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ἀληθείας | 2 Timothy 2:15

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth



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Introduction:

Aletheias is the academic journal of Temple Baptist Seminary of Piedmont International University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Each issue consists of scholarly, researched articles in Biblical Studies, Theology, and Christian Ministry as well as timely sermons. The editors consider the journal as part of the ministry of the University, serving believers in academic circles, in churches, and in the public arena. The journal's purposes are to inform, to encourage, to edify, and to instruct.

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EDITORIAL: PROCLAIMING THE FAITH TO THE Z GENERATION

Barkev S. Trachian *

Introduction

Elie Wiesel was one of the most articulate spokesmen of the Holocaust survivors. The author of fifty-seven books and the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Wiesel kept the excruciation of the pain of Auschwitz ever present in the moral conscience of the world. Wiesel's initial meeting with the French author François Mauriac has been recounted in many publications under the heading, "Speaking of Christ." It was this encounter that encouraged Wiesel to publish his manuscript for the *Night*. Originally written in Yiddish, it was later published in French (*La Nuit*) and in English (*Night*).

With a deep appreciation of the Jewish people and a tender compassion for their suffering, Mauriac was eager to share with Wiesel, during their meeting, God's infinite love and Christ's sacrifice. However, with the horrific pain of the Holocaust still torturing him, Wiesel was not interested in Mauriac's message. Mauriac writes:

And I, who believes that God is love, what answer could I give my young questioner, whose dark eyes still held the reflection of that angelic sadness which appeared one day upon the face of the hanged child? What did I say to him? Did I speak of that other Israel, his brother, who may have resembled him – the Crucified, whose cross has conquered the world? ... I could only embrace him, weeping.¹

Recalling the agony of Auschwitz, Wiesel writes:

On that most horrible day, even among all those other bad days, when the child witnessed the hanging (yes!) of another child who, he tells us, had the face of a sad angel, he heard behind him a groan:
'For God's sake, where is God?'²

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¹ Mary C. Boys. 2016. "Speaking of Christ." *America* 215 (3): 31–32.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=aph&AN=116977441&scope=site&custid=s8692456> (accessed 11 February, 2019).

² Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill and Wing, 1958), p. xx.

Wiesel was emotionally and spiritually crushed! He could not intellectually reconcile the coexistence of evil and an omnipotent God. Current research shows that “evil and suffering” are the main causes of leading Generation Z to Atheism.³ In the light of this reality, how do we proclaim the truth? How do we apply the Great Commission? What does the Bible command us to do? How could our message penetrate the darkness of evil?

The Mandate

A new life in Christ comes with a powerful mandate. We are the recipients of not only the blessings of eternal life, but also the privilege of serving as representatives for Jesus Christ. The resurrected Lord reminded the disciples in Acts 1:8: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

We have the power of the Holy Spirit and the command of our Lord to be witnesses. The authority is absolute: “...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). The command is unequivocal: “...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The enablement is assured: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you...” (Acts 1:8). The empowerment in Acts 1:8 is a direct application of the Great Commission given by our Lord in Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-49; and Jn. 20:21-23. The commandment to make disciples is clearly through proclamation of Faith.

³ Barna Research Group, “Generation Z, Atheism, and the Problem of Evil.” <https://Ischristianitytrue.wordpress.com/2018/26gen-Z-atheism-and-the-problem-of-evil/> (accessed 17 February 2019).

In Luke 19:10 Jesus proclaims His purpose: “⁴For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Paul underscores our Lord’s purpose in II Cor. 5:18-20:

“Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

Jesus sums up the purpose of His ministry in Luke 24:44-47:

...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. ... And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

In John 20:31 and I Jn. 5:13 we are taught that the ultimate attainment for people is to participate in the life of God and Jesus Christ.⁵

The theme of this issue of *Aletheias* is “Proclaiming Faith.” The command that the disciples received in Acts 1:8 is today our command from our Lord. How faithful are we in obeying our Lord’s command? How effective is our witness?

The Challenge

Even a simple survey of the 21st century shows that our cultural environment has been changing globally. Values, beliefs, tenets that we held with reverence are no longer in place. The scales used to assess those values have been changing as well. It is very interesting that “as our society changes and becomes more global, pluralistic, and diverse, our communication setting actually becomes more like the way it was for the early

⁴ NASB.

⁵ Cornelis Bennema, “Moral Transformation Through Mimesis in the Johannine Tradition,” Tyndale Bulletin, Vol. 69.2, 2018, p. 185.

church.”⁶ Darrell Bock argues correctly that the cultural left has accelerated “to a point where the church has to come to grips with that change.”⁷ There is a vacuum between the messenger and the audience. Our communication with our culture is being blocked due to the cultural clouds that surround our hearers. Biblical illiteracy, naturalistic philosophies, anti-Christian forces dominate our educational, scientific, and cultural messaging.

Concurrent with efforts to block the Gospel message, Satan is active in filling the educational curricula and professional programs with an atheistic mindset. Recognizing this cultural shift and asking for divine wisdom to articulate the Gospel message effectively is our urgent task. The safety net of Christian faith and biblical principles is no longer in place to safeguard our social and intellectual mores. The Bible is no longer the sacred, absolute universal foundation of faith, core values, morality, and life. As a consequence, absolute truth no longer exists. Objective truth has been replaced by subjective personal truth. This cultural shift is reflected in disappointing statistical findings. According to a Barna Report 2006-2010, 44% of US adults claimed to be born again. This percentage dropped to 36% in 2010-2017. In 2017, only 31% of US adults stated that they were born again.⁸

In a study of US Religious Identity and Religious Faith in 2018, the question was asked which of the following best describes your religious faith. Disappointingly 13% of Generation Z, in contrast to 5% of Boomers stated “Atheist.” Another sobering finding in the reason given for lack of faith in God. Among Generation Z 29% and among the

⁶ Darrell L. Bock “The Use of Scripture in the Public Square.” *Criswell Theological Review*: Spring 2018 N.S. Vol. 15 #2., p. 27.

⁷ Bock, p. 28.

⁸ Barna Report, “American Culture and Faith, 2017,” <https://www.culturefaith.com> (accessed February 15, 2019).

Millennials 30% gave the presence of “evil.” According to Barna 2018, the percentage of Generation Z that identifies as atheist is double that of US adult population.⁹

The Strategies For Reaching The Post-Christian Culture

Effective Use Of The Scripture

Darrell Bock identifies three different audiences: biblically literate believers, biblically literate unbelievers, biblically illiterate unbelievers.¹⁰

In Communicating The Message Of The Bible With Biblically Literate Believers We Must Present The Truth Directly And Forcefully

The Holy Spirit has promised to impact the hearts. Paul used this method in Romans 1-3, I Cor. 1-2, and in Ephesians 4:17-32.

In Communicating The Message Of The Bible With Biblically Literate Unbelievers We Must Present Truth Through A Mixture Of Confrontation And Invitation

Peter illustrates this principle in Acts 2. Appeal to the Scriptures can be a powerful tool to bring conviction: Peter makes a very effective use of Old Testament prophecy such as Joel 2:28-32, the promise of the Messiah such as in Psalm 16:8-11, and finally, the resurrection such as in Psalm 110.

In Communicating The Message Of The Bible With Biblically Illiterate Unbelievers Appropriate Context

An excellent illustration is Paul’s message in Acts 17. Paul begins with a theological story (Acts 17:22). Next Paul refers to a highly respected Greek poet, Aratus. Paul effectively starts a theological story and connects it to themes that are familiar in the

⁹ Barna Research, “Religious Identify and Religious Faith” <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/Jan.24.2018> (Accessed February 16, 2019).

¹⁰ Darrell Bock, “The Use of Scripture in the Public Square,” p. 27.

culture. Paul's third step is drawing attention to our accountability to God through Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). From that point on Paul's focus is on Jesus. "..., Jesus' ministry is one that time and again is linked to the salvation of the Gentiles, their inclusion, and their gathering into God's people (cf. e.g. Luke 2:32, 3:6; Acts 2:39; 10:45; 13:46-47, etc.).¹¹

Apologetics is a useful tool to prepare the unbelieving mind to see the need for biblical truth by showing the futility of man-made avenues and devices to find absolute Truth. As Christianity penetrated into the Greek and Roman culture apologetics was used very effectively to vindicate the claims of the Bible, to refute arguments made against the Bible, and to refute non-Christian systems. The proper place of apologetics is in pre-evangelism, where the audience is unreasonably enslaved to humanistic logic. It is never intended for apologetics to replace any portion of evangelism.

Recognition Of The Relevance Of The Audience

The message of the Gospel does not change. However, the delivery method or approach requires effective communication that is relevant. In this respect, the audience does matter. Presenting the Gospel to a group of children requires an approach that is different from that used for adults. An awareness of our audience and the cultural backgrounds of listeners can be very relevant factors in the reception of our message. In sharing the Gospel with Cornelius, Peter starts with a theological narrative. His story is about God's plan to send His Son to die for mankind that is the only way to be reconciled with God (Acts 10:42).

¹¹ Aaron White, "Reading Inclusion Backwards: Considering the Apostolic Decree Again in Fresh Context." *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. Volume 48, Number 4, November 2018. p. 202.

The Impact Of Our Attitude

Our attitude toward our audience matters. The spirit we display in our communication can develop a desire in our audience for more light or resentment of our message. In his first encounter with Wiesel, all Mauriac could do was “embrace him, weeping.” The story of the “Good Samaritan” is a powerful example of the approach our Lord presented to us.

Conclusion

We have the divine mandate to proclaim the message of salvation to a lost world. God has promised to give us the enablement through the Holy Spirit. Many challenges make that task difficult but also urgent. The current young generation is being subjected to powerful forces of skepticism, humanism, and atheism.

Darrell Bock lists eight lessons that the early church understood and applied.¹²

These lessons are relevant today as well in reaching Generation Z for Christ.

1. Know your audience.
2. Use theologically rooted stories, when appropriate to create context in sharing the Gospel.
3. Watch your attitude.
4. Start where people are and guide them to the cross.
5. Be culturally literate.
6. The goal is to lead people to Christ; not just win an argument.
7. Spiritual battles require spiritual resources. Rely on the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and prayer.
8. God is the one that saves; we are expected to obey His command.

You will find this issue of *Aletheias* informative, inspiring, and convicting. A special blessing is to include; for the first time, two articles in Portuguese. “... we must

¹² Darrell L. Bock “The Use of Scripture in the Public Square.” *Criswell Theological Review*: Spring 2018 N.S. Vol. 15 #2., pp. 36-37.

continue to proclaim the Word of God, no matter if it is popular or not (2 Tim. 4:1-5), until we can say that we have fought a good fight and finished the race that was set before us (2 Tim. 4:7).”¹³ It is our prayer that the 2019 issue of *Aletheias* will lead us to a deeper dedication to Declaring Faith.

¹³ Richard Bargas, “Threats to the Heart of the Gospel.” *Voice*, March/April 2019, p.20.

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FROM CLARITY TO PROCLAMATION: TWENTY THESES ON SCRIPTURE'S PERSPICUITY

Jerry Hullinger, Th.D.*

Is Scripture Clear Or Is It Not?

If the Scripture be obscure or ambiguous, what need was there for its being sent down from heaven?¹

As Luther had spearheaded the Reformation in Wittenberg and Calvin in Geneva, so efforts were led in Zurich by Ulrich Zwingli. In 1522 he was granted access to the Oetenbach convent where he spoke to a group of Dominican nuns. His two themes were the Word of God and the Virgin Mary.² Later that year his comments on Scripture were published as a pamphlet entitled *Von Klarheit und Gewissheit des Wortes Gottes (Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God)*.³ In this volume Zwingli asked an important question: “Where is this clarity? If God wants his Word to be understood, why does he speak in parables and riddles?”⁴

Like Christians today, the Reformers believed that the Bible was to be in the hands of the people to be read, studied, grasped, proclaimed, and obeyed. If this is true, then why do people find the Bible difficult to understand? These questions surface in the eighth chapter of Acts where a man is traveling from Jerusalem to his home in the kingdom of

*Jerry Hullinger is a professor of Bible at Piedmont International University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

¹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 108.

² G. W. Bromiley, *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 49.

³ Though Zwingli's main point is that the understanding of Scripture is not dependent on the Roman Magisterium but on the work of the Spirit as the Word is faithfully delivered, he does affirm that the essential message of the Bible is within the grasp of any rational person.

⁴ McGill University, “Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God,” matthew.milner/teaching/resources/docs; accessed 3/19/2016.

ancient Nubia.⁵ This individual held a high governmental position in the administration of Amanitare who was the queen mother of that kingdom.⁶ The Holy Spirit compelled Philip the evangelist to approach the slow-moving wagon in which this official was seated. As Philip approached, he heard the man reading aloud from a scroll of Isaiah the prophet.⁷ Reading aloud was common in the ancient world since letters in the manuscripts could be crowded and therefore difficult to decode. It was therefore helpful for each syllable to be pronounced. Thus, reading the words out loud made it easier to understand by noting where the word divisions came.⁸ Moreover, reading audibly was a method to help in memorizing

⁵ This man was a Gentile who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. Barclay explained that "In those days the world was full of people who were weary of the many gods and the loose morals of the nations. They came to Judaism and there they found the one God and the austere moral standards which gave life meaning. If they accepted Judaism and were circumcised and took the Law upon themselves they were called proselytes; if they did not go that length but continued to attend the Jewish synagogues and to read the Jewish scriptures they were called God-fearers. So this Ethiopian must have been one of these searchers who came to rest in Judaism either as a proselyte or a God-fearer" (William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 68-69). The religious status of the eunuch is specifically stated by Luke when he later refers to Cornelius as one who "feared God" (Acts 10:2). It is most likely that a "God-fearer" was a technical description for Gentiles who worshiped Israel's God, but had not become full proselytes. One strong support for this is the fact that the phrases "fearing God" and "the ones/those fearing God" occur eleven times in Acts. Schnabel suggests that the term could be applied to Gentiles who had been honored by the Jews because of their charitable work (Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 494). Commenting on the literary evidence outside of the New Testament from Juvenal, Josephus, and Philo, Finn remarks that this "tends to corroborate Acts at least to the extent that these authors...reveal the existence of Gentiles in a variety of places who, short of conversion, were drawn to Jewish belief and practice" (Thomas Finn, "The God-fearers Reconsidered," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 [1985]: 83).

⁶ Piers Crocker, "The City of Meroe and the Ethiopian Eunuch," *Buried History* 22 (1986): 67. The text refers to her as "Canadace." This was a dynastic title given to the succession of a royal line of queens, thus "the Candace." Witherington suggests that the title was a transliteration of an Ethiopic title "*k[e]ut[e]ky*" (Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 296).

⁷ This scroll would have been about 8 inches x 12 inches and anywhere from 16 1/2 to 145 feet long. It would have been written in square Assyrian script or in Greek (Darrell Bock, *Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 342).

⁸ John Polhill, *Acts, New American Commentary*, Volume 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 224. Augustine made an amusing comment about his mentor Ambrose, "While reading, his eyes and tongue were silent" (Aurelius Augustine, "The Confessions," in *Basic Writings of St. Augustine* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], I:75), indicating that he could decipher ancient manuscripts without reading aloud.

what was read.⁹ Philip asked the eunuch: ¹⁰ "do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch responded: "how can I, unless someone guides me?"¹¹ This account illustrates the issue addressed in this article: Merely reading the words of Scripture, does not guarantee the meaning will be understood.¹² This shows from the Bible itself that perspicuity cannot be minimized to a simplistic definition.

Generally speaking, the term "perspicuity" merely refers to that which is understandable or marked by clarity. However, this continues to beg the question, if the Bible is clear why does it not always seem clear? As an educated man, why did the eunuch need an explanation of the Isaiah scroll? If it is understandable, then why are there so many understandings of it even within Christendom? Part of the answer is to clarify the meaning of perspicuity. This article will seek to reconcile Scripture's self-confessed comprehensibility with the fact that for many the message seems incomprehensible.¹³ This will, in turn, grant the ability to proclaim with confidence the message of the Bible.

⁹For example, *Tractate Abot* 6.5 indicates that there are forty-eight qualifications in learning the Law. The first is by "audible study" and the second is by "utterance with the lips" (Philip Blackman, *Mishnayoth: Order Nezikin* [London: Mishnah Press, 1954], 543). For a technical discussion of the inclusion and placement of Abot, see Alexander Guttman, "Tractate Abot—Its Place in Rabbinic Literature," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 41, no. 2 (Oct 1950): 181-193.

¹⁰ The Ethiopian is referred to as a "eunuch." This term is used 8 times in the New Testament, but 39 times in the LXX, and 180 times in the Classical literature. The term can refer merely to one who was a high official (Richard Longenecker, "Acts," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank Gaebelin ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 363). However, it was common for men in government positions at this time to be castrated. This was to prevent impregnation of royal women and thus making a claim to the throne, and therefore grant more access into the inner workings of the administration. "During this period, eunuchs in the courts of this part of Africa were not only castrated but usually also partially dismembered" (Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 296). This, of course, would preclude the eunuch from converting to Judaism since proselytes could not be circumcised.

¹¹ The word translated "guides" has the sense here of assisting someone in the acquisition of knowledge (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* Third Edition [Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000], 690). For the only other New Testament uses, see Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39; John 16:13; Revelation 7:17.

¹² This is a critical point to underscore: reading Scripture does not equal understanding Scripture.

¹³ Well-meaning Christians have often expressed frustration when it comes to interpreting the Bible. If the Bible is God's word and he wants us to understand it, then why are there so many interpretations of what God has revealed? Or, the attitude is that only the elite scholar can understand the Bible, and so why

The Assumed Clarity Of Scripture

Jesus told his apostles in the Upper Room that after his ascension he would send the Spirit. One of the functions performed by the Spirit would be to guide the apostles into all truth and bring to their remembrance what Christ had taught them.¹⁴ This truth would be preached and inscribed thus laying the foundation for the Church. The truth recorded for each succeeding generation would be true apostolic succession.¹⁵

Just as the Spirit had brought together humanity and divinity in the incarnate Word; so he would bring together humanity and divinity in the written word to produce inerrant and infallible truth. That is, the third member of the Trinity would superintend and use the human element in the recording of Scripture in such a way that it would present the actual words of God.

should they even try? Many believers throw up their hands in defeat and even stop reading the Bible. Skeptics will often criticize the authority of Scripture by asserting that it can mean anything one wants it to mean. If one is having a discussion with someone and a passage from the Bible is appealed to, the individual does not have to offer a rebuttal or do any kind of interaction with the biblical text. All he has to do is utter those dreaded words: *that's just your interpretation*. And the conversation is effectively over. "That's just your interpretation" trumps any biblical argument which can be given. Even Christians seemingly pick and choose what parts of the Bible they will obey and not obey? Paul says very clearly in Romans 16 that we are to greet each other with a holy kiss. Some international Christians do this but American Christians, by and large, do not. Jesus told his disciples in his Upper Room Discourse to wash each others' feet. Why do some churches practice that and others do not? Should we speak in tongues or not speak in tongues? Should we tithe? Jesus gave an unambiguous command which virtually every Christian disobeys when the gospel is shared with a Gentile. This is a violation of Jesus' teaching. In Matthew 10:5 he said not to take the message to the Gentiles but only to the Jews. In light of such a clear statement, why is this knowingly violated by taking the gospel to non-Jews?

