheless come at any time. The Judge is still at the door. The day is still at hand. There are no other events that must

²Dennis McKinsey, ed., "Imminence" in "Biblical Errancy," issue 89 (May 1990).

occur on the prophetic calendar before Christ comes to meet us in the air. He could come at any moment. And it is in *that* sense that Christ's coming is imminent. In the very same sense, His coming was imminent even in the days of the early church.

I suppose it is *also* possible that Christ could delay his coming another two thousand years or longer. Given the rapid decline of society, I do not see how that is possible, but neither did the apostles when they surveyed the state of the world in their time. He still *could* delay His coming. That is why Christ taught us to be prepared, whether He comes immediately or delays longer than we think possible (cf. Matt 24:42–25:12).

In any case, the passing of two thousand years is no reproach whatsoever against the faithfulness of God or the trustworthiness of His Word. This is precisely the point Peter made when he anticipated the scoffers who would arise, mocking the promise of Christ's return (2 Pet 3:3-4). Peter's reply to those scoffers? "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (v. 8). The amount of earthly time that passes is of no consequence. It is certainly irrelevant from God's timeless point of view. A moment is like many eons in His mind, and eons pass like moments. He is not bound by time as we are, and no amount of time can ever nullify His faithfulness. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (v. 9).

In other words, the real reason for the Lord's delay is not that He is negligent or careless in fulfilling his promises, but simply because He is long suffering and kind, delaying Christ's coming and the wrath that will accompany it while he calls out people to salvation. And Christ will not return before the merciful purposes of God are complete. Far from suggesting apathy or neglect on God's part, the long delay before Christ's appearing simply underscores the remarkable depth of His nearly inexhaustible mercy and longsuffering.

And therefore the fact that two-thousand years have elapsed is utterly irrelevant to the doctrine of Christ's imminent return. Christ's coming is *still* imminent. It could occur at any moment. The command to be ready and watchful is as applicable to us as it was to the early church. In fact, the return of Christ should be an even *more* urgent issue for us, because it is drawing nearer with the passing of each day. We still do not know *when* Christ is coming, but we do know that we are two thousand years closer to that event than James was in those earliest days of the Christian era, when the Holy Spirit moved him to warn the church that the coming of the Lord was at hand and the Judge was already standing at the door.

Why Is Christ's Imminent Return So Important?

Why is it so important to believe that Christ could come at any moment? Because the hope of Christ's imminent coming has a powerful sanctifying and purifying effect on us. "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). The knowledge that Christ's coming is drawing closer should motivate us to prepare, to pursue Christlikeness, and to put off all the things

that pertain to our former lives without Christ.

The apostle Paul took this very line of argument near the end of his epistle to the Romans. He reminded the believers at Rome of their duty to love their neighbors as themselves, saying love is the one principle that fulfills all God's moral commands (Rom 13:8-10). Then stressing the urgency of living in obedience to this Great Commandment, he wrote,

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for *now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed*. The night is far spent, *the day is at hand*. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Rom 13:11-14).

That is the apostle Paul's wake-up call to the church. Christ's return is approaching. The time now is nearer than when we first believed. Every moment that passes brings Christ's return even closer. How are we to redeem the time? He calls for a three-part response that perfectly sums up the Christian's proper perspective on the imminent possibility of Christ's return.

Wake up! "Awake out of sleep," he pleads (v. 11)—and he underscores both the urgency of this command and the imminency of Christ's return, with four phrases: "now it is high time"; "our salvation is nearer" (v. 11); "The night is far spent"; and "the day is at hand" (v. 12). Time is short; opportunity is fleeting. The Lord is coming soon, and the event draws nearer every moment. The time to obey is now. The *only* time we can take for granted is now. And since there is no guarantee of *more* time, it is unconscionable to defer our obedience.

Consider this: The apostle Paul was stressing the urgency of this commandment in *his* day, two thousand years ago. He believed the coming of Christ was near—and getting nearer by the moment. How much *more* urgent are these things for our time? "Now our salvation is nearer" (v. 11)—two thousand years nearer, to be precise. Now is certainly not the time to let down our guard or fall asleep. Although some might be tempted to think the long delay means Christ's coming is no longer an urgent matter, a moment's thought will reveal that if we believe Christ was speaking the truth when He promised to come again quickly, we *must* believe that the time is drawing nearer by the moment—and the urgency is not lessened by the delay, but heightened.

It is perfectly natural for infidels, skeptics, and unbelievers to think Christ's delay means He will not fulfill His promise (2 Pet 3:4). But no genuine believer should ever think that way. Rather than despairing because He tarries, we ought to realize that the time is nearer now than it has ever been. He *is* coming. As we saw earlier, His Word guarantees that He will come. Our hope should be growing stronger, not diminishing, as He delays his coming.

When Paul writes, "And do this, knowing the time" (Rom 13:11), he

employs a Greek word for “time” (*kairos*), that speaks of an age or an era, not the time (*chronos*) told by a clock. “Knowing the time” therefore speaks of understanding this age, being discerning, like “the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chronicles 12:32). Christ rebuked the Pharisees for lacking this same kind of discernment: “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times [*kairos*]” (Matt 16:1-3).

Perhaps Paul had seen signs of spiritual lethargy or dullness among the believers at Rome. No doubt life in that great city held many distractions and earthly enticements that drew hearts away from the earnest hope of Christ’s appearing. Like the society in which we live, Roman life catered to the flesh, offering many material comforts and earthly amusements. Perhaps they were inclined to forget they were living in the last days. Spiritually, they were falling asleep.

It sometimes seems as if the entire church today is in an even worse state of spiritual drowsiness. There is widespread indifference concerning the Lord’s return. Where is the sense of expectation that characterized the early church? The sad legacy history will record about the church of our generation is that as we neared the dawn of a new millennium, most Christians were far more concerned about the arrival of a computer glitch known as the “millennium bug” than they were with the arrival of the millennial King!

Too many Christians in our time have settled into a state of insensate lethargy and inactivity—an unresponsiveness to the things of God. They are like Jonah, fast asleep in the hold of the ship while raging storms threaten to sweep us away (Jonah 1:5-6). They are like the foolish virgins, who “while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept” (Matt 25:5). It is high time to awake from that slumber.

Paul sent a similar wake-up call to the church at Ephesus: “‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:14-16). Never was such an alarm more needed than today. In the words of our Lord Himself, “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping” (Mark 13:35-36).

When Paul says “our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11)—he is speaking, of course, about the *consummation* of our salvation. He was not suggesting that the Romans were unregenerate. He was not telling them their *justification* was a yet-future reality. He was reminding them that the culmination of what began at their regeneration was drawing closer by the moment. “Salvation” in this context refers to our *glorification*, the final goal of God’s saving work (Rom 8:30). Throughout Scripture, this is connected with the appearing of Christ: “We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). We “eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that

it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil 3:20-21). "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:4). "He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb 9:28). Notice that the writer of Hebrews employs the word *salvation* the same way Paul uses it in Rom 13:11.

This final aspect of salvation is what Paul referred to a few chapters earlier, in Rom 8:23: "We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." That is the aspect of our salvation that is nearer than when we first believed, and it only awaits Christ's coming.

So Paul's penetrating appeal here in Romans 13 assumes that Christ's return is imminent. If another eschatological age (*kairos*)—especially the Tribulation—were going to occur prior to Christ's return for the church, Paul would have surely pointed to the onset of that era and urged the Romans to prepare for it. But far from warning them that a dark era of Tribulation was in their future, what he told them was virtually the opposite: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (v. 12). The *kairos* of persecution, hardship, and darkness was "far spent" (*prokopitō* in the Greek text—meaning "advancing quickly," or "being driven out"). Daylight—the final consummation of our salvation when Christ returns to take us to glory—is imminent.

We have no idea how much sand remains in the hourglass of human history. But we ought to realize that a lot of sand has passed through the hourglass since the apostle Paul said the dawning of daylight was already at hand. How much more urgent is this wake-up call for the church today!

The nighttime of Satan's dominion will soon give way to the dawn of Christ's coming for His own. The apostle Paul used precisely the same imagery of darkness and dawn when he wrote to the Thessalonians:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 5:1-9).

God did not appoint us to wrath. The day of wrath that shall come in the Tribulation is not what we are to be preparing for. The sudden appearing of Christ to take us to glory is our hope. Wake up! Be sober. Be alert. Your redemption draws near.

Throw off! The approaching of dawn means it is time for a change of garments: "Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom 13:12). Paul's imagery evokes the picture of a soldier who has spent the

night in a drunken orgy. Still clad in the garments of his sin, he has fallen into a drunken sleep. But dawn is approaching, and now it is time to wake up, throw off the clothes of night, and put on the armor of light.

The Greek verb translated “cast off” was a term that spoke of being ejected or expelled forcefully. The Greek term is used only three other times in the NT, and in each case it speaks of excommunication from a synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). So the term carries the idea of renouncing and forsaking sin (or the unrepentant sinner) with vigor and conviction. Paul is calling for an act of repentance. He wants them to cast off—excommunicate, or break fellowship with—the “works of darkness.” It is the same expression he uses in Eph 5:11: “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

Paul often employs the imagery of changing garments to describe the putting off of sin and the old man. “Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22). “Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col 3:8-9). Notice the twofold putting off: “you *have put off* the old man with his deeds”; but *keep putting off* “all these” works of darkness. The picture this evokes is that of Lazarus, raised from the dead, given new life, but still bound in old grave-clothes that still needed to be put off (cf. John 11:43-44).

Employing similar imagery, the writer of Hebrews urges believers to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). There he pictures the Christian like an athlete, stripped of all encumbrances and ready to run. There is much we must throw aside if we are to be prepared for the coming day. James sums it up succinctly: “lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness” (Jas 1:21). And Peter echoes the thought: “laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” (1 Pet 2:1).

Put on! There’s another aspect of being prepared for the Lord’s appearing. We are not fully prepared for the dawn of the new day unless we have put on the appropriate attire: “put on the armor of light. . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 12, 14).

Again, the imagery is that of a soldier who had spent the night in drunken carousing. He had stumbled home and fallen asleep in clothes that were now wrinkled and befouled with the evidence of his reveling. Day was dawning. It was time to wake up, to cast off the old clothes, and to put on something clean and polished and battle-ready. “Armor” suggests warfare, and that is fitting. Though the return of Christ is imminent, that is no warrant to forsake the battle. Scripture never suggests that His people should sit on a hillside somewhere to await His coming.

In fact, between now and His coming, we are locked in a battle “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:11). The nearness of our Lord’s return does not mitigate the seriousness of the battle. Now is not the time to

slacken our diligence, but the opposite. We should engage the battle with new vigor, knowing that the time is short. "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (v. 13).

In other words, we are not off-duty soldiers, free to carouse and indulge in the fleshly pleasures of night life. We are on duty, and our Commander-in-Chief might appear at any moment. Therefore, "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy" (Rom 13:13). The Christian who is not living a holy and obedient life with heavenly priorities is a Christian who does not grasp the significance of the Lord's imminent return. If we genuinely are expecting our Lord to appear at any time, that blessed hope should move us to be faithful and walk properly, lest our Lord return to find us walking improperly, disobeying, or dishonoring Him. In Christ's own words, "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:35-37).

There's more: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom 13:14). Again, when we are glorified, we will be instantly conformed to the image of Christ—made as much like Him as it is possible for human beings to be. Christlikeness is therefore the goal toward which God is moving us (Rom 8:29). Even now, the process of sanctification should be conforming us to His image. As we grow in grace, we grow in Christlikeness. We are to become a reflection of Christ's character and His holiness. And that is what Paul means when he writes, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." We are to pursue sanctification, to follow after Christ in our conduct and character, to let His mind be in us, and to let His example guide our walk (Phil 2:5; 1 Pet 2:21).

Paul compared his pastoral duty of discipling the Galatians to birth pains, as he sought to bring them to Christlikeness: "I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). Writing to the Corinthians He also described sanctification as the process by which they would be remade in Christ's likeness: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). In other words, we progress from one level of glory to another as we progress toward the ultimate goal. So "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" is simply a command to pursue sanctification (the whole theme of Romans 12–16).

When Paul told the Galatians, "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27), he was in essence saying sanctification begins at conversion. From the first moment of faith, we are clothed in his righteousness. That is justification. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa 61:10).

But that is just the beginning of what it means to put on Christ. Justification is a once-for-all completed event, but sanctification is an ongoing process. And the command to "put on . . . Christ" in Romans 13 is a command to pursue the

Christlikeness of sanctification.

The hope of Christ's imminent return is therefore the hinge on which a proper understanding of sanctification turns.

Let's review some of the key texts that speak of the imminence of Christ's return, and notice specifically what kind of practical duties this doctrine places on us:

- ! *Steadfastness*: "Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Jas 5:8).
- ! *Kindness*: "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (Jas 5:9).
- ! *Prayer*: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers" (1 Pet 4:7).
- ! *Faithfulness in assembling together and encouraging one another*: "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:24-25).
- ! *Holy conduct and godliness*: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Pet 3:11).
- ! *Purity and Christlikeness*: "When He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

Those cover several broad categories, embracing every aspect of our sanctification. The hope of Christ's imminent return is a catalyst and an incentive for all these things—every fruit of the Spirit, every Christian virtue, everything that pertains to holiness and Christlikeness, and everything that belongs to life and godliness.

That is why it is so important to cultivate a watchful expectancy for the imminent coming of Christ. The point is not to make us obsessed with earthly events. In fact, if your interest in the return of Christ becomes a consuming fixation with what is happening in this world, you have utterly missed the point. The knowledge that Christ's return is imminent should turn our hearts heavenward, "from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet 3:14).

LIVING A NEW LIFE: OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING ABOUT CONVERSION

William D. Barrick
Professor of Old Testament

Both liberal and evangelical scholars have entertained doubts about the presence and/or frequency of conversion in the OT, but the doctrine is illustrated and objectified in the OT rather than being presented in doctrinal discourses as in the NT. Moses spoke of conversion in terms of the circumcision of the heart in Deut 10:16 and 30:6. The OT prophets referred often to Deuteronomistic theology found in Deut 27–30 as a foundation for their prophecies. Joshua spoke of fearing the LORD in developing the Deuteronomistic basis of conversion. Hezekiah's trust in the LORD also built on that foundation, and the prophets after him continued to build thereon. Examples of conversion in the OT included Abram, Naaman, Rahab, Ruth, the sailors on board the ship with Jonah, and the Ninevites. Elements involved in conversion in the OT included the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, knowledge of God, confession, faith, and repentance. A total change in a person's life was the obvious outcome of conversion.

* * * * *

Introduction

Is the OT doctrine of conversion one of the “things” to be taught to all peoples (Matt 28:20)? Jacob Milgrom claimed that “religious conversion is neither attested nor possible in ancient Israel before the second temple period.”¹ Evangelical scholars may not be so sweeping in their claims, but some are convinced that “the concept of conversion is actually very rare in the Old Testament.”² Some scholars claim that “the OT has no fully developed idea of conversion.”³ Do these statements present an accurate picture of the doctrine of conversion in the OT?

Should one look for doctrinal teaching about conversion such as is found

¹Jacob Milgrom, “Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel,” *JBL* 101/2 (1982):169.

²Darrell L. Bock, “Convert, Conversion,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 118.

³Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 120.

in the NT? Didactic subgenre is present in the OT, but it occurs less frequently than in the NT. To speak of doctrine in the OT as though it must be taught in forms similar to those in the NT is misleading. Yet it could be that the doctrinal teachings of the OT are couched in the terms of history and parable—more like the teachings of Jesus Himself. If doctrine can be illustrated and objectified rather than systematized and catechized, perhaps the OT is far more doctrinal than commonly thought.

The thesis of this article is that a number of narrative descriptions of conversion occur in the OT. Examples of conversions in the OT include Abram, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the sailors who were aboard the ship with Jonah, and the Ninevites.⁴ Those conversion stories contain similarities which mark them off as an intentional subgenre, designed to teach the doctrine of conversion by means of historical example. As in the account of the conversion of the apostle Paul in the Book of Acts, such histories indicate that conversion involved a total change in the individual's life—a new life.

Conversion implies a break from one's former mode of life. It must be genuine "with all one's heart and with all one's soul"—an external acknowledgment of having sinned is wholly insufficient. Saul regretted not having observed Yahweh's command and Samuel's directions, but his sorrow proceeded merely from the evil consequences of his actions. There is no conversion without abandoning sin because sin breaks intimacy with God.⁵

Such change was produced by divine intervention.⁶ The individual responded in faith, repentance, and commitment. Divine forgiveness and corporate fellowship within the covenant were results of conversion in the OT.

The Mosaic Description of Conversion

Moses's second and third sermons on the plains of Moab contain the earliest developed description of conversion:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deut 6:4-5).⁷

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear

⁴Amazingly, of these particular examples, Abram is the most neglected as far as OT history is concerned. The narrative assumes his conversion and describes it only tangentially.

⁵Paul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. William G. Heidt (Collegeville, Minn.: The Order of St. Benedict, 1955) 183. Cf. Richard J. Sklba, "The Call to New Beginnings: A Biblical Theology of Conversion," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11/3 (July 1981):71.

⁶Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 2:295.

⁷Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, Calif.: The Lockman Foundation, 1988).

(לַיְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, *l'YHWH*) the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. . . . Circumcise then your heart (וּמַלְתֶּם אֶת עֵרְלֹת לְבַבְכֶם, *umāltēm 'ēt 'ārlat lēbabkem*), and stiffen your neck no more. For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him (וּבִוּוּ תִדְבְּקוּ, *ûbô tidbāq*), and you shall swear by His name. He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen (Deut 10:12-14, 16-21).

The LORD your God will circumcise your heart (אֶת־לְבַבְךָ . . . וּמַלְ, *umāl . . . 'ef lēbabkā*) and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live (Deut 30:6).

The circumcision of the heart described in Deut 10:16 and 30:6 “speaks of internal identification with [the Lord] in what might be called regeneration in Christian theology.”⁸ John J. Davis gave the following definition of regeneration: “Regeneration in its basic and most fundamental aspect is an act of God whereby He imparts to the sinner new life which is eternal and holy in character, effecting a change in the whole man.”⁹ The Mosaic description certainly involved change and new life. Over 1,400 years later, the Apostle Paul used the exact same imagery to define the spiritual Jew (Rom 2:28-29). He attributed the renewal to the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ezek 36:25-27). The Mosaic description served as a preview of the New Covenant¹⁰ that would be revealed through Jeremiah 800 years later:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD (יָדַעוּ אֶת־יְהוָה, *dē'û 'ef yhwḥ*),’ for they shall all know Me (יָדַעוּ אֹתִי), *yē dē'û 'ōfi*), from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and

⁸Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 388.

⁹John J. Davis, “Regeneration in the Old Testament” (ThM thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1964) 64.

¹⁰Merrill, *Deuteronomy* 388-89; J. Gordon McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomistic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 137.

their sin I will remember no more" (Jer 31:31-34).

Deuteronomic Theology and Prophetic Proclamation

Chapters 27–30 of Deuteronomy were the basis for much of the prophetic preaching in the OT.¹¹ Over and over again, the prophets referred to the deuteronomic issues of obedience and disobedience, blessing and cursing, rebellion and repentance. Their preaching was not purely an exposition of Deuteronomy. They also proclaimed the revelation they had received from Yahweh. That revelation involved a progressive development of OT theology couched in each prophet's own terminology and phraseology. Just as the modern preacher refers to the teachings of the OT and NT as the revelatory foundation for his messages, so also the OT prophets referred to prior revelation as the foundation for some of their messages. It is not possible to understand the messages of the OT prophets properly (or for that matter, even the NT prophets) without being well-grounded in the theology of the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Especially those two books of Moses defined and applied issues of personal and corporate holiness to everyday living.

Many scholars hold a radically different view of the relationship between Deuteronomy and the historical and prophetic books of the OT.¹² They propose one or more exilic or post-exilic redactors who either composed, edited, or updated the Pentateuch, the historical books,¹³ and the prophetic books. That redacting hand (or hands) is normally identified as the "Deuteronomist." McConville sounds a warning about such deuteronomistic (as opposed to deuteronomic) theorizing:

[T]he interpreter should be sensitive to the possibility that the theory might unduly dominate the reconstruction of the authentic Deuteronomy.

I believe that this has in fact happened, partly because certain theological value-judgments have been brought to bear that lack adequate justification either in Deuteronomy

¹¹Cf. Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:295. However, one must be careful to observe that Eichrodt attributes such preaching to the Deuteronomist, not to Moses (2:296).

¹²See a discussion of this matter as it relates to Jeremiah in William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52*, Hermeneia, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 12-13. Cf. also Henri Cazelles, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," trans. Leo G. Perdue, in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1984) 89-109; J. Philip Hyatt, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," in *A Prophet to the Nations*, 113-27; John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd rev. ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 33-43. Regarding Mic 6:1-8, Delbert R. Hillers wrote, "In sum, these expressions may be indications of a late date for this passage, or may indicate the influence of an early form of Deuteronomy or a source of Deuteronomy, which is not impossible in Hezekiah's reign" (*Micah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah*, Hermeneia, ed. Paul D. Hanson, with Loren Fisher [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984] 79).

¹³Cf. Robert G. Boling, *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, vol. 6 in *The Anchor Bible*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982) 152: "the Rahab story was only rescued from oblivion and put in place by the later redactor, Dtr 2."

omy itself or in OT theology more generally. For example, the distinction between root and branch has often been made on the basis of a polarization of the theological themes of law and grace.

I shall anticipate some of the argument by saying at the outset that I believe that Deuteronomy as we have it today is the true formative influence, not only on [Deuteronomistic History], but more generally on OT theology. This view attributes to the book a vigor and brilliance of thought that is rarely appreciated. It sees it as a document of theological profundity, capable of discerning a range of possibilities in the relationship between God and human beings, rather than as a series of layered programs for ever-new situations.¹⁴

At times the historical books took up the deuteronomic theology in order to demonstrate how the pagans around Israel occasionally lived more righteously than the Israelites themselves. When the priesthood was tainted with corrupt and immoral men, such Gentiles as Ruth, Rahab, and Naaman came to the God of Israel by faith. The prophet Jonah demonstrated by his disobedience that he was not leading a new life characterized by godliness. He compared unfavorably with the pagan sailors who risked their own lives in an attempt to save his life. The biggest contrast exploded on the stage of history when the repentant pagan population of Nineveh renounced idolatry and violence to turn to the living God (cf. 1 Thess 1:9). They became everything Israel and Jonah should have been but were not.

Deuteronomic exposition was the source for a great deal of prophetic proclamation demanding covenant obedience of apostate (i.e., idol-worshipping) Israelites. Moses's successor, Joshua was the first to expound the Mosaic message:

Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him (יִדְבַקְתֶּם בְּיְהוָה, *ûlê dābqā bô*) and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul (Josh 22:5).

Now, therefore, fear the LORD (יִרְאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה, *yər'û 'ef yhw̄h*) and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods (אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי־מִצְרַיִם, *wêhāsîrû 'ef 'êlōhîm*) which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD (Josh 24:14).

Someone might object that what both Moses and Joshua were describing was the concept of covenant renewal rather than conversion. Covenant renewal, however, was actually a recommitment to the changed life that had been entered at conversion. "Commitment . . . begins with the experience of conversion and then follows through into a life of progressive sanctification in obedience to God's law."¹⁵ On the plains of Moab Moses stood before the second generation of Israelites. They were well aware of the idolatry of their parents and grandparents who perished in the

¹⁴McConville, *Grace in the End* 11-12.

¹⁵J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 297.

wilderness. In preparation for their entry into the land of promise, Moses called upon converted Israelites to recommit themselves to the keeping of the covenant. At the same time, he called upon yet unconverted Israelites to put away their idols and turn to the living God. Joshua issued the same call in Josh 24:14.

The Mosaic description of conversion applied to the kings of Israel and Judah in order to evaluate their relationship to Yahweh. Hezekiah's faith and reformation were described in deuteronomic phraseology:

He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel (חַבַּח בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטָחָה, *bayhwh 'ēlōhē yisrā'el bā'āh*); so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him. For he clung to the LORD (וַיִּדְבַק בַּיהוָה, *wāyyidbaq bayhwh*); he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses (2 Kgs 18:5,6).

Prophetic proclamation in the monarchical period called for conversion.¹⁶ The call of the prophets was, in actuality, “*the divine demand for conversion*, proclaimed with unprecedented vehemence and harshness . . . for this demand, even though directed to the nation as a whole, yet made its appeal to the individual’s capacity for decision.”¹⁷ The people of Judah and Israel were exhorted to change, to convert, to repent, to turn away from idols and back to the living God, the Creator of heavens and earth, Yahweh, their Redeemer.

Prophets ministering over 200 years prior to the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem proclaimed the same deuteronomic message:

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “Return to Me (שׁוּבוּ עִמָּי, *šubū 'ēday*) with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God (וּשְׁבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, *wəš'ubū 'eṭ yhwēh 'ēlōhēkem*), for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him, even a grain offering and a libation for the LORD your God? (Joel 2:12-14; cf. Exod 34:6,7).

The Gentiles were included in the invitation to convert or turn from idolatry to faith in Yahweh:

Turn to Me (פְּנֹנָאֵי לִי, *pənnū 'ē lay*), and be saved (וְהִשְׁעָה, *wəhiwšā'ū*), all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other (Isa 45:22).

In the Book of Isaiah “the means of the conversion of the nations is clear: they will come to acknowledge that Yahweh alone is God, because they will see his Lordship

¹⁶Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:245.

¹⁷Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

and glory made manifest in his salvation of his people Israel.”¹⁸

To include in this article an analysis of prophetic phraseology that is derived from deuteronomic materials is unnecessary. Various scholars have compiled detailed lists and have demonstrated the similarities.¹⁹ A development of the theology of conversion in the OT is parallel to the development of Mosaic theology throughout the remainder of the OT. That does not mean, however, that the concept of conversion did not exist until the time of Moses. Abram’s testimony puts that fallacy to rest.

Unfortunately, many theologians explain away any possible Mosaic involvement in the theology of conversion by attributing the teachings to the hypothetical “Deuteronomic school and the Priestly Code.”²⁰ Such an approach denies Mosaic authorship to much of Deuteronomy and attributes portions of Moses’s sermons to the creative editorial work of a later redactor (e.g., Deut 4:3, 9-10; 10:16; 30:2, 10). It is more consistent with the *prima facie* evidence of the biblical text to conclude that exilic prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel expounded the Mosaic Torah rather than to conclude that an exilic or post-exilic redactor inserted the teachings of those two prophets into Deuteronomy.

Milgrom’s article was primarily a response to Norman Gottwald²¹ and George Mendenhall²² who had proposed that Israel had been composed of Canaanite converts who revolted against their overlords and joined the invading bands of Yahwists from the desert. Milgrom proposed that the resident alien (גֵר, *gēr*), even if he were to accept and practice Israelite religion, was kept from assimilating with the nation throughout the pre-exilic period.²³ Gottwald defined conversion as

¹⁸Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 75. Achtemeier, however, attributes such teaching to the fictions of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah—yet another example of how some theologians manage to limit the doctrine of conversion to the exilic and post-exilic periods.

¹⁹Viz., Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Law suit in the Prophets,” *JBL* 78 (1959):285-95; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972); and Louis Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah: A Redescription of the Correspondences with the Deuteronomistic Literature in the Light of Recent Text-critical Research*, SBL Dissertation Series 83, ed. J. J. M. Roberts (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986) esp. 31-48. Cf. William D. Barrick, “Leviticus 26: Its Relationship to Covenant Contexts and Concepts” (ThD dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1981).

²⁰Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:470.

²¹Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979). See esp. chapter 45, “Canaanite Converts, Neutrals, and Allies vis-à-vis Liberated Israel,” 555-83.

²²George E. Mendenhall, “The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 25/3 (September 1962):66-87

²³Milgrom, “Religious Conversion,” 175. It is not the purpose of this article to respond to Milgrom’s views regarding גֵר in the OT. It is true that the Hebrew term is the equivalent of “proselyte” in the later Jewish history, but the doctrine of conversion in the OT is not limited to the occurrences of גֵר. To limit it

“incorporation into Israel.”²⁴

In arguing for the lack of mass conversion in the pre-exilic period, Milgrom appealed to the mysterious hand of the deuteronomic redactor:

In any event, D's law of the *ḥēřēm* and its concomitant ban on intermarriage presumes that Canaanites qua Canaanites continued to thrive at least into the eighth century. Furthermore, by positing, with many scholars, that the origins of D lie in eighth-century northern Israel, this thesis receives additional support. For the great urban blocks of Canaanites, to judge by the list of city-states that Israel could not conquer (Judg 1:27-35), are all located—with the exception of Jerusalem (v 11)—in the north. It was these Canaanite enclaves assimilating at such an alarming rate—not through conversion but through intermarriage—which gave rise to the intermarriage—apostasy—*ḥēřēm*—holy people sequence in the *ḥēřēm* law of D.²⁵

This concept of a redactor or textual-updater creates problems for the study of conversion in the OT. Were the individual accounts of conversion inserted by the redactor or a sequence of editors from the eighth through the fifth centuries B.C.? Some would argue that the conversion stories were more pertinent to the concerns of the exilic and post-exilic communities. However, “the fact that a book can be shown to be relevant to a certain age does not require that it was composed then.”²⁶ The various hypotheses of redaction often rely upon fallacious presuppositions that undermine the integrity and authenticity of the biblical text.²⁷ Unless the pre-Mosaic setting of the Book of Job is explained away by the fallacious assumption that the

the doctrine in that fashion would be the same fallacy that would deny the biblical teaching concerning the Trinity because the word “trinity” is not employed anywhere in Scripture. Cf. A. H. Konkel, “גלג,” *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 1:838: “The logical translation of the nom. גלג in the LXX is *proselytos*, since the G word has the sense of one who has arrived or a sojourner. The term is used especially in those texts referring to the inclusion of the resident alien as a full participatory member in the religious community (ca. 70s), giving it the nuance of the later, more technical meaning of a convert.” “In postbiblical Heb. and Aram. the vb. *gwr* most often refers to converting (becoming a proselyte)” (ibid). Unsubstantiated presuppositions regarding the Deuteronomist are part and parcel of the discussions regarding the theological significance of גלג: “It would seem that the *ger* plays an important role in Deuteronomy because at the time of the Josianic Reform in 622 B.C., the problem of the protected citizen required special attention” (D. Kellermann, “גלג,” *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 2:445).

²⁴Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* 555.

²⁵Ibid., 173.

²⁶McConville, *Grace in the End* 98.

²⁷Examples of such fallacious presuppositions include: (1) Reality is uniform and universal. (2) Contemporary human experience can provide the criteria by which the past can be determined, examined, and interpreted. (3) Western traditions and cultures are valid sources for evaluating OT literary forms. (4) *Vaticinia ex eventu* explains the reason for prophetic detail. (5) There are no more significant discoveries to be made in the realm of history and archeology that will confirm the accuracy or authenticity of the text of the OT.

time of composition redates the original events themselves, conversion was a concept with which Job and his friends were familiar (cf. Job 8:5-7; 11:13-20; and esp. 22:21-30).²⁸ Thus, conversion in the OT was not a late development—it was a theological concept at least as old as the patriarchs.

The Examples of Conversion in the OT

Individuals who were converted from an idolatrous Gentile background include such major figures as Abram (Genesis 12), Naaman (2 Kings 5), Rahab (Joshua 2), Ruth (Ruth 1:16-18), and the sailors on board the ship from Joppa to Tarshish (Jonah 1:16). Examples of national or corporate conversion include Judah in the time of Asa (2 Chr 14:2-4; 15:12-15)²⁹ and the city of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5-10).

Abram. The inevitable implication of the OT narrative is that Abram's family had been worshipers of idols in Ur (cf. Josh 24:2, 14). Abram had been a Gentile. The primary evidence of his conversion from idolatry is the fact that he responded to Yahweh's call to leave Ur for the land of Canaan (cf. Heb 11:8). Throughout the Scriptures Abram is the epitome of saving faith (cf. Rom 4:1-12; Gal 3:7-9). His conversion was obviously genuine and its pre-Deuteronomic date is practically incontestable. "Both the command of God (v. 1) and the promises of God (vv. 2-3) antedate the implementation of the covenant. Moreover, Abram's faith is also in operation prior to his commitment to be Yahweh's servant."³⁰ However, some scholars do question the legitimacy of accepting the Abrahamic narratives as patriarchal in their time of composition. Albrecht Alt considered "the patriarchal narratives as consisting mainly of secondary material composed by the later writers and reflecting their own religious philosophies."³¹

Interpreters dealing with Josh 24:2 differ in their conclusions concerning the extent to which the statement by Joshua implicated Abram in idolatrous worship.³² It cannot be denied, however, that the NT presents Abram as the classic example of biblical faith. "In effect, said the apostle, Abraham was circumcised in the heart before he ever was in the flesh, and it was that inner work that set him apart

²⁸Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:472.

²⁹This article will not examine this particular example. See Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* 300; and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Quest for Revival: Personal Revival in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 77-88.

³⁰Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 371.

³¹Thomas Edward McComiskey, "The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Analysis of *The God of the Fathers* by Albrecht Alt," in *The Law and the Prophets*, ed. John H. Skilton (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 195.

³²Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 344.

as a covenant son (Rom 4:1-12).”³³

Rahab. Before the Israelites entered the promised land, a Canaanite woman of questionable reputation converted to faith in Yahweh (Josh 2:1-21). Her conversion included an “active acknowledgment that establishes a formal relationship, not merely a passive cognitive condition.”³⁴ Such an acknowledgment is “a formulaic expression used more than once when a foreigner acknowledges Israelite truth (e.g., Exod 18:11; 1 Kgs 17:24; 2 Kgs 5:15; Isa 45:3).”³⁵ Her confession of Yahweh’s supremacy (2:11) echoes deuteronomic themes and phrases (cf. Deut 4:35, 39; 7:9; 10:17).³⁶ Rahab also gave evidence of her changed life by demonstrating **תְּוֹנָה** (*hesed*) to the Israeli spies. In the Book of Joshua she is the first individual

³³Merrill, *Deuteronomy* 388. For an excellent treatment of conversion in the NT (especially the Book of Acts), see William Barclay, *Turning to God: A Study of Conversion in the Book of Acts and Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964).

³⁴Boling, *Joshua* 146 (re: Josh 2:9). G. F. MacLear, *The Book of Joshua, with Notes, Maps, and Introduction*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ed. J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: University Press, 1889) 40, however, does not accept Rahab as a true convert since she merely voiced “a knowledge which is possible to the heathen, for the ‘invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His *eternal power and Godhead*’ (Rom. I. 20).” Cf., also Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, ed. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1997) 50: “Yet her words, for all their deuteronomic flavor, remain appropriate to the ancestor of a group who would remain outside Israel’s camp (6:23). Yahweh remains ‘*your God*.’ She is not the Gentile convert that later tradition would make of her, but rather one of those foreigners in the Hebrew Bible whose acknowledgment that Yahweh is God underscores the self-evident power and glory of Yahweh (Balaam, Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar, Dariusus).” Woudstra, *Joshua* 73: “In some ways her words [2:8-11] reflect clearly that she is just beginning to emerge from her pagan environment. Calling God *the Lord your God* who is a *God in heaven above and on earth beneath*, Rahab expresses a thought which is also biblical; but similar utterances may be found also in pagan literature.” “Cf. the Egyptian ‘Hymn to Aten’ and the ‘Hymn to Amun’; see *DOTT*, pp. 147, 149. These hymns contain expressions such as ‘Thou sole god, there is no other like thee!’ and ‘The only sole one, who has no peer.’ For a pagan reaction to the Lord’s acts on behalf of Israel see also 1 Sam. 4:8. The thought that Israel’s God acts ‘in the sight of the nations’ is frequently expressed in Ezekiel, e.g. 20:22. The Alalah inscriptions contain an invocation of ‘the gods above and the gods beneath,’ language similar to that used by Rahab; see D. J. Wiseman, ‘Alalakh,’ in *AOTS*, pp. 131, 135” (*ibid.*, 73 n. 23).