¹⁴ The question arises as to whether the "bringing to remembrance all truth" applies to all believers or only the disciples. It is probably the latter for several reasons: 1) Jesus says that they would be helped to understand what they had not understood and reminded of things they had forgotten. The disciples were the only ones in a position for this, 2) they were the ones being commissioned by Christ, and 3) they were the ones who wrote Scripture and thus needed this.

¹⁵ "True" apostolic succession is being contrasted with the kind of succession taught by the Church of Rome. For an excellent critique of Rome's view see *Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim* by Norman L. Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). For a review of the book, see Jerry Hullinger, "Review of: 'Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim.'" *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 39 (2009): 90-93.

That said, there is ample evidence on the pages of the New Testament that the expectation of the biblical writers is that what they had written would be understandable. There is no hint of esoteric or hidden meanings to be discovered. Some indications of this assumed clarity are laid out below. Most of the documentation is from the New Testament; however, some Old Testament passages are also included to show that the New Testament writers were simply building on the same idea found previously.

Scripture Is Clear Because¹⁶

Scripture Is Light

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105). “And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place . . .” (2 Pet 1:19a).

Scripture Is Profitable

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Scripture Explains Salvation

“. . . the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15b).

¹⁶ The first seven items mentioned are taken from Larry Pettegrew, “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” *Masters Seminary Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 211-12. The balance of the list consists of passages and concepts which have been added by the author.

Scripture Is Addressed To Common People, Not Religious Experts

“Hear, O Israel” (Deut 6:4). “The common people heard Him [Jesus] gladly” (Mark 12:37). “To the saints who are in Ephesus” (Eph 1:1). “With all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2).

Parents Can Teach Scripture To Their Children

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut 6:6-7).

Even A Child Can Understand Scripture’s Message

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings. . . .” (2 Tim 3:14-15a; see also Eph 6:1-3).

Scripture tests the accuracy of religious ideas

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Some additional passages/concepts include:

Scripture’s testimony of itself

“The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7).

Jesus rebuked people for misunderstanding Scripture

"But go and learn what *this* means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matt 9:13). "But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him.... Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless" (Matt 12:3, 5). "And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning made them male and female?'" (Matt 19:4). "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?'" (John 3:10). "Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.'" (Luke 24:25).

The New Testament quotes and alludes to the Old Testament

It would be folly for the New Testament writers to cite and refer to the Old Testament hundreds of times if the Old Testament were not clear.¹⁷ Luther commented,

¹⁷ One hermeneutical method (among others) that obscures clarity is allegorization. Regarding Paul's use of the term "allegory" in Galatians 4:24, it should be observed that the sense of that term in Paul's day is not the same as the sense assigned to it today in hermeneutical discussions. Bruce pointed out that the way "allegory" is currently portrayed did not come into Christian interpretation until the time of Origen (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text. New International Greek Text Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 206). In any case, Paul refers to allegory as a genre of literature in Galatians 4; there is no evidence that he or any other New Testament writer allegorized insisting that the text had a deeper, spiritual, symbolic meaning (for an excellent discussion with numerous concrete examples, see Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018]). Zuck defined allegorizing as "searching for a hidden meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated reality to the more obvious meaning of the text. In other words the literal reading is sort of a code, which needs to be deciphered to determine the more significant and hidden meaning" (Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* [Colorado Springs: Cook, 1991], 29). The two most famous individuals associated with this method were Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215) and Origen (185-254). Clement believed that in every text there were deeper meanings which were brought to light through allegorical interpretation. This idea of deeper meanings was justified through the bountifulness of God which would indicate there could not be but one sense in a passage (David Dockery, "The History of Pre-Critical Biblical Interpretation," in *Faith and Mission* 10, no. 1 [Fall 1992]: 13) as well as a Platonic worldview in which objects had a spiritual reality. Origen taught that Scripture should be interpreted figuratively according to its spiritual method (Origen. *De Principiis* F. Crombie, Trans. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. C. Coxe, eds, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume IV: Fathers of the Third Century:*

“and what is the design of the apostles in proving their preaching by the Scriptures? Is it that they may obscure their own darkness by still greater darkness?”¹⁸

The writer of Hebrews rebuked for his readers for not using Scripture to grow

In Hebrews 5:11-14 a scathing rebuke is directed to the readers for their immaturity in the faith. They are told that they had been saved long enough that they should be at the point where they could teach others. However, their refusal to grow meant that they needed to be taught again the elementary principles of the faith. In fact, their spiritual state leads to one of the most celebrated warnings in the New Testament to the effect that if they did not right their direction, they would find themselves confirmed in a state of stagnation.¹⁹

Paul commanded the public reading/teaching of Scripture

The fact that Scripture was to be read and taught in the churches shows they could be understood. “Till I come, give attention to [public] reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim 4:13).²⁰

Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company], 252) Whether allegorization of a text creates a meaning that is within the *regula fidei* is beside the point. It is not the prerogative of the reader to determine, and ultimately cast a pall over the original sense of the text.

¹⁸ Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 107.

¹⁹ For a defense of this understanding of the Hebrews 5-6 warning, see Jerry Hullinger, *New Testament Life and Belief: A Study of History, Culture, & Meaning* (Winston-Salem: Piedmont International University, 2014), 515-18.

²⁰ That this refers to the public reading of Scripture is demonstrated from the following: a) we know that the public reading of Scripture was common in Old Testament worship and continued to be common in the Church era (Exod 24:7; Deut 31:11; 2 Kings 23:2; Neh 8:7-8; Luke 4:16; Acts 15:21; 2 Cor 3:14; 1 Thess 5:27), b) the charge to "read" occurs in a list with other public duties, c) the two other NT uses of the word "reading" refer to public reading in a religious gathering (Acts 13:15; 2 Cor 3:14), and d) the next duty "exhortation" would most naturally be based on what was just publicly read.

The Scripture includes imperatives

The imperative mood in New Testament Greek is a volitional one. It is an appeal to the will of the individual to make a choice. Though there are different uses of the imperative mood in the New Testament, 1,357 or 83% of them deal with commands and prohibitions.²¹ It would be ludicrous for the New Testament writers to use nearly 1,400 imperatives if they could not be understood by their audience. Moreover, imperatives typically have their basis in a doctrinal discussion. Thus the imperative would only make sense if the material on which it was based made sense (for example, see the use of “therefore” in Rom 6:12; 12:1; Eph 4:1, or the discussion of the kenosis in Philippians 2 as the basis for humility and unity in the church).

We are accountable to Scripture

When Paul wrote a letter in his apostolic office to a church, he held them accountable for the contents. In fact, he even threatened the Corinthian church that if they did not follow through on his instructions he would not spare them apostolic discipline (2 Cor 13:2). The same accountability is taught by Jesus himself as he threatens discipline and promises reward on the basis of his revelation (see the letters to the churches in Rev 2-3).

As a conclusion to Scripture’s assumed clarity of itself,” Wayne Grudem’s words are accurate.

The appropriate conclusion...is that Scripture repeatedly affirms that it is able to be understood—not only certain verses or statements, but the meaning of the whole of Scripture on many topics is able to be understood by God’s people. These affirmations are not limited to understanding the basic way of salvation, or

²¹ James Boyer, “A Classification of Imperatives: A Statistical Study,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8, no. 1 (1987): 36.

understanding only major themes, or understanding certain topics or certain parts. These are affirmations about the nature of Scripture in any part, apparently grounded in a deep assumption that the Scriptures are communication from a God who is able to communicate clearly to his people.²²

It is demonstrable that the writers of the New Testament, as guided by the Holy Spirit, give to the Church revelation they assume is clear. So much so that those who read will be held accountable for that revelation when they are judged in the future. Further, when the writers refer back to the Hebrew Scriptures, they are doing so in such a way that would have been understandable to their readers.

As with the Ethiopian in the first century A.D., there is a need in the twenty-first century to clearly present the original, intended sense of Holy Scripture. If the Church abdicates this responsibility, she has effectively gagged God.²³ It is not enough to use and quote Scripture, which can sometimes be dangerous, but to communicate the intended meaning of Scripture.

A fortiori, we have no access to the Word of God in the Bible except through the words and the minds of those who claim to speak in his name. We may disbelieve them, that is our right; but if we try, without evidence, to penetrate to a meaning more ultimate than the one the author intended, that is our meaning, not theirs or God's.²⁴

²² Wayne Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (Nov 2009): 7.

²³ This phrase is borrowed from the title of D. A. Carson's ponderous volume on pluralism (*The Gaggling of God*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996]). The point in using the phrase is to observe that the Christian community "gags" God as much as the non-Christian community when improper hermeneutics are used. Either way, God's message is not communicated.

²⁴ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 37-40.

Twenty Theses On Perspicuity

Thesis 1: Though Scripture Is Unique In Its Nature, It Should Be Interpreted Just Like Any Other Written Text²⁵

The Bible is the only written text that is inspired by God and therefore inerrant in its original documents, and inerrant as its translations reflect the autographa. However, a mystical, spiritual, subjective approach to interpret the contents of the Bible should not be taken. Scripture should be interpreted like any other form of writing; according to the received laws of language in which the original was written. Thus while recognizing the sacred nature of Scripture, interpreting the Bible should be approached just like an email, a newspaper article, a novel, or a book of secular history would be approached. It will be observed that virtually all of these theses are applicable to and expected in any field of study.

In his essay entitled “Interpreting the Bible Like a Book,” Moses Stuart asks the question, “Are the same principles of interpretation to be applied to the Scriptures as to other books?” Stuart correctly answers his question by noting that “nearly all the treatises on hermeneutics [note that hermeneutics is not a field of study unique to the Bible]...have laid it down as a maxim which cannot be controverted, that the Bible is to be interpreted in the same manner, i.e., by the same principles as all other books.”²⁶

²⁵ This statement, of course, is not to be confused with Benjamin Jowett’s use of the phrase in his influential essay “On the Interpretation of Scripture.” In this piece his point was that Scripture should be interpreted as any other piece of ancient literature. By this he meant that the Bible is not applicable to later times (Roger Beckwith, “Essays and Reviews 1860: The Advance of Liberalism,” *The Churchman* 108, no. 1 [1994]: 51) which was fueled by an anti-supernatural view of the text (Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* [Crossway, Wheaton: 2016], 55-56).

²⁶ Moses Stuart, “Interpreting the Bible Like a Book,” in *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 53.

Further, this observation is inherent in the human race, and therefore muzzles the objection: who makes up the rules? when interpreting th Bible. Interpret the Bible just as other written works are interpreted.²⁷

Thesis 2: Understanding Scripture Is Something That Is Progressive In Nature. Perspicuity Does Not Mean That The Meaning Of The Bible Can Be Understood All At Once. Or Stated Differently, Not All Scripture Is Immediately Clear

Thesis 3: All Scripture Is Not Equally Clear

Thesis 4: When A Text Is Understood In A More Significant Way, This Does Not Necessarily Negate Truth Already Learned From A Text

For example, a 4-year old is capable of memorizing John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” From this he can know that there is a God who loves him, and why this is significant since he can grasp the fact that he is a sinner. If this same child as an adult later goes to seminary and studies the same passage, he will become aware from the same text the significance of the “so...that” construction, the fact that the term “world” is used in at least three senses in John, that the verse is not entering the theological fray as to the nature of the will but that the term “whosoever” simply means “each one,” and on it goes. This deeper understanding does not mean that what he learned as a 4-year old from this text is false or has changed.

Thesis 5: The Basic Teaching Of Scripture Is Clear To All Who Seek To Understand It²⁸

One could quibble on what is meant by “basic teaching.” However the point is that if someone puts in a modicum of effort to understand the Bible (just like if someone wants

²⁷ Ibid, 54.

²⁸ The word “basic” is used instead of something like “essential.” The distinction the writer to the Hebrews makes in 5:12 where he speaks of “milk” and “meat” has to do with levels of truth. So for example,

to understand something in any field), there are certain truths which will become evident. These would include such things as the existence of God, certain perfections of God,²⁹ the deity of Christ, the sinfulness of man, the death and resurrection of Christ, future judgment and blessing of mankind, etc. Chrysostom drolly remarked regarding Scripture that "even the simple-minded (*idiotae*) can understand it, if only they read it carefully."³⁰

Thesis 6: Effort Is Required To Understand Scripture Beyond The Basics

Thesis 7: The Amount Of Effort On The Part Of Individuals To Understand Scripture Beyond The Basics Is Equipollent To The Amount Of Value They Place On The Scripture

Thesis 8: Understanding The Scripture Requires Use Of Reliable Study Sources

Thesis 9: Perspicuity Involves A Distinction Between Subject And Object

This is drawing on an observation made by Jacobus Arminius when he wrote that "This perspicuity comes distinctly to be considered both with regard to its object and its subject. For all things [in the Scriptures] are not equally perspicuous, nor is every thing alike perspicuous to all persons."³¹ The point is that the property of clarity belongs to the text not to the reader of the text. Often obscurity from the reader's perspective is due to laziness and ignorance.

a casual reader of Scripture can understand basics about eschatology (milk), but it will take much more effort to understand more complicated issues related to eschatology (meat).

²⁹ Note that Paul says in Romans 1:20 that these kinds of things are known by all people just from natural revelation, and without excuse if repressed. How much more evident would would these truths be from reading the Bible?

³⁰ Cited by Francis Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, "21 Questions on the Doctrine of Scripture," www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/21Question.

³¹ Jacobus Arminius, "Disputation VIII On the Perspicuity of the Scriptures I," in *Works of James Arminius, Vol 2* (ccel.org/Arminius/works2.iii.viii, accessed 3/24/2016).

Thesis 10: Though Scripture Is Clear, It Can Still Be Misunderstood

This thesis is a corollary of the preceding. Grudem states well that “perspicuity affirms that Scripture is *able* to be understood rightly, not that it will *always* be understood rightly.”³² This underscores the necessity of using proper method, reliable sources, and depending on the Christian community for correction.

Thesis 11: There Is Such A Wealth Of Potential Knowledge In The Bible That It Can Never Be Exhausted In This Lifetime

Thesis 12: There Are Some Truths In The Bible That Can Never Be Exhausted Even Through Eternity. Since God Is Infinite, Understanding His Revelation Is Infinite

Thesis 13: The Perspicuity Of Scripture Is Not To Be Confused With The Illumination Of Scripture

Many are of the opinion that understanding Scripture is aided with the help of the Holy Spirit.³³ The writer’s view is that grasping what the Bible means (which is being discussed here) is different than grasping the *significance* of what the Bible means.

Broughton Knox put it like this:

An intellectual apprehension of what the scriptures are saying is not difficult and does not require an outside interpreter. However, the acceptance of the truth of what is being said, and apprehension of our own relationship to it, is another matter and comes about only when the Spirit of God writes his word on our heart, that is, touches the inmost point of our personality so that we align ourselves with what is being said. This in turns leads to a much deeper apprehension and understanding of what the Bible is about.³⁴

³² Grudem, “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” 12.

³³ Ibid, 12 under the heading “Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without the help of the Holy Spirit.” See also Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), I:183. It is my contention that the illumination of the Spirit has often been misunderstood as something that is *intellectual*, when in fact it should be understood as something that is *affectional*. It is a difference between information and persuasion. If it is agreed that Scripture is clear and understandable, then it follows that any unbeliever or believer who uses proper method can determine the meaning of Scripture.

³⁴ Broughton Knox, *Broughton Knox: Selected Works*, 2 (Sydney Australia: Matthias Media, 2003), 122.

Thesis 14: The Clarity Of Scripture Comes To Light By Applying The Proper Sub-Disciplines To The Study Of The Text

Examples would include things like literary genre, context, culture, lexicography, and syntax.

Thesis 15: That The Clarity Of Scripture Comes To Light By Using Proper Hermeneutical Method (See Theses 1 And 13) Is Like Putting On Eyeglasses

Though used in a slightly different context, Calvin's analogy is being adapted in this thesis. He wrote, "For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly."³⁵

Thesis 16: Those Christians Whose Vocation Is Other Than Full-Time Ministry Should Be Able To Rely, With A Balance Of Submission And Reasonable Assessment, On Biblical Scholars And Pastors

There is a lot at work in this thesis. First, not everyone has the same amount of time to study the Scripture. Therefore, there must be some reliance on scholars and pastors. Their study becomes an aid for all of the body of Christ in understanding the message of Scripture. The layman should not have a sense of guilt about this. Second, this has nothing to do per se with intelligence, spirituality, ability, or value. It is merely acknowledging the fact that each person has his own role in the world. Third, the layman should have a respect for what the scholar/pastor does, just as he does when he goes to a mechanic to have his car fixed or a dentist to have a cavity filled. Fourth, the scholar/pastor should not have any

³⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), I: 64.

pride for he remembers that he is simply filling a role that others could fill, and that he will be accountable to God for what he has taught. Fifth, the layman should know enough of the Christian faith to be aware when false doctrine is being taught. And sixth, as the layman listens to his pastor, he should not only be learning what the Bible says, but how to discover what the Bible means for himself.

Thesis 17: The Requirements For A Holy Life Can Be Clearly Discerned By Even The Most Casual Reader Of The Bible

Thesis 18: God Has Been Pleased Not To Reveal In Scripture Some Things We Would Like To Know

There are some questions that God has simply not seen fit to answer or give light on. When this is the case, our consequent ignorance should not be an occasion for saying that Scripture is not clear, but rather that the particular area we wonder about is not a part of God's revelation.

Thesis 19: Perspicuity Is Misconstrued When Taken To Either One Of Two Extremes: 1) Only An Ecclesiastical Body Can Give The Final, Authoritative Interpretation Of Scripture, Or 2) Each Individual Becomes The Final Authority As To What Scripture Means. The Historical Christian Doctrine Of Perspicuity Has Never Taught That The Individual Is His Own Interpreter Apart From The Christian Community

Thesis 20: Difficult Passages Should Serve As An Impetus For More Diligent Study

What is the believer to make of passages in the Bible that continue to be obscure?

The words of Turretin and Augustine are superb.

We hold that Scripture has its own secrets, which we cannot discover, and which God wills to be in Scripture to awaken the zeal of the faithful, to increase their effort, to control human pride, and to purge the contempt that easily could have arisen from too much ease [of understanding].³⁶

³⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, "21 Questions on the Doctrine of Scripture," www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/21Question. Accessed 3/24/2016.

Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness. And I do not doubt that all this was divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride by toil, and of preventing a feeling of satiety in the intellect, which generally holds in small esteem what is discovered without difficulty.³⁷

Accordingly the Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the Holy Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere.³⁸

Conclusion

The doctrine of perspicuity correctly asserts that the meaning of Scripture is clear, which sounds simple enough. Unfortunately, what it means for Scripture to be clear is often misunderstood to communicate that one should be able to simply read the Bible and understand its meaning. Or worse yet, making a statement of truth and then attaching a Bible verse to it. If this approach is utilized, God's word becomes no more beneficial than any other holy book used by a cult or false religion. In fact, the very words of God can be used to promote error. This article has argued that the clarity of the Bible is not always automatic, and that effort must be invested to properly understand the text. Only then will it become a "lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path" (Psalm 119:105).

³⁷ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* II.6.7, newadvent.org/fathers. Accessed 3/24/2016.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II.8. Luther echoed Augustine when he wrote, "So if you find an obscure passage in Scripture, do not be alarmed, for certainly the same truth is set forth in it which in another place is taught plainly. If you cannot understand the obscure, then adhere to the clear" (cited by John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955], 139-141).

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INCARNATIONAL APOLOGETICS

David Wheeler*

Definition:

“Incarnational” Apologetics is the representative public and private lifestyle of a Christian that validates to the world the absolute truths of the Bible. It should be the natural result of a “born again” experience and is communicated to the world through both actions and attitudes of Christians as they consistently live out the tenants of their faith in community with both the redeemed and unredeemed.

Obvious Questions to Consider:

Is “Incarnational” Apologetics A Valid Expression And Study In Light Of More Traditional “Informational” Forms Of Apologetics?

From a traditional perspective apologetics is the study of internalizing and perfecting “informational” approaches and arguments to defend the absolute truths of the Bible especially in light of consistent attacks from a pluralistic culture. Considering the fact that one’s Christian faith is totally dependent upon the validity of these truths relating to the biblical claims of Christ as Savior (i.e. Death and Physical Resurrection of Christ, Forgiveness of Sin, the Deity of Christ, etc.), this is obviously an essential issue to protect the integrity of historical Christianity.

Nevertheless, the “incarnational” expressions of one’s faith are equally as important, especially when the goal is to evangelize an unredeemed world. While “informational” apologetics represents the explanation of essential biblical tenants to the

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Christian faith; “incarnational” apologetics represents the actualization of those same biblical belief systems into the authentic expressions of a believer’s life. It is, in a sense, wrapping one’s faith in the flesh of daily living.

For instance, consider the apologetic claims related to biblical inerrancy. Conservative Evangelicals consider this, rightfully so, imperative to a clear understanding of truth as it relates to all areas of one’s Christian faith. After all, if the Bible is not shown to be trustworthy in every way as it relates to faith and life, how can one know for sure if what they believe is genuine?

The same is true when considering “incarnational” apologetics as it relates to the issue of biblical inerrancy and other equally important foundational beliefs. If one claims to believe the Bible to be inerrant but exemplifies it in the expressions of their life as a contradictory code of ethics and behavior, what should the non-Christian world conclude about this same faith that supposedly came from the Bible? Not that anyone is perfect, but shouldn’t an inerrant Bible that is espoused as the final authority for the Christian faith result in something close to an inerrant lifestyle from its proponents?

At some point the real issue of biblical inerrancy boils down to the question of authority. For the Christian, the Bible is authoritative because of its author, the Holy Spirit who spoke the word into being. On the other hand, for the non-Christian the issue of accepting biblical authority as an essential precursor to salvation is in part verified by the consistent “incarnational” expressions of Christians who claim to have experienced a “born again” conversion. Since real authority is never assumed but earned when dealing with the unsaved world, it is imperative that one’s approach to biblical apologetics is validated by a life that exemplifies the person of Christ as found in the Bible.

The same argument can be applied to other areas of traditional apologetics. Consider for a moment the important issues related to the resurrection of Christ. While the historical and biblical aspects are imperative in validating the authenticity of the event, one must never ignore how the miraculous event transforms the individual expressions of a Christian's daily life.

For instance, a Muslim friend who converted to Christianity communicated that it was not the great arguments of traditional "informational" apologetics that finally drew him to examine the claims of Christ. On the contrary, it was the consistent caring actions of a high school friend who lived out a "resurrected" life before him.

It was not that his friend ever stopped verbally sharing the "informational" truths about Christ with him. The truth is that he boldly shared the gospel on many occasions. The bottom line was the simple undeniable fact that his friend's life "incarnationally" validated the biblical truths he graciously espoused.

In fact, the former Muslim admitted that he regularly abused and embarrassed his schoolmate hoping that he would grow weary and leave him alone. In the end, the former Muslim became a Christian because he could not argue with the evidences of a transformed life that ultimately became a tool of the Holy Spirit prompting his heart to further examine the tenets of his faith.

It is here that both the "incarnational" and "informational" approaches combine to create an authentic message that obviously pierced the Muslim's heart. The holistic combination of a Christian who was well prepared "informationally" to defend his faith, combined with one who actually lived out his beliefs "incarnationally" as a transforming

expression of Christ could not be denied. In the end, the Muslim received Christ as personal Savior!

Still, the question begs to be asked; should this “incarnational” approach be considered as the other half of genuine apologetics? It certainly appears to be an important aspect of fully communicating biblical truth. The sad fact is that many people will never understand the reality of biblical ideals such as forgiveness, unconditional love, or even salvation, because they cannot move beyond the inconsistent ways in which Christians communicate their faith through daily living. This must stop! According to scripture, the only stumbling block for unbelievers should be the Cross, not the unbiblical actions of those claiming to have been redeemed through that same cross!

Is “Incarnational” Apologetics Just Another Liberal Expression Of The Social Gospel?

For over a century many “Evangelicals” have been negative and reactionary to ministry expressions that exemplified a social conscience because of their fears that the “informational” message of the gospel was not being properly communicated. In their defense, their fears were often justified as numerous ministries were developed to meet physical needs to the obvious neglect of the greatest need of unbelievers, which is to be redeemed.

As a result, over time the passionate pursuits of biblical conservatives to evangelize unbelievers often neglected the “incarnational” expressions of their faith to lovingly live out the commands of Christ by meeting simple needs and demonstrating authentic community. Many well-meaning Christians unknowingly contributed to a negative know-it-all stereotype that continues to stifle real evangelism. While this approach values much

knowledge, it often misses the point of living out a transformed life and underestimates the impact of an inconsistent lifestyle upon unbelievers.

After all, isn't the point of real apologetics to convince people in reference to the truths of scripture so as to result in changed lives. For this to occur, one must model truth for the unbelieving world. As the former staff member for Willow Creek Church, Deiter Zander once said, "the contemporary world is interested in genuine Christianity, not our version of it" (from a conference in Napa Valley, CA, 2000). He went on to say, "if it is more important to be right than to be in relationship with people, you will never relate to this generation" (ibid.). The key here is the obvious need for the unredeemed world to "incarnationally" experience the truths of Christ being lived out in daily lives of committed believers.

Quite frankly, it does not make sense to espouse the powerful truths of Christ if they are not dynamic enough to impact the ways we manifest Him to the world. In a sense this is what Jesus said in Matthew 9:17, "Nor do they put new wine in old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Even though this passage is referring to the old and new covenant, it is still relevant to the discussion. Consider that one of the miracles of salvation is that one receives "new wine" through the power of the gospel message. Unfortunately, without new "wineskins" the whole batch of wine is perverted and its purpose is never realized. The same is true with many Christians who do not understand the connection between beliefs and behavior.

By understanding the biblical truth that it is impossible to divorce the saving message of Christ from the man he represented to the world then one can grasp the fact

that “incarnational” apologetics does not compromise “informational” apologetics in reference to social liberalism. On the contrary, it fully completes the expression of absolute truth and further validates the gospel message to the world.

In the end, this requires a balance between the realms of both “informational” and “incarnational” apologetics. One must never consider it socially liberal to exemplify an authentic Christian lifestyle of servanthood and kindness that validates one’s faith to an unbelieving world. At the same time, one must never remain silent concerning biblical truth and the significant issues relating to faith. As the old saying goes, it represents both sides of the same coin.

Conclusion: How Does One Live An “Incarnational” Life?

In his book, Safely Home, Randy Alcorn tells the story of a fervent Christian named Quan. He was unjustly thrown into jail for publicly proclaiming his faith in China.

Alcorn unwittingly defines “incarnational” apologetics through one of Quan’s heart wrenching experiences with the unbelieving jailer who regularly abused and mocked him. You will want to notice how Quan effectively combined both types of apologetics to achieve an unbelievable outcome to the glory of God! Alcorn shares:

“Quan whispered into the darkness words hidden in his heart. “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”

The guard peered into Quan's cell through the little barred window, which was two handbreadths across. Long used to the darkness, Quan could see the contempt in his eyes.

"Stop smiling!" he yelled.

"I am not smiling," Quan said.

"Yes, you are!" shouted the guard. He rattled the door, but moved on to the next cell.

Suddenly, Li Quan stood and pressed his face against the bars. "Guard!" Quan called. When he didn't come, he called louder. "Su Gan!"

The guard came back and rattled the door violently. "Who told you my name? Be silent or I will come in and make you silent!"

"Su Gan, sir, please, I have a request for you."

"Unless you can pay me, I care nothing for your requests."

"Can I do some labor for you?"

Quan saw in the jailer's eyes surprise mixed with contempt.

"This prison is so filthy," Quan said. "There is waste everywhere. The rats and roaches feed on it. You are not a prisoner, but you must feel like you are. Su Gan has to breathe this foul air, to walk carefully because of what oozes out of the cells. Li Quan can help you. Let me go into the cells one by one and clean up this filthy place. Give me water and a brush and soap, and I will show you what I can do! My father, Li Tong, was a street sweeper, a great cleaner of the ground. The finest in China. And I am my father's son!" (in *Safely Home*, by Randy Alcorn, Tyndale House, 2001, 273-274)

From this point, Alcorn picks up the story after several weeks in which Quan chooses to serve the jailer by cleaning the nasty cells. Again, you will want to notice how God used his Christ-like service. The story picks up with Quan addressing a Christian visitor to the jail named Ben. Alcorn continues:

Ben stood in the chilly winter air. As usual, he waited nervously, trying to keep warm and to will Li Quan out of the black hole. Someone was being led out of the building now, a frail, older man with a pronounced limp and yellow skin, as if he had jaundice or hepatitis.

Ben watched the man, who for some reason was walking toward him. He felt his heart freeze. "Quan?" He tried to disguise his horror. They touched right index fingers through the fence. "You smell like ... soap."

"Yes." Quan beamed, his face and voice surprisingly animated. "This is better than I smelled last time, yes? I have wonderful news! You must tell my family and house church. God has answered prayer. He has given me a ministry!"

"What?"

"I go from cell to cell, bringing Yesu's message." "But I thought you were in an isolated cell."

"God opened the door. I go to the other men. Most have never had anyone else come into their cell except to beat them. I help and serve them as I clean their cells. I bring them the love of Yesu. Twelve men I have visited. When I left their cells, six I did not leave alone."

"What do you mean?"

"When I left, Yesu was with them. Three were already believers, one of them a pastor. He had known my father, Li Tong! Three more bowed their knees to Yesu, who promises never to leave or forsake them. When I walk by their cells on 'the way to clean others, I sing to them, 'Heaven is my fatherland.' When I finish

cleaning all the cells I will start over. Then I can teach Shengjing to each of them. I will teach as I wash."

"The guards let you do this?"

"The smell that used to cling to the guards is now almost gone. Their shoes are not ruined. The prisoners are excited to no longer be alone. Excited to realize that even if they die here, they will have eternal life. Excited that God has not forgotten them, that this world is not their home, that they will find release."

"Sounds more like a revival meeting than a prison."

"Those in prison are not so distracted as those outside. They think about death more. They ask, 'Is this the day?' They do not put so much hope in their plans and successes in this world. I tell them about Yesu and his heaven, and they listen eagerly, much more intently than most free men I speak to in the locksmith's shop. Please, tell Ming and Shen and Zhou Jin about Li Quan's ministry." (ibid., 276-277)

The story of Quan is an amazing picture representing the balance of both "informational" and "incarnational" apologetics. As he served and lived out the life of Christ, his actions validated his faith thus opening a door to share the truths of Christ.

Think about it, "informational" apologetics without "incarnational" validation will often lead to hypocrisy. On the other hand, "incarnational" apologetics without an "informational" foundation of biblical truth will often lead to heresy.

So . . . how does one live an "incarnational" life? It begins by understanding the words of Christ in Mark 10: 43-45, ". . . whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." An "incarnational" life demands surrender, not only to the words of Christ, but His actions as well. Christians must become servants first!

It is kind of like the way Jesus treated the woman at the well in John 4. He didn't embarrass or condemn her. On the contrary, he did the unthinkable for a Jew, he actually spoke to her thus acknowledging her basic value as a human soul created in the image of God. In doing so, he gained her confidence and peaked her curiosity. Ultimately, the

woman was drawn to spiritual water where according to Christ, she “would never thirst again.”

With this in mind, it is worth noting that Christ was always a perfect blend of both types of apologetics. The simple truth is that the “incarnational” life is merely living as Jesus lived by balancing beliefs with behavior. We must be both bold and compassionate at the same time! In the end, Christians must understand that an unbelieving world will not believe what we say about Christ and our faith, until they first see the truth manifested through us. In short, this is “incarnational” apologetics at its best!

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PAUL'S PROCLAMATION OF THE FAITH IN ATHENS IN ACTS 17:15-34: A STUDY OF PAULINE EVANGELISTIC METHOD

Randy Bottoms, Ph.D.*

Introduction

Christ commanded the Church to go out into the world and proclaim the gospel (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15). Christ has tasked the Church to the proclamation of the faith around the world.

The Church began that task immediately after Christ ascended back to heaven after it received power to do so on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8). The Church began to proclaim the faith first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then in Samaria, then in Antioch and across the world (Acts 1:8).

The Book of Acts provides the historical record of the beginning of the proclamation of the Christian faith around the world. It provides excellent examples of the proclamation of the faith by the apostles and early evangelists. One of those great examples is the Apostle Paul. After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul devoted the remainder of his life to tirelessly proclaiming the faith across the Roman world. Paul provides an excellent example of how to proclaim the faith in his evangelism of Athens in Acts 17:15-34. We can study the method of proclamation of this great evangelist and learn principles of proclamation of the faith from him.

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Paul's Method Of The Proclamation Of The Faith In Acts 17:15-34**Paul Was Burdened For The Lost (Acts 17:16)**

Paul observed that the Athenians were huge idolaters. Idols to various pagan gods literally filled the city. When Paul observed all of this worship of false gods, his “spirit was stirred” literally within him (Acts 17:16 KJV). The verb “was stirred” is the Greek word *paroxyneto*, meaning literally “stimulated, irritated, to the point of anger.”¹ Paul was irritated in a righteous way to see all of the Athenians worshipping worthless, false, pagan gods. This created in him a burden for the people of Athens.

Having a burden for the lost is the starting point of proclaiming the faith. Those who would successfully proclaim the faith must share this burden.

Paul Strategically Went To Where The Lost Were (Acts 17:17)

Paul focused his attention to proclaiming the faith in two different places where the Athenians were located and to three people groups.

Paul went first to the synagogue in Athens (Acts 17:17). He went there for two reasons. First, it was the priority of proclamation that God established because the Jews are God's chosen people (Romans 1:16). The gospel was to go first to the Jews. Second, the Jews already had a worldview that would make them receptive to the gospel. They already believed in the monotheistic true God of the Bible. The Bible of the Jews, the Old Testament, talked of the Messiah, Christ. This gave the Jews a familiar religious background that would frame their mind for the reception of the gospel.

¹ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 298.

Paul proclaimed the faith to two groups in the synagogue, the “Jews” and “the devout persons” (Acts 17:17 KJV). The Jews in Athens were obviously Jews who had migrated to, or were descendants of those, who had migrated to Athens. Jews moved around much in the ancient world as they moved to various cities to establish lives and businesses. An interesting second group in the synagogue that Paul proclaimed the faith to was “the devout persons” (Acts 17:17 KJV). The Greek word for “devout persons” is *sebomenois*, meaning “those worshipping.”² These apparently were Gentiles who believed in the monotheistic true God, but were not Jews.³ They worshipped the true God along side the Jews.

The second location where Paul proclaimed the faith in Athens was the “market” (Acts 17:17 KJV), or *agora*, the market place where Athenians gathered to shop, do business, mingle, hang out, and discuss philosophies and issues with others.⁴ Most ancient cities had an *agora*, or market place, where commercial and government business was conducted and was frequented often by the populace. This ancient *agora* is preserved in Athens as an archaeological site, and can be visited today. Visitors can walk around in the same places where Paul mingled and talked to Athenians. It made sense for Paul to go to the market place, for this was the place that would be frequented often by the Athenians.

² Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 298.

³ Fasc. 2. A. T. Kraabel, “The Disappearance of the ‘God-Fearers’”, *Numen* Vol. 28 (Dec., 1981), “JSTOR.org,” URL (January 13, 2019).

⁴ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 298.

The Scripture states that Paul met “daily” in the market place of Athens with those who would give him an audience (Acts 17:17 KJV). Paul proclaimed the faith in Athens with frequency.

Those that would proclaim the faith should plan strategically where to go to proclaim the gospel to others. They should plan to meet unbelievers in places that unbelievers frequent, and in locations that are conducive for sharing the gospel.

Paul Was Prepared To Proclaim The Faith To Those With Different Worldviews (Acts 17:18-21)

Paul encountered Greeks with different philosophies and worldviews in Athens. In the market place, he encountered the *Epicureans*. The Epicureans were followers of the fourth century B.C. Greek philosopher *Epicurus*, who believed that life was controlled by the physical structure of the universe, particularly atoms, and that life was to be lived in practical wisdom in a pleasant life, experiencing pleasures that brought a person pleasantness and tranquility.⁵ Paul also encountered *Stoics*, who were followers of the third century B.C. Greek philosopher, *Zeno of Citium*, who taught that the greatest achievement in life is virtue, attained by knowledge, where a person understands that everything in life, whether good or bad, whether pleasure or pain, is preordained by a divine, cosmic plan, and that life is to be lived in contentment and acceptance of all circumstances in life.⁶

These Greek philosophers were baffled by Paul’s message of the gospel. Some resorted to ridicule of Paul, referring to Paul as a “babbling” (Acts 17:18 KJV). The word

⁵ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 122.

⁶ Robert Audi, gen. ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Second Edition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 880.

“babblers” is the Greek word *spermologos*, meaning literally “seed-picker,” a term that was used of birds picking up seeds, and applied to people as a person who “picks up scraps” of gossip, chatter, here and there, in order to make a living or impression.⁷ It was a pejorative term. It was a picture of Paul “picking up scraps” of information here and there in order to attempt to make a philosophical impression upon people.

Some were baffled by Paul’s reference to “Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18 KJV). Here, we have a clear indication of what Paul was preaching to the Athenians. Paul was preaching the person of Jesus, apparently proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God and Savior, and also preaching the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Both baffled the Athenians. They had never heard of Jesus. And Greek philosophers did not believe in the resurrection of the body. They believed in the immortality of the soul, but not in a resurrection into an eternal body. When the Areopagus was founded supposedly by the patron goddess of Athens, Athene, according to the Greek playwright and father of Greek tragedy, Aeschylus, the Greek God, Apollo, supposedly said, “When the dust drinks up a man’s blood, once he has died, there is no resurrection.”⁸ This message that Paul was preaching was new and baffling to them.

The Athenian philosophers decided to take Paul to the “Areopagus,” (Acts 17:19 KJV), literally, the “Hill of Ares,”⁹ the name for the venerable, ancient council of Athens that presided over cases of homicide, wounding and arson, and also oversaw inquiry into

⁷ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 769.

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City: Anchor Books Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972), 313.

⁹ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader’s Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 298.

new religions and religious movements.¹⁰ It was made up of 150 of the upper crust of Athens and derived its name from the council meeting on the Hill of Ares, the rocky saddle jutting out from the northwest corner of the Acropolis, and within view of the Parthenon and other ancient temples on the Acropolis, and also within view of the agora of Athens. The Areopagus in ancient times met on top of the rocky saddle or on a ledge on the northeast side. The Areopagus sometimes also met in the Royal Stoa of Athens¹¹ It is not clear which location was the site of Paul's meeting with the Areopagus.