³⁵Frank Anthony Spina, “Rahab,” *NIDOTTE* 4:1125. Von Rad also cites the conversion of Rahab as an example of a Gentile exercising faith: Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962-65) 2:379.

³⁶It is due to such echoes that Butler attributes the Rahab account in the Book of Joshua to the Deuteronomist: “The one thing that does appear to be clear is that the Deuteronomist has introduced his own theological conception into the mouth of Rahab in vv 9-11. The tradition of the fear of the nations, the drying up of the waters (וַיַּבֶּשׂ הַיָּם *hi.*), the two kings of the Amorites, and the divine title (12b) all bear Deuteronomistic stamp. Verse 24 stems from the same source. Here then is pre-Deuteronomistic literature given a Deuteronomistic stamp” (Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, vol. 7 in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983] 11). Cf., also Nelson, *Joshua* 46.

to employ the word *hesed* (2:12).³⁷ In the NT, Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 present Rahab as an example of the same faith that characterized Abraham.

In effect, Rahab recites what amounts to an Israelite “Apostles Creed.” Her confession is not that of someone aware of only the most rudimentary aspects of the faith. Rather, this quintessential Canaanite utters an equally quintessential Israelite confession of faith. The ingredients of the confession are constitutive of the covenant between the Lord and Israel, just as the confession becomes in part the basis of the covenant Rahab makes with the spies (Josh 2:12-14, 17-21 . . .). In the end, Rahab’s confession and agreement with the spies eventuate in her and her household becoming part of Israel “to this day” (6:25). This is a conversion story.³⁸

Ruth. Comments and references in the commentary by Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., were the catalyst for this article. Hubbard posed the question: “Is Ruth a ‘convert’ to Yahwism? Since the very question is a modern one, the answer must be a qualified yes.”³⁹ Ruth’s oath of allegiance to Naomi sounds like a confession and reveals her life-changing commitment to Yahweh (cf. Ruth 2:12, “the LORD . . . under whose wings you have come to take refuge”):

Further, her commitment involved a change in life direction—one opposite to Orpah’s—away from her past ties and toward a new God, Yahweh. The commitment also extended into the afterlife. Significantly, though the oath formula normally has Elohim, Ruth invoked the personal, covenantal name *Yahweh*—the only time in the book in which she does so. Since one appeals to one’s own deity to enforce an oath, she clearly implies that Yahweh, not Chemosh, is now her God, the guardian of her future. Hence, while the OT has no fully developed idea of conversion, vv. 16-17 suggest a commitment tantamount to such a change.⁴⁰

One of the great themes of the Book of Ruth is that of *hesed*. According to the testimonies of Naomi (Ruth 1:8) and Boaz (3:10), Ruth clearly demonstrated loyalty and lovingkindness to her deceased husband, to her mother-in-law Naomi, and to her

³⁷Ibid., 147. Cf. Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:506: the conversion required by the prophet Hosea includes “that full understanding of *hēsēd* which befits the covenant relationship, and which takes seriously the God of history.”

³⁸Spina, “Rahab,” *NIDOTTE* 4:1125. McConville offers a sane response to those scholars who would argue for an exilic or post-exilic date for the composition of the Rahab story: “There are, indeed, some indications of a perspective in Joshua that is at some distance from the events described, notably in the phrase ‘to this day’ (4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28; 9:27). These notices do not identify a particular time in Israel’s history, but a long time is scarcely required. The allusion to Rahab (see especially 6:25) is most easily comprehensible if the gap between the event and the comment is short.” Such comments in the text of Scripture are “evidence of a date in the seventh century or later only in the context of a prior commitment to the view that that requirement is to be so dated” (*Grace in the End* 98-99).

³⁹Hubbard, *Ruth* 120.

⁴⁰Ibid.

husband-to-be, Boaz.

Naaman. Jewish tradition identified Naaman as “an example of the righteous proselyte, ranking even higher than Jethro.”⁴¹ Naaman became a proselyte or convert by acknowledging the supremacy of Yahweh (2 Kgs 5:15).⁴² Cogan and Tadmor make the observation that the characteristic post-exilic requirements of the rite of conversion are lacking in the biblical account of Naaman’s conversion.⁴³ That would seem to indicate, therefore, that the biblical account is being recorded accurately in its original historical setting in the monarchical period even though the author of the account may be living in the time of the exile. Naaman’s conversion evidences the universality of the call to conversion that is a frequent aspect of the Elijah-Elisha chronicles.⁴⁴ It also highlights the apostasy of the Israelite king and Elisha’s faithless servant, Gehazi. For a commentary, Paul House’s presentation is the clearest and most comprehensive treatment of Naaman’s conversion and its theological implications.⁴⁵ Naaman’s conversion includes the elements of a confession of faith and a commitment to a new manner of living.⁴⁶

⁴¹Editorial staff, “Naaman,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971) 12:734.

⁴²Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11 in *The Anchor Bible*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1988) 67; T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, vol. 13 in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985) 65; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, ed. Henry Snyder Gehman, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951) 375, 379; Gray, *I & II Kings* 507. Lest Gray’s position be misunderstood as supporting the thesis of this paper, the author would refer the reader to Gray’s anti-supernaturalistic treatment of the miracles of Elisha: “The factual basis of the ‘miracle’ of the floating axe-head may be that Elisha with a long pole or stick probed about the spot indicated (an important point in the text) until he succeeded either in inserting the stick into the socket, or, having located the hard object on the muddy bottom, moved it until the man was able to recover it. In the circles in which the Elisha-hagiology took shape simple instances of prophetic sagacity were soon exaggerated to miracles” (ibid., 511, re: 2 Kgs 6:6).

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Some, like Preuss, have argued that Naaman recognized the revelation of Yahweh in what he experienced—that it was equivalent to the word of Yahweh (Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, Old Testament Library, ed. James L. Mays, et al. [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1995] 1:208).

⁴⁵Paul R. House, *I, 2 Kings*, vol. 8 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 271-74, 313-15.

⁴⁶“Naaman’s conversion includes a confession of faith. . . . Hobbs correctly claims that Naaman’s confession consists of ‘words which accord closely with Elisha’s words in v. 8. . . . Following this confession, Naaman’s actions support his new-found faith.’ Sadly, Naaman’s confession of faith condemns most Israelites of that era, since they have rejected the one true God and embraced gods that cannot heal. Jesus makes this point while rebuking the people of Nazareth in Luke 4:23-30” (ibid., 273). House also points out the implications regarding the theology of missions in the OT: “[T]he Naaman story furthers a canonical emphasis on God’s grace to the nations. From Abraham’s call (Gen 12:1-9) onward

Naaman, like the widow of Zarephath before him (cf. 1 Kgs. 17:7-24), realizes that the God who heals must be the God who saves. His servant girl assumes correctly that Naaman's nationality does not matter to the prophet or to her compassionate God.

Naaman's healing causes him to confess that "there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kgs 5:15). The fact that he makes this claim in a pluralistic, polytheistic culture is significant, for he is in no way sheltered from competing world-views, nor has he failed to observe more than one belief system at close range. He has simply learned to discern the difference between a powerless idol and a personal God who meets worshipers' needs. Clearly, then, Naaman confesses what Israel fails to confess: the sovereign, saving God is the only God and therefore deserves worship.⁴⁷

The sailors. One of the most amazing accounts of conversion is that on the high seas aboard the ship bound for Tarshish with a disobedient prophet as one of its paying passengers (Jonah 1).⁴⁸ The key element in this particular conversion account is the employment of the word "fear" (אָרַץ, *yārē*). The account contains an obvious progression in the development of the concept:⁴⁹

"Then the sailors became afraid" (וַיִּירָאוּ, *wāyyîrē'û* v. 5)

"I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land" (אֲנִי יְהוּדִי וְאֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ יָרֵא, *wē'ef yhw h'ēlōhē haššāmayim 'ānî yārē*, v. 9)

"Then the men became extremely frightened" (וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יָרֵא גְדוֹלָה, *wayyîrē'û hā 'ānāšîm yirē 'āh gēdōlāh*, v. 10)

"Then the men feared the LORD greatly" (וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יָרֵא גְדוֹלָה אֶת יְהוָה, *wayyîrē'û hā 'ānāšîm yirē 'āh gēdōlāh 'ef yhw h*, v. 16)

Hans Walter Wolff observes that even though the statement in verse 16 "has a narrative form, the statement reminds us of the phrase 'fear of Yahweh' which, in the Elohist and in the wisdom writings, is not merely the term for worship, in the sense of a permanent religious affiliation, but even more describes a living

God expects Israel to bless other nations. Moses marries a Cushite (Num 12:1); Ruth is from Moab; Rahab is a Canaanite; Jonah preaches to Assyrians; Daniel prophesies and witnesses to Babylonians. Yahweh, the only God, stands ready to accept Naaman without hesitation. The question is whether the covenant people are ready to share the covenant Lord. Surely this issue must have penetrated the minds of some of the original readers of 1, 2 Kings, and the servant girl's response to Naaman's pain sets a high standard of loving even captors enough to explain God's power to them" (ibid., 313).

⁴⁷Ibid., 314

⁴⁸Joyce Baldwin, "Jonah," *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 2:563.

⁴⁹Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 122; Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah*, Bible and Literature Series, ed. David M. Gunn (Sheffield: Almond, 1983) 31-32; James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, ed. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 57.

relationship of obedience and trust.”⁵⁰ The sailors did more than reverence Yahweh—they acceded to His sovereign control (v. 14, “Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased”). In addition to this evidence of conversion, the sailors demonstrated *hesed* by their self-sacrificing efforts to save the life of the prophet (vv. 10-13). They entreated Yahweh for forgiveness for that which they were about to do with Jonah (v. 14), they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh, and made vows (v. 16) indicating “a lasting bond of trust with Yahweh.”⁵¹

Such a sacrifice could have taken place aboard ship. The commentators speculate on these matters; the text does not say. The important thing is that these sailors, who once called upon other gods (1:5), now worship the Lord that Jonah confesses (1:9). A vow is a promise made to the Lord (Deut. 23:21-23); the contents of these promises are not indicated here. After his experience in the fish, Jonah will resolve to make sacrifices and to fulfill vows that he has made (2:9[10]).⁵²

Ninevites. Upon hearing the Word of God proclaimed by the prophet Jonah (3:4), the people of Nineveh “believed in God” (v. 5, *וַיִּאֱמְנוּ בַּאֱלֹהִים*, *wayya’āminū ’anšē nīnēwēh bē’Īhîm*).⁵³

Just as in Exod. 14:31 so here (*וַיִּאֱמְנוּ בַּאֱלֹהִים*) is a synonymous parallel to *וַיִּיָּרֵאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה*, in 1:16. . . . If the meaning differs at all, it does so only by a nuance: *יָרֵא* may perhaps lay more emphasis on the relationship of obedience (cf. 1:16 with 1:10), while *וַיִּאֱמֵן* rather stresses the relationship of trust (Ps. 78:22). But both words aim to stress the complete reliance on God. . . . Otherwise *וַיִּאֱמֵן* is used only in connection with Israel, as all the references cited show; at the same time, the sense is often that this kind of faith is not to be found in Israel (Num. 14:11; 20:12; Deut. 1:32; 2 Kings 17:14; Ps. 78:22). Against this background it is “almost as if the narrator wanted to say: “Not even in Israel have I found such faith” (. . . cf. Matt. 8:10 with 12:41 and John 1:9f.; 4:1ff.).⁵⁴

⁵⁰Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah* 121. There is evidence that the potential for Gentile conversion existed even prior to the exodus from Egypt (cf. Exod 9:20, 30). This potential must be carefully evaluated in light of the absence of conversion even though there might be a fear of Yahweh (cf. 2 Kgs 17:41).

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 122. *Pirkē Rabbi Eliezer* “fills in the story: “They returned to Joppa and went up to Jerusalem and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins, as it is said, “And the men feared the Lord exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto the Lord”” (Limburg, *Jonah* 57 n. 62).

⁵²Limburg, *Jonah* 57-58.

⁵³“In v. 5 ‘God’ as the object of faith is almost required, since the Ninevites have been told nothing about Yahweh (as were the sailors in 1:9). And it is with conscious artistry that 3:10 picks up *וַיִּאֱמֵן* from 3:9” (Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah* 147).

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 150. Wolff (151) draws an intriguing parallel to the situation of Sodom and Gomorrah, another group of Gentiles who were given the opportunity to convert: “The reader is supposed to grasp, even at this early point, that it is not only a limited number who came to believe. (This was the choice open to Sodom, where at the end even ten righteous men would have been enough to save the whole city [Gen. 18:23-33].” Cf. T. Desmond Alexander, “Jonah,” *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, TOTC, ed. D. J.

Both the sailors and the citizens of the city of Nineveh “called out” to God in prayer (1:14, וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־יְהוָה, *wayyiqrē ’û ’eġyhwḥ*; 3:8, וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־יְהוָה בְּחִזְקָה, *wěyiqrē ’û ’eġ ’èlôhîm bĕhġāzēqāh*). They possessed the same hope “that we do not perish” (וְלֹא־נָאֲדָר, *wĕlō’ nō’bēd*: 1:6; 3:9).⁵⁵ Nineveh’s inhabitants repented in sackcloth and ashes together with fasting (3:5-8).⁵⁶ Limburg comments, “Once again, the people of the world are demonstrating to the people of God how they ought to conduct themselves! . . . The actions of the Ninevites would long stand as a model response to prophetic preaching (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32).”⁵⁷ The involvement of the Word of God in the conversion of the Ninevites is undeniable.⁵⁸ Evidence of their conversion is seen in their humble acceptance of the judgment of God as a consequence of their former behavior (3:9).⁵⁹

The first consequence of faith is acceptance of the judgment as deserved. This is shown through rites of self-humiliation. . . . The completeness of Nineveh’s repentance is brought out in a number of different ways. . . . The fact that even the beasts participate in the rites of repentance (vv. 7b-8a) may be a reminder to the reader that among these strangers even ox and ass (Isa. 1:2f., like the stork and the swallow, Jer. 8:7) know more about repentance than do men and women in Israel.⁶⁰

In addition to their humility, the Ninevites set about to change the way they behaved

Wiseman (Downers Grove, Ill./Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1988) 121: “The Hebrew idiom *he’ min b’*, denotes more . . . than just believing what someone has said; it expresses the idea of trusting a person.”

⁵⁵Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue*, Overtures to Biblical Theology, ed. Walter Brueggemann, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 72.

⁵⁶Limburg, *Jonah* 80.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 82. Cf. 85: “Of course the Assyrian king as portrayed here would not know the sort of creedal statements used by Joel and in *Jonah* 4:2. . . . He is kindred to another Gentile, a centurion, who also did not presume upon the Lord’s help, and of whom Jesus said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith’ (Luke 7:1-10).” Many commentators express the opinion that “the king of Nineveh” is inconsistent with the usual title “king of Assyria” and indicative of composition as late as the Persian period (cf. Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976] 185). However, it must be borne in mind that “there is a sparsity of Assyrian source material from the first half of the eighth century BC. This is a period of Assyrian history about which we are unfortunately very poorly informed” (Alexander, “Jonah,” *TO TC* 125; cf., also 122).

⁵⁸Limburg, *Jonah* 151: “Here [3:6] הַדְּבָר ‘the word,’ does not mean the news of the people’s conversion. If that were meant we should expect to find הַדְּבָרִים אֲלֵהֶם, ‘these things’ (Gen. 15:1; 1 Kgs 17:17; 21:1; and frequently). It is precisely ‘the word’ which Jonah proclaimed, דְּבַר, being the specific term for the prophetic word (Jer. 18:18; Amos 3:1; Ezek. 33:30, and frequently).” See, also 156: “The precondition for the faith is the messenger’s word that has gone forth.”

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 153.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 156. See Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993) 306-9, regarding the nature of forgiveness and its relationship to remission of penalty. Cf. also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 373-78.

toward their fellow man. As individuals they turned (וָשׁוּבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה, *wəyāšubū 'iš*) from their “wicked way and from the violence [הַחֲמָסָה, *hehāmās*]” that was a hallmark of their national character (3:8; cf. Nahum 2:13 [Eng. 12]; 3:1). Such a change could be an indication that they would enter into human relationships with what could be termed *hesed*.

The Elements of OT Conversion

One element is glaringly absent in all of these OT examples of conversion: they have no reference to the Holy Spirit. Did the Spirit have a role in OT conversion? From John 3:5-8 it would appear that knowledge of the Spirit's involvement in regeneration had been revealed in the OT. However, John 7:39 seems to indicate that prior to Christ's glorification the Spirit had not yet been placed within those who believed. That the Spirit did not enter or indwell OT believers in association with conversion would be consistent with the future focus of passages such as Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14.⁶¹ Absence of an indwelling of the Spirit in OT believers is not the same as His having no involvement at all, however. The exact nature of the Spirit's role in OT conversion is a subject deserving further examination, but that is beyond the scope of this current study.⁶²

The instrument of conversion in the OT was the Word of God (Ps 19:7).⁶³ Although the Word of God is not directly evident in a few of the OT cases, it is present indirectly. Naaman heard the words of the prophet Elisha who was the spokesperson for Yahweh. The prophet's instructions were obviously in accordance with the will of God since God did heal the Syrian. No word of or from Yahweh was mentioned in the first chapter of the Book of Ruth, but it may be assumed that she had received some instruction since she was cognizant of the covenant name of her in-laws' God and employed it in her oath of allegiance. Rahab had heard the reports of Yahweh's delivering Israel out of Egypt and leading them through the wilderness. Perhaps she had not heard it from a prophet, but she had heard nonetheless. She responded to what she had heard and did know. God met her at that point and provided her with the additional witness of the Israelite spies who had come to her house. Those spies confirmed the reports Rahab had heard. It is nonsensical to speak of the encounter with the spies in sexual terms. There was no better place for the Israeli spies to become invisible.⁶⁴ It had the appearance of happenstance or an on-the-spot human decision. However, as in the Book of Ruth, such happenstance was

⁶¹Cf. Ralph A. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 6:922, 925-26; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 354-56; Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 66, 209.

⁶²One approach to this question is presented by Leon J. Wood in *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 64-68.

⁶³Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* 300.

⁶⁴Woudstra, *Joshua* 69-70.

really an indication of divine guidance behind the scenes.⁶⁵

Conversion may be summed up in the Hebrew term **נָשָׁב** (*šûb*, “he turns”).⁶⁶ Repentance and faith are its primary elements.⁶⁷ Faith “achieves in practice the acknowledgment by the individual of the sole sovereignty of Yahweh.”⁶⁸ Such acknowledgment is inseparable from conversion which includes penitent humility.⁶⁹ Confession of the sovereignty of Yahweh is clearly evident in the cases of Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the sailors, and the Ninevites.⁷⁰

An entreaty for forgiveness was also an element of OT conversion.⁷¹ Prayers for forgiveness were conditioned upon the nature of God and were accompanied by the awareness that God was not obligated to forgive their sins. As a holy God, He was perfectly within His rights to execute full judgment upon the sinner even though he or she had confessed. They threw themselves at His mercy, trusting that there was yet an opportunity for them to experience His grace. Divine forgiveness was the equivalent of freedom from guilt.⁷²

A total change in one’s life was the obvious outcome.⁷³ Eichrodt refers to this element of conversion as “the bringing of every department of life under the sovereign claims of the holy God.”⁷⁴ Evidences of conversion’s radical change in the individual’s life include a commitment to Yahweh and the performance of covenant-loyalty (*hesed*) to one’s fellow man. The pagan sailors on the ship with Jonah offered sacrifices to Yahweh and made vows (Jonah 1:16). Naaman also committed himself to the offering of sacrifices to Yahweh (2 Kgs 5:17). Ruth showed that kind of loyalty and loving-kindness to her mother-in-law Naomi. Naaman exhibited it in his offer of a gift to the prophet Elisha. Rahab demonstrated it by hiding the Israeli spies. Corporate or mass conversion provided the same evidence. The Ninevites demonstrated it by forsaking their violent practices and treating one another with mutual love and respect.

Another change was also evident: the converted experienced a new relationship to God.⁷⁵ The new relationship implied the renewal of fellowship with

⁶⁵Ibid., 71.

⁶⁶Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:288, 466-71. Cf. Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* 299-301.

⁶⁷Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* 297.

⁶⁸Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:283.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰See the charts appended to this article.

⁷¹Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:458.

⁷²Ibid., 2:422.

⁷³Cf. Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* 242, 299.

⁷⁴Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT* 2:245.

⁷⁵Ibid., 2:434.

Him that had been broken by personal sin.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Through the process of studying the Mosaic description of conversion and the OT examples of conversion it has become clear that there is, indeed, evidence of a developed concept (or, doctrine) of conversion prior to the Second Temple period. This author has the same reaction that Eichrodt had to the theological opinion that claimed the OT “speaks only occasionally of forgiveness and certainly does not put it as the centre of its scheme of salvation”: “it is simply incomprehensible that anyone can venture such an opinion.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶Ibid., 2:459.

⁷⁷Ibid.; cf. n. 3 and Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* 120.

CHART 1: ELEMENTS IN OT CONVERSION

<i>Element</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Passage (NASB)</i>
Word of God	Abram	“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed” (Heb 11:8)
	Rahab	“we have heard [רָחַבָּ]” (Josh 2:10)
	Naaman	“Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean’” (2 Kgs 5:10)
	Sailors	“I am a Hebrew, and I fear [אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה] the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.” (Jonah 1:9)
	Ninevites	“Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’” (Jonah 3:4)
Knowledge	Rahab	“I know [יָדַעְתִּי] that the LORD has given you the land” (Josh 2:9)
	Naaman	“Behold now, I know [יָדַעְתִּי] that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (2 Kgs 5:15)
	Sailors	“the men knew [יָדְעוּ] that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them” (Jonah 1:10)
Confession	Rahab	“the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh 2:11)
	Ruth	“Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God [יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָמָה] . . . Thus may the LORD [יְהוָה] do to me” (Ruth 1:16-17)
	Naaman	“Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (2 Kgs 5:15)
	Sailors	“Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased” (Jonah 1:14)
	Ninevites	“that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands” (Jonah 3:8)
Faith / Repen- tance	Abram	cf. Rom 4:1-12
	Ruth	“the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge” (Ruth 2:12)
	Ninevites	“Then the people of Nineveh believed in God [וַיִּימְנוּ בַּאֱלֹהִים]” (Jonah 3:5)

<i>Element</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Passage (NASB)</i>
Entreaty	Naaman	"In this matter may the LORD pardon (חַלַּף?) your servant" (2 Kgs 5:18)
	Sailors	"Then they called on the LORD and said, 'We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased.'" (Jonah 1:14)
	Ninevites	"let men call on God earnestly [יִקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים] [בְּתַזְקָה]" (Jonah 3:8)
Change (שׁוּב) / Commitment (חֻסָּד)	Abram	"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance" (Heb 11:8)
	Rahab	"I have dealt kindly with you (עָשִׂיתִי עִמָּכֶם חֻסָּד)" (Josh 2:12)
	Ruth	"May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me [וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם חֻסָּד כַּאֲשֶׁר] [עָשִׂיתֶם עִמִּי חֲסִדִּים וְעִמָּדִי]" (Ruth 1:8) AND "You have shown your last kindness [חֲסִדֶּךָ] to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich" (3:10)
	Naaman	"please take a present from your servant now" (2 Kgs 5:15) "your servant will no more offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice (נִזְבַּח) to other gods, but to the LORD" (2 Kgs 5:17)
	Sailors	"Then the men feared the LORD greatly [וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים] [וַיִּזְבְּחוּ אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ אֶת־יְהוָה] [וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים] and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD [וַיִּזְבְּחוּ אֶת־יְהוָה] and made vows [וַיִּזְבְּחוּ אֶת־יְהוָה]." (Jonah 1:16)
	Ninevites	"turn [וַיִּשְׁבוּ] from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands" (Jonah 3:8; cf. 3:10)
	Forgiveness	Naaman
Ninevites		"When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented (נִינָחַם) concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it" (Jonah 3:10)

HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

Robert L. Thomas
Professor of New Testament

A difference of opinion is emerging among evangelicals about the degree of historical accuracy of the Synoptic Gospels. A historical survey of how various individuals explain the Great Commission illustrates that difference of opinion. An examination of how the church at different periods has viewed this Commission gives perspective regarding how and when this difference developed. The early church took the words of the Commission at face value, assuming them to be spoken by Jesus. The post-Reformation church did the same until the impact of the Enlightenment, which generated the ideology of Historical Criticism. Radical Historical Criticism questions the basic historicity of the Commission, Jesus' claim of all power, His command to go to all nations and baptize, and His use of the trinitarian name in connection with baptism. Evangelical Historical Criticism questions the historicity of the same parts of the Commission, though usually not to the same degree as radical Historical Criticism. This evangelical approach to the Great Commission poses a serious dilemma for evangelical preachers and teachers in their handling of the Great Commission.

* * * * *

Since the release of *The Jesus Crisis*¹ in October of 1998 a number of informative developments have come. Response to the book has been overwhelmingly positive,² but a few have reacted strongly against it.³ Some are yet undecided as to how to respond to it.⁴ The differences in response have magnified a significant difference of opinion about the accuracy of the Synoptic Gospels that exists in the evangelical community at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

¹Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, eds., *The Jesus Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998).

²E.g., L. Russ Bush, Book Review of *The Jesus Crisis*, in *Faith & Mission* 16/1 (Fall 1998):120-121., and *Christian News* 37/33 (September 13, 1999):1, 26-28.

³E.g., Grant Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," *JETS* 42/2 (June 1999):193-210.

⁴E.g., Mike Stallard, "An Essay on Liberal Hermeneutics," *The Conservative Theological Journal* 3/10 [December 1999]:296-97

The diversity of opinion about the Gospels raises interesting questions: What difference does it make in terms of Christian ministry? Does it matter that some evangelicals understand the Gospels to be historically accurate down to the last detail, and others see the Gospels as only approximations of what Jesus said and did? Does it affect how people will preach and teach those Gospels during the next century?

A historical survey is often helpful in evaluating contemporary practices. For purposes of such a survey, the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) is a good passage to consult in comparing how various groups have handled and are handling that passage in ministry and discussion and how the advent of Historical Criticism has affected the preaching and teaching of it. The following discussion will describe the reception of the Great Commission by leaders in the early church, by scholars from the Reformation until the impact of Historical Criticism was felt, by the practitioners of radical Historical Criticism, and by those of evangelical Historical Criticism.

THE GREAT COMMISSION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

An examination of the Great Commission in the early church is an appropriate startingpoint. A comparison of the early church's handling of the Commission lays a historical foundation for proceeding through various periods to see the similarities and differences. A century-by-century survey of the ancient church reflects how the early fathers responded to Jesus' parting commission.

Second-Century Witnesses

In his "Epistle to the Philadelphians" Ignatius wrote,

For those things which the prophets announced, saying, "Until He come for whom it is reserved, and He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles," have been fulfilled in the Gospel, [our Lord saying,] "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."⁵

A later work spuriously attributed to the same writer, said,

Wherefore also *the Lord*, when he sent forth the apostles to make disciples of all nations, *commanded them* to "baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," not unto one [person] having three names, nor into three [persons] who became incarnate, but into three possessed of equal honor.⁶

Later in the second century Irenaeus also cited the commission:

⁵*Phld.* 9 (*ANF*, 1:85).

⁶*Philippians* 2 (*ANF*, 1:116) [emphasis added].

That is the Spirit of whom *the Lord declares*, “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” And again, giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God, *He said to them*, “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”⁷

During the same period Tertullian in speaking of Christ reported,

Now, the Gentiles knew nothing either of Him, or of any of His promises. Therefore it was to Israel that He spake when He said, “I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Not yet had He “cast to the dogs the children’s bread”; not yet did He charge them to “go into the way of the Gentiles.” It is only at the last that *He instructs them* to “go and teach all nations, and baptize them” when they were so soon to receive “the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, who should guide them into all truth.”⁸

Regarding Jesus’ instructions to His disciples, Tertullian also wrote,

Accordingly, after one of these had been struck off, *He commanded the eleven others* [emphasis added], on His departure to the Father, to “go and teach *all* nations, who were to be baptized into the Father, and into the Son, and into the Holy Ghost.”⁹

In his remarks *Against Praxeas* Tertullian added more:

After His resurrection He promises in a pledge to His disciples that He will send them the promise of His Father; and lastly, *He commands them* to baptize into the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, not into an unipersonal God. And indeed it is not once only, but three times, that we are immersed into the Three Persons, at each several mention of Their names.”¹⁰

After speaking of Jesus’ nativity, passion, and resurrection, the same writer cites the commission again:

“For the *law* of baptizing has been *imposed*, and the formula prescribed: “Go,” He *saith*, “teach the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹

Third-Century Witnesses

Origen cited the Great Commission at least once:

⁷*Against Heresies* 3.17.1 (ANF, 1:444) [emphasis added].

⁸*The Prescription against Heretics* 8 (ANF, 3:247) [emphasis added].

⁹*Ibid.*, 20 (ANF, 3:252).

¹⁰*Against Praxeas* 26 (ANF, 3:623) [emphasis added].

¹¹*On Baptism* 13 (ANF, 3:676) [emphasis in the original].

We would say in reply, that so He did; for righteousness has arisen in His days, and there is abundance of peace, which took its commencement at his birth, God preparing the nations for His teaching, that they might be under one prince, the king of the Romans, and that it might not, owing to the want of union among the nations, caused by the existence of many kingdoms, be more difficult for the apostles to Jesus to accomplish the task enjoined upon them by their Master, when *He said*, "Go and teach all nations."¹²

Hippolytus in combating the heretic Noetus had occasion to use the Commission:

The Father's Word, therefore, knowing the economy (disposition) and the will of the Father, to wit, that the Father seeks to be worshipped in none other way than this, *gave this charge* to the disciples after He rose from the dead: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."¹³

Cyprian cited the Lord's words in the Great Commission a number of times:

"*The Lord*, when, after His resurrection, He sent forth His apostles, *charges them, saying*, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."¹⁴

Lest therefore we should walk in darkness, we ought to follow Christ, and to observe His precepts, because *He Himself told His apostles* in another place, as He sent them forth, "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."¹⁵

For *the Lord* after His resurrection, sending His disciples, *instructed and taught them* in what manner they ought to baptize, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."¹⁶

Likewise in the Gospel, *the Lord after His resurrection says to His disciples*: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."¹⁷

¹²*Against Celsus* 2.30 (ANF, 4:566-67) [emphasis added].

¹³*Against the Heresy of One Noetus* 14 (ANF, 5:228) [emphasis added].

¹⁴*The Epistles of Cyprian* 24:2 (ANF, 5:302) [emphasis added].

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 62.18 (ANF, 5:363) [emphasis added].

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 72.5 (ANF, 5:380) [emphasis added].

¹⁷*The Treatises of Cyprian* 12.2.26 (ANF, 5:526) [emphasis added].

At the Seventh Council of Carthage, convened in A.D. 256 to deal with the issue of baptizing heretics, a number of bishops had occasion to cite the Great Commission. They did so with such introductory formulas as “He gave them charge, saying” (Lucius of Galbae), “God and our Lord Jesus Christ, teaching the apostles with His own mouth, has entirely completed our faith and the grace of baptism, and the rule of ecclesiastical law, saying” (Euchratius of Thence), and “the Lord by His divine precept commanded to His apostles, saying” (Vincentius of Thibaris).¹⁸ When combined with the introductory words from the other fathers cited—“the Lord . . . commanded,” “the Lord declares,” “He instructs them,” “He commanded the eleven others,” “He commands them,” “He saith,” “He said,” “He gave this charge,” “The Lord . . . charges them, saying,” “He Himself told His apostles,” “The Lord . . . instructed and taught them . . . , saying,” and “the Lord . . . says to His disciples”—these formulas leave no room for doubt that the early church attributed the very words to Jesus Himself.

Summary of the Second and Third Centuries

The unanimity of opinion among the early fathers that Jesus spoke the words of the Great Commission is completely obvious. They took the statements of the Great Commission at face value, without ever questioning that they represented historical fact. No one issues even the slightest hint that someone else put these words into Jesus’ mouth. That He is the historical source of the Commission is unquestioned.

It remains to compare that observation with how the post-Reformation church and Historical Criticism view the Great Commission.

**THE GREAT COMMISSION FROM THE REFORMATION
UNTIL THE IMPACT OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM**

Early church perspectives regarding the Great Commission continued without interruption for over a thousand years and into the period following the Reformation. The following comments illustrate scholarly opinion in the orthodox church during those later years.

Lange wrote,

The declaration of Christ: “All power,” etc., and His command to baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, etc., as also the fact that He received the adoring homage of His disciples, show clearly that He presented Himself, not only in the majesty of His exalted humanity, but also in the brightness of His divinity.¹⁹

¹⁸The Seventh Council of Carthage (*ANF*, 567, 568, 569).

¹⁹John Peter Lange, *Matthew*, in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical*, trans. and ed. by Philip Schaff (reprint of an 1857 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 560.

In connection with 28:18 Broadus states, "Jesus claims universal authority. . . . It is on the basis of this mediatorial authority, in heaven and on earth, that the Saviour issues his commission to his followers."²⁰ In connection with 28:19-20 he continues, "Jesus gives direction that all the nations shall be disciplined unto him, and taught to keep his commandments."²¹

Regarding the words "all nations" in 28:19, Alford notes,

It is absurd to imagine that in these words of the Lord there is implied a *rejection of the Jews*, in direct variance with his commands elsewhere. . . . With regard to the difficulty which has been raised on these words,—that if they had been thus spoken by the Lord, the Apostles would never have had any doubt about the admission of the Gentiles into the Church,—I would answer . . . 'that the Apostles *never had any doubt whatever* about admitting Gentiles,—only whether they should not be *circumcised* first.'²²

Meyer also evidences his conviction that Jesus spoke the words of the Great Commission. He paraphrases "all power was given to me" in 28:18 thus: "[all power] was practically given, that is, when the Father awoke me out of death."²³ Commenting on the words "all nations" in 28:19, he writes, "On this occasion Jesus makes no mention of any particular *condition* on which *Gentiles* were to be admitted into the church. . . ."²⁴ He comments on "the name" in the baptismal instruction of 28:19:

Had Jesus used the words τὰ ὀνόματα (*ta onomata*, "the names") instead of τὸ ὄνομα (*to onoma*, "the name"), then, however much He may have intended the names of three distinct persons to be understood, He would still have been liable to be misapprehended, for it might have been supposed that the plural was meant to refer to the *various* names of each separate person.²⁵

Summary of Orthodox Opinions following the Reformation

Examples from the period following the Reformation until Historical Criticism began to make its impact are plentiful and could be multiplied. The ones cited above represent a great multitude of Christian leaders from that period who show that orthodox Christianity held to the same view of the Great Commission as

²⁰John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886) 592.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4 vols. (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898) 1:306 [emphasis in the original].