Those that would proclaim the faith to others should be aware of the various worldviews of their potential audience and be familiar with them. It behooves evangelists today to be aware of what unbelievers in their culture are thinking and what they believe. It will help in the approach of reaching unbelievers.

Paul Preached A Message To Unbelievers That Was Appropriate For His Audience (Acts 17:22-34)

Paul's message to the Athenians is an excellent message, tailored exactly to the circumstances in Athens and the thinking of his Greek pagan audience. Paul demonstrated excellent skill in presenting his message to them.

Paul began his excellent sermon by exhibiting a kind and gracious attitude toward the Athenians. He was complimentary of their zeal for religion, although they were worshipping idols and false pagan gods. He refers to the Athenians as being "in all things too superstitious" (Acts 17:22 KJV). The expression "too superstitious" means literally

¹⁰ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 151.

¹¹ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 139.

“very religious.”¹² Paul very skillfully used the idolatry of the Athenians to make a complimentary, kind statement to them that would open their attitudes to be receptive to Paul’s message. It’s a great example to follow of treating unbelievers with kindness when dealing with unbelievers.

Paul skillfully used an actual altar in Athens that the Athenians were familiar with to begin his sermon. He referred to their altar “To the Unknown God” (Acts 17:23 KJV) as a starting point, pointing out that this altar was referring to the true God of heaven, which the Athenians did not know. Paul took an altar to an unknown god and used it to transition to the thought of the true God.

Beginning in Acts 17:24, Paul began an excellent sermon about the doctrine of the true God and the doctrine of man and this true God’s relation to man. It contains excellent and very important information about the true God. This presentation about the true God is given in the background of the idolatry of the Athenians. Paul contrasted the true God with the pagan false gods.

Paul began his sermon in Acts 17:24 by stating that God is the creator of all things, both in heaven and earth, including the materials for idols and man. Paul stated that the true God did not dwell in “temples” (Acts 17:24 KJV) made by human hands. Paul said this while standing on the Hill of Ares within view of the Acropolis with its magnificent Parthenon, the temple to the goddess Athena, and two other pagan temples. Everyone could look over at the Acropolis and see the pagan Greek temples.

¹² William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 172.

Paul then stated in Acts 17:25 that the true God sustains human life, and gives to all humans “all things,” (Acts 17:25 KJV), i.e., that which is necessary for life such as food, water and resources.

Paul also stated in Acts 17:26 that God created all nations of men from one person, Adam. He states that God made men “of one blood” (Acts 17:26 KJV). The word “blood” does not appear in the original. The original reads “And he made out of one every nation of men.”¹³ In other words, God made all nations of men out of one man, Adam.

Paul goes on to make an amazing statement about God’s creative purpose for men. He states that God created men to “dwell on all the face of the earth,” (Acts 17:26 KJV), i.e., God’s purpose is that men inhabit all areas of the earth. Paul also states that God has sovereignly determined the time of each nation upon the earth, the years that each nation will exist, and the boundaries and borders of each nation. Paul was telling the Athenians that God determined the boundaries of Greece and the time that Greece would exist in history, as well as all nations.

Paul makes another amazing statement about mankind in Acts 17:27. There, Paul states that mankind was not only created to fill all areas of the earth, but that mankind was also created to “seek the Lord” (Acts 17:27 KJV). Some would make God very exclusivist in His dealings with mankind, but Paul states here in this verse that God desires all of mankind to seek Him. It is a general appeal to all mankind.

Paul makes another remarkable statement about mankind in Acts 17:27. Here, Paul states that God created man to “feel after him, and find him” (Acts 17:27 KJV). The word

¹³ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader’s Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 299.

for “feel after him” is the Greek word *pselapheseian*, meaning to “feel about for,” or “grope after.”¹⁴ It is a picture of a man feeling around and groping, attempting to find an object in the dark. Man lives in spiritual darkness, and God lives behind a veil just out in front of man, and God wants all mankind to “feel about for”, “grope after,” and find Him. Again, it is a general appeal to all mankind, and is not exclusivist.

Then, Paul states in Acts 17:27 that God is “not far” (Acts 17:27 KJV) from every person. God is not far away from man. God is within reach of every person. God wants to be reached by each person. God is reachable. Again, it is a universal appeal to all men to reach out to God, and is not exclusivist.

Paul exhibited great skill in knowledge of the Greek poets and using this knowledge to find a common reference point with the cultured Greek pagans to preach the gospel to them. In Acts 17:28, Paul states regarding the true God, “For in him we live, move, and have our being” (KJV). This line is a direct quote of the Cretan Greek philosopher-poet, Epimenides.¹⁵ Paul is saying here to the sophisticated Greek audience that even one of the revered Greek poets, Epimenides, stated that our lives, activity in life, and existence all depend upon the true God. Paul then quotes another Greek poet known to the sophisticated Athenian pagans, Aratus, in his *Phainomena*, 5, who stated, “For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28 KJV).¹⁶ What Paul was saying to the Athenians here was that even the Greek poet, Aratus, stated that man is created in the image of God. Paul states the concept of man

¹⁴ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 900.

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 359.

¹⁶ F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City: Anchor Books Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972), 312.

being created in the image of God to counter idolatry. God is not made of stone or material made from the hands of man. Neither is man. God is a Spirit-being who does not dwell in pagan temples. Man is made after the likeness of God where he, too, is a spirit-being, not confined to a pagan temple.

Paul used great skill and knowledge of classical Greek literature to witness to the sophisticated Greek pagans. He used this knowledge as a common reference point to preach the gospel to them. The Church, too, should be familiar with knowledge common of unbelievers and use it as a reference point to share the gospel with the lost. If believers are talking to people of science, believers should have some familiarity with science. If believers are talking to people of philosophy, believers should be familiar with philosophy. If believers are talking to skeptics, believers should be familiar with what skeptics think. And the list goes on.

Paul uses the doctrine of man being created in the image of God to confront the idolatry of the Athenians (Acts 17:29).

Paul makes an interesting statement in Acts 17:30. There, he states that God “winked at” (Acts 17:30 KJV) the times of ignorance of the idolatry of the Greeks and mankind. The word “winked at” is the Greek word *hyperidon*, meaning “overlooked, disregarded.”¹⁷ What Paul is saying is that God “overlooked, disregarded” the times of the Greeks and mankind ignorantly practicing idolatry. That did not mean that God was not aware of and was not concerned about the idolatrous practices of men, or condoned idolatry. It meant that God “overlooked” the idolatry in the sense that he tolerated it and

¹⁷ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 299.

did not issue immediate judgment upon it because of His grace and His plan to bring Christ into the world to die for men and save men.¹⁸

Paul stated that God showed grace to the Athenians and all men in their ignorance, but that now, God “commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30 KJV). Again, the universality of God toward all men is seen. God commands everyone in the world to repent. It is not exclusive. Repentance is commanded and is possible for all men in the world, if they will just do so. The Church should proclaim a message of repentance to the world to turn from ignorance and sin and to turn to Christ. It is a message that should be proclaimed to all men.

In Acts 17:31, Paul gave the reason why all men were to repent, turn from their idolatry and sin, and believe in Christ. It is because God has already appointed a future day of judgment of all men by one man, Jesus Christ. The word “hath appointed” in Acts 17:31 (KJV) is in aorist tense, which means that God has already appointed a day of judgment. It has been determined. The word “world” in Acts 17:31 (KJV) is the word *oikoumenen*, meaning “humankind, inhabited earth.”¹⁹ All of mankind faces a future day of judgment.

The idea of a future judgment and accountability for sin was also a concept that was alien to the Athenians and Greeks. Paul stated that the world would be judged “in righteousness by that man” (Acts 17:31 KJV). Paul stated that the world will be judged by a standard of righteousness, God’s righteousness, and that it will be made manifest where men come short of this righteousness. It is interesting that Paul states that mankind will be

¹⁸ Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 271.

¹⁹ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader’s Green New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 299.

judged by a “man” (Acts 17:31 KJV). God has determined that men are to be judged by a man. That man will be, of course, Jesus Christ.

The statement that really raised the eyebrows of the venerable Athenians listening to Paul’s message is the evidence that God has given to men that they will be judged: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Again, the Greeks did not believe in resurrection. It was an alien concept to them. Paul’s statement clearly indicates that he preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ as part of the gospel. The resurrection of Christ produced a living man who is alive to conduct a future judgment. The future judgment of all men is just as sure as the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Church should make sure that it includes the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its proclamation of the gospel. It is an essential part of the gospel.

The Athenians reacted as most men do. Some of them mocked and made fun of the idea of a resurrection (Acts 17:32). But some were prompted to hear more of the message that Paul was preaching (Acts 17:32). So it is with the presentation of the gospel. Some will mock and refuse to believe, but others will seek the truth. The Church should have faith that God will produce some fruit in the proclamation of the faith.

Paul departed from the middle of the Areopagus. The words “from among them” in Acts 17:33 (KJV) are literally “out of the middle of them”,²⁰ indicating that he had been standing in the middle of the group while proclaiming the faith. It is not known whether Paul returned to the Areopagus and presented the gospel to them again.

²⁰ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader’s Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 299.

The good news is that some fruit was produced among the Athenians, though small. Acts 17:34 states that a handful of the Athenians believed the gospel, among whom were “Dionysius the Areopagite” (Acts 17:34 KJV), who was a member of the venerable Areopagus. Also, a woman named “Damaris” (Acts 17:34 KJV) believed the gospel. Apparently, there were some women who were allowed to hear presentations to the Areopagus, although the council was made up of men. “Others” (Acts 17:34 KJV) were said to have also believed, which means that there were at least two others that believed. So, at least four people who heard Paul’s message to the Areopagus believed in Christ. There may have been more than four.

Paul did not establish a church in Athens, but a church organized later, probably under the leadership of Dionysius the Areopagite. Strong Greek tradition says that Dionysius founded the church in Athens. A street near the Acropolis is named after him. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, called Dionysius the Areopagite the first bishop of the church at Athens.²¹ In the second century, some bishops of Athens such as Publius, were martyred. According to Melito of Sardis, the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius attempted to check the persecution of Christians in Athens.²² The eloquent Christian apologists Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, and Athenagoras came from Athens. The church at Athens was represented at the Council of Nicea. The Christian rhetoricians, St. Basil, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus, studied at Athens.²³

²¹ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., “Dionysius the Areopagite,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 405.

²² F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., “Athens,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 103.

²³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910), 325.

Conclusion

Paul exhibited a concern and burden for the lost. He cared about lost people. He strategically went to where the lost were. He had a plan and method of where to go to reach the lost. Paul studied and prepared to proclaim the faith to the lost. He educated himself about the literary and philosophical backgrounds of the people of the Roman world. He was aware of the various worldviews of the people of the Roman world, such as the Greeks and Athenians. Paul tailored his message to the backgrounds of his audience. He proclaimed the faith with strategy.

Paul serves as an excellent example of how to proclaim the faith. He is a worthy example to follow. The Church should learn from Paul and follow his example.

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PROCLAIMING FAITH FROM THE PULPIT: THE ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PREACHING AND APOLOGETICS

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Introduction

Sheila's friend, Mary, invited her to a special Sunday evening service at her church designed to answer questions about the Christian faith for skeptics and seekers. As a curious non-Christian, Sheila was intrigued by the invitation and decided to attend one of the services. Mary's pastor began each message at these services with a question about Christianity, and the night Sheila attended the question was, does God really exist? As Sheila listened to the message, the pastor explained that each person has an innate sense of what is right and what is wrong, and that this innate sense of morality is a clue to God's existence. Sheila was challenged by the message and, though she did not respond to the brief gospel invitation offered at the end of the service, she did promise to attend again with Mary. The preaching Sheila heard offered answers to questions about God, and she began to seriously consider the claims of Christianity.

Raised in a Christian home, John regularly attended church and other activities, including participating in his youth group and actively sharing his faith in Jesus. Upon graduating high school John enrolled as a commuter student at the local state university and, as part of his course of general studies took a course in cultural anthropology. His professor was an atheist and an outspoken critic of religion in general, especially Christianity, and soon the professor's challenges led John to wrestle with profound and persistent doubts about the existence of God and the reliability of the Bible. Thus, when

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John's pastor began a series of sermons on why the Christian worldview makes sense and the Bible can be trusted, John found answers to his doubts and his faith was strengthened. The preaching John heard helped him find reasons to believe, and he grew as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

What do these examples of preaching have in common?¹ Though the primary purpose of the preaching in Sheila's instance was to make a compelling case for Christianity to skeptics and seekers, and the primary purpose in John's instance was to strengthen a disciple's faith, both messages involved apologetics. However, is this a legitimate role for preaching whether to those who are already Christians or to seekers and skeptics? Is there a nexus—a central link or connection—between apologetics and preaching for discipleship and evangelism or are these separate activities?²

In consideration of these and related questions, the purpose of this research is to inquire into the relationship between apologetics and preaching for evangelism and for discipleship. The presentation explores a rationale for and biblical examples of apologetic preaching, and the special significance of moral apologetics in preaching. Research findings will suggest that there is a rational, biblical basis for the importance of preaching and apologetics in the realm of evangelism and discipleship, and that moral apologetics is especially apropos to apologetic preaching.

¹ Though the names in each instance are changed, each of these situations describes a real-life experience of the researcher with apologetics and preaching. Further, while discussed separately in this research, discipleship and evangelism could occur in either of the preaching examples provided. A message may be primarily designed for discipleship, but it is certainly possible and likely that evangelistic implications follow, and vice-versa. However, as considered in chapter three, effective apologetic preaching generally has a specific audience in mind—sometimes disciples and sometimes seekers and skeptics.

² Nexus comes from the from the Latin *nectere*, meaning to bind or tie. *Vocabulary.com Dictionary*, s.v. "nexus." <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/nexus>.

Why Does It Matter?

Preaching is a fundamental and regularly occurring expression of a pastor's work within most congregations, both in terms of evangelism and discipleship. Wayne McDill concludes that, "of all the tasks to be done in ministry, preaching is surely one of the most important."³ Paul the apostle admonished his young protégé, Timothy, who was also a pastor and mentor to other pastors, to "give attention to...exhortation" (1 Tim. 4:13), to "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2), and to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5).⁴ In these directives to Timothy, Paul describes the centrality of the pastor's role as preacher—to exhort, teach, and evangelize. Haddon Robinson explains that the pastor's call to preaching is so significant because "through the preaching of the Scriptures, God encounters men and women to bring them to salvation...and to richness and ripeness of Christian character."⁵ Though there may be exceptions to the centrality of preaching in a pastor's ministry, such as instances of multi-pastor churches where one pastor focuses on counseling and another on student ministries and so on, the general expectation of lead pastors is that they will preach. Books have been written offering approaches to how such preaching might occur, but all agree that preaching is a staple of faithful pastoral ministry.⁶

³ Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), concl., par. 8, Kindle.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *The Holy Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

⁵ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), chap. 1, par. 11, Kindle.

⁶ Books addressing the topic of preaching include Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005); Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009); McDill, *12 Essential Skills*; Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*; and Simon Vibert, *Excellence in Preaching: Studying the Craft of Leading Preachers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011).

However, amid the prevailing post-modern and post-Christian milieu in much of the world, the audience to which the pastor delivers his message is increasingly ignorant of and unsure of the veracity of even its most basic elements. According to James White, 23 percent of adults in the United States consider themselves as having no religious affiliation, and nearly 19 percent of adults claim to be former Christians.⁷ Add to these statistics the widespread veneration of philosophical and religious pluralism and one begins to recognize the challenge today's pastor faces when standing behind the pulpit and proclaiming the Christian message.⁸ As White aptly states, "It's simply a cultural reality that people in a post-Christian world are genuinely incredulous that anyone would think like...well, a Christian—or at least, what it means in their minds to think like a Christian."⁹

Therefore, beyond simply preaching biblical messages what a pastor preaches may regularly need to include apologetic content, be it explicit or implicit.¹⁰ Pastors who preach should expect to engage in various forms of apologetic encounters—helping answer challenges to belief posed by unbelievers while also helping strengthen the faith of believers. What a pastor should do and what a pastor can do, though, are not necessarily the same when it comes to apologetics, and this reveals a fundamental problem: Pastors may have little knowledge of apologetics in general, and less in how apologetics relates to preaching. For those pastors who do have knowledge of apologetics, they may not know how to integrate apologetics into their ministry of preaching in a holistic manner that avoids

⁷ James E. White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 11.

⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 13-56. See also, Thomas J. Gentry, "Knowing the Savior: A Critical Assessment of Philosophical Religious Pluralism, Christian Pluralism, and Christian Inclusivism," *Aletheias*, Spring 2018, F

⁹ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 130.

¹⁰ Ravi Zacharias, "The Pastor as an Apologist," in *Is Your Church Ready? Motivating Leaders to Live an Apologetic Life*, eds. Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 15-24.

turning sermons into dense apologetics lectures or trite and simplistic messages lacking relevant depth and substance.

However, all Christians, including pastors should be jealous for the character of God. The psalmist declares that “great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised” (Ps. 48:1), and “give thanks to the LORD, for He is good” (Ps. 106:1). In unison with Job, God’s people should possess a resolve and trust that proclaims despite appearances to the contrary, “blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Yet, it is precisely God’s greatness and goodness that are under attack directly and indirectly in some challenges presented by antagonists of the Christian faith.¹¹ If God is great, the skeptic asks, then why are there so many examples of slavery in the Bible, and why would He order the slaughter of Canaanite women and children? If God is good, the struggling Christian wonders, then why did individuals kill thousands of innocent people in the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and why did an earthquake kill thousands in India? These are challenging questions that strike at the very heart of God’s character, and the Christian message offers answers that reflect sensitivity to the issues and certainty regarding God’s greatness and goodness more than anything else. Preaching can and should help with these challenges to God’s character.

Believers are also commanded to “sanctify the Lord God in [their] hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks [them] a reason for the hope that is in [them], with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). The word translated “defense” in this

¹¹ Examples of such antagonism include Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008); Sam Harris, *Letters to a Christian Nation* (New York: Random House, 2006); and Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007).

verse is from the Greek *apologia*, the basis for the English word apologetics.¹² Thus, in these few words from Peter the apostle, a command comes forth that all believers are to be ready to engage in apologetics as opportunities arise. When might a Christian business executive have opportunity to do apologetics? What about the Christian construction worker on the jobsite: what are his opportunities for apologetics? What about the Christian mother of preschoolers attending a weekly playgroup at the city park: what is her apologetic obligation? Though the details of each of these situations vary, the common theme is that each Christian is to take whatever his or her opportunities are and engage in apologetics when appropriate. What are the pastor's opportunities? He has an important platform from which his apologetic engagement could occur each week as he stands to preach to his congregation. If he is aware of particular apologetic opportunities—challenges to faith in the public media, common objections heard when evangelizing, or something specific to the local community—these are his opportunities, and if he is faithful to Peter's command he will take them. Faithful Christians prepare for and engage in apologetics, pastors included.¹³

¹² Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG, 1992), 232.

¹³ Though beyond the scope of the present study, the researcher tentatively concludes that apologetics and preaching may even serve a concomitant role in the new heavens and new earth, since glorified humanity will still retain a rational-affective capacity which will allow for continued growth in godliness without the constraints of sin. Even without sin, apologetic proclamation could be a means to God's continued work in the redeemed of the ages. There may be hints of this in what Revelation describes as the courtroom-like worship scenes (e.g., chapter five) where argumentation is involved in explaining to the worshipers what is happening and why the Lamb is worthy, etc. Certainly, there is substance enough here for at least considering the possibility.

Preaching And Apologetics

Is there a central link or connection between preaching and apologetics? If so, what is it? Though preaching and apologetics were defined in the previous chapter, understanding the rationale for their concomitance requires fuller development. Thus, the focus in this chapter includes a discussion of the rationale for both the general association of preaching with apologetics, and the specific way preaching relates to moral apologetics.

The Rationale For The General Nexus Of Preaching And Apologetics

Overcoming Obstacles To Faith In Evangelistic Preaching

In evangelistic preaching, obstacles to belief can be based on rational and passional barriers formed when a person is ignorant of the coherence and defensibility of the Christian message.¹⁴ Apologetic content in evangelistic preaching can help overcome such barriers to belief by addressing common objections to the Christian faith. For example, the central doctrine of the Christian faith is arguably the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:12-19). However, since the first reports of the resurrection were made to Jewish and Roman authorities there have been attempts to disprove the claim (Matt. 28:11-15).¹⁵

Each generation of Christians since Christ resurrected has also encountered detractors from the resurrection, and this generation of believers is no different. A recent survey in Great Britain concerning beliefs about the resurrection reveals that, of the 2,010

¹⁴ For a discussion of the concomitance of rational and passional (i.e., affective) components in faith formation, see William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 1-13.

¹⁵ Justin Martyr (ca. AD 155) also states that in his day the Jewish leaders were still claiming that the disciples stole Jesus' body. Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenæus*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 107, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.iv.cviii.html>.

adults surveyed, 50 percent do not believe the resurrection happened, and of the respondents identified as active Christians, 43 percent do not accept the biblical account of the resurrection as accurate.¹⁶ Thus, when preaching a gospel message that is dependent upon the doctrine of the resurrection, the evangelistic preacher should anticipate that many in his audience likely reject the doctrine, and proactively defend it as part of a cumulative case supporting the Christian gospel.

Overcoming Doubt And Equipping Believers In Discipleship Preaching

In discipleship preaching, besetting doubts and answers to attacks on the faith of Christians by an unbelieving world can be addressed by including apologetic content in sermons. Through apologetic preaching for discipleship, believers are able to better overcome their own doubts (cf. Heb. 11:1-2), and to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). For example, as the barrage of writing from the New Atheists demonstrate—including the frequently vitriolic and one-sided attacks upon Christianity by Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett—Christians are often susceptible to challenges based on a lack of preparation to answer apologetically-oriented questions.¹⁷ Believers might be harangued by opponents of the faith with questions such as: How could a loving God command the genocide of the Canaanites? or How could anyone believe a Bible that was assembled in the early third century by misogynistic, power-hungry men in league with Constantine and bent on

¹⁶ “Resurrection Did Not Happen, Say Quarter of Christians,” News, BBC Online, accessed November 8, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-39153121>.

¹⁷ For a brief, scholarly overview of the New Atheists and their teachings, see *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “The New Atheists,” <https://www.iep.utm.edu/n-atheis/>.

controlling people?¹⁸ The researcher knows from personal experience that an accessible series of apologetic-infused messages targeting believers and addressing such concerns can provide great strength and resources to a struggling congregation. Such messages can also buoy the pastor's spirit amid the persistent concerns and doubts raised by those he shepherds.

Adding Overall Depth To The Pastor's Ministry Abilities

In both apologetic preaching for evangelism and discipleship, the preacher will spend considerable time learning apologetic content and preparing it in such a way to make it accessible through his preaching. As this happens, the preacher's apologetic knowledge and abilities increase and will usually overflow into his broader pastoral ministry. For example, learning apologetics concerning which theodicies are most helpful in addressing the problem of evil provides a pastor with greater ability to offer pastoral counsel when someone is looking for answers to personal or societal tragedies.¹⁹ Likewise, when a pastor becomes better equipped with apologetics in his preaching, he is likely to show an increase in confidence related to evangelism, and, in turn, become more intentional about evangelizing and encouraging his congregation to do the same. As he does so, it is reasonable to think that the same apologetics that helped his confidence rise will also

¹⁸ Questions such as these are addressed in Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, eds., *Contending with Christianity's Critics* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), and William Lane Craig, ed., *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 2009).

¹⁹ Admittedly, apologetics may not always be apropos for pastoral counseling, especially since sometimes people simply need to vent their pain, and no answers will matter. However, there are times when counselees move beyond venting and need answers in the counseling room. At these moments, apologetics can be a helpful counseling tool, even if it first comes in the form of sermons. Regarding the importance of pastoral care and preaching, see Thomas C. Oden, "Ministry through Word and Sacrament," in *Classical Pastoral Care*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 28-57.

become a focal point in teaching others to evangelize. The researcher's experience with apologetic preaching has led to the development of entire evangelistic campaigns in his congregation, including the development of apologetically-tailored evangelistic tracts and training programs (see Figures 2.1. and 2.2.).

Does God Exist?

In answer to the question of whether or not God exists, three strong reasons point us to saying, "Yes!"

First, the world around us, with its clear design and purpose, reveals a Creator who gives order and a plan to all things.

Second, our moral compass, our sense of right and wrong toward and from others, reveals a righteous One who is the perfect moral standard, giving us a sense of justice and injustice.

Third, our inner yearning for more than what we can see and know, our desire for something transcendent, reveals an eternal One who made us for much more than what we see in this life.

If you put these three reasons together, bringing the design and purpose of the world, and the right and wrong of our moral compass, and the desire for transcendence, into one being, what kind of God does it reveal? Walk through these things from first to last and here is what you get.

You get a God who is beyond us but gives us a desire to find Him.

You get a God who made us to know right and wrong because He is perfect righteousness.

You get a God who creates all things, including us, with a purpose and with a design.

Where do you find a God like this? ***Turn this card over and keep reading!***

Figure 2.1. Apologetically-Tailored Evangelistic Tract, Front Side

Look at every *ism* in the world of beliefs, from atheism to pantheism, and you find this God only in one place. **This is the God of the Bible.** The evidence points not to just any God, but the God of Scripture, the God who is revealed to the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

All the proofs of God's existence ultimately bring us to one person, Jesus Christ.

He knows we were made for eternity.

He is perfect righteousness.

He knows we have a design and purpose.

If you would like a relationship with the God who made you for a relationship with Him, the solution is as simple as **ABC**:

Ask God to forgive the sins you have committed and to make you a new person.

Believe that God's only Son, Jesus, died to pay for your sins and resurrected from the dead so that you can have a relationship with God.

Confess your faith in Jesus publicly by being baptized and becoming part of a local church where you can worship and serve God alongside other believers.

Want to know more? Join us for any of our services or visit us online. ***We hope to meet you soon!***

Figure 2.2. Apologetically-Tailored Evangelistic Tract, Back Side

The Rationale For The Special Nexus Of Preaching And Moral Apologetics

Having considered the rationale for a general connection between preaching and apologetics, the next area of inquiry concerns the special role of moral apologetics within preaching. To review the definition provided in chapter one, moral apologetics involves either positively or negatively making an apologetic argument for the existence of God derived from the existence of objective moral facts and their implications for the existence of a moral being whose character and commands provide the basis for those facts. It is helpful to point out that within moral apologetics there are moral arguments for the existence of God, and there are ways of arguing morally relative to God's existence—both are under the penumbra of moral apologetics.²⁰ Likewise, regarding moral apologetics broadly conceived, there are reasons to consider as part of the rationale for a special affinity between preaching and moral apologetics. The reasons presented here are those the researcher considers most pertinent to the present discussion.

Emphasizing The Moral Nature Of God And Humanity

When utilizing moral apologetics in preaching, especially in evangelistic preaching, an emphasis upon the objectivity of moral facts can provide tremendous benefit in helping unbelievers consider the role of morality in pointing them to God.²¹ Such moral

²⁰ Specific to moral arguments, there are numerous versions available to apologists (e.g., Thomas Aquinas's version based on degrees of perfection in the *Summa Theologiae*, or C. S. Lewis's version in *Mere Christianity*), but, for reasons discussed in chapter 4 below, this researcher prefers a version of the moral argument that is cumulative, abductive, and teleological. For a discussion of the various nuances within moral apologetics, including the distinction between moral arguments for the existence of God and arguing morally/for morality based on God's existence, see Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, chaps. 4-8, and *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chaps. 1, 8-10. See also Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 276-277, and *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2011), 16-33, 566-573, and 1556-1562.

²¹ Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 49.

facts include moral goodness, moral obligations, moral knowledge, moral transformation, and a sense of moral providence.²² Consider, for example, moral obligations as a part of apologetic evangelistic preaching. It is not difficult to imagine how a preacher could speak of every person's innate sense of moral obligation as a means of revealing both God as the moral standard, and each person's imperfection in keeping his or her moral obligations.

This type of use of moral apologetics in a sermon could provide the basis for an entire sermon. Even if the preacher's message is on a different topic than moral apologetics, when coming to transition to the invitation it is a fairly straightforward move to include moral obligations. These can help highlight humanity's problem with sin and the need of a perfect moral Savior. Further, in instances of apologetic preaching for discipleship the universal innate sense of moral obligation provides a helpful segue to point believers to their need to trust not in their own imperfect righteous deeds, but in the perfect righteousness of Jesus.²³ Indeed, the moral nature of God and humanity provide many opportunities for preaching that includes a moral apologetic component.

²² Baggett and Baggett devote an entire chapter to each of these categories in *The Morals of the Story*. Moral goodness relates to the existence of things that are genuinely good, as contrasted to those that are genuinely evil. Moral obligations relate to the sense of oughtness associated with morality and moral goodness. Moral knowledge relates to the man's ability to know that there are genuine moral goodness exists. Moral transformation relates to the awareness and experience of genuine change in a person's moral acts and abilities. Moral providence relates to man's highest good being found in a right moral relationship with God and others.

²³ In the researcher's own discipleship preaching he regularly uses a sermon structure designed to emphasize the concomitance between moral apologetics (in the broader sense of arguing morally based on God's existence) and transformation. The method, developed by the researcher during his DMin studies in 2012-2015, is based on the acrostic COACH: Connect to a genuine need for transformation in the believer's life, Orient the discussion of the need to the Word of God, Apply the challenge and importance of the needed transformation to specific life instances, Cultivate the proper "I can't" tension by emphasizing that the believer must look to Christ for her righteousness and moral transformation, and Heal with the gospel as applied to believers with the goal of seeing them renew their resolve to live holy while trusting wholly in Christ for their righteousness before God. This type of sermon structure may be adapted for evangelism or discipleship.

Centering Evangelistic Preaching On Sin, Righteousness, And Redemption

Related to the reason just discussed, but specifically focused on apologetic preaching for evangelism, the moral center of the gospel regarding sin, righteousness, and redemption also reveals a vital link between preaching and moral apologetics. Consider this point related to the categories of moral facts discussed by Baggett and Baggett: goodness, obligations, knowledge, transformation, and providence.²⁴ Can the gospel be preached without speaking of moral goodness, since “no one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18)? No. Can the gospel be preached without speaking of moral obligations, since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23)? No. Can the gospel be preached without speaking of moral knowledge, since “what may be known of God is manifest in [all persons]...His invisible attributes...even His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:18-20)? No. Can the gospel be preached without speaking of moral transformation, since the gospel reveals that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17)? No. Can the gospel be preached without speaking of moral providence, since the gospel reveals that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16), even though “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19)? No.

To preach the gospel is to preach regarding moral goodness, moral obligations, moral knowledge, moral transformation, and moral providence. Of course, it is possible that someone could attempt to preach the gospel without these moral facts, but what gospel would that be? It is also possible to confuse moral facts vis-à-vis the gospel with preaching

²⁴ Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, chap. 5-9.

moralism as a means to salvation. Yet, such possibilities notwithstanding, anyone who takes seriously the Bible and the evangelical faith revealed therein will recognize that to preach the gospel requires preaching about moral facts.

Engaging Passional Reason

This final part of consideration concerning the rationale for the reciprocal relationship between preaching and moral apologetics is, admittedly, one that is easily overlooked in discussion of the what and how of apologetics. Apologists are stereotyped, and sometimes deservedly so, as logic choppers whose primary engagement with life is cerebral and rational. To summarize a remark from one of the researcher's parishioners during a discussion following an apologetic conference a few years ago, it is apparent apologists have a head, but not always apparent that they have a heart. Is this a caricature? Certainly, but a caricature is a likeness to something real, albeit an exaggerated likeness. This is why it is important to remember that when apologetics is primarily cerebral and rational it is out of balance and possibly even unbiblical.

Consider how it might be unbiblical for apologetics to become primarily cerebral and rational. In Peter's words, the purpose of apologetics is to "give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). This passage reveals, among numerous other things, that apologetics is tied to hope, the hope abiding in a Christian even in the most difficult circumstances.²⁵ Such hope certainly contains a rational component, but it is more than a logical process that generates and sustains hope—hope

²⁵ For a helpful consideration of the broader context of Peter's words concerning apologetics and how they relate to the whole person and the centrality of hope in the gospel message, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *New American Commentary*, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 168-179.

involves the whole person's mind, will, and emotions in trusting God and knowing that He will take care of His children. Thus, to engage in apologetics is to engage in more than a cerebral consideration of premises and conclusions.

Further, if apologetics is only engaged in the rational components of fact and argumentation it is out of balance, since to be balanced in apologetics requires the passionate and affective elements of a person that are associated with hope and confidence in God. Balanced apologetics engages the whole person, appealing to what Wainwright describes as passionate reason, "the possession of the appropriate moral and spiritual temperament" as concomitant to reason in "track[ing] truth."²⁶ What Wainwright and others (e.g., Pascal) recognize is that there is a necessary relationship between a person's rational and affective capacities that come together in forming faith.²⁷

How does this relate to moral apologetics and preaching? Due to the innate moral aspects of personhood (e.g., conscience, judicial sentiment), the fundamental moral consideration associated with God's existence, and the *sensus divinitatis* found within all persons, moral apologetics in preaching offers a direct method of engaging the whole person on the levels of intellect, conscience, judicial sentiment, and the sense of the

²⁶ Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 5.

²⁷ An example of Pascal's appeal to what Wainwright describes as passionate reason with a moral apologetic bent is found in quotes like this one from Pascal's *Pensees*, "Men despise religion. They hate it fear it is true. To remedy this, we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason; that it is venerable, to inspire respect for it; then we must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true; finally, we must prove it is true. Venerable, because it has perfect knowledge of man; lovable because it promises the true good." One can readily see there is also a moral component to Pascal's thought of the gospel (what he calls religion), as he speak of the fear men have regarding its truth (with moral implications), and the possibility that good men will want it to be true, and that believers should show its truth (a reference to living as much as argumentation), because it reveals who man is (moral implications) and what is the true good (moral implications). See Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. W. F. Trotter (1567; repr., London: GlobalGrey, 2017), 49.

divine.²⁸ Consider how all of these elements are present in the response of the hearers to Peter's evangelistic sermon on Pentecost, which included claims of Christ's divinity, Israel's moral culpability for rejecting Him, and the possibility of change upon repentance and faith: "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins'" (Acts 2:37-38). Peter's preaching was clear, there is a moral component to the gospel, and the response of the hearers was also clear as they responded with mind and heart to the message. This example reveals that moral apologetics in preaching is important because it offers an opportunity for preachers to engage the passionate reason of hearers in a unique, powerful manner.

Before concluding the discussion of this reason for the importance of preaching and moral apologetics, it is worth considering the relationship between moral apologetics and what has been described as an existential argument for God's existence. The form of the argument here is from Clifford Williams, author of *Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense Of Desires And Emotions For Faith*²⁹ In syllogistic form, Williams's arguments is as follows:

P1: We need cosmic security. We need to know that we will live beyond the grave in a state that is free from the defects of this life, a state that is full of goodness and justice. We need a more expansive life, one in which we love and are loved. We need meaning, and we need to know that we are forgiven for going astray. We need to experience awe, to delight in goodness and to be present with those we love.

²⁸ For a discussion of conscience, judicial sentiment, and *sensus divinitatis* under the broader penumbra of a systematic theological consideration of anthropology, see Dorman, *A Faith for All Seasons*, 3-8.

²⁹ Clifford Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense of Desires and Emotions for Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011).

P2: Faith in God satisfies these needs.

C: Therefore, we are justified in having faith in God.³⁰

This presentation from Williams, though not exclusively focused on moral apologetics, certainly includes key moral elements (e.g., “free from the defects of this life...goodness and justice...to know that we are forgiven for going astray...to delight in goodness”³¹), and those moral elements are both rational (e.g., wanting goodness and justice, and to receive forgiveness) and affective (e.g., wanting freedom from defect, and to delight in what is good). Thus, the preacher utilizing moral apologetics certainly has a powerful means at his disposal when it comes to reaching hearers via their passionate reason.

Two Types Of Apologetic Preaching

Moving from an inquiry into the rationale for a coalescence of preaching and apologetics, in a general sense for all apologetics, and in a special sense related moral apologetic, the focus of the research turns to an exploration of two types of apologetics preaching. First, apologetic preaching as evangelism, and second, apologetic preaching as discipleship. Each type of preaching is initially considered relative to its distinctives, and then a biblical example of each type is explored.

Apologetic Preaching As Evangelism

Distinctives Of Apologetic Preaching As Evangelism

Before considering a few of the distinctives of apologetic preaching as evangelism, it will help to review the definition of evangelistic preaching offered in chapter one.

³⁰ Ibid., 32.

³¹ Williams, *Existential Reasons*, 32.

Evangelistic preaching, or preaching as evangelism, is preaching focused specifically on presenting the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone to skeptics and seekers with the goal of seeing them come into a saving relationship with God. In relating evangelism to apologetics, the priority is to understand that evangelism is the goal toward which apologetics is a means. Though evangelism may occur without apologetics, when apologetics are used with unbelievers the goal should be oriented toward evangelism.

The point of these principles is that apologetic preaching as evangelism is never simply about besting an opponent or winning an argument, it is about seeing seekers and skeptic come to seriously consider the good news of God's offer of salvation. Winning a soul, not an argument, is the goal of apologetic preaching as evangelism. With this in mind, the distinctives of apologetic preaching for evangelism are engaging the unbeliever's worldview; employing a word-and-deed approach; and utilizing multiple mediums to communicate the gospel.

Engaging The Unbeliever's Worldview

Apologetic preaching as evangelism is an attempt to engage the worldview of a seeker or skeptic. Worldview refers to the philosophical, religious, and cultural beliefs that coalesce to provide a lens through which a person views the world around them. Sire explains that a worldview answers the following questions: What is prime reality—the really real? What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us? What is a human being? What happens to a person at death? Why is it possible to know anything at

all? How do we know what is right and wrong? What is the meaning human history? What personal, life-orienting commitments are consistent with this worldview?³²

Regarding preaching with worldview in mind, Keller explains that the evangelistic preacher's calling is to identify and relevantly apply the gospel to the "baseline cultural narratives" of a particular audience.³³ Doing so takes into consideration the following commitments on the part of the one doing apologetic preaching as evangelism: the preacher must know how the Christian worldview answers the questions related to all worldviews; he needs to determine how to approach each worldview question/aspect with a view to tying the presentation in with the gospel (i.e., asking, How does the gospel apply to this particular concern/cultural narrative about the worldview question being considered?); and he should respectfully engage the hearer's worldview, remembering that the hearer is usually unaware of the problems with his worldview, or that Christianity has anything substantive to say regarding that worldview.