²³Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Part I, The Gospel of Matthew*, 2 vols. trans. and ed. by William P. Dickson and William Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879) 2:300.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 2:301 [emphasis in the original].

²⁵*Ibid.*, 2:302 n. 1 [transliteration and translation added; emphasis in the original].

early church leaders did. An unbroken continuity of opinion prevailed in viewing the words of the Great Commission as coming from the mouth of Jesus Himself. No early Christian community or redactor could lay claim to having originated His recorded sayings. The account in the Gospel of Matthew is historically precise in its description of Christ's marching orders to the eleven disciples and to the church as a whole.

THE GREAT COMMISSION IN RADICAL HISTORICAL CRITICISM

When the Enlightenment began to impact Gospel studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,²⁶ however, monumental changes began occurring. Among theologically liberal scholars, questions about the historical accuracy of the Gospels started to emerge. Those questions have multiplied as the twentieth century has progressed and has now come to a close. To find that radical historical critics have questioned various aspects of historicity regarding the Great Commission is not too surprising. After all, these are scholars who, for the most part, doubt that Jesus ever rose from the dead. Their perspectives on the Great Commission pose an interesting contrast to positions taken by Christian scholars before them.

General Reliability of the Account

A. B. Bruce exemplifies extreme skepticism regarding the Commission:

This great final word of Jesus is worthy of the Speaker and of the situation. Perhaps it is not to be taken as an exact report of what Jesus said to His disciples at a certain time and place. In it the real and the ideal seem to be blended; what Jesus said there and then with what the Church of the apostolic age had gradually come to regard as the will of the Risen Lord, with growing clearness as the years advanced, with perfect clearness after Israel's crisis had come. . . . To this measure of Christian enlightenment the Apostolic Church, as represented by our evangelist, had attained when he wrote his Gospel, probably after the destruction of Jerusalem. Therein is summed up the Church's confession of faith conceived as uttered by the lips of the Risen One.²⁷

Montefiore gives another example:

This story, the unhistorical character of which is obvious, is the *sequitur* of xxvii. 62-66. When the Christians said not only that Jesus was risen, but that his tomb was empty, the Jews retorted that, if the tomb were empty, this was due to the body having been stolen by the disciples. The Christian rejoinder is contained in Matthew's story. Both attack

²⁶See Thomas and Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis* 85-131.

²⁷A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5 vols. (1956 reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 1:340.

and defense are late; they arose when the situation of the tomb was already forgotten, or when no examination on the spot could be made.²⁸

Words from the Jesus Seminar belong here:

These commissions [i.e., those in Matthew 28, Luke 24, and Acts 1] have little in common, which indicates that they have been created by the individual evangelists to express their conception of the future of the Jesus movement. As a consequence, they cannot be traced back to Jesus.

The commission in Matthew is expressed in Matthew's language and reflects the evangelist's idea of the world mission of the church. Jesus probably had no idea of launching a world mission and certainly was not an institution builder. The three parts of the commission—make disciples, baptize, and teach—constitute the program adopted by the infant movement, but do not reflect direct instructions from Jesus.

These commissions do not rest on old tradition, as their variety and divergence show. They are framed in language characteristic of the individual evangelists and express their views of how the mission of the infant church is to be understood.²⁹

Of course, every one of Jesus' words in Matt 28:18-20 received a "black bead" vote—i.e., a rejection because of being unhistorical—in the deliberations of this group.

Jesus' Claim of All Authority

Regarding Jesus' claim of all authority in Matt 28:18, Montefiore states,

The historic Jesus would have been greatly amazed had he been told that such a comprehensive claim was to be put into his mouth. In fact the words spoken are a *résumé* of the Christian faith and of the Church's mission, as the resurrection made them. It is the glorified Christ who instructs future generations.³⁰

Jesus' Command to Take the Gospel to All Nations

Regarding Jesus' command in v. 19 for the eleven to take the gospel to all nations, the same author comments, "The old apostles knew nothing of a command to make all the nations Christian."³¹

M'Neile adds his opinion in connection with this last issue:

The evangelizing of all nations was spoken of in xxxiv. 14. But the difficulty there caused by the words is greater, if possible, in the present passage. If the risen Lord

²⁸C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2 vols. (New York: KTAV, 1968) 1:356.

²⁹Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993) 270.

³⁰Montefiore, *Synoptic Gospels* 1:357.

³¹Ibid.

commanded it in one of His latest utterances, the action of the apostles with reference to the Gentiles (see *e.g.* Gal. ii. 9, Ac. x. xi. 1-18) is inexplicable. The admission of Gentiles to the Jewish religion is an expectation found, of course, in the O.T. But that their admission into the Jewish-Christian Church was something quite different is shewn by the glad surprise expressed that God had 'given to the Gentiles also repentance unto life' (Ac. xi. 18). Nor is there a hint in Acts or Epistles that when the first apostles confined themselves to Jews, while recognizing S. Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles, it was because of their 'reluctance to undertake spiritual responsibilities.' . . . The universality of the Christian message was soon learnt, largely by the spiritual experiences of S. Paul, which were authoritative for the Church. And once learnt, they were early assigned to a direct command of Christ. It is impossible to maintain that everything which goes to constitute even the essence of Christianity must necessarily be traceable to explicit words of Jesus.³²

Another of Montefiore's views is relevant here:

There were two parties in the young church, one anxious to convert and accept the nations without any 'Jewish' observance; the other more conservative. 'By the time Matthew wrote, a new exegesis which could reconcile the parties had been evolved. It was admitted on the one hand that the Master had said, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." . . . It was conceded also by the liberal party that in His first Mission Charge He had forbidden the Twelve to go into any way of the Gentiles or any city of the Samaritans (Matt. x. 6); in return, the other side admitted that this limitation was only intended for the time during which He walked on the earth. . . .'³³

Jesus' Command to Baptize

Regarding the command to baptize in v. 19, the same skepticism is evident:

Jesus had never made baptism a condition of discipleship. After his own baptism by John we hear of the rite no more. The history and origin of the conception of the Trinity lie outside the story and age of Jesus.³⁴

It is probable, not that Mt.'s text is unsound, but that the whole clause is due to him, and that the Lord did not *at this point* command the rite of baptism.³⁵

The Trinitarian Formula

Those of radical persuasions also question the historicity of the trinitarian formula from the lips of Jesus:

It seems plain from the early material in Acts that baptism was performed 'in the name

³²Alan Hugh M'Neile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 435.

³³Montefiore, *Synoptic Gospels* 358.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵M'Neile, *St. Matthew* 437.

of' and also 'into the name of' Jesus as Lord and Messiah. The mistake of so many writers on the New Testament lies in treating this saying as a liturgical formula (which it later became), and not as a description of what baptism accomplished. The evangelist, whom we must at least allow to have been familiar with the baptismal customs of the early Messianic Community, may well have added to *baptizing them* his own summary of what baptism accomplished.³⁶

Summary of Opinions from Radical Historical Criticism

That radical Historical Criticism has reduced the historical validity of the Great Commission to nothing is quite conspicuous. That would probably exclude "teaching them all things" from the Commission too. Scholars of that persuasion stand at the opposite pole from the early church writers and from orthodox scholars through the centuries until the impact of the Enlightenment made itself felt in Gospel studies.

THE GREAT COMMISSION IN EVANGELICAL HISTORICAL CRITICISM

Evangelical historical critics are next in line for a comparison of views on the Great Commission. Beginning about the middle of the twentieth century, evangelicals began jumping on the historical-critical "bandwagon." Ned Stonehouse was the first person of significance—perhaps the first of any level of importance—among the early evangelicals to break ranks with the early-church and post-Reformation orthodox view regarding the independence and the historical reliability of the Synoptic Gospels. He did this in a 1963 publication.³⁷

Heading by heading, here is how some current evangelicals stand regarding the Great Commission.

General Reliability of the Account

In his overall perspective on the passage Hagner recounts,

At the same time, it is very clear that the words are recast in Matthew's style and vocabulary. . . . This fact, however, does not amount to a demonstration that Matthew composed the passage *ex nihilo*. . . . He may simply have worked over and re-presented a tradition available to him. . . .³⁸

³⁶W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, vol. 26 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1971) 362-63.

³⁷Ned B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels, Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963). The book was an expansion of the Peyton Lectures delivered at Fuller Theological Seminary, March 27-30, 1962.

³⁸Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. By David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1995) 883.

Gundry writes along the same lines:

We may legitimately assume, then, that in vv 9-10 and 16-20 Matthew edits Markan material no longer available to us and that vv 11-15 represent an inserted continuation of the story started in 27:62-66, also an insertion.³⁹

Note the major focus of both writers on Matthew's editorial activity rather than on the historical factuality of the account. The early fathers took the account to be factual, not as an editorial "make-over" by Matthew.

Jesus' Claim of All Authority

Commenting on v. 18, Gundry writes,

The addition of $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha$ [*pasa*], "all," then represents his [i.e., Matthew's] favorite diction, heightens the thought of Jesus' authority, and possibly reflects Dan 4:14 LXX. . . . Therefore it is better to say that Matthew takes "All authority has been given to me" from the tradition behind Luke 4:6b, "to you I will give all this authority," which he omitted in Matt 4:9. Its use here compensates for its omission there. Matthew inserted "in heaven and on earth" also in 6:10. The phrase adds heavenly authority to the earthly authority offered by the Devil. Matthew has a penchant for pairing heaven and earth. . . .⁴⁰

Note Gundry's opinion as to the source of three aspects of Jesus' claim of all authority:

- (1) The term "all" derives from Matthew's editorial activity.
- (2) The source of the statement as a whole is the Devil's words during Jesus' temptation in the desert.
- (3) The universal scope of the claim, "in heaven and on earth," comes from Matthew's editorial "penchant for pairing heaven and earth."

In these regards, he approximates very closely the radical historical critic who wrote about Jesus' being surprised to learn that such a comprehensive claim had been put into His mouth.⁴¹

Jesus' Command to Take the Gospel to All Nations

Evangelical comments about the command to take the gospel to all nations (28:18a) follow the same path. Beare has written,

Obviously enough, if any such command had been known to the apostles, and to the early church, they would not have debated about the legitimacy of such a mission, and the

³⁹Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 591.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 595 [transliteration added].

⁴¹Montefiore, *Synoptic Gospels* 357.

'pillars' of the mother church in Jerusalem could hardly have agreed to restrict themselves to 'the circumcision' while it was left to Paul and Barnabas—two men who had not been among the eleven who received the command—to go to the Gentiles. This alone would be enough to demonstrate that this charge of the risen Jesus is a relatively late formulation. The controversy over the admission of Gentiles is long over, and indeed forgotten.⁴²

Beare's summation closely resembles the views of M'Neile and Montefiore on the origin of the command as being the early church rather than Jesus Himself.

The same is true of Hill's perspective on the command to make disciples of all nations:

The *Sitz im Leben* of the verse probably lies in the life and work of the Church about fifty years after the death of Jesus. Had Christ given the command to 'make disciples of all nations,' the opposition in Paul's time to the admission of Gentiles to the Church would be inexplicable. It must be assumed that the Church, having learned and experienced the universality of the Christian message, assigned that knowledge to a direct command of the living Lord.⁴³

Jesus' Command to Baptize

Evangelical Hagner shows affinity to radical Historical Criticism in his view of Jesus' command to baptize:

Matthew tells us nothing concerning his view of Christian baptism. Only Matthew records this command of Jesus, but the practice of the early church suggests its historicity (cf. Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 38; 9:18; etc.). The threefold name (at most only an incipient trinitarianism) in which the baptism was to be performed, on the other hand, seems clearly to be a liturgical expansion of the evangelist consonant with the practice of his day. . . . There is a good possibility that in its original form, as witnessed by the ante-Nicene Eusebian form, the text read "make disciples *in my name*" [i.e., with no reference to baptism]. . . . This shorter reading preserves the symmetrical rhythm of the passage, whereas the triadic formula fits awkwardly into the structure as one might expect if it were an interpolation. . . .⁴⁴

The probability is that Jesus gave no such command to baptize according to this author. In that opinion he closely approximates the radical historical critics.

The Trinitarian Formula

Evangelical historical critics find their closest kinship with radical Historical Criticism in their treatments of the trinitarian formula in Matt 28:19.

⁴²Francis W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1981) 544-45.

⁴³David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 362.

⁴⁴Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* 887-88 [emphasis in the original].

Gundry, Blomberg, Carson, and Osborne furnish examples of this similarity. Gundry writes,

εἰς τὸ ὄνομα (*eis to onoma*) is a favorite phrase of his [Matthew's] . . . and occurs nowhere else in the synoptics. Further Mattheanisms include πατρός (*patros*) . . ., υἱοῦ (*huiou*) . . ., and ἁγίου πνεύματος (*hagiu pneumatos*). . . . Matthew edited the story of Jesus' baptism so as to emphasize the Trinity . . .; yet only Jesus' name is associated with baptism in Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 1 Cor 1:13, 15 (cf. Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 6:11; 10:1-4). Therefore Matthew seems to be responsible for the present formula.⁴⁵

Blomberg joins his company:

On the other hand, it is not inconceivable that Matthew distilled the essence of Jesus' more detailed parting instructions for the Eleven into concise language using the terminology developed later in the early church's baptismal services. As R. E. O. White reflects: "If Jesus commanded the making of disciples and the baptizing of them "in my name," and Matt. expressed Christ's fullest meaning (for disciples "of all nations") by using the fuller descriptions current in his own day, who shall say that he seriously misrepresented our Lord's intention?"⁴⁶

Carson is of the same mind:

The term 'formula' is tripping us up. There is no evidence we have Jesus' *ipsissima verba* here and still less that the church regarded Jesus' command as a baptismal *formula*, a liturgical form the ignoring of which was a breach of canon law. The problem has too often been cast in anachronistic terms. . . . [A]s late as the Didache, baptism in the name of Jesus and baptism in the name of the Trinity coexist side by side: the church was not bound by precise 'formulas' and felt no embarrassment at a multiplicity of them, precisely because Jesus' instruction, which may not have been in these precise words, was not regarded as a binding formula.⁴⁷

Osborne is among this same company of evangelical historical critics when he allows that the originator of the command to baptize was Jesus Himself, but contends that the trinitarian formula contained in the command was a Matthean redaction of a monadic formula.⁴⁸

Summary of Opinions from Evangelical Historical Criticism

⁴⁵Gundry, *Matthew 14–28* 596 [transliterations added].

⁴⁶Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992) 432-33.

⁴⁷D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in Vol. 8 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 598.

⁴⁸Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives, a Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 245.

From the above citations, it is evident that certain evangelical scholars have sided with radical historical critics in raising questions about whether Jesus ever gave the Great Commission. In trying to find a middle point between the orthodox position of the early church and recent radical opinions, they have compromised the basic historical accuracy of this Commission. If they have done that, a question mark hovers over the source of the rest of the Commission.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING THE GREAT COMMISSION

If questions exist about the genuineness of four major parts of the Great Commission as well as about the Commission as a whole, can evangelical preachers have any confidence in affirming that Jesus spoke *any* of the words of the Commission? Did He claim all authority in heaven and in earth as 28:18 says He did, or was that a later addition by well-meaning followers? Did He command His disciples to take the gospel to all nations, or was that element added to the Gospel tradition fifty years after His ascension? Did He command the disciples to baptize, or was that a liturgical addition added to the account by the writer at a later time? Did He prescribe using the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in connection with baptism, or was that a Matthean redaction of what actually occurred on this occasion in Galilee?

With so much of what may be labeled as ambivalence at best and dehistoricizing at worst, how is an evangelical leader to preach and instruct his people about Jesus' final command to His disciples and His church? It is quite evident that some evangelical scholars have conceded major ground to theories of Historical Criticism. Fifty years ago, evangelical scholars stood squarely for the historical accuracy of the Gospels in general and the Great Commission in particular. Their stand matched that of the early church leaders and representative post-Reformation scholars cited early in this article. Today much equivocation prevails among them on that point.

To say that the words represent Jesus' intent even if He did not utter these specific instructions is a presumptuous copout, possibly a concession to gain respectability with the academic intelligentsia, an effort to find a middle ground between the absolute accuracy of the Gospel account and the extreme view that Jesus never said any such thing. If He never spoke the words, the Gospel writer has misrepresented a historical happening and the text is not inerrant. Further, the church from earliest times has mistakenly tied the words directly to Jesus and has obeyed the command of a clever redactor of church tradition, not of Jesus. The missions mandate is a clever ruse. The directive to carry the good news to the ends of the earth did not come from Jesus. To believe His claim to universal authority, in carrying the gospel to all nations, in baptizing, and in using the trinitarian formula therewith is a mistaken assumption. He never spoke those words. A very early Christian community and/or Matthew put the words on His lips.

The practical impact of Historical Criticism on proclaiming and obeying the

Great Commission is devastating. The evangelical church will do better if it dispenses with that ideology in studying and responding to this portion of the Gospel accounts. The same holds true for the Synoptic Gospels as a whole. Those works are historically accurate and deserve to be recognized and preached in that light.

EDUCATING *THE LORD'S REDEEMED AND ANOINTED*: THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHAPEL EXPERIENCE 1868–1894

J. Gregory Behle
Professor of Christian Education
The Master's College

Institution-sponsored religious activities within American state universities in the nineteenth-century have gone largely unnoticed by higher education historians, although such activities were an integral part of such institutions from their founding. One such case was the compulsory chapel at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from its origin in 1868 to the demise of chapel in 1894. The first Regent of the University, John Milton Gregory, instituted chapel exercises from the beginning of the institution. Emphasis on chapel began to decline under the leadership of Selim Hobart Peabody, the second Regent. Compulsory chapel attendance ended during the tenure of Thomas Jonathan Burrill, the interim Regent who followed Peabody. Historical lessons to be learned from the University of Illinois experience include the effect of changing student populations on chapel attendance, the limitation placed on faculty schedules by academic work loads, and the effect of leadership's view of the importance of chapel attendance.

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

RESOLVED. . . that sensible of our dependance on the Divine blessing in the great work in which we are engaged, it should be a standing order of this board to commence each day's proceedings

¹The title of this article, "Educating the Lord's Redeemed and Anointed," is drawn from the speech by Dr. Newton Bateman, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Illinois, given at the University's opening on 11 March 1868. He stated, "Thank God, monopolies of learning by privileged classes, are among the discredited shadows of the past. A new element is henceforth to bear sway in the destinies of these States and of the nation. To the dust must go, and will go, whatever schemes devices or systems refuse to affiliate with or set themselves in opposition to, *the Lord's redeemed and anointed—the People*" (Dr. Newton Bateman, "The Address of Dr. Newton Bateman at the Inauguration of the University," *Some Founding Papers of the University of Illinois*, David Hatch, ed. [Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1967]: 30-31).

by reading of the Word of God and prayer.¹

On Tuesday, the 12th of March 1867, the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial University met to begin the process of creating a new college on the Illinois prairie. Appointed by the Governor, the Board took their oath of office and sat down to transact the first business of the day. J. C. Burroughs, a trustee from the Chicago area, offered the above motion on behalf of the great work to be undertaken by the board.

That afternoon, the first official decision of the Board of Trustees was enacted. According to the board minutes, the motion was seconded and adopted unanimously. Isaac Mahan, a Baptist minister from Marion, Illinois, was called to the platform and led the Trustees in prayer to Almighty God, in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, invoking His blessing upon the members individually and upon the enterprise they met to organize. Today, the small institution that began on a March afternoon with the invoking of Christ's eternal blessing is known as the University of Illinois.²

The University of Illinois today bears scant religious resemblance to that envisioned and invoked by its pious founders. The rise of secularization as an historical theme of American higher education has obscured investigations of spiritual life and culture that occurred on campuses during the period following the Civil War. Higher education historians Hofstadter and Hardy observe, "There are several major themes that command the attention of the historian of American higher education, but among these the oldest and longest sustained is the drift toward secularism."³

Attention to secularization as a theme has distracted many scholars from

¹*The First Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial University*, (Springfield, Ill.: Baker, Bailhache & Co., 1868) 16. The author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to the following for their assistance in this project: (1) the University Archive staff, especially Bob Chapel for his professionalism in supplying archival information and anecdotes on historical materials; (2) the library staff of The Master's College in procuring necessary interlibrary resources, especially Peg Westphalen and Janet Tillman in this research phase; (3) Kelly Behle for patiently editing and offering constructive criticism.

²Winton Solberg, University of Illinois Historian and former President of the American Society of Church History (1986), in his centennial history of the institution, points out the Protestant influence evidenced by the Board of Trustees' first decision. See Winton U. Solberg, *The University of Illinois, 1867-1894: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968) 96.

³Richard Hofstadter, "Part I—The Development of Higher Education in America." in Richard Hofstadter and C. DeWitt Hardy, *The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952) 3. Space precludes a full discussion of secularization within the American academy. The movement toward secularization in the nineteenth-century is treated in several important works including George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University, 1994), and George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University, 1992).

noticing what was occurring in terms of religious life on college campuses during a period of educational upheaval. To muddy the scholarly waters further, the land-grant college movement that emerged from the Morrill Act of 1862, gave birth to a new educational era and institutional-type in American higher education. The institutions created by the Morrill Act, many of which are now the premier campuses of state university systems, have remained largely untouched by historians. Scholarly occupation with the decline of the traditional liberal arts college, rooted in classical learning, and the emergence of the new research university as a paradigm of scientific advancement frequently overshadow histories of the land-grant colleges.

The absence of full investigations has created a distorted historical view that institutions of higher learning were either avowedly secular or decidedly evangelical, depending upon the historian's perspective. This following essay examines historically one aspect of campus religious life, the compulsory chapel, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in its formative years. The value of such an analysis is that it can provide both a clearer picture of what was happening on American campuses and fill the skeletal structure of student religious life on a state university campus in a period of both religious and educational ferment.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Early Religious Influences on American Higher Education

Beginning with the Puritan founding of Harvard in 1636, the relationship between the church and college in American higher education is replete within the corpus of general historical surveys. Historians comment, "Religion is connected indissolubly with the beginnings of American higher education."⁴ "The whole number of colleges in the United States not founded by religion can be counted on one hand."⁵ Brubacher and Rudy, in their standard treatment of American college and university history, summarize that colonial colleges were founded with the vision of an educated clergy, with Christian thought as the foundation of intellectual activity.⁶ Harvard's oft-cited admissions requirement from the "The Laws, Liberties, and Orders of Harvard in 1642" summarizes it well: "Every one shall consider the main end of his life and studies to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life; John xvii.3." Such religious visions of colleges and universities harken back to an

⁴Clarence Prouty Shedd, *The Church Follows Its Students* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938) 1.

⁵Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War, with Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing Upon the College Movement* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1965) 56.

⁶John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities*. 4th ed. (New Brunswick, Conn.: Transaction, 1997) 6.

era of Christian influence within the academy.⁷

The Place of Religion and the Emergence of the Land-Grant Colleges

The University of Illinois emerged in the wake of the Morrill Act of 1862. Referred to as the “Land-Grant College Act,” this legislation is frequently seen as the decisive point in the emergence of the state universities.⁸ The Morrill Act is the centerpiece of legislation that brought the land-grant college movement into existence by proposing the setting aside of federal land for the financial support of colleges that taught the agricultural sciences and the mechanical arts. Such a proposal was revolutionary: the thrust of higher education had favored the liberal arts and aimed at society’s elites.⁹ In spite of its importance, a lack of literature exists on this important educational movement. For the most part, focused historiography of the land-grant college movement appears in only four general treatments.¹⁰

It is more than a historical curiosity that the author of the legislation, Justin Morrill, did not envision the new “agricultural and mechanical colleges,” or A & Ms as they are commonly known, as heralding in secularization within the state universities and divesting educational power and prestige from the denominations. Arguing on behalf of his legislation, Morrill contended that the church would *benefit* by the expenditures of federal land-grants for the financing of this new type of college. He argued, “Pass this measure and we shall have done . . . something for .

⁷Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University*, I (New York: Arno, 1977) 515.

⁸In a tongue-in-cheek obituary, the Morrill Act of 1862 is cited as the “cause” of the death of the liberal-arts college. See James Axtell, “The Death of the Liberal Arts College,” *History of Education Quarterly* 11 (Winter 1971):339. For a fuller treatment of the origin of the American state universities, see Elmer Ellsworth Brown, “The Origins of American State Universities,” *University of California Publications in Education* 3 (1903):1-45.

⁹The Morrill Act read in part that “. . . by each state which may take and claim the benefit of this act, to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such a manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. . . .” (“The Land Grant Act of 1862,” *Some Founding Papers of the University of Illinois* 54, see Article 4).

¹⁰These works include Joseph B. Edmond, *The Magnificent Charter: The Origin and Role of the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges and Universities* (Hicksville, N.Y.: Exposition, 1978); Edward D. Eddy, *Colleges for Our Land and Time: The Land-Grant Idea in American Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957); Allan Nevins, *The State Universities and Democracy* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1962); and Earle D. Ross, *Democracy's College: The Land-Grant College in the Formative Stage* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1942). Bibliographic information is cited in Roger Williams, *The Origins of Federal Support for Higher Education* (Pennsylvania State University: University Park Press, 1991) 2-3. When religious influences are considered, the literature evaporates dramatically.

. . . the better support of Christian Churches. . . .”¹¹

Despite the intent of the legislative framer, secularization is often laid at the feet of the Morrill Act:

The larger significance of the Morrill Act lay in the fact that the new practical instruction was placed on par with the liberal arts. In the new state institutions Greek and Agriculture entered the curriculum on the same plane; religious activities were free of sectarian control; there was now a living union between university and public school system. The rise of the new university was marked by a loosening of denominational control over the colonial colleges as well as by the growth just mentioned, with a consequent tightening of the orthodox grip upon the smaller and newer colleges.¹²

Nevins notes that others sought to define the new land-grant colleges by “. . . the exclusion of church or chapel, for state institutions had to avoid the entanglements of dogma. . . .”¹³ Reflecting this reality, one committee, debating the merits of a single vs. multiple institutions benefiting from the federal funding produced by the sale of land scrip, concluded,

Such single college must either exclude Christianity entirely, and so be either atheist or pagan, or if it admits Christianity at all it must support that form of Christianity which it admits, with our state fund, and so be a cause of jealousy and wrangling among sects. . . .¹⁴

Yet in spite of such debates and tensions, religious life did exist on these campuses in the early years of the land-grant movement. Edmond notes that compulsory chapel in some form existed at nearly all land-grant institutions.¹⁵ The chapel exercise in one such college prior to the period of secularization furnishes the substance of the remainder of this investigation.

THE CHAPEL EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Background and Founding of the University of Illinois

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was chartered in February, 1867. Birthed in the aftermath of the Morrill Act, the Illinois Industrial University,

¹¹Justin S. Morrill. *Speech of Hon. Justin S. Morrill of Vermont on the Bill Granting Lands for Agricultural Colleges; Delivered in the House of Representatives, April 20, 1858* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1858) 14.

¹²Shedd, *The Church Follows Its Students* 6.

¹³Nevins, *The State Universities and Democracy* 82.

¹⁴Mary Turner Carriel, *The Life of Jonathan Baldwin Turner* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1961) 177.

¹⁵Edmond, *The Magnificent Charter* 164.

as it was originally called, was to be the land-grant agricultural and mechanical college for the people of Illinois. These people shared a common heritage of Protestantism, Republican roots, and a New England cultural heritage.¹⁶ The denominational composition of the student body was slightly mixed. However, social, political, cultural, and intellectual homogeneity often absorbed denominational differences. Naturally the new institution assumed such a flavor. The history of the University of Illinois has been well-chronicled and numerous general surveys are available to interested readers.¹⁷

The Period of Formation: John Milton Gregory, 1868–1880

The leader chosen to guide and direct the new Illinois Industrial University was John Milton Gregory.¹⁸ Recognized by many for his classic educational work, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, Gregory blended the qualities of a Baptist minister, a seasoned educator, a gifted communicator, and a recognized author.¹⁹ He had previously served as the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Michigan and as president of Kalamazoo College before accepting the responsibility of building the new industrial college. Gregory's evangelical background influenced much of the early character of the institution in its formative years. It would be impossible to consider religious life at the University apart from Gregory's imprimatur. His influence as Regent spanned the years of 1867 to 1880.

Gregory's influence as a religious leader was felt in both his authorship of numerous teaching aids and his advocacy for religious education, particularly the Sunday School movement. In addition to *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, Gregory published *How to Teach the Bible* as a teacher training manual.²⁰ He was a strong advocate for the Sunday School movement, largely due to a personal sensitivity to encroaching secularization in the common school. Such advocacy by Gregory is evident in early promotional literature for the University of Illinois that featured national publications connected with the Sunday School movement on the front page

¹⁶See Daniel Thomas Johnson, "Puritan Power in Illinois Higher Education Prior to 1870" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1974). For a detailed analysis of student origins and backgrounds, see J. Gregory Behle and William E. Maxwell. "The Social Origins of Students at the Illinois Industrial University, 1868-1894," *History of Higher Education Annual* 18 (1998):93-109.

¹⁷These include Winton U. Solberg's excellent treatment in his centennial history; *The University of Illinois, 1867-1894: An Intellectual and Cultural Heritage* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968). Other titles include Alan Nevins, *Illinois* (New York: Oxford University, 1917); Burt E. Powel, *Semi-Centennial History of the University of Illinois*, vol. 1 (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1918); and Roger Ebert, ed., *An Illini Century* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1967).

¹⁸For a full biographical treatment of John Milton Gregory's life, see Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *John Milton Gregory and the University of Illinois* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968).

¹⁹John Milton Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

²⁰John Milton Gregory, "How to Teach the Bible," in Alvah Hovey, *The Bible* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1900).

of the University bulletin and promotional materials.²¹ An unpublished manuscript entitled "The Sunday School"²² articulates Gregory's own view of the Sunday School and the intended content of it. In it, Gregory recognized that the Sunday School was to fulfill the Great Commission, was birthed in Reformation ideals, and should maintain commitment to the authority of the Bible. He argued that the Sunday School should comprise seven key teaching components centered on the Word of God.²³ The emphasis of these seven components was content rather than methodology, in sharp contrast to contemporary trends. He placed great emphasis on biblical literacy.

Sermon manuscripts from Gregory's files provide some insight into the Regent's own spiritual thought and, possibly, to chapel content. The brief length of many of the messages suggest they would have fit the time and subject parameters of a University chapel devotional. Sample topics include "Lessons from the Spring Time," dated 14 April 1872, which treats the spring season as a metaphor for life, and "The Christian Elements of Character," a chapel lecture dated 15 September 1872, where Gregory explores character development from a generically Protestant perspective.²⁴

Reflections of Gregory's chapel talks invoked a sense of fond memories from his former students. Writing in the historical sketch of the University at the time of the semi-centennial in 1918, Scott observed,

Dr. Gregory had a gift for speaking that enabled him to supplement the influence of class work with a series of chapel talks which impressed the youth of that day to an extent hard, if not impossible, now to realize. "Every University of Illinois student of the '70s will tell you" wrote Ockerson, "of Dr. Gregory's morning chapel talks, those earnest,

²¹"The Illinois Industrial University" I (June 1871), printed by Flynn & Scroggs, Printers and Book Binders, Urbana, Ill., in the Willard C. Flag Papers, 1863-1878 (1/20/7), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. These publications include the works of Rev. Edward Eggleston, notably advertisements for the *National Sunday School Teacher* and the *National Series of Lessons for 1871 on the Words of Jesus Christ*; *The Sunday School Record*; the *Sunday School Manual*; and an edited work entitled *The Infant Class; Hints on Primary Religious Instruction*. Additional advertisements were provided for weekly readers entitled *The Sunday Scholar* (for young people) and *The Little Folks* (for children).

²²"The Sunday School" (ca. 1860), John Milton Gregory Papers, (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

²³These include a discussion of biblical history from the "Hills of Eden"; a study of the great biographies of Scripture; a study of biblical geography; an examination of biblical antiquities centered primarily on manners and customs; a study of biblical "criticism" or interpretation; a study of theology as the "science of God"; and finally, the plan of salvation.

²⁴"The Lessons of Spring Time," Chapel Lecture, 14 April 1872; "The Christian Elements of Character," Chapel Lecture, 15 September 1872, John M. Gregory Papers (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. A fuller treatment of the impact and nature of Gregory's chapel messages and homiletic style are found in Kersey, Jr., *John Milton Gregory and the University of Illinois*, 162-65.

kindly appeals with their almost personal challenge to each one of us.”²⁵

Numerous undated sermon manuscripts of a briefer nature suggest possible thematic messages provided by the Regent. These include devotional treatments of Luke 12:32 (“Fear not little flock . . .”)²⁶; 2 Cor 2:16 (“And who is sufficient for these things”); Isa 40:30-31 (“Even the youths shall faint and be weary . . .”); Matt 13:45-46 (“Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchantman . . .”); 1 Pet 4:18 (“If the Righteous scarcely [i.e., with difficulty] be saved, where shall the *ungodly & sinner* appear?”); 1 John 4:8 (“God is Love”); Phil 2:9-10 (“Wherefore God also has highly exalted him . . .”); Rom 8:38-39 (“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . .”); Matthew 22 (“What think ye of Christ?”); Matt 11:16-19 (“To what shall I liken this generation . . .?”); and Zech 4:6 (“—Not by *might* nor by *power* . . .”).²⁷ The content and homiletic style suggest that he handled most of the messages in a devotional or expositional manner of a generally thematic nature. Brief exposition was provided without detailed Greek or Hebrew textual analysis, often with an emphasis on practicality, moral virtue, and character development. An illustration of practicality for the student body occurs in a message drawn from Isaiah 40 in which Gregory observes, “The student often grows weary with his long pursuit of learning. . . .” Solberg suggests, and archival material affirm, that the messages in chapel were to encourage the student “. . . to live nobly and emphasized the power of ideals to change lives.” He notes,

Gregory usually officiated at the brief ritual. He offered prayer and led both a responsive New Testament reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. . . . This ceremony was much less distinctly religious than the holy worship which had characterized the antebellum period and still obtained in many colleges. Trustees usually attended chapel when the Board met in Urbana and often spoke; Gregory advised on studies, warned against disorder, and informed his charges about contemporary events. Students themselves frequently gave informal or formal addresses.²⁸

Gregory believed in the importance of chapel to the new institution’s general well-being. He argued,

This daily assemblage of the whole body of students is in my estimation one of the most

²⁵Franklin W. Scott, ed., *The Semi-Centennial Alumni Record of the University of Illinois* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, 1918) xi. The student mentioned is John Ockerson, who entered the University in 1869.

²⁶Gregory refers to Second Baptist Church, Chicago, 7 August 1870. A possible indicator that this message was preached from this locale.

²⁷“Unpublished Sermon Manuscripts,” John M. Gregory Papers (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

²⁸Solberg, *University of Illinois* 178. Such themes are replicated today in many Christian colleges that mandate chapel attendance.

important educationary [sic] influences of a general character among us. It affords opportunities for familiar practical lectures on subjects not taught in classes and yet high importance to the formation of character. The general discipline of the University depends largely upon this daily assembly.²⁹

From the outset, the fledgling University would be, as Solberg points out, “avowedly Christian but non-sectarian.” That the new University should have a strong Protestant flavor would be expected. Statewide census statistics of Illinois in 1870, just two years after the founding of the University, suggest that there were 722 Baptist organizations, 212 Congregational, 1,426 Methodist, and 595 Presbyterian, not counting other smaller Protestant denominations included in the census enumeration. In contrast, Roman Catholic organizations numbered only 290 statewide and were largely confined to the greater urban areas, such as Chicago, where Catholic immigrants were likely to assimilate. Jewish representation and non-Protestant groups were likewise minimal by comparison.³⁰ In summary, “The People of Illinois—whose leading denominations were Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian—never doubted that the old faith should be perpetuated at Urbana.”³¹ However, such religious flavor characteristic of Illinois was generic. Numerous denominational colleges existed within the state which competed for Illinois students, many of which had greater tradition and educational reputation than the new Industrial University. Because of this, it is likely that “. . . the more pious youths avoided what the public regarded as a secular school and went to church colleges.”³²

Gregory’s religious views and influence prompted stinging rhetoric from his critics. During the school’s earliest history, external attacks against Gregory and the direction of the new university appeared in many Illinois papers, often

²⁹*The Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial University* (Springfield, Ill.: Weber & Co., Printers for the State, 1878) 10.