Concerning the likelihood that the average seeker or skeptic is ignorant of the relevance of Christianity, Keller laments that, "religion is now almost the enemy. That is why for many today religious faith seems so unimaginable as to be crazy...Science and objective reason, it is said, have subtracted God from the imagination of modern people and left behind secularity."³⁴ Preachers are certainly called to enter into this context and offer the Christian message in the form of apologetic preaching for evangelism, but doing so requires preparation and a persisting consciousness of the importance of worldview.

³² James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 21-23.

³³ Keller, *Preaching*, chap. 5, par. 7., Kindle.

³⁴ Keller, *Preaching*, chap 5., par. 7-8. The latter part of Keller's statement reflects the influence of Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2007), 22. See also Craig A. Loscalzo, *Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).

Employing A Word-And-Deed Approach

The old adage that gospel needs hands and feet as well as a voice is certainly apropos when it comes to apologetic preaching as evangelism. To be sure, nothing replaces the preached word—no commitment to social justice, or humanitarian efforts, or benevolent sacrifices will ever replace the gospel as “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:17). However, as Ken Wytsma and Rick Gerhardt’s insights reveal, the biblical approach to apologetics includes an element of servanthood and practicality that goes beyond making claims and presenting arguments. “For most people,” they write, “the truth of any worldview is logically linked to practical applications. If Christianity is—as its apologists claim—the accurate understanding of reality, then it ought to result in practices that offer hope and solutions to the obvious brokenness of our world.”³⁵

What does this type of word and deed approach to apologetics consist of? One need look no farther than the nascent Christian community described in Acts 2:42-47 to find an example of the concomitance of word and deed in the wake of apologetic preaching for evangelism. Luke explains that the believers “had all things in common, and sold their possessions and good, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45), and that the believers were “breaking bread from house to house, [eating] their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46). What was the result of these two activities—benevolent giving to meet the needs of others and simple living in community? Luke describes the results as follows, “having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to

³⁵ Ken Wytsma and Rick Gerhardt, “Social Justice and a New Kind of Apologist,” in *A New Kind of Apologist*, ed. Sean McDowell (Eugene: Harvest House, 2018), 62.

the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).³⁶ Luke is not describing some form of Christian Socialism or Christian Communism. The giving was voluntary and need-based, and there is no indication in the text that owing private property was discouraged.³⁷ However, the Christians message was being preached and practiced as evidence of the gospel’s transformative power—proof of a word-and-deed approach.

While there are certainly those occurrences in the early church that are descriptive rather than prescriptive (e.g., the way the Holy Spirit came on separate groups of people), this account of the church’s practice is both descriptive and prescriptive. The church that preaches the gospel with evangelistic and apologetic zeal—one must recall that the primary audience to the preaching were Jews who required a clear and convincing apologetic regarding Jesus as Messiah—will support that preaching with practical acts of service and social concern.³⁸ Word is primary in apologetic preaching for evangelism, but deed is a vital corollary that helps incarnate the preached message.

Utilizing Multiple Mediums To Communicate

How should the one engaged in apologetic preaching for evangelism choose to communicate the gospel message? This is not a question of whether preaching should be replaced with some other medium such as drama or movies or song. Rather, this is a

³⁶ For a thorough background and exegesis of this passage, see John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *New American Commentary*, eds. E Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 118-122.

³⁷ Commenting on the benevolence of the nascent Christian community, Polhill states, “verse 45...speaks against the early Christian community adopting a practice of community ownership. The imperfect tense is used, indicating that this was a recurrent, continuing practice: their practice was to sell their property and goods and apportion the proceeds whenever a need arose This is much more in keeping with the Old Testament ideal of community equality, of sharing with the needy so that ‘there will be no poor among you’ (Deut. 15:4).” Polhill, *Acts*, 120.

³⁸ As an historic example of the power of word and deed in apologetic preaching for evangelism, see George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), chap. 2.

question of what types of content provide the best mediums to convey the gospel in an apologetic evangelistic sermon. Before considering a few possibilities, it will help to clarify why the discussion of mediums is important. Mediums relate to the broader question of how people best receive information, especially information that makes claims about absolute truth in the contemporary post-modern milieu. Commenting on the challenge of doing apologetics today, Markos states that “postmoderns yearn to break out of the box in search of mystery, wonder, and awe. As a result, they tend to privilege intuition, imagination, and synthesis over logic, reason, and analysis.”³⁹

The challenge the apologist faces is how to appreciate and tap into these ways of relating while still holding true to the core message of the gospel. One extreme is to sacrifice everything on the altar of relevance, and another is to refuse to adopt the methods to current needs for fear of compromising the message. Neither of these two options reflect the dynamic of incarnation seen in Scripture and exemplified in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).⁴⁰ There must be a way, however, to reach a culture where it is and how it thinks and relates with the ageless message of the gospel.

This is where apologetic preaching for evangelism can benefit from the works of such notable authors as G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis, who both captured the imagination and heart of their respective generations by using mediums like fiction to present the core teachings of Christianity. What reader will forget Aslan as a type of Christ in Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, or the impish man who was transformed when the angel

³⁹ Louis Markos, *Apologetics for the 21st Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 195.

⁴⁰ An example of this type of incarnational ministry is Paul’s description in 1 Cor. 9:22-23 of his willingness to “become all things to all men...for the gospel’s sake.”

killed the creature depicting lust in Lewis's *The Great Divorce*? Likewise, any reader of Chesterton's fiction will recognize that he masterfully wove themes of good and evil, mercy and forgiveness, and reason and faith into his *Father Brown Mysteries*. Does this mean that the one engaged in apologetic preaching for evangelism must become a master writer? Of course not, but it will likely help his preaching if he learns to use imagination and supposal and metanarrative story elements to reach his audience.⁴¹

Admittedly, there is much to learn in this area, and there may be evangelicals who consider such approaches syncretistic and instances of compromise, but even a brief perusal of Jesus's preaching reveals His use of means to capture the imagination and wonder of His hearers in familiar ways. "A sower went out to sow" (Matt. 13:3), and "the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants" (Matt. 18:23) are two examples of Jesus' use of imaginative language for the sake of reaching an audience. The history of preaching is replete with similar examples of preachers using various means to communicate the gospel in a relevant manner, and the one who practices apologetic preaching for evangelism today should expect to do the same.

Apologetic Preaching As Evangelism In Acts 17:16-32

Having considered the distinctives of apologetic preaching as evangelism, it is appropriate to turn to the text of Scripture to see if an example of such preaching is present. One such example does exist in the message Paul delivered to the philosophers and others

⁴¹ For a discussion of the role of metanarrative in reaching post-modern audiences, see Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 273-288.

gathered on Mars Hill in Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:16-32.⁴² Though beyond the current research concern to provide a detailed exegesis of the passage, there are points to consider regarding the text in relation to apologetic preaching as evangelism: Paul's motivation for the message he delivered; his use of common ground in introducing his message; his appropriation of natural theology and cultural elements in his message; and his segue to the gospel and an appeal to the audience at the conclusion of his message.

Paul's Motivation

What motivated Paul when he came to Athens was what would eventually lead to his opportunity to preach on Mars Hill. According to v. 16, when Paul arrived in Athens “his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols,” and this led him to act and to begin preaching apologetically for the sake of evangelism. “Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there [and] he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection” (vv. 17-18). Notice the connection between what Paul felt and what Paul did—he felt anger over the idolatry of the city, and he made an impassioned argument to Jews and Gentiles for the divinity of Jesus and His resurrection.⁴³ Thus, relative to apologetic preaching for evangelism Paul demonstrates his awareness of the culture he is serving, is motivated by concern for its spiritual darkness, and takes specific action in ways appropriate to each of his audiences.

⁴² Similar instances of apologetic evangelistic preaching include Peter before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4, Peter at Cornelius's house in Acts 10, and Paul at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13. In each instance the presentation of Christ's deity, death, and resurrection (i.e., the gospel) are followed by some type of “so what” question to address why the gospel matters.

⁴³ The phrase “was provoked” in sixteen translates the Greek *paroxyno*, infuriated; and the word “reasoned” in seventeen translates the Greek *dialegomai*, to argue, preach. Polhill, *Acts*, 365-366; Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG, 1992), 455.

Paul's Use Of Common Ground

After Paul begins by connecting with the audiences he relates to in the Jewish synagogue and the marketplace (v. 17), he eventually is invited to speak to a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers assembled on Mars Hill (vv. 18-19).⁴⁴ They are curious about what they hear Paul preaching about Jesus and the resurrection and conclude “he seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods” (v. 18). Paul makes his way to the designated place for delivering his message, noticing along the way the numerous idols and altars, and begins his message by saying, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with the inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (vv. 22-23). Paul shared a common religious interest with the Athenians, and he exploited it for the sake of the gospel. Commenting on Paul’s approach in this passage, Bock observes that “here we see a key way to introduce the Christian message for an audience that is unfamiliar with the story of God’s activity as revealed in Scripture. Most people believe in the existence of God and grant that we are accountable to him, providing a starting point for proclamation.”⁴⁵ When the preacher turns to apologetic preaching for evangelism, following Paul’s example of starting with common ground between preacher and audience is a solid first step forward with the gospel message.

⁴⁴ As a former Pharisee, Paul would have had a strong connection with the Jews he encountered, and as a tentmaker, he would have also had awareness of the marketplace and its customs. These both helped him relate to his audience.

⁴⁵ Darrel L. Bock, “Acts”, in *The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible: The Gospels and Acts*, ed. Jeremy Royal Howard (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2013), chap. 5, 17:24, Kindle.

Paul's Use Of Natural Theology And Cultural Elements

Beginning in v. 24 and concluding in v. 29, Paul makes significant use of natural theology and cultural elements to develop his message. While some perceive this as Paul's commitment to a particular apologetic methodology (i.e., classical apologetics that first argue for the existence of God and then move to specific Christian content⁴⁶), the point here is that Paul made ample use of what his audience would have understood through their cultural commitments and worldview. The researcher has written elsewhere that "out of the ten verses in Paul's message (totaling 269 words), eight [of the verses] deal with themes from general revelation ([accounting for] 218 of the 269 words)." Here is a breakdown of how Paul used natural theology and known culture in his message:

1. The human sense of the divine (*sensus divinitatis*): "in all things you are very religious" (vv. 22-23)
2. God is Creator: "who made the world" (v. 24)
3. God is sovereign: "Lord of heaven and earth" (v. 24)
4. God is not an idol: "does not dwell in temples," is not "worshiped with men's hands" (vv. 24-25); "we ought not to think the Divine Nature is like...something shaped by art and man's devising" (v. 29)
5. God is the source of all life: "gives to all life, breath, and all things" (v. 25)
6. God is the origin of all people/nations: "made from one blood every nation" (v. 26)
7. God is personal/directs history: "has determined their preappointed times" (v. 26)
8. God is immanent: "not far from each one of us" (v. 27)
9. Known poetry (culture) provides a reference to God: "as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'" (v. 28)
10. God is the source and sustainer of all life: "in Him we live and move and have our being," and "we are also His offspring" (v. 28)⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Thomas J. Gentry, "Unleashing Faith by Bearing One Another's Burdens: An Exploration of the Biblical Rationale for and Practice of Christians Helping Christians through Lay Counseling Ministries," *Aletheias*, (Spring 2017), 167-170, <https://fellowshipinchrist.org/files/GentryArticles/3.29.17-Aletheias.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Adapted from Gentry, "Unleashing Faith," 167-168. Based on Paul's use of natural theology and cultural ideas, as well as the location of the message, a reasonable case can be made that Paul's experience has a parallel the trial of Socrates, also accused of introducing new gods; a key difference is between Paul's reference to the "times of ignorance" now ending, whereas Socrates spoke of them as continuing in his day. See Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 17-29; and Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts, the Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), part 3, Acts 17:16—18:17, par. 8, Kindle.

Paul's actions in regard to natural theology and culture reveal a willingness and capability on his part to find meaningful ways to deliver an apologetic evangelistic sermon in a relevant manner. He uses the metanarrative of human existence and religious impulse, what Mikeal Parsons describes as, "the fullest and most dramatic speech of Paul's missionary career."⁴⁸ Preachers who preach apologetic evangelistic sermons would do well to emulate Paul in this practice.

Paul's Segue To The Gospel And Appeal To The Audience

Interestingly, Paul's message in Athens ended without much fanfare and very little explicit biblical content. Not that Paul did not share the gospel on Mars Hill, but his presentation appears rather truncated and even pithy. He segues to the gospel by declaring that God "commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (vv. 30-31). With that brief presentation his message ended with a proclamation of the resurrection, and his hearers then made one of three responses. Luke reports that "and when they heard of the resurrection, some mocked while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.'... However, some men joined him and believed" (vv. 32, 34). Some hearers reject the gospel, some remain curious, and some repent and believe.

What these verses at the end of the message imply is that Paul's presentation came across in such a way that the hearers sensed there was a decision to make regarding what they heard. While not an overt example of an invitation at the conclusion of a gospel

⁴⁸ Parsons, *Acts*, part 3, Acts 17:16—18:17, par. 9.

message, the basic elements are present—Paul warns of future judgment, preaches Jesus and the resurrection, and people make a decision.⁴⁹ Part of the significance of this for those preaching apologetic evangelistic messages is that no matter what the road is to get the hearers to the destination, remember that the destination is the coming judgment and Jesus and His resurrection. Also, it is helpful to remember that Paul’s experience reveals that even the best apologists preach evangelistic sermons that receive mixed responses, so leave the responses to “God who gives the increase” (1 Cor. 3:7).

Apologetic Preaching As Discipleship

Distinctives Of Apologetic Preaching As Discipleship

As defined in chapter one, discipleship preaching or preaching as discipleship is preaching focused specifically on presenting Scripture to believers “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16), so the goal of discipleship preaching, therefore, is to aid the community of followers of Christ in knowing and doing the will of God. When coupled with apologetics, such preaching serves to help believers overcome doubt and to acquire apologetic knowledge, so they can better “give a reason for the hope that is in [them]” (1 Pet. 3:15). As part of a complex of faith formation led by the Holy Spirit, “apologetics...equips the questioning or doubting Christian to find the intellectual confidence to be a wise witness to the truth of the gospel.”⁵⁰ Distinctives of

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the theological content of the gospel invitation, see R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 37-53. Streett’s work also includes a consideration of the various types of invitations used by Paul in Acts, revealing a diversity of practice that was adapted to each situation—sometimes the invitation was explicit and sometimes it was implied. Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 78-79.

⁵⁰ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity), chap. 2, par. 66, Kindle. Regarding doubt and the believer, there may be times when the issue involves matters of pastoral care more than apologetics, although the two need not be considered exclusively. Further, when addressing doubt it is helpful to identify the type, what Gary Habermas explains

this type are preaching include: removing obstacles to Christian growth; teaching the “how” of apologetics; and aiding in guarding the flock.

Removing Obstacles To Christian Growth

Growing, active Christians will inevitably experience doubts about the content of their faith or the surety of their relationship with the Lord as they grow and are tested (cf. James 1:2-8). To paraphrase Luther, the Christian cannot control the doubts that come at him any more than a man can control the birds that fly around the trees in his yard.⁵¹ However, just as the man can take measures to keep the birds from nesting in his trees, so the Christian can take measures to keep doubt from taking root in his mind and heart. Also, if Christians are engaging their culture and sharing their faith, they will eventually encounter someone who is hostile to the faith and armed with one or more seemingly substantive arguments.

When Christians experience these challenges, apologetic preaching for discipleship can help by addressing the doubts and providing the answers to challenges to the faith. Sometimes doubt is intellectual, sometimes it is emotional, and sometimes it is a matter of refusing to believe out of rebellion.⁵² Regardless of its source, apologetics through preaching can help the Christian move past doubt to faith and obedience. Habermas explains that apologetics is like a coin with two-sides: one side focuses on those who are not yet Christians, and the other side focuses on those who already believe.⁵³ Both are

as factual, emotional, or volitional instances of doubt. Gary R. Habermas, *Dealing with Doubt* (Chicago: Moody, 1990).

⁵¹ Martin Luther, “Controlling Your Thoughts,” in *Faith Alone*, ed. James C. Galvin (1546; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 67.

⁵² Gary Habermas, class notes of this student in APOL 910, Apologetic Methodology, Liberty University, Fall 2016.

⁵³ Habermas, class notes of this student.

legitimate roles for apologetics, and when a pastor knows this and takes seriously his responsibility to preach sermons that include apologetics, he helps his congregation grow in spiritual maturity.

Teaching The “How” Of Apologetics

Like it or not, a preacher’s congregation will learn how to do certain things by the way the preacher does them. For instance, how a preacher regularly explains the gospel at the time of invitation will have a pedagogical effect on the congregation over time, and they will likely explain the gospel in similar terms to what they have regularly heard the preacher use. This is not necessarily a problem if the preacher is careful of his method and cognizant that he is teaching by doing, especially in the pulpit. The upside to this phenomenon is that when it comes to apologetic preaching as discipleship, a preacher can both equip the saints with apologetic content and with apologetic presentation skills.

Though the congregation will not necessarily acquire the precision and polish of their pastor, they can learn the basics from his delivery method. This is, in part, how Augustine taught his mentees to preach and teach during his years of ministry as pastor and bishop in North Africa. Edward Smither explains that, “the daily disciplines of prayer, scriptural study, and reading, as well as regular interaction with Augustine’s teaching, prepared many monks for a possible future in church ministry.”⁵⁴ Augustine certainly did more to train the monks he shepherded than simply preach and teach. However, they regularly heard his preaching in worship and structured teaching in various forms of

⁵⁴ Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008), 146.

colloquia.⁵⁵ Smither also reports that much of Augustine's apologetic material (e.g., against the Donatists, against Pelagius, against the Manicheans) was developed and presented in the context of training his mentees.⁵⁶ Thus, Augustine provides an excellent example of how what is said in a sermon or teaching will both convey content and method to the hearers that desire to learn. Apologetic preaching for discipleship is one of the means to convey such content and methods to the people of God.

Aiding In Guarding The Flock

When pastors commit to apologetic preaching as discipleship, whether for a specific series of messages or as an ongoing practice in all messages, they are helping maintain the right and left limits of orthodoxy within the congregation.⁵⁷ This aspect of apologetic preaching is sometimes either overlooked due to the primary focus on answering criticism leveled against the faith and in helping unbelievers overcome obstacles to belief. However, faithful and regular apologetics in the pulpit sets a certain tone in the congregation, making clear that false teaching and attacks on the faith will be addressed, and biblical orthodoxy will be maintained in the spirit of speaking the truth in love for the sake of edifying and protecting the body (cf. Eph. 4:11-16; Jude 3). This practice is not a guarantee against the rise of false teaching or unintentional heterodoxy among the brethren, especially since there are innumerable other ways people hear preaching and Christian

⁵⁵ Smither, *Augustine as Mentor*, 146-148.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁷ Though the researcher regularly delivers focused apologetic messages as discipleship preaching, he has grown in his practice of taking necessary apologetic excursions during messages that are not otherwise apologetic in orientation. For example, if preaching about the blessing of the resurrection vis-à-vis justification, it is likely that a side point will be offered about the reliability of the resurrection accounts in the Bible. This can be accomplished in just a few minutes, and the overall effect on the congregation and the sermon is a sense of confidence and legitimacy as the Christian message is presented as true and reliable.

content outside their local church. However, as Don Howell's study of Paul's leadership reveals, through regular preaching that explains and defends the Christian message, a congregation can and will gravitate toward consistent orthodoxy based on the "word of God [that] is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).⁵⁸

There is also historical support for the use of apologetics in protecting the church's doctrine. Douglas Taylor's exploration of the role of positive apologetics in the first three centuries of church demonstrates precedent for apologetics in this role.⁵⁹ Taylor explains that through the use of apologetics the early church stood firm against encroaching heresy by offering "justification for belief in and commendation of Christianity."⁶⁰ When faced with attempts by heretics to alter "one or more aspects of the deity, death, and resurrection reports as they related to Jesus," these early apologists helped "establish the credibility of Christianity."⁶¹ Likewise, when pastors commit to apologetic preaching today they help believers live within a hostile culture without sacrificing their distinctive beliefs. Perhaps one of the greatest though underutilized weapons in the preacher's arsenal when it comes to doctrinal purity is the practice of regular apologetic preaching for discipleship.