³⁰Data were derived from on-line sources for general comparative purposes only. United States Historical Census Data Browser, available from <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>; Internet accessed 6 November 1999; This site is made available with the cooperation and consent of the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR).

³¹Solberg, *University of Illinois* 176.

³²See *Ibid.*, 179. Similar phenomena exist today. In addition to the students’ religious pietism, parental religious perceptions and affiliation probably factored heavily in the decision to attend a “secular” state university vis-a-vis a church college. Solberg points out that Illinois produced very few students who entered the ministry (less than ten out of 846 graduates in the period ending in 1894). Statistical evidence suggests that by 1885 only two alumni from the Illinois Industrial University had identified themselves as “Clergymen” on occupational registers—0.5% of alumni population (“Statistics of the Alumni of Colleges and Universities in the United States,” *Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1884-1885*. [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886] clxxxvi-clxxxvii.)—and this at the time when Gregory’s influence was established. By way of contrast, Illinois Wesleyan had produced 57 “clergyman” or 26% of the alumni population; Knox College had produced 68 clergy alums, or 13% of the alumni population; no data for that period were available from Wheaton College.

originating from a local board member, M. L. Dunlap, who wrote under the pseudonym "Rural." In one case, an Illinois paper editorialized, "The cream of the huge joke which the trustees have perpetrated upon the people of Illinois, is the fact that the Regent and all the Professors in the University . . . are all preachers, not very powerful ones at that. . . . [sic]"³³

Many early critics felt the new University reflected more of the old guard New England liberal arts college where the ancient languages and professional training (including ministerial training) marked the education of their young people. These antagonists viewed Gregory's efforts at the University as replicating the older collegiate tradition, including religious training and moral development, rather than forging a new type of practical and scientific education in agriculture and mechanical sciences, which would benefit the farm or mechanic's shop.

The Formation of the Chapel Experience. From its inception under Gregory's regency, chapels were an integral part of daily life at the new Industrial University. The earliest faculty minutes record that chapel was allotted a fifteen minute slot at 8:15 a.m. in an already very full day. Modern college students would shudder under the work loads prescribed by the faculty. Breakfast was taken from 6:45 to 7:15 a.m. First recitations occurred from 7:15 to 8:15 a.m. After these came chapel (8:15 to 8:30 a.m.), lectures and drill (alternately, 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.), then recitations (9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.). Dinner took place from 12:30 to 1:00 p.m., followed by labor, usually on the campus farm, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., then access to the library (3:00 to 6:00 p.m.), supper (6:00 p.m.), and study time (7:00 to 10:00 p.m.).³⁴ The first student of the University, James N. Matthews, in a letter to his father, corroborates such a schedule.³⁵ In addition to chapel, students had to attend

³³John Milton Gregory Papers, (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. The editor goes on to identify the theological doctrines of Atonement, Predestination, Election, the Perseverance of the Saints, the Immaculate Conception, Immersion, and Justification by Faith as important, but that scientists and agriculturalist should be included among the college faculty, in addition to "the preachers."

³⁴Senate Coordinating Council, Faculty Record, March 13, 1868 to September 13, 1879, (4/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. The aforementioned time table is recorded on 28 March 1868 by G. W. Atherton as secretary (hereafter referred to as the *Faculty Record*). Such a daily schedule appeared to be problematic. Student discipline issues appear at significant discussion levels in the early faculty records—especially absenteeism which precipitated numerous admonishments and expulsions from the Regent and University, respectively.

³⁵James N. Matthews (Champaign) to Dr. William Matthews (Mason), 3 October 1868, James N. Matthews Papers, 1868-1872 (41/20/26), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. Matthews writes, "I will give you a programme of our daily labor. 7 A.M. three classes recite. 8 A.M. chapel exercises. 9 A.M. three classes one of which is my Latin. 10 A.M. three classes one of which is my Algebra. 11 A.M. farm work. 12 o'clock we have dinner. 1 P.M. Agriculture, which is my class, . . . 2 P.M. Chemistry, . . . 3 P.M. there is a class in Botany and book-keeping, and Algebra. 4 P.M. drill or lecture. From 5 P.M. to 7 P.M. is recreation, from 7 to 9 study hours. This programme is not exact, but as near as I can guess it."

Sunday services in the community along with a Sunday afternoon chapel at the University.

It appears that very early in the institution's history, the chapel period expanded from the initial fifteen minutes allotted by the faculty. By the fall term of 1868, chapel was increased to thirty minutes (8:15 to 8:45 a.m.).³⁶ To insure prompt attendance, "hall sergeants" were assigned and students were to assemble according to their hall "for passing to the chapel for morning services." Such a march to chapel exercises by the students was memorialized in an alumni poem entitled "The Retrospect of Seventy-Four":

*How sweet t'would be, could we but hear
Again the bugle call
Which summon'd students far and near
Promptly in line to fall*

*We'd march most willingly to chapel now
Nor grudge the moments spent
In song and prayer with lecture how
Withal to live content.*³⁷

Though attempts were made to encourage student piety in chapel exercises, and church attendance was expected,³⁸ local churches failed to welcome the University students. Nathan Ricker, discussing his own experiences as an early graduate observed, "Students generally attended the churches, but were not warmly welcomed there, and no attempts were specially made to interest them."³⁹

The Nature of the University Chapel. Faculty were assigned the task of monitoring student absences and excuses related to chapel. Surprisingly, few chapel exemptions are recorded in the earliest years of the institution, in spite of significant student discipline and excuse problems which appear in faculty discussion. The first excuse noted by the faculty record was a request for a student Morris to be excused from chapel and by a parent, Mr. McKinley, to keep his son from chapel ". . . for a

³⁶*Faculty Record*, dated 14 September 1868.

³⁷Alumni Association, Class of 1874, "The Retrospect of Seventy-Four," [1914], (26/40/101), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

³⁸The faculty determined at the 15 September 1868 faculty meeting ". . . that all students, unless specially excused, be required to attend the religious service of Sabbath afternoons, & that the morning chapel services for that day be postponed to the afternoon" (*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 15 September 1868). It appears that Illinois initially followed the customary practice of earlier morning chapel before dismissal to area churches that was common in many antebellum colleges.

³⁹"The Story of a Life, 1922-26, 1953," Nathan C. Ricker Papers, 1875-1925 (12/2/22), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

time on account of illness.”⁴⁰ The next recorded excuse was a Sunday chapel exemption for student Columbia, possibly due to the student's home in close proximity to the University and his father's participation in the local Baptist church.⁴¹ The first hint of compliance problems was recorded at the 25 April 1870 faculty meeting. The faculty passed a motion that “. . . the students who fail in their duties at the Chapel Exercise in Prof. Baker's Dept. will not be allowed to recite in any of their classes until they are excused from or perform such duties.”⁴² No additional information is provided. Faculty members also occasionally spoke in chapels; again from the “Retrospect of Seventy-Four”:

*Professor Taft we'll ne'er forget,
The great uncombed was he.
Methinks sometimes, I hear him yet
In chapel, preach economy.*⁴³

Chapel also afforded the University the opportunity to communicate business matters and campus-wide information to the students as a community. In one example, the faculty requested that the Regent “. . . explain to the students at chapel the importance of selecting their department of study and urge then the selected departments with their names [sic].”⁴⁴ Gregory had advocated that chapel was both beneficial to the kind of discipline and drill the institution sought to cultivate and in unifying the University as a community.

Review of the faculty record in regards to chapel suggests several themes. First, the start and allocated time for chapel in the daily regiment changed frequently in the early years of the institution. Numerous explanations, often within days of

⁴⁰*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 6 December 1869. As a humorous side note, the first student appealing for a chapel excuse, “student Morris,” was likely John Calvin Calhoun Morris, evidently named for the Geneva Reformer!

⁴¹*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 22 May 1871. The excuse likely refers to student Thomas B. Columbia whose father, Curtis F. Columbia, was a prominent Champaign farmer and merchant who attended the local Baptist church. See “Curtis F. Columbia,” *Biographical Record of Champaign County, Illinois* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1900) 56. Such an exemption appears to be consistent with the *Faculty Record*. At the 10 April 1871 meeting, student “R. R. Salter was excused from attendance at chapel on Sundays and Monday mornings to go home” (*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 10 April 1871). Home for student Salter was in Joliet, Will County, Ill., approximately 116 miles from the University.

⁴²*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 25 April 1870.

⁴³Alumni Association, Class of 1874, “The Retrospect of Seventy-Four,” [1914], (26/40/101), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

⁴⁴*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 17 October 1870. This request was likely due to the identification of course of study both in student records and institutional promotional literature. At another faculty meeting, it was voted that “. . . the library rules be read in chapel to morrow” (*Faculty Record* meeting dated 29 January 1872).

each other, are possible as to why the time of chapel changed.⁴⁵ The frequent changing of start time and allocation suggests that the faculty “fit” chapel around lectures and recitations and not vice-versa.⁴⁶ By the early 1870s, chapel time had been returned back to the original fifteen minutes to accommodate academic scheduling. It is interesting to note that reduction of chapel time by the faculty coincides with complaints by students about faculty attendance at chapel. In a humorous jib at the faculty, students ran an advertisement in the student paper stating, “WANTED—The presence of our faculty at chapel exercise in the morning.”⁴⁷ Gregory, while on leave, exhorted his faculty to attend chapel as a good example to the students because “the chapel exercises have always constituted in my esteem the central element and chief factor in our system of discipline.”⁴⁸

Second, faculty records say nothing of discussion regarding chapel content or assignment of chapel responsibilities other than who would monitor excuses. Student discipline, class absenteeism, scholarship questions, curricular matters, and committee reports, all appear to dominate agenda items. Records regarding chapel appear as secondary issues, suggesting the University faculty viewed chapel as ancillary.

Finally, in contrast to class and recitations, few excuses are noted for absenteeism from chapel. This further suggests several things. Compliance was

⁴⁵For example, the chapel time was originally set for 8:15 a.m. and given fifteen minutes time (28 Mar 1868). This was changed in the fall term to 8:15–8:45 a.m., increasing allocation to thirty minutes (14 Sept 1868). The following spring, chapel time was again changed by faculty directive to 8:30–9:00 a.m. (15 Mar 1869). Discussion of chapel times was again conducted at the 5 May 1869 faculty meeting with no change implemented. In the fall, chapel time was again set by the faculty at 8:30 a.m. (10 Sept 1869), but quickly changed five days later to 7:30 a.m. (15 Sept 1869). In January 1870, chapel time was cut down to twenty minutes to allow for the recitation schedule. By November 1871, chapel was back to the original schedule of 15 minutes at 8:15 a.m. (13 Nov 1871). Senate Coordinating Council, Faculty Record, March 13, 1868 to September 13, 1879, (4/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

⁴⁶This writer concludes that the college faculty probably failed to share the Regents' enthusiasm for the chapel exercises due to overextension of responsibilities. Solberg has observed that Gregory did carry a disproportional amount of institutional responsibility, and it was Gregory who was the strongest advocate for the chapel exercises. Gregory's frequent travels to promote the new university probably left chapel responsibilities to an already extended faculty. While it appears Gregory was present at most faculty meetings where chapel was discussed, the prioritization of chapel by Gregory, coupled with his travels to promote the university, left the faculty with additional responsibilities to maintain. It is certainly possible that the faculty did support the general tenor and purpose of the chapel, but felt its intrusion into already heavy institutional work loads. Further study is necessary to explore faculty perceptions of chapel importance. See Winton U. Solberg “The University of Illinois Struggles for Public Recognition,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* LIX (Spring 1966):5-29.

⁴⁷*The Student* (Urbana, Ill., February 1873) 9, (41/8/802) University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

⁴⁸Joseph R. DeMartini, “Student Protest During Two Periods in the History of the University of Illinois: 1867-1894 and 1929-1942” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ill., 1974).

either not a problem, an unlikely proposition given what was known of other universities at the time, or not enforced, suggesting again low levels of faculty commitment or priority. Academic matters preoccupied the attention of the faculty and the chapel was likely relegated to lower level of importance, especially given the demands of starting a new university.

The Period of Decline: Selim Hobart Peabody, 1880–1891

The chapel experience at the University of Illinois under the second Regent, Selim Hobart Peabody, brought changes and challenges to religious life at the University.⁴⁹ Peabody's own religious credentials as new Regent raised the ecclesiastical eyebrows of many a local clergymen. His daughter observed,

When my father was recalled to take the Regency of the University, the religious people of the community were more than a little aroused. It was unusual that a man without a clergyman's training and experience, without a clergyman's prestige, should be a college president. The new Regent was a scientist. Was he a Darwinian? Would he countenance infidelity? These and similar questions were put to him many times, and he was at some pains to reply.⁵⁰

Peabody maintained an open pulpit policy in chapel and invited visiting clergymen to speak when religious conferences were held in the local community. Such an open platform afforded visitors the opportunity to decry both the Regent and the lack of religion at the University. Following a chapel, one minister was overheard saying, "I tell you, I have given this godless University a good shaking today."

At the time of Peabody's appointment, chapel absence by the faculty was increasing as an issue on the campus. Editors of the student paper fired a salvo across the faculty deck when they critically observed,

Why do not the professors attend chapel more regularly? Some of their number, it is true, are seldom absent, but a far greater number only appear at long intervals, and a few are not present during the exercises, on an average, twice a year. We think that this is not just as it should be. It is setting an example to the students which, if they should follow, would cause trouble at once. But really, now, we can't see how a professor who has not been to chapel for a whole term can have the heart to pass judgement upon a student who has three unexcused absences in the same time, if a professor has no interest in the chapel exercises and the whole student body of assembled students, we do not know any better way for him to show it than to stay away regularly from chapel. If his work will not allow him to attend all the time, he can certainly gladden the students with his presence at least occasionally. We can assure them all that with their presence the exercises are

⁴⁹For a uncritical discussion of the life of Peabody, see Katherine Peabody Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody: A Biography* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1923).

⁵⁰Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody* 155-156.

more interesting and agreeable than without it. If it were proper to suppose that any of them could understand slang, we would appeal to them mildly to brace up and come to chapel.⁵¹

To prove their point further, the student editors tracked and published faculty attendance through the fall term of 1880 by identifying each faculty member by name, including number of days present and number of days absent from chapel, beginning on 27 September through 10 December, 1880. Of the fifteen University professors, average daily attendance was estimated at 7.47, approximately one-half the faculty.⁵²

To say that the chapel services were problematic to Peabody would be an understatement. Solberg has summarized the challenge of chapel to Peabody's regency:

But the students did become increasingly opposed to compulsory chapel. This inherited program posed a problem with no easy solution. It was still the rule in American higher education. The University of Wisconsin had pioneered among state institutions in making attendance voluntary in 1868. Harvard took the lead among private colleges and in 1886 abolished a chapel requirement which had stood for a quarter of a millennium. The Harvard Chaplain at the time was Francis Greenwood Peabody, a relative of the Regent. In nearly all other schools of higher learning, however, the traditional religious rite remained in force.⁵³

The situation at Illinois was becoming increasingly problematic. In summary,

Students found the daily assemblies monotonous and boring. Men still had to form in military ranks and be checked off before marching into the ceremony. Peabody tried to make the specifically religious component brief, and yet it caused grumbling. Critics maintained that a phonograph record could have said the Lord's Prayer more effectively than did the Regent. Even the secular parts of the programs met opposition. The novelty of every senior giving a chapel oration, introduced in 1887, soon wore thin. Occasionally an older speaker informed or entertained, but too often an authority lectured on discipline. And students continually object to the fact that faculty members rarely observed the duty they imposed on their students.⁵⁴

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant challenges to institutionally-

⁵¹*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 20 October 1880):4.

⁵²*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 15 December 1880):8.

⁵³Solberg, *The University of Illinois* 303. It is more than an interesting historical coincidence that the Chaplain who presided over the demise of Harvard's chapel, and thereby ended an era, was a relative of the Illinois Regent.

⁵⁴Solberg, *University of Illinois* 303-4.

sponsored, compulsory chapel at the University of Illinois was the Foster North affair which erupted on the campus in 1885. North, an avowed agnostic, began a personal boycott of chapel that escalated into a faculty confrontation over chapel non-compliance.⁵⁵ The issue quickly moved beyond the perimeters of the University into the Illinois courts. Eventually, the University would be vindicated in its position, but not before the winds of change began blowing across the Illinois prairie. Girling, stating Peabody's view, wrote,

The Regent, while insisting upon chapel attendance, ruled that students who requested to be excused because of religious conviction should have their scruples respected. He made the law out of consideration for the Jews and Roman Catholics in attendance, though none of them, so far as he knew, ever took advantage of it. When, however, there came an attempt to abolish, not only compulsory attendance, but even the chapel service itself, my father maintained and won a sturdy conflict.⁵⁶

Though Peabody permitted excuses for religious objections, North refused such exemption on agnostic grounds, arguing that to receive an exemption he must believe something first. Arguing that he lacked any conviction, he noted that such an exemption would not be possible.⁵⁷ Clearly, North sought legal remedy for compulsory chapel rather than the personal exemption which the University was willing to grant. The impact of the Foster North affair would reverberate through Peabody's regency.

Lack of faculty support for compulsory chapel, coupled with the first significant student challenges began setting the stage for the ultimate demise of the chapel experience at Illinois. By the early 1890's, student discontent was finding its expression in chapel disturbances and disruptions—enough to cause the student editors to rally to the defense of the beleaguered exercises. In 1891, they observed the following student behavior,

It is not the business of the ILLINI to do any preaching, but there are a few things, to

⁵⁵For a brief synopsis of the Foster North affair, see Winton U. Solberg, "The Conflict Between Religion and Secularism at the University of Illinois, 1867-1894," *American Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1966):183-99, or Solberg, *University of Illinois* 304-8. For a fuller treatment, see Foster North, *The Struggle for Religious Liberty at the University of Illinois* (Los Angeles: Wetzell, 1942).

⁵⁶Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody* 157. The "sturdy conflict" is a reference to the Foster North case and its effect on the Regency of Peabody.

⁵⁷North cites the following waiver used for chapel excuse: "WHEREAS, At the daily assembling of the students of the Illinois Industrial University in the apartment called [sic] the chapel religious services are held, to wit, the reading of the New Testament scriptures and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer; and, WHEREAS, Attendance upon the listening to any religious services is repugnant to my religious convictions, and in violation of what I conceive to be my rights of conscience. Therefore, I _____, a studenty [sic] of mature age, of said university, respectfully ask of the regent and faculty thereof that I may be excused from attending and listening to such religious services" (North, *The Struggle for Religious Liberty at the University of Illinois* 11).

which we all must plead guilty, the remedy of which will affect certain University affairs like oil does the dry parts of a machine. First of all is the noise and disorder that so often occurs in chapel. Of course we all know that the few minutes spent in chapel, is a very inopportune time in which to read papers, tell stories or display any gymnastic acquirements. We also know that it is very improper to cheer sacred music and very foolish to cheer every little funny remark or plain statement that any speaker may make. The Regent and all other sensible speakers, the band, and the choir would much rather be greeted by thoughtful, appreciative silence and attention. There are times when hearty applause is perfectly reasonable. Let us try to confine our cheers to such occasions.⁵⁸

Evidently, their exhortations went unheeded. In February of the following year they again offered a rebuke to the offending minority.

It is said by wise men that the only way to find out whether a man has any respect for himself, is by observing the manner in which he treats others. If this is true, there are a few among our number who ought to be somewhere else. Such thoughtless clapping of hands, hissing, and promiscuous whispering as has of late been done in chapel by certain students, is thoroughly disgraceful.⁵⁹

In addition to the aforementioned disruptions by the malcontents, fugitive sources suggest that the students glued the Bible shut, "letted eye-water," and set off stink-bombs.⁶⁰ Reminiscences by Peabody's daughter of the ". . . smartly atheistical followers of Ingersoll, who had Shavian powers of irritation," reflect on their disruptive powers. She writes,

They posted scurrilous notices on the chapel door. They absconded with the pulpit Bible,—which did not catch the Regent napping, however, because he carried a pocket Testament. They got on Class Exhibition programs (the meetings were held in the chapel) and took delight in shocking the community. And they did no little harm, because they were quoted as representing the University's teachings. They sometimes tried to interrupt chapel service with tramping. The sincere ones among them thought they were fighting a battle for freedom and enlightenment. That their efforts were characterized by bad taste tended to render them futile; they moved by contrary suggestion, arousing religious zeal in opposition. My father forgave much to their youthful ardor because of their sincerity; but they were an unqualified nuisance, as they meant to be. Although comparatively few, they were capable agitators.⁶¹

Expanding student enrollments by the 1890's created a more religiously

⁵⁸*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 17 December 1891):18.

⁵⁹*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 29 February 1892):12.

⁶⁰Cited by DeMartini, "Student Protest During Two Periods in the History of the University of Illinois: 1867–1894 and 1929–1942" 142. This researcher was unable to verify these problems from primary archival sources due to document damage and missing materials.

⁶¹Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody* 157.

diversified student body than the one encountered in the early years of the institution's history. What began with an enrollment of 77 students in 1868 had expanded to 519 students by 1890.⁶² Such diversification diluted the religious homogeneity which had marked the early years of the University.

The Final Demise: Thomas Jonathan Burrill, 1891–1894

Following the departure of Peabody, the University of Illinois began, as Solberg puts it, “a major transformation,” as the University undertook the task of modernization and movement toward institutional prestige in the window afforded by the resignation of Peabody. Burrill, the third and acting Regent of the University, was no stranger to the University, having served with Gregory as a professor. Burrill's own religious beliefs were not hostile to religion. Burrill himself joined a student Bible study in the early years of the University.⁶³

The sweeping changes effected by the acting Regent included the beleaguered chapel exercises. Rather than continue the chapel out of nostalgic sentimentality or collegiate tradition, Burrill recognized the changing winds and set the University on a new course. Compulsory chapel met with a quiet end. Solberg summarizes,

The demise of compulsory chapel, which collapsed at Urbana like the one-hoss shay, also created a better atmosphere. As soon as Burrill grasped the reigns he induced the Faculty to terminate the military formation for entering and leaving chapel, a constant source of misdeeds. Without announcing the fact, authorities stopped checking attendance at chapel shortly thereafter, although the University continued to hold a chapel exercise. Members of the Board attended the ceremony as late as May, 1893, and Burrill thought regular student attendance was among the best in the nation. But in the fall of 1893 laboratories, shops, and drawing rooms were excluded from the rule requiring all University rooms to close during the assembly period, and in March, 1894, the Faculty resolved to discontinue the exercise after June. In recommending this policy to the Trustees, Burrill explained that it would permit better use of time for academic purposes in an increasingly large and complex institution. “Other reasons” also lay behind the suggestion, but Burrill never elaborated on this vague phrase. He admitted privately that most students would not miss the rite, and Draper later wrote that chapel came to an end because it had become irrelevant—“really a bore to everybody.” On this pathetic note the University abandoned the ancient practice, and a decline in religious fervor facilitated public acceptance of the act.⁶⁴

CONCLUSIONS, AN OBITUARY, AND HISTORICAL LESSONS

⁶²“Growth of the University by Years,” *The Semi-Centennial Alumni Record of the University of Illinois* lxxxii.

⁶³Solberg, *University of Illinois* 180.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 375-76.

The termination of the chapel experience at the University of Illinois can be attributed to several key causes. Outside the University, political and social factors brought about by changing values within the academy in general and Illinois specifically contributed to the demise under the general rubric of secularization. While a ubiquitous theme, secularization during the period of 1880 to the turn of the century is well-documented and correlates with the changes experienced at the University of Illinois. The Foster North affair was indicative of such change and inevitable within an expanding state university student population.

Several factors entered into the decline of the chapel from within the University. Gregory's vision of the chapel experience probably was mirrored by his faculty and was not shared with equal passion by his successor, Selim Peabody. Institutional support beyond the first Regent's own beliefs in the value of the chapel experience faded with his resignation. Faculty that might have shared the consensus on the value of chapel exercises were under institutional pressure in a variety of academic and non-academic areas. Further compounding the difficulty was encroaching secularization on the one side and competing denominationalism on the other. The non-sectarian nature of the compulsory chapel experience rendered it vulnerable to change or obsolescence, more so than at institutions that maintained a strong theological vein or denominational heritage.

Solberg offers as a concluding obituary,

Thus had the legacy bequeathed by triumphant Protestantism and the old sectarian college transformed. The changes had been gradual and their full effect lay in the future. Without doubt much of value had been lost in the process.⁶⁵

Perhaps no more fitting epitaph is written than that of Henry Claus, whose 1913 survey of chapel practices records the death of chapel at the University of Illinois. In a terse statement, he writes: "UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS: No chapel services held."⁶⁶ Institutionally-sponsored religious exercises were dead, but not without leaving an historical legacy.

Descriptions of the nineteenth-century chapel experience often parallel the problems that plague many Christian colleges with their mandated chapels today. Student resistance to mandatory attendance in the midst of full schedules, levels of chapel formality rooted in bygone tradition and removed from a true sense of worship, faculty indifference evidenced by absenteeism, the desire by some students to "beat the system" evidenced in the excuses devised to conceal noncompliance, and even the occasional "prank" in chapel—all mirror the problems found in the nineteenth century.

Historical lessons for today's educators abound. If the words of the

⁶⁵Solberg, "The Conflict Between Religion and Secularism at the University of Illinois, 1867–1894" 199.

⁶⁶Henry T. Claus, "The Problem of College Chapel," *Education Review* 46 (September 1913):185.

preacher are true, "There is nothing new under the sun,"⁶⁷ then modern educators whose campuses mandate compulsory chapel might consider the lessons of the nineteenth-century Illinois experience. Shifting student demographics and diversity will inevitably bring changes regarding institutional-sponsored religious activities such as chapel. Though many Christian colleges feel a certain immunity to the problems of a public state university, changing student populations are creating a climate that bears some similarity to that which precipitated the Foster North affair. Christian colleges which have loosened, or even abandoned, confessional or doctrinal statements to attract and expand constituencies (often because of financial exigencies) may suddenly find themselves in a predicament similar to Illinois in 1885.⁶⁸

Second, many Christian liberal arts colleges, like Illinois in its formative years, will find faculty who relegate chapel to a lower personal or professional priority due to broad academic responsibilities and extended institutional work loads that prevail in a small college environment. Although faculty may share, and even believe in, the value of the chapel experience, academic workload management frequently militates against participation and involvement.

Third, chapel importance will often follow the imprimatur of the regent, dean, or president. Leadership influence will likely shape not only the purpose of chapel, but its priority as well. The desire to build a campus community may well eclipse spiritual benefits in priority in some leaders' minds. More than one institution has experienced the degeneration of chapel from pious worship and learning to "assembly hall" celebrations or community gatherings for some perceived corporate benefit. On the other hand, leaders who see the spiritual benefit of chapel may use it in its historic antebellum sense. The other danger is replication of the chapel experience as nothing more than nostalgic sentimentality or denominational tradition.

The chapel experience is an integral part of the history of American higher education and worthy of scholarly exploration in the literature. The legacy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recalls the opportunities and challenges of the chapel experience and causes reflection on a bygone era within the state universities.

No better summary is available than that of Patton and Field in their aptly titled work *Eight o' Clock Chapel*.

Chapel more than any other spot, *was* the college. Once a day, at least, we became aware of ourselves as a whole. Traditions gathered there and were handed down. Profes-

⁶⁷Ecclesiastes 1:9 (New American Standard Bible).

⁶⁸The reader is referred to James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This landmark work does an excellent job of documenting the shift from theological heritage to encroaching secularization within several key denominational institutions.

sors—they attended far better forty years ago—became generally known; student leaders emerged; we went directly from chapel to classroom, . . . the day started with a common center.

Altogether, “Eight O’ Clock Chapel” was an institution not lightly to be esteemed. By faculty and students alike it was recognized as a symbol of college unity and life. The college today which, by reason of its size, lack of homogeneity, or on other grounds, abandons the good old custom, whatever may be the gains, is bound to lose something of vital worth. Why else do graduates ten years out so generally vote in favor of a compulsory system?⁶⁹

Scholars of colleges and churches would do well to remember the link that tied them together and not relegate it to historical misremembrance or scholarly obscurity.

⁶⁹Cornelius Howard Patton and Walter Taylor Field, *Eight o’ Clock Chapel: A Study of New England College Life in the Eighties* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927) 201.

EPHESIANS 1:3-4 AND THE NATURE OF ELECTION

Leslie James Crawford*

Ephesians 1:3-4 highlights the very important doctrine of election, but the passage is not without interpretive challenges that relate to that doctrine. An examination of individual words and phrases within the section reflects whether it supports the teaching of corporate or individual election. The two verses are part of a doxology that occupies 1:3-14 and emphasizes God's activity in benefiting His people. Various words and phrases within the doxology that contribute toward a correct understanding of election are "He chose," "He predestined," "us," "in Christ," "holy," "blameless," "with every spiritual blessing," and "in the heavenly places." An examination of those leads to the conclusion that God in eternity past selected certain individuals to receive a comprehensive spiritual package that includes justification and adoption. The two verses rule out the position of corporate election and support an individual, unconditional view of election.

* * * * *

The subject of election has been a controversial one in the history of the church.¹ Two opposing viewpoints have traditionally dominated the debate: unconditional, individual election (normally associated with a Calvinistic theology) and conditional individual election (normally associated with an Arminian theology). This scenario is changing and a third view is becoming increasingly popular.

The last four decades have brought an increasing number of books that advocate a corporate view on the subject of election.² The view first denies

*Professor Crawford is Academic Dean of the Adelaide College of Ministries, Adelaide, Australia. This article presents the principal substance of his M.Div. thesis, "An Investigation of the Nature of Election in Light of Ephesians 1:3-4," accepted at The Master's Seminary in the spring of 1993.

¹For good summaries of the controversy's history see *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) by A. C. Custance (3-77) and *Predestination, Grace and Free Will* (Westminster: Newman, 1964) by Dom M. John Farrelly (71-138).

²J. A. T. Robinson's book, *The Body* (London: SCM, 1952), led the way, followed by E. Best's *One Body in Christ* (London: SPCK, 1955). Robert Shank popularized this emphasis in *Elect in the Son: A Study in the Doctrine of Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), originally released in 1970, followed by *God's Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984) by R. Forster and V. Paul Marston, and more recently William W. Klein's *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

individual election to salvation and then teaches that all instances where individuals are chosen in Scripture are appointments to service. A Christian is only elect by virtue of Christ's election, not on account of a pretemporal choice by God out of the mass of fallen humanity. It is at the point of conversion, i.e., a believer's incorporation into the church, that election could be said to apply to any individual.

Though the topic of election is controversial in theological debate, it is crucial to a theological understanding of salvation. One cannot divorce an understanding of election from a correct view of God since God is the agent who does the choosing. Likewise, it is impossible to separate an understanding of election from one's view of man since he is the object being chosen. God and man are defined in part by the definition given to election, which makes this subject of prime importance.

A proper comprehension of election is also critical to evangelism,³ which is a primary task of the church. One's view of election defines the natures of preaching and conversion, and so again the importance of a correct understanding cannot be overstated. In addition, the issue of eternal security has its roots in the ground of election and the relative parts played by God and man in it. All of these combined demand a true biblical comprehension of the elements of election.

Proponents of the corporate understanding of election use Eph 1:3-4 to support their position. The following discussion explores the nature of election in Eph 1:3-4 by analyzing the exegetical data of the passage in its context and paying special attention to key terms related to election, so that a clear picture of Paul's understanding of election may result. A determination of whether either the corporate or the individual position can be sustained biblically will then be possible.

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF EPHESIANS 1:3-4

Context of the Passage

Ephesians gives no clear indication of any special circumstances that prompted Paul to write the epistle. This is unlike its companion epistle Colossians. Therefore the subject matter in Ephesians incorporates a bigger picture than one local church's needs.⁴ The central theme of the epistle is "God's overall design for his Church and for his world,"⁵ a theme that Paul powerfully introduces in the opening doxology within which these verses occur.

The immediate context of the passage is a unified sequence of thought

³For a discussion of the relationship of evangelism to election, see J. I. Packer's fourth chapter entitled, "Divine Sovereignty and Evangelism," in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966).

⁴Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, revised by Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 19.

⁵A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in Vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (vol. 11; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 17.

expressed in one sentence spanning verses three through fourteen of chapter one.⁶ The opening word, “Blessed” (Εὐλογητός, *Eulogētos*), declares the focus of this section. Paul affirms that God is blessed, an identification of God’s intrinsic character,⁷ and then he elaborates on how God expressed this blessedness toward humanity in salvation.⁸ God is the active agent throughout the doxology and the benefactors of His activity are people.

It is God “who has blessed” (verse 3), chosen (verse 4), “predestined,” “freely bestowed” (verse 5), lavished redemption and forgiveness (verses 7-8), “made known” and “purposed” (verse 9), given an inheritance, working everything according to His will (verse 11), sealed (verse 13), and given the Holy Spirit (verse 14).⁹ Therefore, it will be His glory that is praised (vv. 6, 12 and 14).

Only two times in the entire doxology does Paul clearly refer to a necessary human activity.¹⁰ In verse thirteen, he declares the two pre-conditions of the Holy Spirit’s sealing: hearing and believing, both of which are also dependent on divine activity.¹¹ God must send the preacher (Rom 10:15), and supply the spiritual power for the message to accomplish its task (1 Cor 2:1-5; Eph 2:8). Therefore, even when the sinner is active, so must God be also. Thus the entire context emphasizes strongly the primacy of God’s role in salvation.

The repeated emphasis on the controlling factor of God’s actions, His purposeful will (1:5, 9, 11), reinforces that primacy. Paul emphasizes the freedom of God to act solely according to His volition, independent of all external factors.¹² God’s will has purpose, but that purpose is not to be found outside Himself. He is sovereignly independent in all His actions.¹³ The passage has a corresponding

⁶A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 432-33.

⁷T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) 3.

⁸Considerable debate exists as to what, if any, verb should be supplied with Εὐλογητός here. Four possibilities are: supply ἐστίν, “is,” which makes the statement an affirmation; or, ἔστω, “be,” which makes it an exhortation; or, εἴη, “may . . . be,” which expresses a desire, wish; or, no verb, which then makes it an exclamation. The analogy of these verbals and the consistent use of the indicative mood suggests the first option is best.

⁹Steve Delamarter, “Biblical Studies on the Doctrine of Election” (Research Paper, Western Evangelical Seminary, 1978) 9.

¹⁰Possibly “holy and blameless” in verse four has reference to human activity, but it is preferable to view these terms as a description of the believer’s position, not practice. See the discussion later in this article on pp. 86-88.

¹¹To realize that this human activity is that of unsaved sinners, not already saved saints, is important. God’s salvific activity is directed to unbelievers who will become believers, but are not yet so.

¹²Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Winona Lake, Ind.: Alpha Publications, 1979) 316.

¹³John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 34-35.

emphasis on grace in the first expression of God's ultimate purpose, "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6) and in the description of His riches which have been lavished on believers (1:7). Grace, by definition, points to the unworthiness of the recipient and the generosity of the giver,¹⁴ which elevates the actions of the one dispensing it.

Paul could not have more powerfully highlighted the supreme position of God in salvation, than in 1:3-4 which introduces this emphasis.

Key Expressions in the Context

Having an accurate understanding of the meaning of "He chose" (ἐξελέξατο, *exelexato*), the subsequent parallel concept, "predestined" (προορίσας, *proorisas*), the referent, "us" (ἡμᾶς, *hēmas*), and the oft repeated "in Christ" formula is critical. Added to these is the correct understanding of the concepts of holiness and blamelessness that Paul refers to here.

The Meaning of "He chose" (ἐξελέξατο, exelexato)

Exelexato is part of the word group, which has the basic sense of "to gather" and by extension "to say, speak."¹⁵ The common Greek sense of ἐκλέγομαι (middle voice, *eklegomai*) is "to choose, to pick out,"¹⁶ and it may refer to a thing (Luke 10:42; 14:7), but primarily alludes to people in the NT, as it does here.¹⁷ It often designates an appointment to a position of service, such as the twelve disciples (Luke 6:13; cf. Mark 3:13-14). Jesus Christ is designated the Elect One (Luke 9:35), and the church as His chosen people (1 Pet 1:1; 2:9).

The middle voice suggests the action of the verb bears some additional relationship to the subject rendering it.¹⁸ Westcott states that whenever *eklegomai* is used in the NT, the middle voice emphasizes "the relation of the person chosen to the special purpose of him who chooses."¹⁹ The emphasis is on the subject, His activity and aim. God has made a specific choice, which is directed by His own

¹⁴R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 181-84.

¹⁵A. Debrunner, "λέγω κ. τ. λ.," *TDNT*, 4:71-73.

¹⁶Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 196.

¹⁷BAGD, 242.

¹⁸H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1957) 156-58

¹⁹Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 8. See also John F. MacArthur, *Ephesians*, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 11.

purpose.²⁰

The point of difficulty is the nature of God's choice. Does it include the sense of choosing out of a group, thus excluding a portion of them, or not? Are the objects of His choice individuals, groups, or solely Christ? Meyer categorically states,

Entirely without reason Hoffmann, *Schriftbeweis*, I. p. 223, denies that ἐκλέγεσθαι here has reference to *others not chosen*, and asserts that it applies *only* to that which we, in the absence of election should not have become. This is according to the very *notion* of the word quite impossible. Ἐκλέγεσθαι *always* has, and must of *logical necessity* have, a reference to *others*, to whom the chosen would, without the ἐκλογή, still belong.²¹

Logic must have the support of exegesis, and the biblical usage certainly supports Meyer's logic.

The Hebrew equivalent is בָּחַר (bāhar, "he chooses"),²² and its OT usage supports the idea of a choice out of many.²³ The choice of Israel involved the bypassing of other nations (Deut. 7:6; 14:2) and even within the nation, the tribe of Judah was chosen and Ephraim rejected (Ps 78:67-68).²⁴ Such was also true of individuals, such as David who was chosen from among his brothers (1 Samuel 16; cf. Ps 78:70).

The NT usage continues this sense (Luke 6:13; John 15:19; Acts 1:24; 15:7), where some were chosen and others were not.²⁵ Abbott objects that instances occur where the idea of choice from among others is missing, but he can only cite the example of Christ.²⁶ It would be unwise to use the election of Christ as a standard in defining the meaning of the word, since He is unique in every respect and certainly to be distinguished from fallen humanity in the matter of election.

Lenski suggests that the compound form itself through the prefix ἐκ (*ek*)

²⁰The aorist tense developed a large variety of uses, but its original use was to express punctiliar action. It came to be applied to durative actions and so became the common method of expressing indefinite action, allowing the context to define it more exactly (Robertson, *Grammar* 830-31). It commonly expresses the fact of an action without regard to its duration or temporal significance (Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar* 193-95). The reference to "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:3) in the context here demands a single act of election in eternity past.

²¹Meyer, *Ephesians* 313.

²²For extensive treatment of the Hebrew term בָּחַר, see Horst Seebass, "בָּחַר," *TDOT*, 2:73-87; John N. Oswalt, "בָּחַר," *TWOT*, 1:100-101; G. Quell, "ἐλέγομαι, Election in the Old Testament," *TDNT*, 4:145-71.

²³Eadie, *Ephesians* 18.

²⁴Although not stated directly, this implies the rejection of the other tribes also.

²⁵S. D. F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 3:248.

²⁶Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

implies a choice *out of* a group.²⁷ But others look to the aorist tense used here, as an indication of immediate election at the point of calling,²⁸ or the immediately following phrase, “in Him,” as a qualification leading to a corporate understanding.²⁹ The aorist tense, however, is qualified by the subsequent temporal statement which fixes the activity of election in eternity past, before the creation of the material universe.³⁰ The “in Christ” formula will be examined later,³¹ but it does not demand a corporate meaning to the exclusion of an individual one, thereby denying the excluding of some in election.

The accumulation of evidence is strong: (1) the literal meaning of the term; (2) the logical inference from the term; (3) the OT usage of the Hebrew equivalent, *bāhar*; (4) the NT usage of the term; and (5) even the prefix *ek* contained in the term. All these support the concept of choice out of a group to the exclusion of the remaining members of the group. Therefore, Paul, writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit, chooses to describe as the first expression of God’s manifold blessings, His selection of certain people, to the exclusion of certain others. It remains to be shown whether the objects of this particular activity are unbelievers or believers.³²

The Meaning of “He predestined” (προορίσας [proorisas])

This verb *proorisas* is a “late and rare compound” that means “to define or decide beforehand,”³³ and the NT uses it of God’s eternal decrees.³⁴ The prefix *πρό* (*pro*) “expresses the fact that the decree is prior to the realization of its object.”³⁵ It does not mean before others, but before fulfillment, which is not strictly a time referent, but it is clear from the immediate context that this divine activity is before creation also.³⁶

²⁷R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961) 354.

²⁸Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

²⁹Shank, *Elect in the Son* 45-46.

³⁰O. Hofius, “καταβάλλω,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 255-56.

³¹See pages 83-86 of this article.

³²See pages 82-83 of this article.

³³A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931) 4:517. For examples of the use of ὀρίζω in late, secular Greek, see James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 457.

³⁴Leslie C. Allen examines the OT background of προορίζω and suggests an association with God’s eternal decrees. He concludes that the decrees are indeed ancient, being before time itself (“The Old Testament Background of [πρό] ὀρίζετο in the New Testament,” *NTS* 17 [October 1970]:104-8).

³⁵Salmond, “Ephesians” 251.

³⁶Meyer, *Ephesians* 315.

Here *proorisas* occurs as a participle qualifying the main verb,³⁷ *exelexato*, previously stated in verse four, and specifies the action of God in eternity whereby He has fixed in advance the destiny of certain people.³⁸ The Greek term υἰοθεσία (*huiiothesian*),³⁹ translated “adoption as sons,” describes that destiny as God’s taking the elect into His family.⁴⁰ By this act, the elect receive the family name and inheritance, as if they were natural sons.⁴¹

In this context, considerable disagreement exists over the nature of the participle. Is it causal, giving the reason for election,⁴² or temporal, indicating predestination is prior to election,⁴³ or modal, expressing the form which election took?⁴⁴ Although the participle may carry a causal sense,⁴⁵ there is no real distinction between *exelexato* and *proorisas* beyond that indicated by the prefixes *ek* and *pro*. The first emphasizes the nature of the selection and the second the certainty of it.⁴⁶

Elsewhere predestination is never distinguished from election with regard to chronology⁴⁷ or logical priority. God’s foreknowledge is the only concept given any sequential priority (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:2),⁴⁸ and despite the fact that the most common use of the aorist participle is temporal sequence, indicating a prior action,

³⁷The participle also occurs in verse eleven in relationship to another main verb ἐκκληρώθημεν, but there it explains the basis of ἐκκληρώθημεν. The believer’s relationship to God is not accidental or incidental, but “founded on and resulting from the eternal foreordaining purpose of God Himself” (Salmond, “Ephesians” 264).

³⁸Lenski, *Ephesians* 360-61.

³⁹This term also appears in Rom 8:13, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5. Paul develops the concept of filial relationship more fully in Gal 4:1-6, drawing on the Roman custom of adoption whereby it was possible to adopt a child who was not one’s own son, often as a remedy for childlessness. This was a legal process, requiring witnesses, which gave the adopted child the full rights of a natural son. It is never used of Christ, for He alone is God’s Son by nature, and it emphasizes that a believer’s sonship is conferred by divine act (Eduard Schweizer, “υἰοθεσία,” *TDNT* 8:399).

⁴⁰Robertson, *Word Pictures* 301-2.

⁴¹Salmond, “Ephesians” 251-52.

⁴²Abbott, *Ephesians* 8.

⁴³Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, with a Revised Translation* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859) 7-8.

⁴⁴Meyer, *Ephesians* 315.

⁴⁵Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar* 227.

⁴⁶Eadie, *Ephesians* 31.

⁴⁷Ellicott, in his commentary on Ephesians (*Ephesians* 8), argues that Rom 8:29-30 provides a sequence of divine salvific activities which places predestination prior to election, but this can only be sustained if ἐκάλεισεν is another term for election, which it clearly is not. It refers to the historical moment of the effectual call of the elect sinner to salvation (K. L. Schmidt, “καλέω κ. τ. λ.,” *TDNT* 3:487-536).

⁴⁸Meyer, *Ephesians* 315. See Alfred Junior Martin’s article for a discussion of foreknowledge, “The Sovereignty of Grace as Seen in Romans 8:28-30,” *BSac* 99 (October-December 1942):453-68.

the evidence is against it here. A non-sequential understanding is not unusual since aorist participles commonly express simultaneous action.⁴⁹

The primary emphasis is contained in the main verb *exelexato*, and the participle provides a further aspect of its meaning. If a causal or temporal sense is adopted,⁵⁰ the emphasis reverses and predestination becomes the primary thought. It is better to view God's act of election as being expressed in the predestination of the elect, so that the primacy of election remains without diminishing the importance of predestination. Therefore the participle is modal and the two concepts are simultaneous acts of God, without temporal sequence.

The Meaning of "us" (ἡμᾶς [hēmas])

The simple pronoun *hēmas*, easily translated "us," expresses the object of the divine activity in this context, but the exact meaning is harder to define. Most commentators agree that it refers to Christians in general in the early verses of this section.⁵¹ It is less clear whether God viewed the objects of His election in their saved or unsaved condition. Determining this is crucial for an understanding of the nature of election.

The context contains no indication of any preconditions related to election or predestination. The sealing of believers by the Holy Spirit has two prerequisites: hearing and believing, but since these are activities in human history, occurring at the point of conversion, they are not to be transferred into eternity past as conditions of election.⁵² The purpose of election is expressed by εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ (*einai hēmas hagiōus kai amōmous katenōpion autou*), "that we should be holy and blameless before him,"⁵³ which cannot be both the goal and the ground of election. Only unbelievers need to be brought to this state.⁵⁴

It is therefore apparent that God is dealing with humanity in its fallen condition, which means the objects of election are unbelievers, who will become

⁴⁹Robertson, *Grammar* 860-61.

⁵⁰The one so acting is God and in light of His attribute of omniscience, knowing all things, at all times, all at the same time, it is contradictory to have sequence of time in His thought processes. See Norman Geisler's comments in his chapter, "God Knows All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, David and Randall Basinger, eds. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986) 67.

⁵¹Some of these are Henry Alford (9), Heinrich Meyer (311), John Eadie (12), Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 6, and Charles Ellicott (4) in their respective commentaries on Ephesians. See also Donald Jayne's short comments, "'We' and 'You' in Ephesians," *ExpTim* 85/5 (February 1974):151-52.

⁵²Paul K. Jewett, *Election & Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 73.

⁵³See pages 86-88 for a discussion of these terms. It will be argued that they signify full justification and thus indicate election is purposed to save the elect.

⁵⁴C. Samuel Storms, *Chosen for Life: An Introductory Guide to the Doctrine of Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 93-94.

believers on account of their election.⁵⁵ Paul is referring to them as those in time, who have already benefited from their election, but God views them prior to all that His activity will produce.

The Meaning of the “in Christ” formula (ἐν Χριστῷ, ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐν ᾧ [en Christō, en autō, en hō])

The “in Christ” formula is one of Paul’s favorite phrases in this epistle, occurring at least thirty-four times.⁵⁶ There are ten references in this section alone (1:3-14) and two in this passage. The exact meaning is difficult to determine and there is much diversity of opinion, but an accurate understanding of election and predestination is impossible without it.⁵⁷

The preposition can express locality or instrumentality,⁵⁸ and Allan suggests the latter sense is predominant in Paul’s use of it in Ephesians in connection with Christ.⁵⁹ Robertson considers that *en*, when used with reference to people, expresses the concept of mystical union,⁶⁰ and certainly the elect must be in union with Him to obtain the spiritual benefits associated with election. Meyer interprets the preposition as having an inclusive sense, which narrows the source of all the divine blessings to Christ and no other.⁶¹ In addition, Wedderburn, when discussing Paul’s use of this phrase, includes a causative sense.⁶² It is necessary to understand the connection of the formula in this context before reaching a definitive understanding of it.

Commentators do not agree upon the connection of this formula in verse 3. Does it refer to *hēmas*, and, if it does, in what sense?⁶³ Or does it refer only to the activity of election without reference to *hēmas*?⁶⁴ Or does it refer only to Christ and specify Him as The Elect One?⁶⁵ The latter two views have major objections to

⁵⁵The plural form is not a designation of corporeality, but an identification of the numerous individuals who are among the elect.

⁵⁶John A. Allan, “The ‘in Christ’ Formula in Ephesians,” *NTS* 5 (1958-1959):54.

⁵⁷For a theological discussion of this formula that highlights the difficulties in expressing its meaning, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (one volume edition; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 948-54.

⁵⁸G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) 150-51; Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary* 209-10.

⁵⁹Allan, “The ‘in Christ’ Formula” 59.

⁶⁰Robertson, *Grammar* 587.

⁶¹Meyer, *Ephesians* 312.

⁶²A. J. M. Wedderburn, “Some Observations on Paul’s Use of the Phrases ‘in Christ’ and ‘with Christ,’” *JSNT* 25 (October 1985):84, 89.

⁶³Ellicott, *Ephesians* 6.

⁶⁴Lenski, *Ephesians* 354-56.

⁶⁵Shank, *Elect in the Son* 45-46.

overcome, since the object of the verb *exelexato*, is certainly *hēmas*, not *autō*. It is impossible to dismiss *hēmas* as the focus of election, though admittedly the centrality of Christ is significant. Therefore, the formula is not connected directly to the verb, but qualifies *hēmas* in some way.

This phrase points out the position of those defined by *hēmas*, a position that has eternal and temporal aspects. Elsewhere Christ's relationship to His people is clearly that of federal redemptive representation (cf. Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22).⁶⁶ As fallen humanity is related to Adam, so the elect are related to Christ.⁶⁷ Hodge points out that the OT pattern of an Israelite's enjoyment of blessing on account of his relationship to Abraham and God's covenant with him supports a parallel understanding here.⁶⁸

Salmond suggests this formula expresses that Christ is the *causa meritoria* of election.⁶⁹ Wong sees in this formula all redemptive activities and suggests it also includes their efficacy, which Christ's direct performance achieved.⁷⁰ These suggestions would harmonize with the causal and instrumental uses of the preposition *en*, but they are clearly seen only in other passages. In this context no such clear meaning appears, and in fact, when Paul expresses the instrumental aspect of Christ's relationship to the elect in vv. 5 and 7, he uses *διὰ* (*dia*), not *en*. One would expect some distinctive meaning for *en*. Therefore it would be incorrect to render it as *dia*, "through Christ," because Christ is more than the instrument,⁷¹ and when Paul wants to use *dia* to express instrument, he does so.⁷²

Another difficulty associated with these nuances is their adverbial character, which would lead one to connect the formula to *exelexato*, but which contradicts the previous argument for a connection with *hēmas*. It is probable that Paul has omitted an article between *hēmas* and *en autō* which would, if included, give a rendering, "He chose us (who are) in Christ." This would give further support

⁶⁶Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

⁶⁷The scope of this article does not allow a discussion of the nature of humanity's relationship to Adam. The question of seminal unity cannot be answered here, but it is not critical to the analysis of Eph 1:3-4. The writer holds a federal only position. For further reading see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 2:192-214.

⁶⁸C. H. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 31.

⁶⁹Salmond, "Ephesians" 247.

⁷⁰Simon Sek-Muk Wong, "A Semantic Analysis of Ephesians 1:3-14" (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987) 86.

⁷¹Abbott, *Ephesians* 5-6.

⁷²In v. 5 Paul uses *διὰ* with Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, and also in verse seven with τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, and so a mere substitution would fail to account for the nuances contained in the words. Robertson suggests that Paul's use of *διὰ* with Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ points to Christ as the representative of mankind (A. T. Robertson, *Grammar* 583).

for an adjectival sense, describing the position of those designated by *hēmas*.⁷³ Although the instrumental and causal senses are clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture and even in this section (1:5), it is better to assign the formula, as used here, the concept of mystical union.⁷⁴

Previously it was determined that *hēmas* referred to people in their pre-conversion condition, i.e., while unbelievers, with reference to their election. It was also decided that Paul refers to them as those who have already benefitted from that election. The formula would therefore explain the condition of the elect when their election is realized. The historical realization of God's electing activity is the elects' mystical union with Christ.

The previous occurrence of *en Christō* with ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ (*en pasē eulogiq*, "with every blessing") harmonizes with this sense, for it is in union with Him that these blessings are historically realized. Such an understanding fits well with the positional emphasis introduced in v. 3 by ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (*en tois epouraniois*, "in the heavenlies") and also parallels both the local and mystical ideas contained in this phrase.⁷⁵ This concept harmonizes with Robertson's suggestion for *en*, but does not exclude further aspects of the elects' relationship to Christ. The discussion of predestination (v. 5) and the agency of Christ's blood (v. 7) express these subsequently.⁷⁶

Though it is true that Christ is God's Elect One (Isa 42:1, 6 f.; cf. Matt 12:18) and that apart from His election there could be no realization of the election of unbelievers, His election is of a different nature. Christ was elected to be the redeemer in contrast to sinners being elected for redemption. Thus Christ's election does not truly parallel that of Christians, and so theirs cannot be contained in His.

Therefore the "in Christ" formula used in Ephesians is best defined as describing the mystical union of the elect with Christ,⁷⁷ which is the historical

⁷³In Classical Greek a prepositional phrase may be employed as an attributive expression modifying a substantive. In such cases the article is added before the prepositional phrase for the sake of clarity. In the NT, however, there are a considerable number of instances where the article is omitted, and this is true in Paul, such as in Eph 2:11, τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί; Eph 4:1, ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ; Col. 1:2, τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαίς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς (Nigel Turner, "Syntax," *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, James Hope Moulton, ed., Vol. 3 [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963] 221-22). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume the article has also been omitted in Eph 1:4.

⁷⁴This is the conclusion of Richard Longenecker in his discussion of liberty in Christ. He considers the formula has a definite local nuance which is mystical in nature, but "not the pagan mysticism of absorption, for the 'I' and the 'Thou' of the relation retain their identities. But it is the 'I and Thou' communion at its highest" (Richard L. Longenecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976] 160-70).

⁷⁵For further study of the local nuance of ἐν, see the appendix by Colin Brown, ed., *NIDNTT* 1190-93, and Nigel Turner, "Syntax" 262-64.

⁷⁶Robertson suggests that Paul's use of διὰ with Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ in verse 5 has a representative meaning (*Grammar* 583).

⁷⁷The limited scope of this work does not permit a detailed explanation of this concept, but its identification is sufficient in analyzing corporate and individual election.

realization of their eternal election and reception of all the accompanying spiritual blessings.⁷⁸

The Meaning of “holy” (ἅγιους [hagious]) and “blameless” (ἄμώμους [amōmous])

The adjective/substantive *hagious*, primarily meant “dedicated to the gods,” and by extension, “worthy of veneration.”⁷⁹ The basic idea is one of separation and consecration, where what is set apart is to be removed from worldly defilement and joined to divine purity. This then gave the word a moral significance, which, when applied to God’s people, denotes the obligations of a new position.⁸⁰

The second term *amōmous* was used in the LXX of the condition of a sacrificial animal which was without a physical defect. It was applied to people in a moral and religious sense.⁸¹ Christ’s sacrifice (Heb 9:14) and the church as a whole (Eph 5:27) are so described. The absence of anything that would render the person unworthy of God is the idea contained in the word, and “blameless” is a good rendering of it.⁸²

The issue here is how Paul is using these two terms with reference to election. The clause in which they occur expresses purpose,⁸³ completing the meaning of *exelexato*, but the exact meaning of the terms is debated. There are two possibilities: election has the purpose of bringing the elect to full justification, so that these terms describe the believer’s position,⁸⁴ or, election has the purpose of sanctifying the elect, so that these terms describe the believer’s practice.⁸⁵

The use of εἶναι (*einai*, “might be”), as compared with γίνεσθαι (*gines-thai*, “might become”), argues for a positional sense here.⁸⁶ The statement is absolute, not progressive, since the elect will possess these characteristics and not

⁷⁸Markus Barth, *Ephesians, Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3*, in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 107-8.

⁷⁹Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon* 6-7.

⁸⁰Balz, “ἅγιος κ. τ. λ.,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 1:16-17.

⁸¹BAGD, 47-48.

⁸²Salmond, “Ephesians” 249.

⁸³Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar* 214-15; Eadie, *Ephesians* 12; Ellicott, *Ephesians* 6; Meyer, *Ephesians* 313.

⁸⁴Meyer, *Ephesians* 313-14. Although a minority view, some scholars (e.g., Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 93-94) understand the positional aspect to be final sanctification, as is clearly the case in Eph 5:27, but the context here is against that view. All the blessings are associated with initial salvation, as the subsequent discussion will prove.

⁸⁵Abbott, *Ephesians* 7.

⁸⁶Meyer, *Ephesians* 314.

progress toward them.⁸⁷ The contextual emphasis is on position and not practice, focusing on what God alone can provide, apart from the believer's activity.⁸⁸ The subsequent use of these terms in Eph 5:27 is clearly positional, referring to final perfection.⁸⁹ Whether ἐν ἀγάπῃ (*en agapē*, "in love") is connected to *exelaxato* or *proorisas*, the positional sense is reinforced, since it is God's love that is in view.⁹⁰

Eadie considers these terms never to be used of the believer's complete justification on the grounds that the presence of sin remains and only the due penalty for sin has been removed.⁹¹ His objection, however, can be turned against his perspective, since, if these terms cannot describe the believer's position, which is perfect in Christ, how could they be applied to his practice which is certainly not perfect? It seems more difficult to use such a categorical statement concerning the state of the believer as a description of progressive sanctification.⁹²

Colossians 1:22 is often appealed to as a parallel passage to support the progressive sanctification position since it uses both terms,⁹³ but it does not employ the same verbal construction, using παραστῆσαι (*parastēsai*, "to present"), and using them in a different context which has already exhorted believers to walk worthy (Col 1:10). Therefore it is not truly parallel to the Ephesians passage, but since the Colossians passage looks forward to the end result of God's salvific work,

⁸⁷Compare Phil 2:15 where γένησθε is used with ἄμεμπτοι and ἄμωμα in the context of the Christian life.

⁸⁸This is not to deny the clear statements of Paul in v. 13 concerning hearing and believing, but the immediate and overall emphasis is God's activity. It remains to be seen whether they are a product of divine fiat and thus a further part of the divine blessings associated with election.

⁸⁹Paul's use of these terms to describe Christ's presentation of the church in her final state of perfection completes the process which he has introduced in Eph 1:4. The corporate emphasis in 5:27 is appropriate since all the members of the church will participate in this glorious event at the same time. The church, for the first time, will be complete in all respects, and so is best presented as a unified whole. This provides no grounds for reading back a corporate interpretation into 1:4.

⁹⁰It is possible to connect this phrase to ἀγίους and ἀμώμους. This is argued by Lenski (*Ephesians* 359), Westcott (*Ephesians* 9), and J. Armitage Robinson (*Commentary on Ephesians* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1903] 27). Most commentators dismiss a connection to ἐξελέξατο on the grounds that it is too remote, but Alford (*Greek Testament* 71), considers it no more remote than the previous relationship of εὐλογήσας to ἐν Χριστῷ. Others such as Meyer (*Ephesians* 314), Eadie (*Ephesians* 28-31), Abbott (*Ephesians* 8) and Ellicott (*Ephesians* 7) attach ἐν ἀγάπῃ to προορίσας. This last connection best harmonizes with the contextual emphasis, that focuses on God's activity, not man's. An opening statement concerning God's love provides a fitting motivation for His act of predestination, which in this context has adoption as its goal. Paul's other connections of ἐν ἀγάπῃ in Ephesians (3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2), although standing in an antecedent relationship to what is modified, do not militate against a differing connection here. They are remote from this context and in each case the emphasis is on the believer's actions, not those of God, which is the emphasis in 1:3-4.

⁹¹Eadie, *Ephesians* 22.

⁹²Even if the alternative view is adopted, the believer must first be justified before he can be sanctified, and therefore God's purpose in the case of individual election must include his justification.

⁹³Salmond, "Ephesians" 250.

i.e., the believer's perfection in the presence of the one who has saved him, it actually lends support to the other view. Both passages use these terms in their fullest sense of perfection, Eph 1:4 positionally at the beginning of salvation and Col 1:22 experientially at the end of salvation.

As discussed earlier, the associated term *proorisas* also has a positional goal as its focus, the adoption of the elect. God predestined the elect for the purpose of bringing them into a filial relationship with Himself, which grants each believer the position and full rights appropriate to a natural son. In addition, the subsequent blessings of redemption and forgiveness are associated with initial salvation. This understanding and emphasis fits well with the positional connotations of *hagious* and *amōmous*.

In light of the evidence, it seems best to understand *hagious* and *amōmous* in a positional sense, referring to the justification of the elect. This is critical since it defines the purpose⁹⁴ of election as including justification, which is the primary blessing leading to all others.

Thus far the discussion has sought to clarify the meaning of significant terms and concepts relating to election in Ephesians 1:3-4. There is yet one key syntactical relationship that needs to be examined in order to define completely Paul's message. This is the relationship of election to the concept of "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," to which it is compared by the conjunction *καθώς* (*kathōs*, "just as"). First, one must determine the two parts in this phrase.

The Meaning of "with every spiritual blessing" (ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ [en pasē eulogiā pneumatikē])

The preposition *en* has an instrumental sense in this phrase, expressing the means by which believers are blessed.⁹⁵ The word for blessing, *eulogiq*, is singular and combined with *pasē* has the idea of every possible blessing presented in a single package, with nothing lacking.⁹⁶ Thus, God has blessed each believer with a comprehensive spiritual package. Commentators have assigned various meanings to the spiritual aspect of the package.

Robinson and Westcott define them as spiritual (New Covenant) blessings as opposed to the earthly, material ones provided under the Old Covenant.⁹⁷ Schnackenburg and others suggest that *pneumatikē* points to the source, which is the

⁹⁴One could understand the infinitive to indicate the idea of result, but this is much less common in the NT (Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, 214-15).

⁹⁵Robertson, *Word Pictures* 516-17.

⁹⁶Lenski, *Ephesians* 352.

⁹⁷Robinson, *Ephesians* 7.

Holy Spirit.⁹⁸ Abbott and Lenski consider them to belong to the sphere of man's spirit, intended for spiritual men, as against fleshly men.⁹⁹ Salmond views them as the blessings, which belong to the sphere of spiritual activities, corresponding to the nature of the agent, God.¹⁰⁰

The context contains no indication of any antithesis between these two forms of covenantal blessings,¹⁰¹ and in chapter two, the OT covenantal context is used with a spiritual emphasis (vv. 11-12). If source were the primary idea, then it would be more naturally expressed by ἀπὸ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ (*apo tou pneumatikou*, "from the spiritual") or ἐκ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ (*ek tou pneumatikou*, "out of the spiritual").¹⁰² Here the nature of the blessings is emphasized, not their source.

The nature of man is not in focus here, but the nature and activity of God, and there is certainly no indication of any contrast between spiritual and carnal men (such as in 1 Cor 2:14; cf. 3:1, 3). In fact the recipients, as discussed earlier, are viewed by God in their fallen state, and these blessings alter that state, transforming it into a spiritual one. It is what the blessings are by nature, not how they are received, that is in view here. This is their identifying characteristic.¹⁰³ The comprehensive blessings that God has bestowed are spiritual in nature, designed to meet the spiritual needs of the recipients.

The Meaning of "in the heavenly places" (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις [en tois epouraniois])

In Ephesians, *en tois epouraniois* occurs four other times, three of which are clearly local (1:20; 2:6; 3:10), and possibly the fourth also (6:12). Here, the local sense is also best, resulting in the rendering "heavenly places," not "heavenly things,"¹⁰⁴ but the exact meaning of *epouraniois* is debated, even among scholars who embrace local understanding.

Eadie considers the phrase to refer to definite heavenly places where God dwells as sovereign over the earth. Westcott views them as the realm of divine or demonic activity. Salmond understands them to be a further definition of the previous spiritual blessings, describing the region in which they are found.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸R. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991) 50; Eadie, *Ephesians* 13-14; Meyer *Ephesians*, 311.

⁹⁹Abbott, *Ephesians* 4; Lenski, *Ephesians* 352.

¹⁰⁰Salmond, "Ephesians" 246.

¹⁰¹Abbott, *Ephesians* 4.

¹⁰²Salmond, "Ephesians" 246.

¹⁰³Admittedly the spiritual nature of the blessings derives from their source, God, who is spirit (John 4:24), but the emphasis here is not on source.

¹⁰⁴Salmond, "Ephesians" 247.

¹⁰⁵Eadie, *Ephesians* 15-17; Westcott, *Ephesians* 7; Salmond, "Ephesians" 246-47.

Despite this debate, the differing views contain the primary idea of a positional sense, and combining the elements of each best captures the full meaning, since each one is true and cannot stand independent of the others. The phrase therefore further defines the spiritual blessings as being located in the spiritual realm over which God is supreme, which accounts for their effectiveness in meeting the spiritual needs of each recipient.

The Relationship to Election

The connecting conjunction *kathōs* conveys the idea of correspondence. It shows that the previous statement regarding blessing is in harmony with the subsequent one concerning election.¹⁰⁶ In this context it carries a modal rather than a causal idea,¹⁰⁷ and could be rendered “according as” or “in conformity to the fact that.”¹⁰⁸

This final connection supports the emphasis of a positional understanding of election. Paul presents the package of blessings as fully possessed¹⁰⁹ at the point of conversion,¹¹⁰ which the believer has by virtue of his position in Christ. Corresponding to this is God’s eternal, electing purpose, which has brought this reality to pass.

Summarizing Paul’s Understanding of Election

It is now possible to summarize Paul’s understanding of election as expressed by Ephesians 1:3-4. God, in eternity past, for no other reason than His own design and will, selected certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity to be the recipients of a comprehensive spiritual package, which includes their justification and adoption. This is an action totally free on God’s part, without any external influence, which is ultimately purposed to bring praise to Himself, particularly to His grace.

Election, viewed as foreordination, also guarantees the destiny of the elect, with particular reference to adoption. Every elect person is adopted into God’s family with full filial position and privileges. The historical realization of eternal election is the mystical union of the elect with Christ and only in this relationship do the elect receive the accompanying spiritual blessings also contained in their election.

There are no preconditions to election, such as a person’s foreseen faith or meritorious life. In fact, the goal of election is to provide the necessary spiritual

¹⁰⁶Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

¹⁰⁷Eadie, *Ephesians* 18.

¹⁰⁸Salmond, “Ephesians” 247.

¹⁰⁹Lenski, *Ephesians* 352.

¹¹⁰Westcott, *Ephesians* 6.

condition for a sinner to have acceptance with God. Paul refers to the elect as those who have already benefited from their election, but God views their condition prior to all that His activity will produce. The objects of election are unbelievers, who will become believers on account of their election. In all of this, God is supreme, sovereign, and Savior.

CONCLUSION

In light of the exegetical analysis of Ephesians 1:3-4, it is apparent that this passage does not support the corporate approach to election and that it supports an individual, unconditional view of election. Men differ in this matter and yet all are recipients of God's grace. May the differences be addressed in that spirit, even as this writer has sought to do.

**POTUIT NON PECCARE OR NON POTUIT PECCARE:
EVANGELICALS, HERMENEUTICS,
AND THE IMPECCABILITY DEBATE**

Michael McGhee Canham*

The debate over whether Christ was not able to sin or able not to sin results from Scripture's failure to address the issue directly. Some advocate that He was peccable (able not to sin), others that He was not able to sin (impeccable). Five hermeneutical issues relate to the resolving of this debate: what to do about the silence of Scripture, the argument from theological implications, the meaning of theological terms such as "ability" and "humanity," the role of theological presuppositions in exegesis, and an appeal to other relevant theological models. The role of theological suppositions includes a consideration of the meanings of πειράζω (peirazō, "I tempt, test") in connection with Christ and of χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας (chōris hamartias, "without sin") in Heb 4:15. Relevant theological models to be consulted include the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ, the theological concept of "antinomy," and the kenosis of Christ. The preferred solution to the debate is that Christ in His incarnation was both peccable and impeccable, but in His kenosis His peccability limited His impeccability.

* * * * *

One of the greatest challenges believers face in seeking to answer questions the Scripture does not clearly or explicitly address is clarifying the relationship between hermeneutical, exegetical, and systematic theological questions. In issues where the Scripture is silent or unclear, hermeneutics play a role in aiding believers to arrive at an answer to such questions. So it is with the question of Christ's impeccability (i.e., whether Christ could have sinned or not). After elaborating on issues in the debate, this essay will examine several hermeneutical and theological issues that bear upon answering the question about Christ's relationship to sin.

Discussing the matter of Christ's relationship to sin is not a discussion of

*Michael Canham (M.Div. [1994] and Th.M. [1995] from The Master's Seminary; Ph. D. [in progress, Westminster Theological Seminary]) serves as the Associate Pastor/Acting Senior Pastor at the Penn Yan Bible Church in Penn Yan, N.Y. The following article is adapted from a paper of the same title presented at the National Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Danvers, Mass., on November 17, 1999, and represents Mr. Canham's response to a difficult issue.

whether Christ actually sinned or not. This essay does not propose to deal with an issue about which evangelicals are in such wide agreement. The NT writers unanimously affirm that Christ was utterly and absolutely sinless in His incarnation.¹ The following discussion will build on that assumption.