Apologetic Preaching As Discipleship In Jude

Jude's epistle, though only a short twenty-five verses, represents one of the clearest examples of apologetic preaching as discipleship in the entire Bible. Probably written for

⁵⁸ Don N. Howell, *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 256-264.

⁵⁹ Douglas E. Taylor, "One from the Beginning: A Proposed Apologetic for the Growth of the Church from AD 30-250" (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2018), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the purpose of being used as a sermon in churches comprised of primarily Jewish converts to Christianity,⁶² Jude offers several helpful considerations regarding preaching, apologetics, and discipleship, including: his purpose; his arguments; his presentation of moral and doctrinal exposé and instruction; and his reminders to the congregation.

Jude's Purpose

Immediately after greeting his audience, Jude declares the reason for his writing, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3). The first part of the verse reveals Jude’s pastoral intention to instruct the believers in their shared faith, and the last part reveals his pastoral concern that his focus must change to an apologetic matter (“contend earnestly”) related to the Christian faith (“the faith...once for all delivered”). Regarding this apologetic concern, Duskocil explains that “the verb for contend earnestly (*epagonizomai*) occurs only here in the [New Testament]. It was used to describe athletes in competition striving with great intensity for victory,” and that “since this faith was once for all delivered to the saints, every Christian, not just church leaders, is to defend Biblical [sic] truth from erroneous teachings of false teachers.”⁶³ This second point offered by Duskocil is especially apropos when considering why Jude is urging believers to the apologetic task of “striving with great intensity”—Jude knows that apologetic is the calling of all believers, and his goal is to urge

⁶² “Jude offers us a sermon in rhetorical form that has only an epistolary opening to indicate that it came to the audience in a written form, though it was likely delivered orally at the point of destination. We must think constantly in terms of the oral majority of the culture and how literate persons like Jude were trying to speak into their situations.” Ben Witherington III, “Jude: Another Brother’s Sermon,” in *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 560.

⁶³ Brad Duskocil, “Jude,” in the *Grace New Testament Commentary: 1-2 Peter and Jude* (Denton: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), II.A., pars. 3-4, Kindle.

them to fulfill their calling in defense of the faith. Jude continues in v. 4 by identifying the exact nature of the apologetic concern, “certain men have crept in unnoticed...ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Though discussed further below, Jude reveals the concern has a moral aspect (“ungodly men...lewdness”), and a theological aspect (“deny the Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ”). Thus, Jude is insistent that every believer must take up the apologetic fight with intensity in defending the common Christian doctrine and practice. Any pastor who would engage in apologetic preaching for the sake of discipleship will press upon his hearers the same concern with the same urgency. The faith must be defended.

Jude’s Apologetic Arguments

Jude’s arguments contain several elements related to apologetic preaching for discipleship. He makes clear that the concern is no mere secondary matter of private interpretation or personal conviction but is a direct attack on the grace of God in word and deed (vv. 4, 19). Further, with his focus identified, Jude presents a case against the teachers and their error beginning with references to the Old Testament and apocryphal books/accounts known to the readers (vv. 5-11), thereby establishing his argument under the auspices of divine revelation and communal knowledge.⁶⁴ Jude is also adamant that there is judgement coming to the false teachers and those who follow their errors (vv. 12-15). He is addressing something that is more than a mere theoretical issue, but one with eternal significance (vv. 14-15).

⁶⁴ Compare Schreiner, *Jude*, 447-451, and Witherington, *Jude*, 623-625.

Though sounding a strong warning, Jude also offers assurance to the believers that what is happening is not something to be surprised about or fear, but something that is concomitant with living in the Last Days (vv. 16-18). Finally, Jude ends his argument with a note of pastoral direction regarding helping those caught in the errors (vv. 20-23), and pastoral comfort based on the character and faithfulness of God (vv. 24-25).⁶⁵ Through the entire presentation, Jude remains focused on the apologetic issue and his concern for the congregation, providing warning and consolation in the face of pernicious moral and doctrinal error.

Jude's Moral And Doctrinal Exposé And Instruction

As Jude makes his apologetic argument, he is clear to expose and instruct regarding the moral and doctrinal errors of the false teachers. In what some preachers today might find a refreshing example of pastoral authority and directness, Jude does not hesitate to use strong descriptive language to make his point: “marked out for this condemnation” (v. 4), “lewdness...denying the only Lord God” (v. 4), “dreamers[that] defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries” (v. 8), “like brute beasts...corrupt themselves” (v. 10), “Woe to them!” (v. 11), “serving only themselves...twice dead” (v. 12), “for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (v. 13), “ungodly sinners” (v. 15), “grumblers, complainers” (v. 16), “mockers...walk[ing] according to their own ungodly lusts” (v. 18), “not having the Spirit” (v. 19).

⁶⁵ Regarding the pastoral significance of Jude's concluding doxology, Watson explains that, “by ending his appeal with a focus upon God, Christ, and their future hope, his audience is ever more persuaded to act as Jude advises.” Duane F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (Latvia: Scholars Press, 1988), 76.

It is difficult to conceive that anyone who received Jude's message, including the false teachers, would be unclear on the seriousness of the moral and doctrinal sins that precipitated an apologetic sermon to warn, motivate, and instruct the brethren. This aspect of apologetic preaching for discipleship takes courage and discernment, lest the preacher go the extreme of avoiding issue or the extreme of preaching only judgment. Paul's counsel to the Ephesians is helpful at this point, "speaking the truth in love...grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

Jude's Reminders To The Congregation

One of the striking aspects of Jude's message to the believers is his instruction to commit to "building [themselves] up in [their] most holy faith...keep[ing themselves] in the love of God" (vv. 20-21), and "on some have compassion...but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire" (vv. 22-23). These two groupings of commands, the first directed to the believer's selfcare and the second to the believer's care of others, reveal that Jude's apologetic preaching included the expectation that the hearers would put into practice what they were taught. Yes, God keeps His people (v. 24), but this assurance is not a reason to do nothing. On the contrary, the outcome of apologetic preaching for discipleship is a better-equipped believer who knows what she believes, why she believes it, and how she must live in relation to her beliefs.

Calvin's comment on Jude's exhortation to the believers to take steps to strengthen themselves in the face of the false teachers offers a helpful insight. He explains that Jude "shows the manner in which they could overcome all devices of Satan, that is, by having love connected with faith, and by standing on their guard as it were in the watch-tower,

until the coming of Christ.”⁶⁶ Jude’s intention is both immediate and eschatological, looking to help sure up the believers presently and until Christ returns. This is a poignant reminder that apologetic preaching for discipleship (and evangelism) has a sense of the now-and-not-yet. As the disciple learns to defend the faith he becomes an ambassador for Christ in this world while helping others stand firm in anticipation of the next.

⁶⁶ John Calvin, “Jude,” in *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen, v. 20, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom45.viii.ii.viii.html>.

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BIBLICAL AND CULTURAL EXEGESIS: TWIN COMPONENTS FOR CONTEXTUALIZED MINISTRY IN THE GREAT COMMISSION ENTERPRISE

Dustin Conner*

Introduction

God textualized the redemptive narrative—the story of his mission to restore fallen mankind to its intended, harmonious state of unadulterated fellowship with Himself through the atonement accomplished Jesus Christ—within the sixty-six books of the Bible and sent his redeemed followers to proclaim this message of good news among all the nations of the earth. The Bible, as a text, details the purpose of God’s mission and how the church joins God’s mission through retelling the redemptive narrative within all cultural contexts—a concept derived from Matthew’s wording of the Great Commission for Jesus’s disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19a ESV). As Timothy Keller states, “The great missionary task is to express the gospel message to a new culture in a way that avoids making the message unnecessarily alien to that culture, yet without removing or obscuring the scandal and offense of biblical truth.”¹ How can the church best retell God’s redemptive story among various cultural contexts that have their own worldview narratives expressed in various texts that inform their beliefs, customs, and activities?

Retelling God’s redemptive story faithfully among the nations requires each disciple of Christ to deeply understand two things: 1) how to rightly understand the

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¹ Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 89.

meaning of each passage of the Bible individually and as part of the whole corpus of Scripture and 2) how to understand a specific cultural context in order to appropriately communicate God's message of redemption—especially the texts and stories that narrate that culture's worldview and beliefs. Kevin Vanhoozer explains, "If the theologian is to minister the Word of God to today's world, both the Word and the world must be understood. Theology must engage in both biblical and cultural hermeneutics."² Biblical and cultural exegesis, though unique in purpose, function uniformly and are equally essential in Great Commission enterprises. Therefore, the Christian missionary must simultaneously exegete the text of Scripture and the texts produced by the receptor culture in order to communicate appropriately a contextualized gospel message within that particular context. The effective missionary exposit God's Word faithfully through exegetical labor and elucidates the culture's deep gospel needs through growing in cultural literacy. Doing so results in contextualized spiritual formation adapted for the receptor culture. Missiologist Gaylin Van Rhee's *Missional Helix* suggests a framework for explaining and demonstrating the interconnectedness of biblical exegesis (especially as it relates to expositional teaching) with cultural exegesis (especially as it relates to cultural literacy) for developing contextualized ministry praxis for the purpose of spiritual formation.

Defining And Distinguishing Biblical And Cultural Exegesis

Biblical exegesis and cultural exegesis must be understood in their proper spheres in order to explain their unique roles and relationship in developing contextualized ministry

² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 311.

practice. The parameters of biblical hermeneutics allow the process of exegesis to yield faithful exposition of the Scriptures resulting in an understanding of God’s revealed Word. Likewise, the parameters of cultural hermeneutics allow the process of cultural exegesis to yield cultural literacy of a particular culture’s texts, worldview, and needs resulting in an understanding of the cultural narratives needing to be challenged with the gospel narrative. Proper contextualized gospel ministry—whether ministered in word or deed—depends upon the missionary’s conversance in both fields. Therefore, defining “biblical hermeneutics,” “exegesis,” and “exposition” will help detail the missionary’s theological labor in the Scriptures while “cultural hermeneutics,” “cultural exegesis,” and “cultural literacy” will help detail the missionary’s relational labor among the people whom God has sent them to proclaim the gospel. Defining the interrelated nature of these various concepts related to biblical and cultural exegesis will then help clarify the missiologial task of “contextualization” in relationship to interpreting Scripture and culture.

Explaining Biblical Exegesis

Hermeneutics—the science, methods, or principles of biblical interpretation—provides guidelines for interpreting Scripture to help the interpreter accurately exegete the meaning of the biblical text with the goal of that meaning being applied. Grant Osborne describes hermeneutics as a science with its logical laws and orderly classifications, as an art that the interpreter develops as they acquire the right skills, and as a spiritual act led by the Holy Spirit.³ He also explains the goal of hermeneutics, “To discover the intention of

³ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (2d ed.; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2006), 21–22.

the Author/author (author = inspired human author; Author = God who inspires the text).”⁴ One must examine the biblical text in light of its historical context, grammatical and syntactical structure, and literary genre to deduce the meaning of the text to the original audience and its relevant meaning for a contemporary audience. Hermeneutics explores the divine communication between the communicator (God), his communication (the biblical text), and the receivers (God’s people) so that God’s people accurately understand the meaning of God’s words.⁵ Therefore, hermeneutics has the goal of interpretation leading to application by the Christian community.

Exegesis, “Is the process of determining the meaning of a text of Scripture, the word of God”⁶ or simply “Deriving one’s interpretation from the text.”⁷ Biblical exegesis endeavors to take out of or derive the intended meaning or understanding of the Scriptures. When deriving the interpretation of a biblical text, one must do so responsibly and ethically in order to understand what the author (God) wanted the original audience to know about his nature or will without adulterating the interpretation thereof with personal opinion or bias. Kostenberger and Patterson explain it well: “[The Bible] is an authorially shaped and designed product that requires careful and respectful interpretation. There is therefore an important ethical dimension in interpretation. We should engage in interpretation responsibly, displaying respect for the text and its author.”⁸

⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁵ Graemes Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 30–36.

⁶ Chester McCalley, “Biblical Exegesis and Exposition,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6, no. 4 (2000): 3.

⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 83.

⁸ Ibid., 58.

Proper exegetical analysis of a biblical text safeguards against the improper interpretation of that biblical text or “*eisegesis*.” Eisegesis, the result of poor exegesis, means “The practice of reading one’s presuppositions and opinions into a biblical text, rather than allowing the text to reveal its own meaning.”⁹ When the interpreter allows personal ideology to determine the meaning of the text instead of biblical theology, the result is a homily developed from personal preference at the expense of the biblical author’s intended meaning.¹⁰ Exegesis demands that the interpreter analyze the biblical text carefully and with much detail in order to faithfully interpret the text’s intended meaning.

Exposition entails the art of proclaiming—usually through a sermon or other Bible teaching method—the meaning of a biblical text so an audience can understand the meaning of the Scripture clearly and apply it to their daily living. Chester McCalley relates exegesis and the needs of the congregation to his definition of exposition as, “The skill of translating careful exegesis into food for sheep...We have congregations that come for food. They come to grow and to develop. Expository skill is taking all the technical data [from exegetical work] and presenting it in a form that sheep can understand.”¹¹ Timothy Keller, speaking of the two objects in view with preaching—God’s Word and the human listener—says, “It is not enough to just harvest the wheat; it must be prepared in some edible form or it can’t nourish and delight.”¹² The expositor must exegetically examine the language, structure, theme, and relation to the gospel of a biblical text using sound

⁹ Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Nelson Rummage. *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 41.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ McCalley, “Exegesis,” 15.

¹² Timothy J. Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015).

hermeneutical guidelines and accurately exposit its meaning and relevant application for an audience needing to be awakened to their need for Christ and his commands. Exegesis provides the basis for exposition so that a sermon comes *from* the text and is not imposed onto the text.¹³

Explaining Cultural Exegesis

In the fields of theology and Christian mission, *cultural hermeneutics* functions similarly to biblical hermeneutics by providing a framework to understand “The art and science of interpreting culture; the set of rules, guidelines, or principles for interpreting cultural texts and trends.”¹⁴ The principles of cultural hermeneutics guide the missionary in becoming a bicultural resident who develops mission praxes balanced with respectful understanding of the culture and fidelity to the gospel. Before comprehending the results of cultural hermeneutics rightly applied—cultural understanding, respect, and fluency—two key terms in the above definition— *culture* and *cultural texts*—need further clarification.

Culture is often relegated to just the language, music, art, food, and customs of a particular group of people in a particular location, but as Timothy Keller notes, “...properly understood, [culture] touches every aspect of how we live in the world. Culture takes the raw materials of nature and creates an environment... Culture affects every part of human life.”¹⁵ According to Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:15, God commands humanity to “fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” and to “work” and “keep” the physical earth and all its

¹³ . McCalley, “Exegesis,” 3.

¹⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 248.

¹⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 90.

elements that God has created for them to use. In essence, God commands them to cultivate (from which the word “culture” derives) or reform his creation for mankind’s good use. Bruce Ashford defines culture as, “Anything that humans produce when they interact with each other and with God’s creation. When we interact with the each other and with God’s creation, we cultivate the ground..., produce artifacts..., build institutions..., form worldviews..., and participate in religions...”¹⁶ Appropriate for this treatise, Vanhoozer’s definition of culture in *Everyday Theology* reveals the integrated nature of a culture and what it produces (cultural texts).

*...culture is made up of “works” and “worlds” of meaning. Culture is a work because it is the result of what humans do freely, not a result of what they do by nature. Culture is what we get when humans work the raw material of nature to produce something significant. Let us call the products of such work cultural texts...Culture is a world in the sense that cultural texts create a meaningful environment in which humans dwell both physically and imaginatively. Culture is the lens through which a vision of life and social order is expressed, experienced, and explored; it is a lived worldview.*¹⁷

As the Bible records the story of God, so a culture’s texts record the stories—past and present, despairing and hopeful—of that society. *Cultural texts* are the intentional products— movies, music, art, marketing campaigns, buildings, clothing, beauty products, social networking applications, etc.—that bear meaning and reflect a culture’s narratives, worldview, desires, and hopes. Therefore, cultural texts—because they are intentionally produced, have meaning, and reflect the culture—require interpretation.¹⁸

What a culture produces to encapsulate treasured concepts, ideals, or longings expresses Vanhoozer’s “works” of meaning, and what that culture does (and with whom)

¹⁶ Bruce Riley Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham, 2015), 13.

¹⁷ Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology*, 26.

¹⁸ Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology*, 248.

with those productions express his “worlds” of meaning that provide a “lived worldview” through which one interprets their own cultural situation. Therefore, mankind produces “culture” through its own efforts and labor, then, ironically, is shaped by the same cultural texts they produced.¹⁹ This begs the question: Can the people of a specific cultural context rescue themselves from the negative results generated by the selfish misuse of their own cultural texts? Cultural hermeneutics help the missionary analyze and assess a culture’s texts to provide a contextually appropriate, gospel-informed response.

Cultural exegesis, like biblical exegesis, aims to interpret a specific culture’s worldview, longings, and needs following appropriate hermeneutical guidelines. By examining and interpreting a culture’s texts and trends, the cultural exegeticist (missionary) draws out not only what that culture values but obstacles that hinder a gospel breakthrough. Just as biblical exegesis enables the expositor to accurately declare the intended meaning of Scripture to the listener, cultural exegesis equips the cross-cultural missionary to interpret the meaning of a culture’s texts and intelligibly converse with a person of a different cultural background based on a mutual understanding of the cultural texts and trends influencing that person.

Exegeting a cultural context for the purpose of gospel mission not only helps the missionary understand the culture but also safeguards against the dangers of ethnocentrism and syncretism. Monocultural people—those who understand and express only one culture—assume that all other people should be just as they are and resort to judging the customs and behaviors of those from different cultural backgrounds.²⁰ This cultural pride,

¹⁹ Bruce Riley Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 111.

²⁰ Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations & Contemporary Strategies* (2d ed.;

or *ethnocentrism*, hinders the missionary's effectiveness in the receptor culture since automatic adherence to their own culture's way of "doing" gospel mission is expected, and conveys a lack of respect for the new culture. Conversely, missionaries can cross into the blurry, dangerous lines of *syncretism*—the "Blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness and speaks with a voice reflective of its culture"²¹—when they "Attempt to make the gospel relevant to the culture" yet uncritically allow "the gospel [to be] absorbed into idolatrous forms, structures and categories of the culture and is consequently compromised."²² Cultural exegesis that begins and ends with the Scripture informing and determining the missionary's practice in the new culture answers, "How can we be faithful to the gospel (without being irrelevant) and relevant to the culture (without being syncretistic)?"²³

If the missionary fails to understand deeply the receptor culture, he will be inept at forging relationships, earning respect, communicating the gospel effectively, and creating cultural products that holistically enhance that cultural setting. Therefore, *cultural literacy*— "Minimally, the ability to 'read' or make sense of cultural texts and trends...; maximally, the ability to 'write' culture, that is, to use the resources of culture to make one's own meaningful statement"—is required of the missionary desiring to faithfully carry out the mission given the church to make disciples of all nations.²⁴ Vanhoozer details a helpful three-point summary of why Christians should work to become culturally literate

GrandRapids: Zondervan , 2014), 259.