THE DEBATE

Evangelicals of all varieties are committed to the doctrine of Christ's sinlessness, but they disagree over whether Christ could have sinned. Since no Scripture resolves the debate in unambiguous terms, the question becomes, what hermeneutical and theological issues come to bear in one's decision on that issue?²

Two main answers to the question of whether Christ could or could not have sinned are, Christ was "able not to sin" (*potuit non peccare*, peccability), and Christ was "not able to sin" (*non potuit peccare*, impeccability).³ The peccability position asserts that Christ could have sinned even though He did not. This is by far the minority view in evangelical circles today.⁴ Arguments include the following:

[1] *The full humanity of Christ.* If Christ in His incarnation assumed full humanity with all of its attributes, He must have had the ability to sin, since by itself, unfallen human nature is capable of sinning, as the fall of Adam and Eve

¹The sinlessness of Christ is affirmed by people as diverse as Christ Himself (John 7:18; 8:29, 46; 14:30); Luke (1:35; 4:34), Mark (1:24), Peter (John 6:69; Acts 3:14; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 3:18), Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:4), Pilate (Matt 27:24; Luke 23:4, 14, 22; John 18:38; 19:4, 6), Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19), Herod Antipas (Luke 23:15), the penitent thief (Luke 23:41), the Roman centurion (Matt. 27:54), John (1 John 2:1, 29; 3:3, 5, 7), the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 4:15; 9:14), and Paul (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

²So Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 95. Enns points out that generally (though not always) Calvinists hold to impeccability while Arminians hold to peccability (Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1989] 236).

³"Peccability" and "impeccability" are not synonyms for "sinfulness" or "sinlessness." The former does not presuppose a sin nature. Some impeccability advocates fail and erroneously accuse peccability proponents of such teaching. For example, William Banks, in answering the argument that "an impeccable Savior is unable to sympathize with us fully," asks the question, "must a surgeon have had cancer in order to skillfully operate on a cancer patient? Can only the ex-prostitute win prostitutes to Christ?" (William L. Banks, *The Day Satan Met Jesus* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1973] 50). Yet this would assume that Christ *must* have sinned in order to be sympathetic, not that He *could* have sinned, but did not.

⁴Advocates include Gleason L. Archer (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982] 418-19); Millard Erickson (*Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985] 720); James Leo Garrett (*Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 572); Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology* [London: James Clarke & Co, 1960 2:457]; cf. also idem, *Systematic Theology*, abridged ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 364-65).

shows (Gen 3:1-6);⁵

[2] *The temptability of Christ.* Christ was tempted in all points as others are (Heb 4:15); He endured numerous temptations throughout His life (Matt 4:1-11), and the ability to be tempted implies the ability to sin. This argument is the one most often appealed to by peccability advocates.

[3] *The free will of Christ.* That Christ had, as Adam did before the fall, a free will implies peccability.⁶

Peccability advocates see much at stake in this debate, preeminently the reality of Christ's humanity, His temptation, and a truly sympathetic priesthood. They assert that all of the above are compromised if Christ had no ability to sin.

The impeccability position asserts that Christ was unable to sin. This is by far the majority view within evangelicalism of the past and present.⁷ Arguments for this viewpoint include:

[1] *The Deity of Christ.* Since Christ as a Person existed before the incarnation, it follows that Christ's personality resides in His deity. Since Christ is God and since God cannot sin (James 1:13), it follows that Christ could not sin, either.⁸

[2] *The Decrees of God.* Since God had decreed the plan of redemption to be accomplished by Jesus Christ, it follows that Christ could not sin, for had He

⁵Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1984) 117; Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1992) 512.

⁶H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 62.

⁷Representative examples include Louis Berkhof (*Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932] 1:313-14; W. E. Best (*Christ Could Not Be Tempted* [Houston: South Belt Grace Church, n. d.] passim); Loraine Boettner (*Studies in Theology* [Philipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973] 211); R. L. Dabney (*Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemical Theology* [Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871] 470-73); Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 537-39); Herman Hoeksema (*Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966] 358); Gordon Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest (*Integrative Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990] 2:345-47); Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* 95; J. Dwight Pentecost (*The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] 97-100); Charles C. Ryrie (*Basic Theology* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986] 265-66); William G. T. Shedd (reprint; *Dogmatic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.] 2:330-49); John F. Walvoord (*Jesus Christ our Lord* [Chicago: Moody, 1969] 148-52).

⁸A few impeccability advocates (ostensibly because James says that God "cannot be tempted by evil" [1:13]) assert that Jesus, being God, could not be tempted by evil, and thus assert that the "temptation" of Christ was actually a "testing" to prove that He could not sin rather than a solicitation to evil (cf. W. E. Best, *Christ Could Not Be Tempted passim* [esp. 13-17]; Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* 95; Pentecost, *Words and Works* 96-97)). In fairness to the impeccability position, it must be emphasized that only a few advocates of impeccability use this argument.

sinned, the plan of redemption would have failed.⁹

[3] *The Divine Attributes of Christ*. Some impeccability advocates argue from the *immutability* of Christ (cf. Heb 13:8). The reasoning is that if Christ could have sinned while He was on earth, then He could sin now. Since He cannot sin now, and He is immutable, it follows that He could not sin while on earth.¹⁰ Other attributes appealed to are Christ's omnipotence (ability to sin implies weakness, and Christ had no weakness) and omniscience (John 5:25).¹¹

Predictably, impeccability advocates see opposite issues at stake in this debate, preeminently the deity of Christ and the immutability of the decrees of God. Either of these, it would seem, would affect the Person of Christ. Thus, though some unclear questions of theology are nothing more than unprofitable speculation, one's position on this question will reveal much about his hermeneutical and theological method. Lewis and Demarest, impeccability advocates who admit that the question of whether Christ could have sinned is "purely hypothetical," nevertheless go on to state that in this case discussion is helpful, because it brings out the importance of "taking into account as many lines of evidence as possible in one's method of theological decision-making."¹²

In the discussion that follows, the present writer will argue that the kenosis (i.e., incarnation) of Christ makes it possible for Him to be both impeccable and peccable, and that, while He always possessed both capabilities in His incarnation, the exercise of his human attribute of peccability apparently limited the exercise of

⁹Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 48-49; R. L. Dabney, *Syllabus* 471; Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* 358. This argument has a weakness concerning impeccability, for the decrees of God only guarantee that Christ *would* not sin, not that He *could* have sinned. This difficulty relates to the definition of the theological terms such as "ability" (see below).

¹⁰Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 53-55; Dabney, *Syllabus* 473; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237. An appeal to the immutability of Christ (Heb 13:8), especially in connection with the incarnation, must be cautious. In particular unqualified ontological assertions must be avoided. The context of Heb 13:8 refers to Christ's fidelity, not His ontology. Otherwise the incarnation would never have occurred, with Christ entering a new mode of existence as man (cf. George J. Zemek, *Theology I* [Sun Valley, Calif.: The Master's Seminary, 1990] 35, 48).

¹¹Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237. Someone might contend that arguments from the attributes of Christ's deity are not decisive for this view, because in the kenosis Christ yielded the independent exercise of His divine attributes to the will of His heavenly Father. Thus, while impeccability may be implied by each of these divine attributes standing alone, Christ always exercised these in subordination to His Father's will.

Other arguments advanced for impeccability are that Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit (Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 45; Dabney, *Syllabus* 471) and that Christ's will was to do the will of the Father (Enns, *Moody Handbook* 238).

¹²Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:345.

His divine attribute of impeccability.¹³ The problem appears to be that proponents have generally argued that Christ was exclusively peccable or exclusively impeccable, when a “both/and” explanation fits the data better. Recognizing strong evidence supporting both positions in Scripture and in formulating a viewpoint, one must properly account for all of the relevant biblical data.

HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE DEBATE

The rest of this essay will explore five crucial hermeneutical issues relevant to this question. The first two have only brief, tentative answers, as a full discussion would be outside the scope of the investigation. The final three issues will receive a fuller treatment.

- [1] The significance of the silence of Scripture
- [2] Arguments from theological implications
- [3] The meaning of theological terms (e.g., “ability,” “humanity”)
- [4] The role of theological presuppositions in exegesis
- [5] An appeal to other relevant theological models (antinomy; hypostatic union of Christ’s two natures; the kenosis)

The silence of Scripture

What is the significance of the Scripture’s silence as to an explicit answer to the question of Christ’s impeccability? First, this question may very well be one of the “secret things” that God has chosen not to reveal to us, and thus may best be left unanswered (Deut 29:29). “Arguments from silence” are tenuous at best, and thus open for debate.¹⁴ Indeed, for an exegete/theologian to remain silent when Scripture does is often a demonstration of wisdom and not cowardice. As the incarnation of Christ is a great mystery (1 Tim 3:16), certain aspects of that incarnation go beyond the ability of finite human minds to grasp, especially when one considers the union of the two natures of Christ into one person.

Second, the silence of Scripture on this point may be an indication of forcing a question upon the Scripture that it does not answer. The NT writers may have been simply asserting Christ’s sinlessness without speculating on the question of whether He, as the God-man, *could* have sinned. Thus, making passages speaking of the deity and sinlessness of Christ answer questions they were never intended to

¹³This position is close to that advocated by A. B. Bruce (*The Humiliation of Christ in its Physical, Ethical, and Official Aspects* [New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1892] 269) and Alfred Edersheim (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [McLean, Va.: MacDonald, n.d.] 1:298-99).

¹⁴Milton S. Terry warns against the “human tendency to be wise above what is written” (*Biblical Hermeneutics* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.] 585).

address may be dangerous.¹⁵

The argument from theological implications

Often theologians, especially when the Scripture is silent, argue for a position on the basis of implications of the contrary position. The impeccability/peccability debate is no exception. Earlier discussion has noted what each side sees as the consequences of denying its position. In short, impeccability advocates see the deity and even the sinlessness of Christ at stake while peccability advocates see the full humanity of Christ and the reality of Christ's temptations at stake. Or, to put it another way, impeccability advocates say, "If Christ could have sinned (peccability), how could He be God or even sinless?" Peccability advocates reply, "If Christ could not have sinned (impeccability), how could He be truly man or how could His temptations be real?" The other side must answer each set of questions appropriately. In doing so, it risks a danger of allowing finite, human knowledge and logic to fill in gaps or of even ignoring a significant part of the evidence when defending its viewpoint. In answering the questions, the theological implications on both sides are great, and so answers must account for all of the data.

The meaning of theological terms

Another issue that surfaces in this debate is the meaning of various theological terms. Careful definition of such terms is essential in the dialogue, because when terms such as "ability" or "humanity" are used, often no agreement prevails on the definition of these terms or how they are used.¹⁶ Thus, a closer look at the two terms is necessary to frame the issue properly.

"Ability." One important example of this is defining the "ability" part of peccability/impeccability. What does one mean by Christ being "able" or "not able" to sin? One could define ability in several different ways. For example, if one defines peccability in *ontological* terms, then it would seem that Christ in His

¹⁵This is not the only area in theology where this is done. For example, some have pressed into service 2 Sam 12:23, Jonah 4:11, and Matt 18:10 to demonstrate that children who die before the "age of accountability" go to be with the Lord, though none of those passages explicitly state that. Another debate among evangelicals is whether the "I" of Rom 7:13 ff. describes the experience of the regenerate or the unregenerate man. Since strong arguments exist for either position, some have asserted that Paul is not addressing that issue at all in Romans 7, but rather is speaking in terms of salvation history [cf. Douglas Moo (*Romans 1-8*, WEC [Chicago: Moody, 1991] 474 f.; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 126-30; John R. W. Stott (*Romans: God's Good News for the World* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994] 209-11)]. Though neither of these examples exactly parallels the theological issue addressed in this paper, they do illustrate the tendency to apply Scripture to issues the biblical writers never addressed.

¹⁶The same term can have several different aspects to it as well. Cf. Vern S. Poythress, who identifies originary, manifestational, and concurrent aspects of the same term (*God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999] 38-42), or "classificational, instantational, and associational" aspects (*ibid.*, 70-72).

unfallen human nature was able to sin even while in His divine nature He was not, since peccability is a defining attribute of preconsummate humanity.

But what if one views “ability” from the standpoint of the decrees and the sovereign plan of God? This is one of the key arguments used in support of the impeccability position. Since Christ’s saving work was ordained by God before “the foundation of the world” (cf. Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet 1:19-20; possibly Rev 13:8), since the OT contains many prophecies (beginning perhaps with the *protoevangelium* of Gen 3:15) which explicitly point toward Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise of redemption (certainly this is how the NT authors understood Christ in relation to the OT Scriptures), and since God “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11), would it have been possible for Christ to sin and thus thwart the whole plan of redemption which God had decreed would come through Him? Viewed from that perspective, Christ could not have sinned, because in that case God’s veracity and omnipotence would also come into question. It would not simply be Jesus who is not God; God would not be either.

But this is really a different question. To assert that Christ was impeccable because God had previously ordained that He would not sin does not prove that Christ could not sin. Rather, what the divine decrees prove (in Erickson’s words) is that “while [Christ] *could* have sinned, it was certain that he *would* not. There were genuine struggles and temptations, but the outcome was always certain.”¹⁷

A parallel issue theologically would be the issue of human “free” will and the sovereignty of God. Though men are in a certain sense free to make their own choices, that God’s foreknowledge has already rendered man’s choices certain is equally certain.¹⁸

“Humanity.” A second definitional problem arises when one seeks to explain the relationship between peccability/impeccability and Christ’s *human* nature. Was Christ, as true man, capable of sinning? To answer this, one must answer another question: “What constitutes ideal humanity?” Scripture discloses at least four different conceptions of humanity:¹⁹

- [1] prefallen humanity (*potuit non peccare*).
- [2] postfallen, unregenerate humanity (*non potuit non peccare*).
- [3] postfallen, regenerate humanity (*potuit non peccare*)
- [4] glorified humanity (*non potuit peccare*).

¹⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology* 720; cf. Dabney, *Syllabus* 473.

¹⁸Cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 357-58. There are parallel examples of God’s decrees with respect to a contingent event, such as the prophecies concerning the birth of Issac.

¹⁹This is similar to Cornelius Van Til’s discussion of “Adamic consciousness,” “unregenerate/sinful consciousness,” and “regenerate consciousness” in connection with Christian epistemology (*Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.] 21-30); cf. also Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 52-53.

Note that these four states posit different answers regarding peccability. Prefallen humanity (i.e., Adam) was “able not to sin,” and yet Adam could and did sin (peccability),²⁰ while postfallen (unregenerate) humanity is “not able not to sin.” Glorified humanity, on the other hand, with the righteousness of Christ imputed to it (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21) will be sinless as prefallen Adam was sinless, but without the ability to sin (impeccability).

Thus, when one speaks of Christ’s taking on a *human* nature in His incarnation (Phil 2:6-8; 1 Tim 3:16), a determination of which of these four options best relates to Christ’s *human* nature is necessary before being able to ascertain whether peccability is a defining characteristic of that humanity.

Options [2] and [3] are impossible as pertaining to Christ’s humanity, because they both would contradict the overwhelming NT testimony about the sinlessness of Christ. In addition, they implicitly assume that sinfulness is an essential component of true humanity rather than an *intrusion* into humanity.²¹ Thus Silva is right to point out that while “it may be true that to err is human, . . . it is certainly untrue that to be human is to err!”²²

This leaves prefallen humanity (peccability) and glorified humanity (impeccability). Some impeccability advocates have argued that since human believers will be confirmed in impeccable holiness in their glorified state, peccability is not an essential facet of a fully human nature (option 4). Thus Christ could possess a fully human nature and still be impeccable.²³ Yet strict impeccability advocates who employ this line of argumentation must demonstrate that the impeccability of Christ’s full humanity derives from consummate humanity, since only the latter possesses the attribute of impeccability. This argument becomes increasingly difficult when noting the parallels drawn between Christ and Adam in the NT (cf. below), as well as the fact that the incarnation of Christ involved a veiling of His eternal glory (John 17:5; Phil 2:6-8). Thus, perfect humanity for Christ *on earth* seems defined best in terms of unfallen Adam (option [1]), not perfect humanity in the consummation. If Christ’s humanity is defined in this way, then peccability is indeed an essential facet of His true humanity.

²⁰Similarly, postfallen, regenerate humanity restores the believers ability not to sin, though this restoration is in principle or standing only since regenerate humanity still must contend with sin, whereas prefallen humanity did not (V anTil, *Systematic Theology* 28).

²¹Erickson, *Christian Theology* 719-20; W. J. Foxell, *The Temptation of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1920) 99. Erickson notes that “the type of human nature that each of us possesses is not pure human nature. The true humanity created by God has in our case been corrupted and spoiled. There have been only three pure human beings: Adam and Eve (before the fall), and Jesus. All the rest of us are but broken, corrupted versions of humanity. Jesus is not only as human as we are; he is more human. Our humanity is not a standard by which we are to measure his. His humanity, true and unadulterated, is the standard by which we are to be measured” (721).

²²Moises Silva, *Has The Church Misread the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 45.

²³Cf. Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 53-54.

The role of theological presuppositions in exegesis

A fourth relevant hermeneutical issue is the role of theological presuppositions in influencing exegesis. This is especially true in those passages relating to the nature of Christ's temptation. At least two clear examples of this relate to the impeccability/peccability debate: [1] The meaning of *πειράζω* (*peirazō*, "I tempt, test") as pertaining to Christ and [2] the meaning of *χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας* (*chōris hamartias*, "without sin") in Hebrews 4:15.

Peirazō in connection with Christ. Theology does influence lexicography, especially when it comes to how one defines *peirazō* as it relates to Christ. Peccability advocates define *peirazō* in its more common meaning of "to entice to evil," while a few impeccability advocates argue such a definition in Jesus' case is Christologically inappropriate, since James says that "God cannot be tempted with evil" (1:13, cf. Hebrews 6:18, Jesus is God) and that temptation arises from one's internal lusts (1:14-15, Christ had no sin nature). For this reason, some impeccability advocates avoid the word "tempt" altogether in connection with Christ,²⁴ preferring instead to define *peirazō* (when Christ is the subject) more broadly as "testing" or "proving." Thus, the *πειρασμός* (*peirasmos*, "temptation, testing") of Christ was not for the purpose of enticing Him to sin, but rather to demonstrate that He could not sin. Both views have their problems. Peccability advocates have to factor Jas 1:13-15 into their position, while impeccability advocates must explain how *Satan* could be the agent of Christ's "testing" without at the same time soliciting Him to evil. Since Scripture makes it clear that Christ was "tempted" (*peirazō*) (Matt 4:1 ff.; Heb 4:15), three issues arise: (1) Were Christ's *peirasmoi* "testings" or "temptations" (cf. Jas 1:13)?; (2) Were the *peirasmoi* "internal" or "external" (cf. Jas 1:14-15)?; and (3) What bearing does one's position on peccability or impeccability have on the reality of Christ's *peirasmoi*?

(1) *Testing or Tempting?* Certainly it is true that *peirazō* can mean both "to test or prove" and to "solicit to evil,"²⁵ and thus its meaning depends on the context. But the difference between the two meanings is not in who is *being tested*, but in

²⁴Cf. W. E. Best, *Christ Could Not Be Tempted* (Houston: South Belt Grace Church, 1985) 1, 13-17; cf. also Boettner, *Studies in Theology* 211; J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963) 58 ff. who describes Christ's temptations as "trials"; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237-38; Hoeksema (?), *Reformed Dogmatics* 358; Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* 95; Pentecost, *Words and Works* 96-97; Ryrie (?), *Basic Theology* 264-65. Authors in this note with a question mark (?) after their names use the word "testing" consistently in connection with Christ, but do not explicitly deny the appropriateness of the term "temptation" as Best would.

²⁵Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948) 5:74; Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 47 f.; Graham Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, n.d.) 24; Robert L. Thomas, *Exegetical Digest on the Epistle of James* (La Mirada, Calif.: The author, 1974) L 9. Leon Morris ("Hebrews," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger and Kenneth L. Barker. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 951) points out that *πειράζω* occurs more often in the NT in the sense of "tempt" than "test."

who is *doing the testing*. It is a fairly safe deduction that whenever God is the agent of *peirazō*, it must refer to a test or probation, since God does not tempt anyone with evil (Jas 1:13).²⁶ It is in this sense that God tested Abraham (Gen 22:1-12; cf. also Deut 4:34; 7:19; 29:2; Ps 95:8) and in which *peirazō* occurs earlier in James when the writer challenges his readers to “count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (1:2; cf. vv. 3, 12).²⁷ But when Satan or one’s own fallen nature is the agent of *peirazō*, it is a solicitation to evil.²⁸ Given Satan’s role in Christ’s temptation, to assert that the point of Christ’s temptation was to prove that He could not sin becomes problematic. Not only does none of the texts explicitly assert that (apart from the meaning of *peirazō*, whose meaning could go either way), but the further danger of changing the *nature* of Christ’s temptation to view it exclusively as a “testing,” when Satan was clearly attempting to solicit Christ to do evil, is present.²⁹ A further problem relates to the availability of another word in the Greek language that means “testing in order to approve” (δοκιμάζω, *dokimazō*) that the NT writers could have used if that is what they intended regarding Christ’s “temptation.”³⁰ That Jesus *was* tempted is further evidence of His full humanity; thus, Jas 1:13 is not directly relevant to the question of *Jesus’* peccability as the God-man (cf. discussion on “kenosis” below).

(2) *Internal or External?* Does Jas 1:14 teach that *all* temptation (in the negative sense of *peirazō*) comes from one’s internal lusts? If so, then temptation

²⁶Nor can He be tempted, though certainly some are presumptuous enough to try to test God in this sense (e.g., Acts 5:8-10; 15:10). On God’s testing, cf. discussion in Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 30, 32-33.

²⁷Additional indications that James was moving from the good sense of *πειρασμός* (“trial”) in Jas 1:1-12 to the bad sense of “temptation” in vv. 13-18 include a use of noun forms in vv. 2, 12 and verbs in vv. 13, 14 and a use of words denoting approval in vv. 2-12 (δοκίμιον, vv. 3, 12) to terms denoting sin in vv. 13 ff. (κακῶν, v. 13; ἁμαρτίαν, v. 15) (Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Faith That Works* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986] 48; cf. also D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* [Chicago: Moody, 1979] 101).

²⁸Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 5:74.

²⁹Cf. discussion in Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 34 ff. Some (e.g., Schleiermacher) go so far as to deny all struggle in the temptation of Christ (noted in Louis Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:304). Garrett asserts that impeccability advocates Louis Berkhof, in defense of his position, altered the nature of Christ’s temptations and reduced the significance of Jesus’ will in His obedience of the Father (Garrett, *Systematic Theology* 572, citing L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 318-19 [sic 338]). Enns, who sees the temptation as a testing, appeals to the fact that it was the Spirit who drove Christ into the wilderness, and since the Holy Spirit could not have solicited Christ to sin (Jas 1:13), it must have been a testing (*Moody Handbook* 237-38). However, while it was indeed the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness (Matt 4:1; Luke 4:1), it was *Satan* who actually tempted Christ.

³⁰Cf. Rom 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; 14:22; 1 Cor 3:13; 11:28; 16:3; 2 Cor 8:8, 22; 13:5; Gal 6:4; Eph 5:10; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4; 5:21; 1 Tim 3:10; Heb 3:9; 1 Pet 1:7; 1 John 4:1; Prov. 8:10 and 17:3 [LXX]. The adjective δόκιμος (v. 12) and noun δοκίμιον (v. 3) had already been used by James. Δοκιμάζω and its cognates all have the idea of “being approved” (BAGD, 202-3; Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 28-29 [on p. 31 Banks notes that this word is never used in the NT of Satan]). But *πειράζω* is used of the temptation of Christ.

in that sense would not be possible apart from an already existing sin nature, and Christ must therefore be impeccable if He was sinless.³¹ There is much truth in this view; James does say, “*Each one* is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (1:14, emphasis added). If *peirasmos* is limited to this sense of “temptation arising from internal evil desires,” it would be inappropriate to attribute that kind of temptation either to God or Christ, since Christ had no internal sin nature to which temptation could appeal.³² He was *χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας* (*chōris hamartias*, “without sin”) (Heb 4:15).³³ Yet the very fact that Christ *was* tempted suggests that *peirasmos* means much more than James’ contextually specific use of this term in Jas 1:14. In light of the context of James 1 itself and the NT as a whole, several qualifications are necessary.

- [1] *Peirazō*, when speaking of “temptation,” is not restricted to *internal* solicitations to evil arising from one’s sinful nature, but also includes *external* solicitations to evil coming from Satan himself. It was in this sense that Satan solicited Christ to do evil.³⁴ If Christ was tempted to do evil, then Jas 1:13, standing alone, is not directly relevant to the debate. Jas 1:13 states that God (as God) cannot be tempted to sin;³⁵ it does not address the question of whether the incarnate Jesus as the God-man could sin, or for that matter, even be tempted. The latter issue is directly addressed in

³¹Enns comes close to saying this when he says, “[F]or sin to take place, there must be an *inner* response to the outward temptation. Since Jesus did not possess a sin nature, there was nothing within Him to respond to the temptation” (*Moody Handbook* 237-38; cf. better nuancing in Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 82, 83, 107). Yet would this not also mean that Adam and Eve sinned because they already had an inner sin nature?

³²Contra, it would seem, Helmut Thielecke, who sees the temptations of both unfallen Adam and Christ as arising internally (*Between God and Satan* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958] 14-19; cf. also Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology*, 2nd ed. [London: Cambridge University, 1990] 28-60 [esp. 30, 43]).

³³Cf. A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* 264.

³⁴R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1992) 84. Donald Bloesch points out that a failure to recognize this distinction between internal and external temptation in relation to Christ has led many to the opposite extremes of either affirming the sinlessness of Christ while denying the reality of His temptation (e.g., Schleiermacher) or of affirming the reality of Christ’s temptations while denying the sinlessness of Christ (e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* [New York: Scribner’s, 1951] 1:269, 222) (Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978] 1:96, 115).

³⁵The term *apeirastos* (“untempted”) is a *hapax legomenon*, and uncertainty prevails regarding the meaning of the term. Does it mean that God cannot be tempted by evil, or that God, having no knowledge of sin, is therefore unable to tempt anyone. This is a very difficult issue, and this writer tentatively concludes that the first explanation—that God cannot be tempted by evil—is more likely, largely because the immediate context addresses the issue of temptation to sin (cf. vv. 14-15), and the *de* following *peirazei* marks a contrast to the temptableness previously denied by God. See discussion in Thomas, *Epistle of James* L8, P18-19 (Thomas prefers the second view above).

other passages (cf. below).

- [2] The “each one” of Jas 1:14 must be limited to *fallen* man with a sin nature, which would not include either Christ or unfallen Adam in Gen 3:1-7. Hence, Jas 1:14 cannot possibly cover all scenarios of temptation. Adam and Christ, at least, were both tempted in their unfallen condition, which meant that they had no internal sin nature that temptation could appeal to. The first Adam was tempted externally and succumbed; the last Adam was tempted externally and was gloriously victorious over the temptation. Unfallen Adam had no sin nature, yet he was peccable and susceptible to external temptation.
- [3] Not only is the “each one” of Jas 1:14 limited to those who already have a fallen sin nature, this expression may be even more contextually nuanced. A cognate noun of *peirazō* is used in vv. 2 and 12 in the broader sense of “trial” or “testing.” Thus, in v. 14 James may be specifically addressing the one who does not persevere under *peirasmos* (v. 12). When that does not happen, the “testing” (which may come from God, v. 12) becomes a “temptation” (which is not from God, v. 13).³⁶ Such a man who is tempted because he does not respond appropriately to his trial must never assume that the solicitation to evil came from God (v. 13); rather it came from his own internal lusts (v. 14). Thus, the “each one” that James refers to may be “each one” who failed to respond to the *peirasmos* as God intended (v. 12). It is further possible that the *peirasmos* of 1:13-14 is also contextually defined in the restricted sense of temptation “to lust,” rather than dealing with every kind of temptation.³⁷ Thus, temptation does not presuppose, nor does it equal, sinfulness.³⁸

(3) *The reality of Christ's temptations.* Jesus, though He had no sin, nevertheless faced real temptations at repeated points.³⁹ Each of the Synoptic

³⁶See note 27 above. Zane C. Hodges recognizes this lexical progression in James when he states that “it may be safely said that in every ‘trial’ (broad sense) which we have, there is also a ‘temptation’ to evil (narrow sense)” (*The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Suffering* [Irving, Tex.: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994] 27). Hiebert also connects these by noting that “Because of a wrong inner reaction, the testings which God meant for our good can become an occasion for sin” [Hiebert, *James* 101].

³⁷Cf. Thomas, *James* L 8.

³⁸Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 122. Impeccability advocates Lewis and Demarest note, “In order to understand how Jesus could be tempted although he was unable to sin we must grasp the radical difference between temptation and sin. Because a godly person does not commit certain wrong acts, it need not mean that the appeal is not felt. Because an army cannot be conquered, can it not be attacked?” (*Integrative Theology* 2:345).

³⁹The temptation issue was Reformed theologian Charles Hodges’ main difficulty with an “absolute impeccability” answer: “Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot

Gospels records Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness at the outset of Christ's public ministry (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). Yet Satan's temptation in the wilderness was not the only time Christ was tempted; there were other attempts such as the ones through Peter on the eve of the Transfiguration (Matt 16:22 f.; Mark 8:32-33), in Gethsemenae (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:44), and even in the repeated requests of the two thieves on the cross (Luke 23:39-43).

While the contrasts between Christ's temptation and that of Adam are instructive,⁴⁰ the parallels are significant. First, the temptations of both Adam and Christ were to disobey the mandates that they had received. For Adam it was not to eat of the tree; for Christ it was the Messianic mandate (cf. Heb 10:5-10).⁴¹ Second, in both cases Satan used and mishandled the Word of God. Third, there is a similarity in the appeal of Christ to what 1 John 2:16 calls "the lust (ἐπιθυμία, *epithumia*, "desire") of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life." Though certainly in 1 John 2:16 "lust" is used in a negative ethical sense, *epithumia* can and often does have a neutral sense. Satan possibly used these three areas as he did with the woman (cf. "good for food . . . delight to the eyes . . . desirable to make one wise," Gen 3:6). With her he was successful; with Christ he was not (cf. stones to bread; throw yourself down; all these will I give You).⁴² It would seem that maintaining the strong parallels between Adam's temptation in Genesis 3 and that of Christ in Matthew 4, Christ must have had an ability (in some sense) to succumb to those temptations.⁴³

The meaning of *chōris hamartias* in Hebrews 4:15. A second example of the influence of theological presuppositions in exegesis is in the treatment of "yet without sin" (*chōris hamartias*) in Heb 4:15. Does it mean "without resulting in sin" or "without coming from a sin nature?" In many ways this is a false dichotomy; these two choices are not mutually exclusive. Christ's temptations certainly did not

sympathize with his people" (Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 2:457; also idem, *Systematic Theology* (abridged edition) 364-65).

⁴⁰For example, Christ's temptation lasted forty days while Adam and Eve's was apparently quite short; Adam and Eve had the garden with plenty of food; Jesus was in the wilderness with no food. Milton made Christ's temptations in the wilderness the theme of his "Paradise Regained," in that he saw here the beginning of the undoing of the damage done in Eden (cf. Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* 5).

⁴¹Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 16.

⁴²Cf. Strong, who notes that Jesus "had the keenest susceptibility to all the forms of innocent desire. To these desires temptation may appeal. Sin consists, not in these desires, but in the gratification of them out of God's order, and contrary to God's will" (Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* [Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1907] 2:677; cf. Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 74; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* 265). Because the desires in 1 John 2:16 are clearly sinful, it is impossible to draw an exact parallel without attributing a sin nature to Christ.

⁴³It is possible, however, that if Christ was (exclusively) impeccable, Satan was not aware of that and sought to conquer Him as He had Adam and Eve, or that even Christ Himself, given his growth in knowledge (Luke 2:52), was not yet aware that He Himself was impeccable.

result in sin, nor did they grow out of a fallen sin nature (cf. Jas 1:14-15), and so both are true of Christ. But those who force a choice usually do so to some degree based on their presuppositions. Peccability advocates will state that while Christ could have sinned, He did not. *Hamartias* by this view is seen as an act of sin. Advocates of impeccability state that Christ could not have sinned, because He had no internal sin nature. He was *chōris hamartias*. With this view sin refers to a nature, a principle.

The writer of Hebrews has already stated, "Since He Himself was tempted (πειρασθείς, *peirastheis*) in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (πειραζομένοις, *peirazomenois*)" (2:18). These temptations and sufferings were not only those common to the rest of humanity, but also those "subtle temptations which attended his messianic calling,"⁴⁴ and specifically here probably Christ's death (cf. 5:7-8). The writer draws a parallel between Jesus and His people "not so much . . . in the nature and form of the temptation but in the fact that both sustain an experience of temptation."⁴⁵

Hebrews 4:15 is even more explicit, when the author says, "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."⁴⁶ As noted above, there is debate over whether *chōris hamartias* ("without sin") refers to the *result* of Christ's temptations (peccability) or the *way* in which He was tempted ("no sin nature prompting His from within," impeccability). Arguments for the "sin nature" view include the word order and another occurrence of *chōris hamartias* in 9:28, where it is not limiting the outcome of the temptation of Christ but the temptation itself.

However, this view is weakened by the parallel drawn between Christ's temptations and those of His people, which can and, given our sin nature, often do result in sin. If Christ was ontologically unable to sin, one wonders what the point of His temptation even was. How could it support the exhortation for believers to "hold fast their profession" (4:14) if it was impossible for Christ to sin? If there were not the potential of resulting in sin, what would be the point of saying that Christ was "without sin"? But if Christ could have sinned and endured under every possible temptation without sinning, then the argument of the writer of Hebrews is that much stronger. It is in the experience of temptation, not the yielding to it, where

⁴⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT revised (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 88; cf. G. C. Berkhouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 261; Guthrie, *Hebrews* 86, 122.

⁴⁵Guthrie, *Hebrews* 96.

⁴⁶J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., notes that this last expression does not teach that "Jesus Christ was tempted in every particular point just as we are tempted. . . . [but] that in every way in general He was tried similarly" (*Systematic Theology* 59). Thus one must be careful not to make this verse say that Christ was tempted by every possible sin, e.g., homosexuality (cf. discussion in Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* 26; Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 48 n.).

Christ's sympathy with us lies.⁴⁷ Further, *κατὰ πάντα* (*kata panta*, "in all things") in 4:15 appears also in 2:17 in a strictly unqualified sense. Therefore, it is more likely that *chōris hamartias* here represents an outcome rather than a qualification of *kata panta*. Given the fact that *chōris hamartias* ("without sin") follows *pepeirazmenon* ("tempted"), *pepeirasmenon* more likely has the more common use of "tempted" rather than "tested."

An appeal to other relevant theological models

Other relevant theological models play a great role in seeking to answer the question of whether Christ was peccable or impeccable. Indeed, the present writer has found these most helpful in formulating his own position, namely, that the incarnate Christ possessed *both* of these seemingly contradictory attributes. Three theological models undergird this position: (1) the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures into one Person; (2) the theological concept of "antinomy"; and (3) the "kenosis" of Christ.

Hypostatic union of two natures in Christ. The difference between the peccability and impeccability positions essentially boils down to how one explains the relationship between the two natures of Christ. Impeccability advocates ask, "If Jesus could sin, how could He be truly divine?" On the other hand, peccability advocates ask, "If Jesus could not sin, how could he be truly human?"⁴⁸ Certainly this is one of the great mysteries of the incarnation.

Some impeccability advocates appeal to the unique joining of the two natures of Christ into one person as supporting impeccability. Since, it is argued, it is the person who sins, not his nature, and since the personality of Christ resides in His deity, it was impossible for the person of Christ to sin. William G. T. Shedd may be cited as representative when he appeals to the theanthropic person of Christ to resolve the debate: "Consequently, Christ while having a peccable human *nature* in his constitution, was an impeccable *person*. Impeccability characterizes the God-man as a totality, while peccability is a property of his humanity."⁴⁹

On the surface, this appears to be a very strong argument, but to state that the impeccability of Christ's divine nature characterizes the entire theanthropic

⁴⁷Cf. Westcott: "... sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain" (B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: MacMillan, 1892) 59; cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 720, and Leon Morris, *The Lord From Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 51-52 (contra A. E. Taylor: "If a man does not commit certain transgressions . . . it must be because he never felt the appeal of them" [*Asking Them Questions*, ed. Ronald Shelby Wright (London: Oxford University, 1936) 94]).

⁴⁸House, *Charts* 62.

⁴⁹Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* 2:333; cf. also Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* 117; Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 5:77; Dabney, *Syllabus* 471; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237; Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* 358; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:346; Ryrie, *Basic Theology* 265.

person of Christ raises questions concerning the relationship of the other attributes of Christ's divine nature to those of His human nature. Does Christ's omniscience in His divine nature override at all times the finite knowledge of His human nature (cf. Luke 2:40, 52)? Or does Christ's omnipotence override the limitations of his human flesh; at times He was tired and hungry? Certainly these conditions affected not just His human nature but His entire theanthropic person.⁵⁰ The great danger when one appeals to the unique theanthropic constitution of Christ's person to resolve these sorts of issues is that he must ultimately decide which facet of Christ's person—His human or divine nature—is most normative in determining the characteristics of Christ's incarnate person.⁵¹ In this writer's view, both the peccability and impeccability positions when viewed as mutually exclusive fail in appealing to the humanity or deity of Christ to support their respective positions. To ask the question, "Was Christ peccable or impeccable in His incarnation?" is like asking the question, "Is Jesus Christ God or Man?" The answer to both questions is "yes."⁵² That Jesus Christ in His incarnation possessed both attributes (peccability and impeccability) and that He exercised them in keeping with the will of His heavenly Father is better.

(1) *The humanity of Christ.* Though reviewing all the biblical evidence supporting the full humanity of Christ is beyond the scope of this essay, two issues

⁵⁰Cf. A. B. Bruce, *Humiliation of Christ* 273.

⁵¹E.g., Enns argues, "If he were only a man then he could have sinned, but God cannot sin and in a union of the two natures, the human nature submits to the divine (otherwise the finite is stronger than the infinite)" (*Moody Handbook* 237; cf. Boettner, *Studies in Theology* 211). Yet does this reasoning apply to the exercise of Christ's other human attributes? For example, would the fact that Christ was tired and hungry at the same time that He was omnipotent be a case of the human nature "submitting" to the divine nature? Would this not be a case of the divine nature "submitting" to the human nature of Christ? The issue in the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ does not seem to be whether one nature "submits" to the other, but how the two natures in their full integrity relate to one another, as the full person of Christ is submitted to the control of His heavenly Father.

⁵²In dealing with this issue, a kind of modalism as touching the two natures of Christ must be avoided, i.e., that at one time Jesus operated from His divine nature and at another time operated from His human nature. Explanations of this sort fall into the trap of creating a divided Christ (e.g., Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 5:79; Foxell, *Temptation of Christ* 80; Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* 7-8). The position presented here is that Jesus, as the God-man, operated at all times from both natures. As Erickson notes, "The union of the two natures meant that they did not function independently. Jesus did not exercise his deity at times and his humanity at other times. His actions were always those of divinity-humanity. This is the key to understanding the functional limitations which the humanity imposed upon the divinity. . . . [This] should not be considered a reduction of the power and capacities of the Second Person of the Trinity, but rather a circumstance-induced limitation on the exercise of his power and capacities" (*Christian Theology* 735; cf. also Norman Anderson [*The Mystery of the Incarnation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978) 37-40, 42, 142] for a discussion of modalistic heresies in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity). Cf. also several passages where Christ exercises both divine and human attributes (e.g., Matt 14:22-33; Luke 8:22-25; John 11:32-36, 41-46) (Charles R. Swindoll, *Jesus, Our Lord* [Fullerton, Calif.: Insight For Living, 1987] 17-19).

of Christ's humanity that relate directly to the debate over Christ's impeccability are directly relevant.

First, the Scripture parallels Christ and Adam in several major passages (Rom 5:12 ff.; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21; Col 1:15; Heb 2:8-9). One of the titles given to Christ in the NT is "the last Adam" (cf. 1 Cor 15:22, 45).⁵³ Parallels such as these indicate that Christ is the one in whom the ideal man is realized. He succeeded where Adam had failed. When God created Adam and Eve, He created them as perfect, unfallen human beings. They had no sin nature, had no wrong thoughts, had done no wicked deeds. Yet, even with a perfect human nature, they fell into sin. God originally placed man on the earth to rule over it as His representative (Gen 1:28). Psalm 8, quoted in Heb 2:8-9, reiterates this original intention of God, showing that Adam's sin did not thwart that intention. In Rom 5:12 ff., "Jesus was our representative and obeyed for us where Adam had failed and disobeyed,"⁵⁴ while in Heb 2:8-9 Jesus "was able to obey God and thereby have the right to rule over creation *as a man*, thus fulfilling God's original purpose in putting man on the earth."⁵⁵ Two observations are significant: (1) While sinfulness is not an integral part of perfect human nature, peccability (i.e., the ability to choose to sin or not to sin) is, since Adam and Eve had the ability to sin in their unfallen humanity. (2) The parallel drawn between the first Adam and the last Adam in the NT (especially in the area of obedience vs. disobedience, cf. Rom 5:12 ff.) argues strongly that Christ, in His fully unfallen human nature, also had the ability to sin, if He was to be truly human. Thus, unlike God (Jas 1:13), Christ the God-man could be and indeed was tempted. He was subjected to an even greater test than the first Adam, but unlike the first Adam, the last Adam did not fail. To have the ability to sin does not guarantee one will exercise it.

Second, the NT consistently connects the sinlessness of Christ with His humanity, not His deity. In other words, the reasons given for Christ's sinlessness are not His inability to sin by virtue of His deity, but rather His continuous victory in His humanity over every temptation shows His sinlessness.⁵⁶ Hughes notes the significance of this in his comments on 2 Cor 5:21:

⁵³For fuller discussion on passages drawing parallels between Christ and Adam, see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline Of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 53-58, 60-64, 70-78, 81-85, 96-98, 169, 225, 541-43; cf. also Louis Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:314; Ernest Swing Williams, *Systematic Theology* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953) 3:45; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 112-17; J. P. Versteeg, *Is Adam a "Teaching Model" in the New Testament?* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978) passim, esp. 8-29, 33-37. The works by Hoekema and Versteeg especially emphasize the doctrinal importance of the historicity of Adam.

⁵⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 540. Cf. Scroggie comment in note 40 above.

⁵⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 541 (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁶J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 1:338. One must be careful to avoid a false dichotomy here; sinlessness is an attribute of Christ both in His humanity and His deity.

The sinlessness of which these passages speak [here, Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5] refers to our Lord's incarnate life. To wish, as some commentators (Windisch, for example) have done, to move it back to His pre-existent state prior to the incarnation is not only unwarranted but also pointless. That as God He is without sin goes without saying; but what is of vital importance for us and our reconciliation is that *as Man*, that is, in His incarnate state, Christ knew no sin, for only on that ground was He qualified to effect an atonement as Man for man.⁵⁷

(2) *The deity of Christ.* Jesus Christ, though taking on a human nature in His incarnation, retained His deity with all of its attributes (cf. discussion on the *kenosis* below), including impeccability which is an attribute of deity (cf. Jas 1:13; Heb 6:18; Hab 1:13). This fact alone is fatal to an exclusive peccability view, for advocates of peccability who state that Christ could not have been impeccable and still fully human must, in effect, posit that Jesus Christ laid aside one of His divine attributes, which is impossible unless He was never God (cf. Phil 2:5 ff.). Therefore, the very fact that Jesus was God demands the retention of a belief in His full though not exclusive impeccability.⁵⁸

(3) *The theanthropic person of Christ.*⁵⁹ How, then, can Jesus be peccable in His humanity and impeccable in His deity? For that matter, how can *any* of Jesus' divine attributes (e.g., His omniscience and omnipotence) coexist with His human attributes without compromising the integrity of His human nature? This was one of the earliest and most intense debates in the early church that was finally hammered out in the Chalcedon Creed of A.D. 451. This creed described Christ as

one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures *without confusion, without change, without division, without separation* [emphasis added], the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis*—not parted or divided into two *prosopa*, but one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 212-13 (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁸Impeccability cannot be said to be a strictly incommunicable attribute of God, since believers will possess that attribute in their eternal state. Indeed, the *kenosis* of Christ (cf. discussion below) weakens the appeal to the other divine attributes of Christ (e.g., omniscience, omnipotence) as support for impeccability, since Christ yielded the independent exercise of these attributes to the will of the Heavenly Father.

⁵⁹For an excellent, brief discussion on the doctrine of Christ's two natures in one Person, see Erickson, *Christian Theology* 734-38; cf. also A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* 39-48; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1972) 381.

⁶⁰Cited in Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical & Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 133-34; cf. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 556-58; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* 380; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth,

The first emphasized expression in the quotation above underscores the significant contribution of the Chalcedon statement—the relationship between the two natures of Christ. In the impeccability debate, as in other Christological questions, caution is not always exercised, so that the tendency to modify one of the two natures of Christ (as in Apollinarianism),⁶¹ emphasize one at the expense of the other (as in the Christological heresies),⁶² or divide one nature from the other in the Person of Christ (as in Nestorianism) is ever present. Specifically, in this debate there is a tendency to change either the human nature of Christ (on the impeccability side) or the divine nature of Christ (on the peccability side). Either position must be careful to retain the full integrity of both natures as they are joined in one Person. Again, practical theological consequences are at stake. Losing deity loses saving power, losing humanity loses Christ's identification with man in His sacrificial death (cf. Heb 2:14-15).

The theological concept of “antinomy.” One possible objection to the position taken by this paper—namely, that Christ was both peccable and impeccable—is that it implies a contradiction. How can Christ be both impeccable and peccable in His Person? The issue of impeccability is not the only one where such a question arises in relation to Christ. One could just as legitimately ask, How could Christ be both omnipotent and tired? How could he be both omniscient and ignorant? Omnipresent and localized?

Finite and fallen minds trying to understand something that pertains to an infinite God is also part of the answer to such questions. This is an *apparent* contradiction to man in his limitations. J. I. Packer makes valuable observations that are directly relevant in his *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. He discusses another tension in theology, the apparent contradiction between the sovereignty of God in election and the responsibility of man in evangelism. Packer calls this an “antinomy,” and states,

[T]he whole point of an antinomy—in theology, at any rate—is that it is not a real contradiction, though it looks like one. It is an *apparent* incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear and solid evidence; but it is a mystery to you how they can be squared with each other. You see that each must be true on its own, but you do not see how they can both be true together. . . . Neither [set of facts], however, can be reduced to the other or explained in terms of the other; the two seemingly incompatible

1929) 207-9; Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 2:114-19. Cp. with the more recent statement in the Westminster Confession of Faith: “The two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, competition, or confusion” (cited in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877] 3:619-20).

⁶¹See Williams, *Renewal Theology* 1:335.

⁶²Cf. discussion in Foxell, *Temptation of Christ* 85-87.

positions must be held together, and both must be treated as true. . . . [An antinomy] is not a figure of speech, but an observed relation between two statements of fact. It is not deliberately manufactured; it is forced upon us by the facts themselves. It is unavoidable, and it is insoluble. We do not invent it, and we cannot explain it. Nor is there any way to get rid of it, save by falsifying the very facts that led us to it.⁶³

Packer cites as an illustration the antinomy in modern physics of light consisting of both waves and particles at the same time, and concludes that we must “accept [an antinomy] for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real; put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding; think of the two principles as, not rival alternatives, but, in some way that at present you do not grasp, complementary to each other.”⁶⁴ Certainly this counsel is relevant for the impeccability/peccability debate. It is a mystery, based on two sets of facts the relationship of which raises questions the Scripture does not explicitly answer. We must learn to live with the tension.

Yet does not an appeal to antinomy throw the door wide open to an “anything goes” approach to theology? After all, if one allows “antinomy” for this question, he can allow it for just about anything. Where are the controls? This is where Packer’s careful observations of what is meant by an antinomy are so pertinent: It “is not deliberately manufactured; it is forced upon us by the facts themselves. . . . We do not invent it, and we cannot explain it. Nor is there any way to get rid of it, save by falsifying the very facts that led us to it.” In other words, the controls on an antinomy arise from the Scriptures themselves. The discussion has noted that neither the peccability nor the impeccability of Christ is inherently an unbiblical position; both take the biblical text as it stands very seriously; and neither set of arguments seems stronger than the other. Seeing Christ as peccable in His human nature and impeccable in His divine nature is a conclusion that is forced upon us by the biblical facts themselves, and thus we, in the words of Packer, have an antinomy. Accordingly, the use of the theological model of antinomy is relevant in a solution of this debate.

The Kenosis of Christ. The term “kenosis,” which gets at the heart of the incarnation, comes from the verb used in Phil 2:7, which says that Christ, “although He existed in the form of God, . . . *emptied* (ἐκένωσεν, *ekenōsen*) Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.”⁶⁵ Discussions of the doctrine of the *kenosis* have occupied volumes, and the purpose here is not to reproduce or to interact with the voluminous material on that issue, but simply to make some observations as to the

⁶³J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1961) 18-21.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁵Cf. Other occurrences of κενώω in Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:5; 2 Cor 9:3, where it is generally rendered “to make void.”

relationship between this doctrine and the issue of impeccability.

First, that form of kenoticism which asserts that in “emptying Himself” Jesus laid aside His deity is wrong. This is impossible, because the NT teaches that Jesus continued to be God during His incarnation (1 John 5:20).⁶⁶ Further, if Jesus ever ceased to be God, then He was never God, because eternity is a defining characteristic of deity (cf. Gen 1:1; Isa 9:6; John 1:1). Jesus in spite of His *kenosis* continued to possess His divine nature, along with all of the attributes that go with it.⁶⁷ It is instead assumed that the *kenosis* of Christ is the yielding of the *independent exercise* of His divine attributes to the will of His heavenly Father, so that His exercise of them was in submission to the will of His heavenly Father (cf. Mark 14:36; Heb 10:8-10).⁶⁸

Second, though the verb κενόω (*kenōō*) implies an “emptying,” Phil 2:7 goes on to define the nature of the *kenosis* as Jesus’ “taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men [and] being found in appearance as a man.” In other words, the “emptying was not a subtraction but an *addition*” of a human nature.⁶⁹ That addition brought together several apparently contradictory attributes. Christ could be omnipotent (John 5:19; Heb 1:3) and yet tired and hungry (Matt 4:2; 8:24; 21:18; John 4:6) and doing all of His earthly works in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14, 18; Acts 10:38); omniscient (John 16:30; 21:17), and yet grow in knowledge (Luke 2:52; Heb 5:8) and even at times be ignorant (Mark 13:32; John 8:26, 28, 40);⁷⁰ omnipresent (John 3:13; Matt 18:20; 28:20) and yet

⁶⁶Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* 112.

⁶⁷Milne points out that “if the incarnate Son lacked any essential divine attribute, he immediately fails us at three quite fundamental points: revelation (being less than God he cannot truly reveal God), redemption (being less than God he can no longer reconcile us to God) and intercession (if union with human nature necessarily diminishes the divine nature, the ascended Lord could not ‘take to heaven a human brow’; his high-priestly intercession is immediately invalidated)” (Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1982] 147). Cf. discussions in Norman Anderson, *Mystery of the Incarnation* 49, 57-59, 131-35, 146-50; A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* 15-27, 359-68.

⁶⁸Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* 112; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 228; Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 92-93, 216-17.

⁶⁹Enns, *Moody Handbook* 228 (emphasis in the original); cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 734-35; Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 550; Milne, *Know the Truth* 147; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* 180. Perhaps the “subtraction” implied by κενόω refers either to the veiling of Christ’s divine glory or the limitations imposed on the exercise of His divine attributes by the addition of a human nature.

⁷⁰Gerald Hawthorne appeals in some senses to the *kenosis* and in particular Christ’s omniscience to suggest a possible answer to this debate: “[A]ssuming that it was impossible for Him to sin, because of the nature of His person, yet it is also possible to assume that He did not know this was the case. Mk 13:32 implies that the Son, in His incarnate role, was not omniscient—there is at least one thing recorded there which He did not know. If, then, there was one thing He did not know, ignorance of other things was also possible, even this concerning whether or not He could sin” (“Hebrews,” in *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986] 1513; cf. discussion in Foxell, *Temptation of Christ* 88-89). The assumption is that Hawthorne intends to say that Christ in His *humanity*

localized (John 11:6-7); eternal in His deity and yet created in His humanity. Christ had two separate, complete natures, perfectly joined together in one person.⁷¹ Thus, the incarnation made it possible for Jesus to do *as the God-man* certain things that were impossible for Him to do *as God*. He could be seen (cf. John 1:18), be tempted (Jas 1:13), display the sinless infirmities of humanity, and even die (Phil 2:8). This would include even the ability to sin though the NT is emphatic that He never exercised this ability.

That Jesus could and did retain apparently contradictory attributes is the ultimate answer to the impeccability/peccability debate.⁷² However one explains the coexistence of seemingly incompatible attributes in Christ (such as divine omniscience and human finite knowledge), the same explanation would also apply to how Christ could also be both peccable and impeccable. As God, Jesus possessed the attribute of *impeccability*, and He could not lay aside that attribute without laying aside His deity. As perfect man, Jesus was *peccable*, since that as well is a defining characteristic of true, preconsummate humanity as seen in unfallen Adam. This peccability is conspicuous especially when Jesus Christ was tempted to depart from His messianic mission, whether in the wilderness, through Peter, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and even on the cross. On the one hand, to deny Christ's impeccability is to deny Christ's deity. On the other hand, to deny Jesus' peccability is to deny His full humanity and the reality of His temptations. Though the mystery still remains, to this writer the only truly satisfying answer to the question of whether Christ ontologically could or could not sin is that He was both peccable and impeccable in His incarnation, and that in His *kenosis* the exercise of His human attribute of peccability apparently limited (in some sense) the exercise of His divine attribute of impeccability. Praise God, because Jesus knew no sin, had no sin, and did no sin, people can "be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). That is the basis of faith.

was not omniscient (not that Christ did not possess the attribute of omniscience while He was on earth). If so, it is entirely possible that Hawthorne's suggestion—that Christ was indeed impeccable in His person, but that He did not know it when He was tempted—could retain the impeccability of Christ while at the same time underscoring the reality of Christ's temptation.

⁷¹Thus He had two wills, human and divine, with His human will being subject to His Father's will. The two wills, though always agreeing, are often distinguished in Scripture, even in those passages which suggest a *potential* conflict between them (e.g., Luke 22:42; Heb 10:5 ff.) (cf. Anderson, *Mystery of the Incarnation* 55-56, 154-55; Berkhouwer, *Person of Christ* 256; Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 561; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:345). Enns argues for impeccability on the basis that "in moral decisions, Christ could have only one will: to do the will of His Father; in moral decisions the human will was subservient to the divine will" (Enns, *Moody Handbook* 238, citing Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* 2:332). Yet what if the divine will was that He be allowed to be tempted and thus able to sin? Further, there is the danger that led to the monothelite controversy of the Middle Ages—the teaching that there is only one will on Christ (cf. Johnson and Webber, *What Christians Believe* 134 f.).

⁷²Though appealing, the *kenosis* is explicitly rejected by some (e.g., Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:346); the reasons these authorities give for rejecting the explanation suggested here are weak, especially when one applies them to other divine attributes of Christ.

BOOK REVIEWS

Herbert W. Bateman IV (ed.). *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999. 345 pp. \$15.99 (paper). Reviewed by Robert L. Thomas, Professor of New Testament.

A number of factors contribute to make Bateman's work quite interesting. Two are that Charles R. Swindoll, the President of Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote the Foreword of the book and that all four contributors are present or former members of the Dallas Seminary faculty: Darrell L. Bock, J. Lanier Burns, Elliott E. Johnson, and Stanley D. Toussaint. Bock and Burns represent the progressive dispensational position, and Johnson and Toussaint the dispensational (called "traditional dispensational" by Bateman and others throughout the book). The airing out of this difference of opinion represents a sort of public description of a division regarding dispensationalism that has existed among the Dallas faculty for at least the last decade and a half. The General Editor, Herbert W. Bateman IV, is currently associate professor of New Testament Studies at Grace Theological Seminary and a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Johnson contributed essays on "A Traditional Dispensational Hermeneutic" and "Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism," and responded to Bock's essays on "Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism" and "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism." Bock also has responses to Johnson's two essays. Toussaint's essay is "Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist," and the one by Burns is "Israel and the Church of a Progressive Dispensationalist." Toussaint and Burns also wrote responses to each other's essay.

In Chapter 1, Bateman introduces the dialogue with his summary of "Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today." His progressive dispensational bias is evident when he refers to "changes" rather than "refinements" in dispensationalism through the years (23). Rather than referring to "changes," dispensationalists would refer to "refinements" stemming from a closer application of grammatical-historical principles of interpretation during dispensationalism's years of development. The editor also emphasizes the rejection of Ryrie's *sine qua non* of dispensationalism, particularly Ryrie's principle of literal interpretation (35-42), as a defining feature of dispensationalism.

In their dialogue about hermeneutics, Johnson and Bock agree in regard to the correctness in using grammatical-historical principles, but they disagree about what those principles are. This reviewer would suggest that progressives have

changed “the rules of the game,” as Bock acknowledges in an earlier writing:

Evangelical grammatical-historical interpretation was . . . broadening in the mid-twentieth century to include the field of biblical theology. Grammatical analysis expanded to include developments in literary study. . . . Historical interpretation came to include a reference to the historical and cultural context of individual literary pieces for their overall interpretation. And by the late 1980s, evangelicals became more aware of the problem of the interpreter’s historical context and traditional preunderstanding of the text being interpreted. These developments . . . were not considered by earlier interpreters, including classical and many revised dispensationalists . . . [and] have led to what is now called “progressive dispensationalism” (Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1993] 35-36).

Progressives are not operating according to traditional principles of a grammatical-historical approach, but are utilizing different rules without changing the name of the approach. That change allows Bock to follow his “complementary approach” as contrasted with what he calls a “principlal-traditional” approach whereby “the rules of the game are determined principally before one reads the text” (86). Johnson responds by asking, “Does one [approach] rely on principles while the other avoids principles?” (101). Then he notes, “The actual difference is in the rules we follow and how those rules are used” (102). Progressives want to put aside traditional rules and substitute others based on a theological assumption that the NT uses the OT in a certain way rather than allowing the grammatical-historical meaning to stand in each testament.

In connection with the NT use of the OT, Bock has appended a 2-page note to his essay (106-8) responding to this reviewer’s article “The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism” (*The Master's Seminary Journal* 6 [1995]:79-95). In the note he disputes my application of *sensus plenior* (i.e., “fuller meaning”) to describe his use of NT senses to add meanings to the OT and says that I follow the same practice in a later writing of my own. After citing a paragraph from my article, “The Mission of Israel and of the Messiah in the Plan of God” (in *Israel: The Land and the People*, ed. H. Wayne House [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998] 261-80, esp. 272), he asks a series of unanswered questions and concludes that I advocate the same complementary approach as the progressives do. What he chooses to ignore is the next paragraph of my article where I flatly deny that Acts 13:47 is a fulfillment of Isa 42:6 as progressives would say that it is. I would call Paul’s use of Isa 42:6 in that Acts passage an inspired “*sensus plenior* application” of the Isaiah passage to a new situation, not an interpretation of that passage. The single grammatical-historical meaning of the Isaiah passage remains unchanged from what it was when Isaiah originally penned it. Complementary hermeneutics would assign at least a double meaning to such an OT passage, a policy that conspicuously violates traditional grammatical-historical principles.

In his discussion of Israel's covenants, Johnson summarizes, "Nor does God *expand* those who share in fulfillment of Israel's role temporarily when Israel rejects Him" (155, italics in the original), by which he rejects the tenet of progressive dispensationalism. He then adds, "All covenant agreements with Israel will be inaugurated in fulfillment when Israel receives the One whom they crucified . . . when He returns (Zech. 12:10)" (155). Bock disagrees with that position, stating that God *does* expand those who will share the fulfillment (163). In his essay on the covenants, Bock argues that all the covenants of promise—the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New, especially the Davidic—are initially realized in the church (171). Johnson responds that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants went into eclipse during the times of the Gentiles and that the church is merely the beneficiary of some of the provisions of the New Covenant without becoming a covenant partner (206).

In his discussion of the kingdom, Toussaint opts for a view that the kingdom is entirely future, a view that is not normative for dispensationalism (231). That obviously negates the "already/not yet" approach to the kingdom that progressive dispensationalism endorses. In his essay, Burns chooses to discuss Romans 9–11 to demonstrate degrees of OT content in the church (273). To justify this conclusion, he gives the "root" of 11:17–18 the unusual identification of God's loyal love to His covenantal stipulations and promises rather than the usual interpretation that says the root is the patriarchs of Israel (277).

To add to the value of the book, the editor has included a selective bibliography for further study of contemporary dispensationalism, but the bibliography fails to include all the works cited in the book's chapters. *Three Central Issues* will be a vital addition to the libraries of those who have been puzzled or disturbed by the division among dispensationalists since the emergence of progressive dispensationalism in the late 1980s.

Robert D. Bergen. *1, 2 Samuel*. Vol. 7 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1996. 512 pp. \$29.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

Robert D. Bergen is professor of Old Testament at Hannibal-La Grange College in Hannibal, Missouri. He has researched and written about discourse criticism and its application to the study of the biblical text. In this volume, Bergen applies his exegetical methodology to the study and resulting exposition of the book(s) of Samuel.

The New American Commentary is a continuation of the tradition established by the older *An American Commentary* series under the editorship of

Alvah Hovey at the end of the nineteenth century. The current series, as did its predecessor, affirms the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. Bergen adheres to this perspective, referring to 1, 2 Samuel as the accurate and trustworthy Word of God (53-55). The commentaries are based on the NIV, which is printed in the volumes. However, the commentators, as does Bergen, are free to differ from the NIV when they deem it necessary in their comments on the text. The format makes the materials available to layman and scholar alike with the technical points of grammar and syntax occurring in the footnotes rather than the text.

Bergen begins his volume with a 40-page introduction to 1, 2 Samuel (17-56). He concludes that the canonical form of 1, 2 Samuel was produced in the exile in the middle of the sixth century B.C., based on written documents from the times of Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David with reflective theological insights not present in the original source documents (23). The human author is unknown, but his work was integrated into a larger literary unit, though there are differing perspectives of what that larger unit is (23-25). Bergen opts to see 1, 2 as a part of the Former Prophets (Joshua–Kings) that affirmed and explained the teachings of the Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy) (18, 46-53). The position taken in this commentary on the textual debate is that “generally the MT is to be accepted as the most probable original reading, except, in cases where insuperable problems are created by holding to it” (27). Bergen presents a detailed discussion of the purposes that have been proposed for 1, 2 Samuel, in which he settles on a multi-faceted function (27-55). The introduction concludes with an outline of 1, 2 Samuel that serves (with further amplifications) to guide the discussion of the commentary on the biblical text (55-56).

The author devotes the bulk of this volume to a detailed commentary on the text of 1, 2 Samuel (57-480). Bergen’s seminal article “Text as a Guide to Authorial Intention: An Introduction to Discourse Criticism” (*JETS* 30/3 [September, 1987]:327-36) gives valuable insight into his methodology in the commentary section. The structural dynamics of the text at higher organizational levels influences all the lower levels of which it is composed, i.e., language is organized from the top down. With this perspective, Bergen introduces each major division of 1, 2 Samuel with a lengthy discussion of themes that unify the division. He also highlights most sections before commenting on the individual paragraphs. By this means the commentator helps his readers to see the overall flow of the biblical book(s) and the interconnections between different divisions and sections. Further, the author continually shows the connections of 1, 2 Samuel with what has been written before (especially the Torah) and what canonically comes later (especially the Latter Prophets and the NT).

Bergen further sees the biblical author as giving hints about what sections are important in three major ways. First, the writer will vary lexical/grammatical structure from the norms. He cites the text concerning Saul’s evil spirit from the Lord as an example of this phenomenon (182-83). Second, the quantity of material presented within a unit is observed through word count. The book(s) of Samuel evidence this in a number of significant passages (75, 126, 140, 239, 247, 249, 336,

450). Third, unusual kinds of information-bearing structures appear. For instance, 1 Sam 9:1-2 emphasizes Saul's height. Significantly, Saul is the only Israelite specifically mentioned in the Bible as being tall; elsewhere it is only Israel's enemies whose height was noted. Saul is a king such as the nations might have, even to his physical details (120-21). With these higher-level insights, Bergen then proceeds to a valuable study of the individual paragraphs. This is a well-researched, well-written commentary.

Although this is an excellent work, two weaknesses are apparent. First, Bergen shows fourteen similarities between Samuel and Moses. From this, he concludes that Samuel is the long-anticipated prophet who would be like Moses (cf. Deut 18:15) (59-60). However, Deut 34:10-12 especially highlights the signs and wonders that Moses did. Samuel was not a prophet who did signs and wonders like Moses; thus the NT points to Jesus Christ, not Samuel, as the long-anticipated prophet like Moses (Gospel of John; Acts 3:19-23). Second, Bergen notes that 2 Sam 7:12 in its immediate historical context referred to Solomon, but that its primary application in later Scripture was to Jesus. Further, 7:13-15 was also applied directly to Jesus in the NT. A discussion of the hermeneutical principles applied by the commentator to arrive at his conclusions would have been helpful here.

Even with the weaknesses, *1, 2 Samuel* is the best evangelical commentary available on this portion of Scripture. This volume should be the first work bought and consulted on 1, 2 Samuel.

Henry T. Blackaby and Henry Brandt. *The Power of the Call*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1997. 260 pp. \$19.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Thomas A. Halstead, Professor of Bible, The Master's College.

The authors state in their introduction that this is not a methodological book, but rather a book about relationships to God and to others, both believers and unbelievers. It is divided into four sections: (1) God's Standard for Your Calling. This section includes the pastor's role in which he is to be a spiritual leader and his purpose which is evangelization and edification. (2) God's Standard for Your Message. The standard focuses on redemptive preaching which "should cause each person on his own to examine himself and to locate himself, spiritually speaking" (64). (3) God's Standard for Your Heart. The emphasis in these chapters is obedience, which is the basis for true contentment, and God's sufficiency, which is the sum and substance of all ministry. (4) God's Standard for Your Ministry. In this section the authors give a spiritual inventory for all pastors to take and also offers twenty-six marks of spiritual leadership for any servant leader.

Blackaby and Brandt have provided the reader with a number of positive insights in the book. The recommended reading list for pastors and leaders (247-50) is excellent. Also very helpful are the "process the message" questions at the end of each chapter. The purpose of the questions is to assist the reader in applying the

thoughts of the chapter more specifically. In addition, the authors intersperse their discussion with scriptural quotations that complement the concepts. The spiritual inventory found in chapter eleven is relevant for the man seeking to be God's true shepherd, while the marks of spiritual leadership in chapter thirteen give every servant leader the standard for ministry.

However, the book lacks a clear focus. The chapters resemble a collection of personal illustrations and insights with no specific direction. Correlating the sections to the title of the book is difficult. Additionally, the movement from one section to the other is not clear, i.e., from the calling to the message to the heart to the ministry. The authors furthermore emphasize the importance of biblical sufficiency. For example, Brandt states, "As a pastor your assignment from God is not to make people comfortable with their sin, but to help them diagnose and deal with their sin" (88). However, certain places in the book (e.g., 135) indicate the opposite: "Good relations with your neighbor depend upon a good estimate of yourself."

Overall, I believe the book will produce conviction in the hearts of those who read it.

Walter Brueggemann. *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. xiv + 502 pp. \$32.00 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Walter Brueggemann is Professor of OT at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. His commentaries and works on OT theology provide stimulating reading because his exposition consistently focuses on biblical teachings regarding the themes of covenant, land, and divine sovereignty. He seeks to reveal the relevancy of the biblical text to the present time. In this commentary he attempts to demonstrate that a canonical approach to theology can work hand-in-hand with an ideological approach (x-xiii).

Despite his insight, he does not support divine inspiration of Scripture. In the case of Jeremiah, Brueggemann allows for a variety of redactions: "Our exposition cannot easily sort out the distinctions of prophetic person, editing community, and interpreting community" (31; cf. 488, 494). His position on prophecy is *vaticinium ex eventu*—belief that prophecy is the product of history already played out rather than the product of divine revelation (138). Through his sociological analysis of the text, Brueggemann attributes profound theological statements to the convictions of either the writer or the community of faith rather than to direct divine revelation: "The book of Jeremiah is not a 'record' of what happened, but rather a *constructive proposal of reality* that is powered by *passionate conviction* and that is voiced in cunning, albeit disjunctive *artistic form*" (ix, emphasis in the original). In the "Introduction" (1-20), he declares, "It is crucial to our interpretation that Jeremiah's proposal of the world is indeed an imaginative

construct, not a description of what is nor a prediction of what will be” (17). Again, he asserts that “the language is bold and daring, without responsibility for being factually precise” (56, about 4:17-18).

An example of how this plays out emerges in the commentator’s treatment of 23:5-6, a prophetic pronouncement relating to “a branch of righteousness” who is to arise in the Davidic dynasty in the future. Brueggemann indicates that Jeremiah employs the tradition of Isa 11:1. “The usage asserts *the conviction* that God has not finally abandoned a commitment to the Davidic house” (207, emphasis added). On the other hand, even though he skirts the issue of divine prophetic announcement in Jer 23:5-6, Brueggemann observes the irony involved in the fact that the last king of the Davidic line in 587 B.C. was Zedekiah whose name means “Yahweh is righteous.” “The coming king will be genuine ‘righteousness’ (*tsedaqah*), whereas the remembered King Zedekiah is not at all an embodiment of righteousness. That king bore the name; the coming king will embody the reality” (207).

In his exposition of Jeremiah 31 Brueggemann rejects a supersessionist reading of the New Covenant (292). He opposes any Christian preemption of the promised forgiveness in the passage:

My own inclination is to say that in our time and place the reading of Hebrews is a distorted reading, and we are back to the recognition of the Jewishness of the new covenant. At best, we may say that Christians come derivatively and belatedly to share the promised newness. That is not to deny Christian participation in the newness, but Christian participation is utterly grounded in Jewish categories and claims, and can have participation on no other terms (295).

Repeatedly, Brueggemann identifies key literary and grammatical elements of the Hebrew text that are essential to understanding it and representing its teachings correctly: e.g., the envelope structure with *shema* (“hear”) in 5:21 (67), emphasis due to inverted Hebrew word order in 7:5 (79), the rhetorical use of *shub* (“turn”) in 8:4-6 (87), the emphatic personal pronouns of 17:14-18 (164), the forceful employment of the Hebrew infinitive absolute (287-88), and the distinctions to be observed between the two Hebrew negatives, *’al* and *lo’* (394 n. 73).

The evangelical reader will find many of Brueggemann’s observations eminently preachable:

“The modern form of idolatry is finally autonomy, the sense that we live life on our own terms” (107).

“The entire unit of Jer. 11:1-17 is a meditation on Deut. 6:4” (112).

“The isolation of the petitioner with this response is not unlike a citizen who learns of conspiracy in government but can find no place to report it, because everyone to whom report might be made is implicated in the conspiracy. Such a grasp of the realities of public life drives one into isolation and/or into life with God” (120, about 12:6).

“The claim of the [Exodus] tradition is shattered by the new act (cf. 23:7-8; Isa. 43:18-19). There is judgment and there is new possibility. There is exile

and there is homecoming. There is death and there is resurrection. . . . [A]fter the hurling comes the homecoming" (155).

"The 'bill of indictment' (i.e., the record of guilt) is permanently engraved so that it is irreversible, not to be changed, denied, or forgotten. It is written in the ultimate places of memory, on the heart and on the altar. This record on the heart is the very antithesis of the torah on the heart (31:33). Something will be written on the heart, either sin or torah" (157, about 17:1-4).

"[S]elf-reliance is a central pathology of this people. Sabbath fidelity is one surrender of such self-reliance" (167).

"The oracle [42:7-17] gives every thinkable theological warrant for not running away from the trouble. God wants God's people present both to the trouble and to the possibility" (391).

The volume closes with a helpful "Selected Bibliography" of books and journal articles, the latest being published in 1991 (496-502). It may not be the best available commentary on Jeremiah, but the discerning reader will not regret having it handy while preaching or teaching the book of Jeremiah.

David M. Crump. *Jesus the Intercessor. Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999. 295 pp. \$21.59 (paper). Reviewed by J. E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible.

This work on views and issues is by an associate professor of religion and theology at Calvin College, and is the American paperback edition of a work first issued by J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) in Germany in 1992. It was a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, which I. H. Marshall supervised.

The book uses redactional method and literary criticism while taking the Bible seriously as accurate. It surveys the history of study about prayer in Luke-Acts. After this it devotes chaps. 2-6 to Jesus' self-revelation in key Lukan texts as heavenly intercessor on earth. Chapter 7 looks at the heavenly intercessor in Acts, chap. 8 at human intercessors in the OT, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the Targums, Qumran, Philo, and rabbinics. The bibliography shows vast coverage of literature on passages and linguistic studies on such things as key vocabulary in prayer passages (242-75). Crump has indexes of biblical texts, extra-biblical references in about 60 ancient sources, modern authors, and subjects. Informative footnotes occur, and the author lists 121 journals contributing to his study.

Crump points out that Luke says more about prayer in Jesus' ministry and in the early church than any NT writer. His focus is on the christological significance of Jesus' prayer life and how it impacts christology in Acts. He argues that Luke presents Jesus as "the Chosen One of God, the final eschatological Prophet, who superintends the revelation of the Father, especially the revelation of His own messiahship/sonship; who extends God's call to the elect and relieves their spiritual

blindness; who experiences God's guidance and the Spirit's power . . . and who preserves the discipleship of his followers through tribulation, all through . . . prayer. But beyond this, his efficacious prayer ministry on the earth is preparatory to his exercising a similar role in heaven as the church's exalted Intercessor" (14).

The author has much on Rom 8:34, Heb 7:25 and 1 John 2:1. In Luke, readers find sections on texts such as Jesus' baptism, Transfiguration (9:28-36), Luke 11:5-13, prayer for Peter and the other disciples (22:31-32), prayer from the cross, Jesus' Emmaus meal. Acts 7:55-56 receives much attention. Details on intercessors in the OT and other ancient Jewish writings enlighten readers on ancient beliefs. For instance, many intertestamental passages claim intercessory prayers by OT heroes such as Abraham and Moses which the OT nowhere mentions (210-11). One sees much that ancients held about intercessors representing others before God.

The book is the most informative one yet on intercessory prayer in Lukan writings. It enhances awareness of issues, views, reasons, and possibilities on biblical and extra-biblical prayer statements.

John Davis. *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1997. xviii + 264 pp. \$32.50 (paper). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

Though normally *The Master's Seminary Journal* does not review books on art and art history, the present work is certainly a worthy exception. Part of the *Princeton Series in Nineteenth-Century Art, Culture and Society*, this work describes "the special relationship with the lands of the Bible that Americans constructed for themselves" (3). The author breaks his work into two parts: a general introduction of the American relationship with the Holy Land and an examination of four American painters and their work in the Holy Land.

The author has no particular theological stance in mind. In fact he studiously avoids even the slightest "sectarian" concept of the land (10), writing with the hope that "it will be remembered that the land remains holy to many faiths and many peoples, no one of which like the subjects of this study, can fully claim to possess it" (ibid.).

With the arrival of the Pilgrims and later the Puritans to America, settlers viewed this country as "a New World promised land, a divinely favored Protestant nation created by and for a modern 'chosen people'" (back cover). The author details a history of American interest in the Holy Land and the almost ubiquitous manner in which the people of this country identified themselves with the land of Israel. He also details the various American groups and individuals who traveled to Israel in the 19th century, especially the painters who returned to display what they had captured on canvas. He mentions the work of several artists and photographers, but especially details the work of the American artists Miner Kellog, Edward Troye,

James Fairman, and Frederic Church.

The book is well indexed and contains over 100 black-and-white and color reproductions of various works. Those interested in either the study of Israel or the religious history of America will find this book delightful reading.

Erwin Fahlbusch, et al. (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Geoffrey W. Bromily, translator and English-language editor. Volume 1 (A-D). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. xxxviii + 893 pp. \$100.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

One of the important theological reference works, the *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon: Internationale theologische Enzyklopädie*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986-97), heretofore available only in German, is now being produced in an English-language edition. Designed to provide an encyclopedic reference detailing the "global character of the Christian faith of the twentieth century" (xi). In the foreword, Jaroslav Pelikan states, "Quite apart from the symbolic or real importance of the year 2000, this is such a moment for the serious study of Christianity as a historical and a contemporary phenomenon, and the *Encyclopedia of Christianity* is the outcome of a serious scholarly effort to supply both a summary and a starting point" (xi).

The present volume is the first of five in this project. The layout of the work is well-conceived and the material is extremely accessible. The introductory matter includes a much-welcomed "List of Entries," an eminently useful feature that many of the current crop of reference works have unfortunately chosen to omit. This work has a detailed explanation of the organizational features of the work (xvi-xix), a list of contributors and the articles they contributed (xx-xxviii), and nine pages of abbreviations (xxix-xxxviii). It displays the articles in a standard two-column format, lists the author of each article, and has an extensive bibliography with most articles (although German language works typically dominate the articles listed). It includes a few charts, but no illustrations. The work makes liberal use of "see also" and "see" entries to assist the reader.

One of the most interesting and helpful features of this work relates to the entries for individual countries. It includes helpful statistical information for each country in the categories of (1) population, (2) annual growth rate, (3) area, (4) population density, (6) births/deaths, (7) fertility rate, (8) infant mortality rate, (9) life expectancy, and (10) religious affiliation. Each of these entries details a brief history of the country and various sections dealing with the Christian and religious aspects and history of the country. Though most of the entries for countries are presented in an even-handed manner, some (e.g., Brazil, Chile) reflect some unfortunate politicizing on the part of the authors. One obvious problem in the series will be that the time-line for its completion (at least ten years) will render the statistical information of uneven currency within the set.

The liberal (occasionally bordering on the extremely liberal) and ecumenical end of the Christian spectrum, both in terms of theology, sociology and politics, clearly dominates this work. Its contributors are mostly European and are disproportionately of German background. It assumes the validity of higher critical views of Scripture throughout the entries, such as will dismay conservative readers at the entries on the various books of the Bible. For instance, it describes the book of Daniel as “fiction” and Daniel himself as a “mythical wise and righteous figure” (774). Moses as the author of the Decalogue is “ruled out” (787). The completion of Deuteronomy “in its canonical form can hardly have taken shape before the sixth century, if not considerably later” (816). The work rejects Pauline authorship of Colossians, stating that Colossians itself was not written to the church at Colossae (615), which becomes even more problematic since the entry claims, “In both theology and literary style, Ephesians is dependent upon Colossians” (ibid.). It describes even the Corinthians epistles as “a corpus of several letters” that “owe their present form and arrangement to an unknown editor or redactor” (690).

Some entries will mystify the reader as to the reason for their inclusion and/or the amount of space dedicated to their subject. For instance the entry on “Behavior, Behavioral Psychology” (214-17) constitutes nearly seven full columns of interesting material, which contains nothing even remotely connecting the subject at hand with Christianity, Scripture, a biblical anthropology or sociology, or any other religious theme. Other entries such as “Anonymity” (67-68), “Anxiety” (87-89), “Biography, Biographical Research” (256), “Child Labor” (409-10) and “Childhood” (410-12), “Crisis Intervention” (728), “Development” (816-20) and “Development Education” (821) reflect this same problem in varying degrees.

Other articles are simply perplexing in terms of their content. For example, the article on “Bible Study” (239-40) defines the subject as “the group study of individual texts or whole books of the Bible by church members” (239). However, it then presents a “history” of Bible study, making the incredible claim that the “beginnings of Bible Study” are to be found in the “Dutch Reformed Tradition from 1550 onwards” (ibid.), the author apparently believing that “Bible Study” did not occur for the first 15 centuries of the church. One other article to note is that on “Dispensationalism” (854-55). Though generally well done, this article nonetheless has clearly sought to advance the position of “Progressive Dispensationalism” by using the categories manufactured by that particular movement. Notably the author equates the 1967 revision of the Scofield Reference Bible with changes in dispensational theology itself: “Some of the most controversial notes were changed, many others were modified and many new notes were added” (855). However, to state that the notes reflect more careful exegesis and clearer explanations of the text, rather than a modification of dispensationalism, is more accurate.

Some articles are most certainly helpful and useful, and the series will clearly find its way into the libraries of seminaries and secular universities around the country. However, the pastor will want to save the money he might spend on this rather over-priced work and invest in more reliable reference works such as the *Baker Reference Library* or even the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, which is conservative

by comparison to *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*. This reviewer cannot recommend this work as a reliable reference tool for pastors or students.

Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich. *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*. Trans. James D. Nogalski. Mercer Library of Biblical Studies. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 1998. ix + 388 pp. \$45.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

An Introduction to the Psalms is a translation of the fourth edition of *Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985). Its author, Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), was the founder of OT form criticism. The first edition was published in 1933 after Gunkel had passed away in 1932 without being able to complete his work. Joachim Begrich completed the volume, working from Gunkel's notes as much as possible. Wherever he deviated from Gunkel's conclusions, he noted the deviation within the affected portions of the volume. This is the first English translation of Gunkel's concluding contribution to the study of the Psalms that had been highlighted by his commentary, *Die Psalmen*, 4th ed., Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926).

Gunkel's *Introduction to the Psalms* is packed with detailed information about the literary forms and vocabulary of the Psalms. A brief introduction to "The Genres of the Psalms" (1-21) presents the foundational principles for the study. Throughout this first section Gunkel emphasizes again and again the primary tenet of form criticism: "*the genres of an ancient writing must be differentiated by the various events of life from which they developed*" (7, emphasis in the original). The goal of form-critical study is to identify the purpose and function as well as the mood and content of a genre in general and specifically for the literary unit under study (in this case, the psalm). Gunkel provides a detailed analysis of the major genres of the Psalms: hymns (22-65), songs about YHWH's enthronement (66-81), communal complaint songs (82-98), royal psalms (99-120), individual complaint psalms (121-98), and individual thanksgiving psalms (199-221). Then he discusses the smaller genres (222-50), prophetic elements in the Psalms (251-92), wisdom poetry in the Psalms (293-305), mixtures, antiphonal poems, and liturgies (306-18), the history of psalmody (319-32), the collection of Psalms (333-48), and the superscriptions of the Psalms (349-51). An index of Scripture references in two sections (Psalms, 353-70, and Other Scriptures, 371-88) concludes the volume.

The section on the hymns genre is representative of the approach taken by Gunkel, even though the discussion of each genre is arranged differently. (1) He identifies examples of hymns in the OT (22-23), listing even individual verses in a psalm (like the 119th) that contain hymns. (2) He describes the linguistic form of such hymns (23-41), identifying the form by the contents of the introduction, main part, and conclusion. Hebrew words and phrases characteristic of these parts are

noted (e.g., the plural imperative *zamměru* [“play”] might introduce a hymn [23] and, in the main part of the hymn, the nominal sentence usually is employed to describe Yahweh’s qualities [34]). (3) The manner of performance is discussed (41-47) by dealing with such topics as festivals, processions, bodily movements, musical instruments, and choirs. (4) The religion of the hymns is described (47-57). This section presents the concepts of religious moods, the description and praise of God, God’s dominion and deeds, and the prophetic influence on hymns. (5) Gunkel discusses the relationship of hymns to other genres (57-61). (6) Lastly, he describes the internal history of the hymns (61-65).

Throughout the volume, the author draws comparisons with the poetic genres found in Babylonian and Egyptian literature. It is quite clear that Gunkel accepts an evolutionary theory of the historical development of religion and adheres to the dating of biblical composition consistent with the documentary hypothesis. Both of these tenets are characteristic of liberal higher criticism as a whole. The reader also must remember that the volume was written in a very different era of biblical studies, with no knowledge, for example, of the Qumran scrolls. Used judiciously, Gunkel’s work can lead the serious Bible student into a greater awareness of the various kinds of biblical poetry. Every seminary library should have this seminal text on its shelves.

Richard A. Horsley. *Galilee: History, Politics, People*. Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995. viii + 357 pp. \$27.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

The author, professor of Religion and Classics at the University of Massachusetts, has produced a work of significant research dealing with the socio-political and economic forces at work in the region of Galilee during the NT era. The work seeks to fill a void the author detects in studies of the region. He states, “Renewed pursuit of the historical Jesus, critical studies of rabbinic literature, and intensified archaeological explorations have led to revived interest in Galilee” (1), and “Previous understandings of Galilee were ill-prepared for this sudden revival of interest and information” (ibid.).

However, the reader who has any regard for the Bible at all will be significantly disappointed in both the methodology and results of the author’s efforts. The author takes an extreme “minimalist” view of Scripture in relation to historical data. He introduces his historical methodology by informing the reader, “I will generally avoid using the Gospels as sources for life in Galilee. The use of synoptic or Johannine Gospel traditions as historical source for Galilee is just as problematic for using them as sources for the historical Jesus” (14). He also flies in the face of an enormous corpus of even secular literature when he states, “Luke [the gospel of], of course seems the least trustworthy; he often writes patterns from elsewhere in the Hellenistic-Roman world into the scenes set in Galilee” (ibid.), or

to put it plainly, he feels that Luke simply creates episodes and places them into Galilee settings for “effect.” Whereas he gives almost no credibility to Scriptural accounts, he views rabbinic literature as very important, and details an amazing list of its benefits in his study (14-15).

Though the author presents a great deal of material in a clearly well-researched and well-documented work, his goal seems to be more often than not to discredit every conclusion about Galilee that previous scholars had reached. His chief target is Sean Freyne and his classic work *Galilee, from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: a study of Second Temple Judaism* (Univ. of Notre Dame, 1980). Citing Freyne’s work more than two dozen times, the author always disagrees with him, often in a disparaging manner (e.g., 294 n.; 300 n.). Also he is critical of the archaeological work of Eric and Carol Meyers and James F. Strange, especially their *Excavations at Ancient Meiron, Upper Galilee, Israel: 1971-72, 1974-75, 1977* (Cambridge, Mass.: ASOR, 1981), cautioning his readers to use their work with a “critical eye” (296 n.). However, he deals with these authors only briefly in the endnotes, never directly in the text of the work. He never gives their work or conclusions a hearing or presents it in what could be described as an even-handed manner. Even the groundbreaking works of Yohanan Aharoni (e.g., *Galilean Survey: Israelite Settlements and the Pottery* and *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Upper Galilee*) receive no mention.

This work, though scholarly, is too often a set of assertions by the author on one hand and the “out of hand” dismissals of positions contrary to his own with little if any interaction (e.g., his rejection of the historicity of the account of Yohanan ben Zakkai and Jamnia council in Galilee, 94-99). It is a thoroughly disappointing production that has little to commend it. The reader is well advised to continue referring to Sean Freyne for Galilee studies.

Paul R. House. *1, 2 Kings*. Vol. 8 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1995. 432 pp. \$27.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

Paul R. House wrote this volume while a professor of Biblical Studies at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. He has also written *Old Testament Survey*, which highlights the literary features of the OT text and, a major work, *Old Testament Theology* (see review in *TMSJ* 10 [1999] 2:304-6). For an introduction to *The New American Commentary*, see the review of *1, 2 Samuel* by Robert D. Bergen above in this issue.

In his “Author’s Preface,” House introduces the reader to the format he follows in this commentary, both in the introduction and analysis of 1, 2 Kings. The author stresses in this order historical, literary, canonical, theological, and applicational details. This procedure is employed so that a thorough “theological exegesis” may result and serve as the foundation for an expositor’s logical and valid

application of the text. The greatest value that emerges from this commentary is the help it gives for the preaching and teaching of 1, 2 Kings.

An introduction of 58 pages begins the discussion of Kings (27-84). In his introduction to historical issues, House concludes that a single author composed Kings, along with Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, using many ancient sources, writing some time after the loss of the land by Israel/Judah (38-39). His commentary follows the chronological scheme for the kings of Israel and Judah worked out by E. R. Thiele in *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (1983), except for the dating of Jerusalem's destruction in 587 B.C. rather than Thiele's 586 B.C. (39-44). He provides a helpful introduction to the histories of Egypt, Aram (Syria), Assyria, and Babylon during the period narrated in Kings (ca. 970-586 B.C.) (44-47). On the textual issue, House comments on the MT (reflected in the *NIV*), using the LXX as a corrective when necessary (50). The historical section of the introduction concludes with an extended discussion of miracles in 1, 2 Kings. "The author of 1, 2 Kings believed these miracles occurred in real space-and-time history," a conclusion fully supported by philosophical and theological consideration (50-54).

Knowing House's background in literary studies, the reader is not surprised that he devotes 14 pages of the introduction to the literary issues of 1, 2 Kings (54-68). The author concludes that the literary genre of Kings is "prophetic narrative" (57-58), that the structure of the book(s) "focuses on the rise of prophecy and the prophet's war with idolatry" (60), and that the plot of Kings "is [that] Israel went into exile because of its unfaithfulness to God" (61). In his discussion of canonical issues, House reviews 1, 2 Kings as canonically providing the tragic end of Israel's national story and providing an introduction for the prophetic interpretation of the nation's history in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets (71).

He sees six major theological ideas emerging from 1, 2 Kings that reflect its status as a prophetic narrative. These theological issues are monotheism versus idolatry, central worship versus the high places, covenant loyalty versus spiritual rebellion, true prophecy versus "lying spirits," God's covenant with David versus dynastic disintegration, and God's sovereignty versus human pride (73-82). The introductory section ends with a discussion of applicational issues. House states five principles that should guide teachers and preachers in presenting 1, 2 Kings (82-84). The principles are valuable for the expositors of any OT narrative material. Overall, *1, 2 Kings* provides a good, foundational introduction to the book of Kings.

An exposition of the text of 1, 2 Kings constitutes the bulk of this volume (85-410). House works through the biblical text on a section-by-section basis. He discusses each section (and some sub-sections) using the historical, literary, canonical, theological, and applicational formula. Though this format frames and applies the text adequately, what is lacking is a detailed verse-by-verse analysis of the biblical text. The in-depth textual analysis of other OT *NAC* works (such as R. D. Bergen's *1, 2 Samuel*) is absent from this work. The student will need to supplement his use of this volume in textual analysis with works such as R. D. Patterson and H. J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol.

4 (Zondervan, 1988) and D. J. Wiseman, "1 & 2 Kings," in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, vol. 9 (InterVarsity, 1993).

House's work on *1, 2 Kings* is a good commentary for the reader who is beginning his study of the book(s). It certainly deserves a place in the expositor's library.

Steven A. Kreloff. *God's Plan for Israel: A Study of Romans 9–11*. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1995. 112 pp. \$7.99 (paper). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

Paul's teaching concerning Israel in Romans 9–11 has a special appeal to Steven Kreloff who as a university freshman came to Christ from a Jewish background. After his conversion, the Lord led Rev. Kreloff into the Christian ministry as a pastor. The exposition contained in this book originally appeared as articles in *Israel My Glory* magazine from October 1987 through January 1990. The author and publisher have done the Christian public a great service in making these articles available in this book.

The author has endeavored to present an exposition of Paul's teaching in Romans 9–11, showing particularly the righteousness of God in His dealings with the Jewish people (11). To fulfill this purpose, Kreloff gives a simple, but not simplistic, verse-by-verse explanation of this crucial section of Romans. The basic premise of the work is that God is going to fulfill the salvation promises made to Israel through spiritual Jews, those of faith in God from the physical line of Abraham. The present unbelief of Israel in Jesus as Messiah does not negate a future fulfillment of God's past promise to Israel. The existence of a remnant of believing Jews in every generation throughout the church age indicates that God has not permanently cast away His people.

Kreloff traces this basic premise through Romans 9–11. He especially deals with the OT passages Paul cites and explains how the apostle uses them in his argument. In his exposition, Kreloff states only his own interpretive positions, sometimes with added support. He never presents another interpretive viewpoint and interaction with it. For example, Kreloff states that Paul's use of Hosea in Romans 9:25-26 is a "promise of mercy reserved only for a remnant within the nation of Israel" (44-5). Because some dispensationalists argue that Paul is applying the Hosea passage to Gentile believers here, a stronger explanation for Kreloff's preferred view would be helpful. Further, the author makes some insightful comments concerning the evangelization of Jews during the present age. He writes, "During the church age God's primary method for bringing Jewish people to Christ is through godly Gentile Christians. . . . While most Jewish people look on Hebrew Christians with suspicion, they are intrigued by the testimonies of Gentiles who have come to embrace a Jewish Messiah revealed in a Jewish book" (82-83). An extended discussion of this point and its present implications would be very beneficial.

For the expositor working his way through Romans 9–11, *God's Plan for Israel* provides a well-organized discussion that, when used in conjunction with a major exegetical commentary, will help the preacher present Paul's teaching clearly and accurately.

Erwin Lutzer. *The Doctrines That Divide: A Fresh Look at the Historic Doctrines That Separate Christians*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998. 247 pp. \$14.95 (paper).
Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

The author, long-time pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, has put together a thoroughly readable examination of nine controversial doctrinal issues within Christianity. The subjects covered are infant baptism, the deity and humanity of Christ, the sacraments, the worship of Mary, predestination or free will, justification by faith or works, the canon of Scripture, eternal security, and the sovereignty of God.

The author identifies as a key problem in the modern church the lack of theological conviction, knowledge, and accuracy (14). In the introduction the author states, "In days gone by, many believers were tortured, eaten by wild beasts, or burned at the stake because of their doctrinal controversies. Theology was appropriately called 'the Queen of Sciences' because men believed that one's relationship with God dwarfed all other considerations" (13). Since most of the distinctions between denominations and associations within Protestantism originated because of basic doctrinal issues, a clear understanding of those issues is vital in these days when "some of God's sheep cannot tell the difference between grass and Astroturf" (14).

The book is well documented, and the author has included a brief but helpful annotated bibliography of key resources. The book lacks indexes, which this reviewer always views as a deficiency. The four chapters chronicling the debate on "Predestination or Free Will" (chapter 9: Augustine v. Pelagius; chapter 10: Luther v. Erasmus; chapter 11: Calvin v. Arminius; and chapter 12: Whitefield v. Wesley) are the highlight of the book and accurately deal with the strengths and weaknesses of each position. All these are important issues which cannot simply be swept aside by a sort of benign neglect. "Today tolerance is regarded much more highly than doctrinal accuracy. We have grown accustomed to Christian talk shows that are rich in experience but devoid of serious doctrinal content. Indeed, one of the cardinal rules of the Christian media is that all doctrinal content, if there is any, must be reduced to the lowest common denominator" (241).

This is a serious book dealing with some of the "heavy" issues in doctrine. However, the author's clear writing style, his pastoral heart, and passion for doctrinal clarity, make it a must for any Christian concerned with spiritual growth. His work would serve well as the basis for adult Sunday School classes or home Bible studies. This reviewer cannot recommend it highly enough.

Paula McNutt. *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1999. xiv + 284 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

McNutt's work is the latest volume in the *Library of Ancient Israel* series (Douglas A. Knight, ed.) and represents an excellent chronological presentation of the society of ancient Israel.

Following the standard archaeological periods (Bronze Age, Iron Age, Babylonians period, etc.) the author, professor of Religious Studies at Canisius College in New York, brings together biblical, archaeological, and extra-biblical data to describe the "social history." By "social History," "instead of concentrating predominately on national events, leading individuals, political institutions, and 'high culture,'" the author has sought rather to emphasize the "broader and more basic issues such as social organization, conditions in cities and villages, life stages, environmental contexts, power distribution according to class and status, and social stability and instability" (ix). It presents a "micro" view rather than the standard "macro" view of ancient Israel society.

The author has a stimulating discussion of "sources" for this type of study, and she reserves a good part of that discussion for the status of the Scripture as an accurate and reliable source of information. The author clearly rejects inspiration and inerrancy. She views the OT as a work which was "collected and edited" over a period of time (5) and posits that the "portion of the Bible we tend to refer to as 'historical' . . . probably reached its final form in the context of the Jewish religious community sometime after the fall of Judah to the Babylonians" (5). However, the author is also critical of the "minimalist" view that rejects the Bible out of hand as a source document (9). Though she feigns to take a position on the controversy (*ibid.*), she clearly adopts a position that the information contained in the biblical text can rise to a level of epistemological reliability only when confirmed with "extra-biblical evidence."

That being said, the author takes a decidedly problematic position in her reconstruction of the "Origins of Ancient Israel." Here she suggests that Israel began to form in Iron Age I (1200-1000 B.C.), not in what is normally called the "Patriarchal Age" or Middle Bronze (2000-1550 B.C.). Her opinion is that the "so-called patriarchal/ancestral period is a literary construct, not a period in the actual history of the ancient world. The same is the case for the 'exodus' and the 'wilderness period,' and more and more widely for the 'period of the judges'"(42). She arrives at this conclusion because she finds "no extra-biblical evidence that has established any historical correlations with the biblical texts" (*ibid.*). In presenting her arguments, she often falls into a fallacy of the "sweeping generalization" with her repeated use of such phrases as "it is now widely agreed" (42), "it is now generally recognized" (40, 41).

In terms of format this work has excellent indexes and is well-documented,

although it is devoid of references to works by conservative scholars. The type font is a bit light and hard on the eyes. The lack of maps, charts, illustrations, or photographs is also a negative feature.

Those criticisms notwithstanding, the book is a stimulating study and will prove enlightening to the discerning reader. The emphasis on “social history” is needed, though we might hope for a future work by an author who regards Scripture more highly. Readers will certainly want to supplement their reading in this area with Edwin Yamuchi’s *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (Baker, 1994).

Daniel Sperber. *The City in Roman Palestine*. New York: Oxford University, 1998. viii + 200 pp. \$45.00 (cloth). Reviewed by J. Gregory Behle, Professor of Christian Education and Academic Coordinator of the Israel–Bible Extension Program (IBEX), The Master’s College.

Visitors to the Mediterranean world may well appreciate Virgil’s reference to . . . *the long glories of majestic Rome* (*Aeneid*, bk. 1) when they reflect on the archaeological splendor left behind by the Romans. In Israel, what was once the grandeur of the Roman world is now frequently the domain of camera-wielding tourists. As one sits in the theater at Caesarea, explores the bath houses of Masada, soberly reflects on the games conducted in the amphitheater of Beit Shean, or wanders the *Cardo* of Jerusalem, the glories which were Rome speak of an era of magnificence. Daniel Sperber’s *The City in Roman Palestine* is a masterful and scholarly endeavor to explain the human dimension and societal practices of that once great Roman world.

Daniel Sperber is Naftal–Yaffe Professor of Talmud at Bar–Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, Israel. A prolific scholar of twenty books and over 250 articles, Sperber has published such parallel treatments as *Roman Palestine, 200–400: Money and Prices* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1991); *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1984); *Roman Palestine, 200–400, The Land: Crisis and Change in Agrarian Society as Reflected in Rabbinic Sources* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1978); and *Nautica Talmudica* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1986). He was recipient of the Israel Prize in 1992 and is Rabbi of the Yad Tomer congregation in Jerusalem.

The City in Roman Palestine is a detailed exploration of city life in Israel (Palestine) and the trans-Jordan during the Roman period. Sperber meticulously reconstructs elements of daily life and customs from a plethora of sources, drawing principally from literary and archaeological evidences. Documentation, coupled with scholarly discussion and elaboration in the notes, is extensive and thorough. The author, abreast of recent archaeological developments and discussions within Israel, has incorporated them into the narrative. Sperber clearly demonstrates the literary potential of rabbinic source material for elucidating arcane information or for providing color commentary on Roman customs and practices. The book is

supplemented with select photographs and archaeological renderings.

Organizationally, the work begins with a discussion of the nature of the Roman market—including construction, administration and control—as central to the society. This is followed by “Pubs, Drunkards, and Licensing Laws”; “On the Bathhouse”; “Public Buildings”; “Roads and Backstreets”; “City Walls”; “Water Supply, Sewage, and Drainage”; and a general treatment of “Archeology and the City.” The book concludes with two brief appendices that explore “Unidentified Public Buildings” and “Urban Synagogues.” The book includes both place names and general indexes for quick reference. The volume demonstrates a clear command of the primary literature by the author. Readers willing to examine the notes will find rich bibliographic material and annotated analysis of the literature. Finally, Sperber does draw from the expertise of his fellow scholars with contributions by Zeev Weiss, “Buildings for Entertainment” (77-91) and Joshua J. Schwartz, “Archeology and the City” (149-79).

The title, *The City in Roman Palestine*, may lead some readers to conclude that the work focuses on the early Roman (Herodian) period, and thus offers insight into NT history. The text, true to Sperber's expertise, tends to focus on the Roman cities of A.D. 200 to 400—a critical period of rabbinic development in the north of Israel following the Second Jewish Revolt. Though limited discussion of Herodian influence does occur, the book tends to focus on the rabbinic communities and their interaction with the Roman culture in such important northern cities as Caesarea, Sepphoris, and Tiberias. Many of the practices and customs undoubtedly have their antecedents in earlier praxises, but readers hoping for greater NT period interaction will likely be disappointed. Furthermore, source material is derived largely from classical and rabbinical sources. Christian source material (e.g., Eusebius [ca. A.D. 263–339], Bishop of Caesarea) is virtually absent. The text does include both Hebrew and Greek citations, usually with English translation or equivalent. Familiarity with the ancient languages is useful but not essential.

The City in Roman Palestine is well-written and offers liberal quotes from the original rabbinic and classical sources. Reference materials and source documentation are superb, but much of the noted material is inaccessible to the average reader due to limited academic circulation or language presumptions, notably Hebrew. Readers will probably find the chapter endnotes, with their accompanying scholarly discussions and observations, as rich and enjoyable as the text proper. This reviewer, however, found that the constant movement between endnotes and the textual material created a distraction that fragmented this excellent work and broke concentration on the subject under consideration.

Readers anticipating a visit to either Israel or Jordan will benefit from this fine text. Sperber offers very detailed narrative that will enhance site visits to many of the Roman cities featured both in the text and in standard tours of Israel (Jerusalem [Aelia Capitolina], Caesarea, Tiberias) or Jordan (Gerasa, Petra, Amman [Philadelphia]). *The City in Roman Palestine* offers the human dimension of Roman society in contrast to the stark archaeological ruins of these ancient cities that are often missed or overlooked by harried or indifferent tour guides. Although the text

is a serious piece of academic scholarship, it is accessible to the earnest reader interested in understanding this important period of Israel's history. Those interested in Roman history, rabbinic literature, or Israel in general will enjoy this fine work.

Ronald A. Wells (ed.). *Keeping Faith: Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. viii + 152 pp. \$16.00 (paper).
Reviewed by J. Gregory Behle, Professor of Christian Education, The Master's College.

Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England, once advised a colleague, "Colleges and schools of learning are to be cherished and encouraged, there to breed up a new stock to furnish the church and commonwealth when the old store are transplanted." ("Advice to Sir George Villiers," *The Works of Francis Bacon*, [Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1851], 2:378). Bacon's admonishment to cherish the colleges that train up the next generation of leaders is reflected in *Keeping Faith: Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education*. Edited by Ronald A. Wells, Professor of History and Director of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, this series of essays is important, not only to the Calvin College community, but to Christian higher education in general. Calvin College's scholastic reputation, evidenced by its Center for Christian Scholarship, is viewed as a paradigm of Christian academic and scholastic excellence (cf. Wolfe & Heie, "Sample Models," *Slogans or Distinctives: Reforming Christian Higher Education* [University Press of America, 1993] 46). *Keeping Faith* is a series of commemorative essays honoring the installation of Gaylen J. Byker as the eighth President of Calvin College. As such, these essays provide reflections both on Calvin College's historical and theological heritage and on contemporary issues under discussion within Christian higher education, notably gender issues, secularization, social justice, and the place of popular culture. The essays commemorate the institution's past, present realities, and future hopes as Calvin College launches into a new presidential era.

Following a brief editorial introduction, an inaugural sermon, a commemorative poem, and a presidential address, *Keeping Faith* launches into a series of essays addressing a relatively diverse set of topics and challenges to Calvin College specifically and Christian higher education generally. Potential readers will likely gravitate to those that interest them personally, as was the case with this reviewer. Several of the essays appear in various forms in other works. For example, Bratt and Well's historical essay entitled "Piety and Progress: A History of Calvin College," also appears in Hughes and Adrian's *Models for Christian Higher Education* (cf. J. Gregory Behle, review of *Models of Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, by Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian [eds], *The Master's Seminary Journal* 9 [Fall 1998]: 234-36).

Keeping Faith: Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education

offers the reader several intellectually stimulating essays that signal possible future directions for Christian institutions. The work is interspersed with references and allusions to Calvin's historical and theological heritage which provide some coherence to the diverse essays offered. As the subtitle of the book suggests, the central essays reflect "tensions" within Christian higher education. Though the book is a mix of inaugural commemoration and institutional reflection, several of the essays attempt to project beyond Calvin College to broader issues impacting all Christian colleges. Gallagher's essay "'Once More Upon the Breach, Dear Friends': Gender Studies and the Christian Academy" raises the issue of the present status of gender studies in the Christian liberal arts context. Monsma's essay, "The Supreme Court, Societal Elites, and Calvin College: Christian Higher Education in a Secular Age," examines legal aspects of the ubiquitous theme of secularization that appears in much of the literature. Botman's "'Dutch' and Reformed and 'Black' and Reformed in South Africa: A Tale of Two Traditions on the Move to Unity and Responsibility," discusses the issue of social justice, responsibility, and equality in the South African context. Finally, Romanowski's essay, "'You Talkin' To Me?': The Christian Liberal Arts Tradition and the Challenge of Popular Culture," addresses the issue of relevance and cultural engagement on a popular level by exploring the tension between entertainment mediums and denominational hesitations. The tendency of the Christian liberal arts tradition to retreat into the past and replicate a perceived by-gone era of education devoid of cultural engagement renders this essay particularly important in the tension between classical learning and cultural relevance. *Keeping Faith* concludes with an essay justifying the Christian liberal arts tradition from Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale Divinity School, entitled "Should the Work of Our Hands Have Standing in the Christian College?"

Friends of Calvin College will undoubtedly enjoy the reflections and commemorations of their *alma mater*. Scholars interested in exploring the tension-laden issues raised in *Keeping Faith* will find the accompanying essays thought-provoking. Though the subtitle of the work, *Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education*, suggests some level of acceptance of the tensions raised, there will be a cadre of readers who will likely disesteem the tension. Pastors who follow trends within the Christian college context as indicators of ministry directions will also find the essays informative and helpful. *Keeping Faith: Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education* is more than commemorative institutional self-praise, it offers individuals following trends within evangelicalism something to ponder.