²¹ Gailyn Van Rheenen, ed., *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2006), 8.

²² Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014), 269.

²³ *Ibid.*, 270.

²⁴ Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology*, 248.

of their mission field by learning to read culture. Christians should know how to read culture and its prevailing texts to “Know what is forming one’s spirit,” to “Be sure that the scripts they perform in everyday life are in accord with the Scriptures—the story of what God is doing in Jesus Christ through the Spirit to give meaning and life to the world—rather than some other story,” and to “Know where we are in the drama of redemption.”²⁵ Disciple-making cross-culturally demands the missionary know the receptor culture’s longings, worldview, and beliefs (reading culture) so deeply that they are able to create gospel-centered cultural products (write culture) that powerfully convey the meaningful, worldview-altering, transformative gospel message.

As biblical hermeneutics provide guidelines for interpreting God’s words textualized in the Scriptures, cultural hermeneutics provide interpretive guidelines for exegeting a culture’s narratives and desires textualized into cultural texts and trends. The missionary must seek to interpret both the products and related environments of activity of the receptor culture through a biblical filter in order to respond to the redemptive needs left in the wake of depraved cultural texts and customs perpetuating the sinful aspects of the culture. Gospel-centered cultural exegesis prevents the missionary from appearing ethnocentric, protects his mission praxis from becoming syncretistic, and produces a culturally literate missionary able to speak into and create new cultural products focused on Christ and His gospel.

²⁵ Ibid., 34.

Contextualization's Reliance On Biblical And Cultural Exegesis

Biblical exegesis derives from sound hermeneutics, safeguards against duplicitous eisegesis, and results practically in expositing God's truth to mankind through homily, biblical instruction, or evangelistic proclamation. Likewise, cultural exegesis relies on appropriate guidelines for cultural hermeneutics of a culture's texts and trends, assists in avoiding syncretism or ethnocentrism and produces a culturally literate missionary fit for the task of contextualizing ministry praxis. Together, biblical and cultural exegesis help generate contextualized gospel proclamation—through word and deed—appropriate for the missionary's disciple-making task. As Hesselgrave and Rommen assert in the opening section of their seminal work on the subject of contextualization, "The missionary's ultimate goal in communication has always been to present the supra-cultural message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms..." while safeguarding against the potential hazards of "...the perception of the communicator's own cultural heritage as an integral element of the gospel, and...a syncretistic inclusion of elements from the receptor culture which would alter or eliminate aspects of the message upon which the integrity of the gospel depends."

²⁶ Ultimately, contextualization deals with communication (both verbal and nonverbal), communication requires thoughts and symbols to be textualized in some fashion, and texts require interpretation using appropriate guidelines. Given the scope and importance of contextualization, an explanation of the term will help clarify its reliance on exegeting biblical and cultural texts.

²⁶ David J. Hesselgrave, and Edward Rommen, eds., *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 1.

Defining Contextualization²⁷

Much like the definition of culture, an understanding of the definition and application of “contextualization” vary among different Christian groups and missiologists.²⁸ Simply stated, contextualization endeavors to “Communicate the gospel in a more understandable, culturally relevant form”²⁹ or as Bruce Ashford asserts, “To proclaim and embody the gospel *in the midst of human cultures.*”³⁰ Timothy Keller’s definition of contextualization expresses well the thesis of this treatise by showing the personal nature of doing biblical and cultural exegesis for the purpose of contextualized communication of the gospel resulting in the spiritual formation of the receptor culture. He defines contextualization as, “Giving people *the Bible’s answers*, which they may not at all want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and place are asking, *in language and forms* they can comprehend, and *through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them.”³¹ The “*Bible’s answers*” relies on biblical exegesis, “*questions about life* that people...are asking” reflect the culture’s worldview often communicated in their cultural texts and requiring a level of cultural exegesis to understand, “*in language and forms* they can comprehend” explains the essence

²⁷ Reference pages 3–7 of *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* edited by Dr. Gailyn Van Rheenen for a list of several definitions of “contextualization” by various missiologists. Two definitions helpful in understanding the relationship of biblical and cultural exegesis are: “The attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word and will of God in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts” (Hesselgrave and Rommen, 200) and “Contextualization is just another name for the outcome of hermeneutics. It involves certain transformations of a text from one context to another in a way that aims at enabling it’s meaning to be understood in the receiving culture” (Goldsworthy, 275).

²⁸ Hesselgrave and Rommen describe the ambiguity surrounding the term in the 1980s (and even today): “There is not yet a commonly accepted definition of the word *contextualization*, but only a series of proposals, all of them vying for acceptance.” Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 35.

²⁹ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 2.

³⁰ Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 118.

³¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 89. Italics his.

of contextualization, and “*through appeals and arguments*” has the intended goal of the person’s response to and spiritual formation stemming from the gospel.

Critical Contextualization In Exegeting Scripture And Cultural Texts

Historically, the subject of contextualization rose to the forefront of missiological conversations as missionaries started realizing the destruction left in the wake of colonialism in missions. They began to “[recognize] that other cultures had to be understood and appreciated in terms of their own worldviews” not through a domineering Western worldview.³² Cross-cultural missionaries focused more on exegeting Scripture while on the mission field but less on the texts and trends of each individual receptor culture. As the importance of contextualized approaches to gospel proclamation and ecclesiastical structures rose in international missions, missionaries insisted on adopting, in general, one of three various views on the best practices for contextualization: minimal contextualization, uncritical contextualization, or critical contextualization.

Anthropological missiologist Paul Hiebert summarizes these three approaches in his essay “The Gospel in Human Contexts” in *MissionShift* and articulates a critical approach in terms of “divine revelation given in human contexts.”³³

Minimal Or Non-Contextualization

When a missionary assumes they can relate the gospel to the receptor culture regardless of cultural barriers and differences, contextualization of the gospel becomes a

³² Paul G. Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization.” *International Bulletin Of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (1987): 106.

³³ Paul G. Hiebert, “The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization,” in *MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (eds. David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer; Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 82–102.

non-issue. The receptor culture is expected to understand the propositions of the gospel as the missionary expounds them from his culturally shaped understanding of the Scriptures and to assimilate into ecclesiastical structures most familiar to the missionary. “New converts should learn from us and our ways and join us because we are Christians and this is the way we practice it.”³⁴ With this cultural elitism, the missionary sees no need to exegete the receptor culture’s texts and trends since they are automatically viewed as inferior.

Slightly past non-contextualization, minimal contextualization realizes the need for Bible translation and ecclesiastical structures better suited for the receptor culture yet fears too much adaptation will distort the gospel.³⁵ The missionary assumes an elitist viewpoint seeing the people of the receptor culture as “them” (even primitive) and fears their self-theologizing will detract from Scripture. The missionary rejects the culture’s texts, symbols, and customs believing they “...are inherently tied to their pagan meanings and therefore cannot be used by Christians” and imports Western forms of music, architecture, and liturgy.³⁶ Exegeting the receptor culture’s texts and products would only further the missionary’s biased presuppositions of the receptor culture’s worldview leading him to readily dismiss the deep gospel needs that the receptor culture conveys through their cultural products.

³⁴ Ibid., 85.

³⁵ Ibid., 88.

³⁶ Ibid., 89.

Uncritical Contextualization

The opposite approach to minimal contextualization—uncritical contextualization—fails at what Timothy Keller describes as sound contextualization or “Translating and adapting the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particulars of the gospel itself.”³⁷ Uncritical contextualization compromises the essence and particulars of the gospel for the sake of cultural relativism. Preservation of the culture trumps the change needed that the gospel would bring. “If there is good in all religions, why should missionaries seek to convert people who are not Christians?” remarks Hiebert.³⁸ Therefore, the uncritical missionary exegetes the receptor culture’s texts and products not to learn how the gospel speaks into and challenges the deep needs of the culture but to attenuate the gospel so low that the culture has no problem or difficulty receiving it.

Critical Contextualization

Critical contextualization brings a balanced approach to the extremes of minimal and uncritical contextualization. Preservation and appreciation of the receptor culture balanced with fidelity to the essence and particulars of the gospel characterizes the critical approach. The missionary teaches and encourages the receptor culture to understand theology within their own contexts (through community-based hermeneutics) without detracting from the orthodox fundamentals of the Christian faith. In the critical approach, the missionary assumes a transcultural role as he bridges gaps between the culture(s) of the Bible, the receptor culture, and even his own culture through accurately exegeting the

³⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

³⁸ Hiebert, “Gospel in Human Contexts,” 91.

receptor culture's texts and trends and responds with how the gospel informs and transforms that culture's worldview.

Hiebert expresses a fourth view in the article "The Gospel in Human Contexts" that basically exposit a critical approach to contextualization. He asks the question, "What then is the relationship between the gospel and human contexts, and how can we communicate the gospel to humans in their contexts?"³⁹ First, the missionary must understand that the gospel as divine revelation given to humanity by God and transcends (cannot be equated to) all cultural contexts. Secondly, the missionary must study the people of the receptor culture (i.e. exegeting their texts, trends, behaviors, and products) for transcultural conversance and exegete the Scriptures with the receptor culture as a hermeneutical community seeking a non-syncretistic understanding of theology. Thirdly, the missionary engages the fallen aspects of the receptor culture through modeling a gospel-transformed life and "[involving] people in evaluating their own culture in light of the Bible" or, in essence, teaching the receptor culture to exegete its own behaviors, texts, and products to see how the gospel should inform its transformation.⁴⁰

Critical contextualization safeguards against syncretism and colonialism while encouraging the missionary to think transculturally in their interactions with the receptor culture. Done well and in balance, critical contextualization helps transform the receptor culture through the gospel as the new church community embarks on the journey of exegeting both Scripture and their cultural identity, practices, and texts simultaneously.

³⁹ Hiebert, "Gospel in Human Contexts," 94.

⁴⁰ Hiebert, "Gospel in Human Contexts," 99.

The Challenge Of Exegeting Both Scripture And Cultural Texts

The Great Commission implies an understanding that all disciples of Jesus are missionaries sent into a culture to make disciples from within that culture. Jesus, speaking of his disciples, says, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18 ESV). Just as Jesus entered the new context of humanity in the incarnation, so Christ sends his followers into the world’s multidimensional contexts to incarnate the message of the gospel through proclaiming the redemptive narrative of Scripture. The phrase “make disciples of all nations” in Matthew’s Great Commission text implies two things: 1) a knowledge of Scripture since a “disciple” is a student of Jesus Christ whom the Bible reveals and 2) a knowledge of the cultural context of the “nations” where God sends his disciples. As Scott Hildreth asserts, “The command to ‘make disciples of all nations’ requires that the followers of Jesus translate the message into other languages and guide new believers in living out and expressing the gospel within their cultural context.”⁴¹ Therefore, the Great Commission requires that the disciple understand both Scripture and the cultural context in order to effectively make disciples.

The Challenge Of Multiple Cultures

Accurately exegeting both the text of Scripture and specific texts or products of a cultural context can prove extremely challenging since different cultures understand and apply the Bible differently. Graeme Goldsworthy asks a valid question, “[C]ontextualization...involves certain transformations of a text from one context to another in a way that aims at enabling its meaning to be understood in the receiving culture.

⁴¹Scott Hildreth, “Contextualization and Great Commission Faithfulness,” *Global Missiology* 1, no. 8 (2010): 5.

But since the meaning is given in cultural terms, how can we preserve the meaning while transforming the cultural expression of it?"⁴² A culture's worldview, historical background, and current social issues shape how that culture interprets and applies Scripture. The fact that the missionary is at first unfamiliar with a new culture's worldview, history and situation only increases the challenge of cultural exegesis. Hence, the work of exegeting Scripture faithfully—seeking to understand the intended meaning of the text—and the work of exegeting a cultural context unbiased—seeking to understand the beliefs, customs, and values (and the texts narrating these) of an unfamiliar culture—challenges the church to labor in both arenas for the sake of the Great Commission.

Today's interpreter must process the meaning of the text in light of the mindset and cultural situation of the text's original author and do the work of faithful exegesis to determine the text's meaning in what J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays call the interpretive journey in understanding the meaning of a text. The interpretive journey seeks to grasp what the text meant to the original audience, measure the distance in differences between the biblical audience and current audience, determine the theological principle applicable to both audiences, and apply that principle today in light of what the text meant to the original audience.⁴³ Exegeting and understanding a current cultural text, custom, or belief requires the same process of the interpretive journey in understanding the meaning of a Scriptural text since the cultural exegetist must likewise seek to grasp the intended meaning, cultural differences, and related ethic of the cultural texts in order to do faithful word and deed gospel ministry that has been informed by (application) what is learned.

⁴² Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 275.

⁴³ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 21–25.

The Challenge Of An Always Expanding Culture

In comparison to exegeting Scripture, exegeting a specific culture can appear a more daunting challenge in the sense that the missionary deals with interpreting multiple layers, texts, products, forms, customs, and beliefs of the new culture that are constantly evolving and growing. In contrast, the text of Scripture is a fixed document that will not be added to nor the words evolve to a different intended meaning. Therefore, the missionary must stay *au courant* with an everevolving culture producing new texts, trends, and products daily.

The Challenge Of Possible Syncretism

Syncretistic expressions of the gospel and church life pose another challenge in obtaining objective truth through exegeting Scripture. What prevents a local church—especially one in a newly evangelized cultural context—from relativizing the truths of Scripture to conform to their cultural biases as they begin the work of interpreting Scripture? How should the cross-cultural missionary equip this new church for exegeting Scripture? Missiologist Paul Hiebert advocates for a “hermeneutical community” to develop a “A contextualized hermeneutic...” that seeks “...to interpret the Scriptures in a way that is biblically correct but also culturally appropriate.”⁴⁴ A self-theologizing local church does not seek a new *definition* of theological truth but a new, culturally influenced *expression* of it.⁴⁵ “Theology is ultimate truth as God perceives it, whereas theologies are local, partial, culturally bound, yet valid expressions of truth...New theologies answer new

⁴⁴ Hiebert, “Gospel in Human Contexts,” 101.

⁴⁵ Reference Appendix 2 for a response to Norman Geisler’s critique of Hiebert that a hermeneutical community will inevitably fall into syncretism.

questions, address new cultural categories, and critique existing and developing worldviews,” and, as expressed in this paper, help interpret cultural texts and trends to aid the missionary in understanding the receptor culture.⁴⁶

Accuracy in exegesis, the voluminous and multifaceted nature of cultural texts, and the potential slippage into syncretism pose significant challenges for both the missionary equipping new believers for gospel ministry and the local church or “hermeneutical community” within any local context. Maintaining a balance of biblical exegesis seeking God’s objective truth with cultural exegesis seeking cultural literacy is absolutely essential in overcoming these challenges. Hiebert expresses this need well: “In contextualization the heart of the gospel must be kept as it is encoded in forms that are understood by the people, without making the gospel captive to the contexts.”⁴⁷ Exegeting a culture’s texts enables the missionary to understand the forms already employed by the receptor culture, giving a boost in their ability to contextualize and communicate the gospel effectively.

The Missional Helix As A Practical Multi-Exegetical Framework⁴⁸

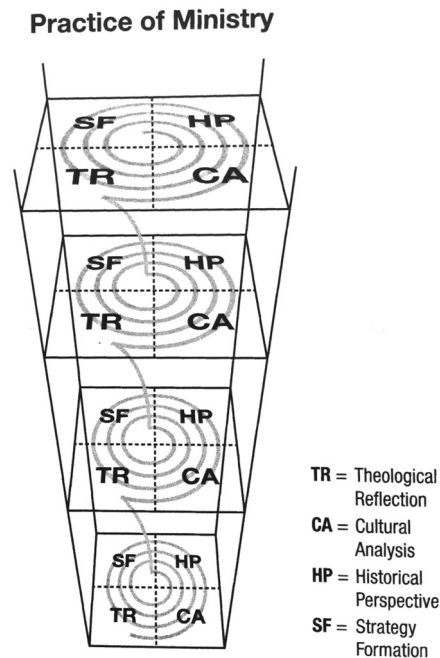
The Missional Helix, a contextualization framework designed by Dr. Gailyn Van Rheenen to aid missionaries in designing and implementing ministry praxis in a cross-cultural setting, provides a workable grid for exegeting the text of Scripture and exegeting a receptor culture’s texts simultaneously when seeking to communicate the gospel in a contextually appropriate manner.

⁴⁶ Van Rheenen, *Missions*, 204–205.

⁴⁷ Hiebert, “Gospel in Human Contexts,” 93.

⁴⁸ “Multi-exegetical” encompasses the idea of the interconnectedness of the guiding principles of both biblical and cultural exegesis while developing contextualized ministry praxis.

The helix contains five elements—Theological Reflection, Cultural Analysis, Historical Perspective, Strategy Formation, and Spiritual Formation—through which the missionary examines various aspects of the receptor culture in order to deduce the most appropriate form of ministry engagement. Each element helps structure a framework fitting the thesis of this treatise: *theological reflection* for exegeting the biblical text, *cultural analysis* for exegeting cultural texts/products, *historical perspective* for understanding how the receptor culture has exegeted their own texts alongside Scripture, *strategy formation* for seeing how the first three elements aid in biblical exposition (especially in preaching), and *spiritual formation* for visualizing the intended goal of contextualized exposition leading to gospel conversions in the receptor culture.

Figure 1 The Missional Helix⁴⁹

In the field of Biblical hermeneutics, scholars such as Grant Osborne propose that understanding Scripture “Entails a ‘spiral’ from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today...A spiral is a better metaphor [than a circle] because it is not a closed circle but rather an open-ended movement from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader...” with the intended goal of “...spiraling nearer and nearer to the text’s intended meaning...then to guide my delineation of its significance for my situation today.”⁵⁰ The Missional Helix mirrors this sentiment, guiding the missionary nearer and nearer to contextualized ministry practice.⁵¹ Van Rheezen describes the Missional Helix as “...a spiral because the missionary returns time and time

⁴⁹ Diagram taken from Van Rheezen, *Missions*, 310.

⁵⁰ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 22.

⁵¹ Tim Keller also affirms the spiraling metaphor for both hermeneutics and contextualization in *Center Church* 105, seeing it as a better approach than crossing a two-way bridge (John Stott’s older illustration).

again to reflect theologically, culturally, historically, and strategically under the guiding hand of God to develop ministry models appropriate to the local context”⁵² and “...a helix because theology, history, culture, and the practice of ministry *build on one another* as the community of faith collectively develops understandings and a vision of God’s will within its cultural context.”⁵³

For the purpose of this treatise, the Missional Helix provides a practical framework for “spiraling” through the meaning of a text of Scripture, the receptor culture’s texts, and the receptor culture’s literacy of the gospel (historically speaking) in order to proclaim the gospel through expository preaching for the purpose of spiritual formation. Preparing for and delivering a sermon will serve as a case study for expounding the necessity of exegeting the text of Scripture and the texts of the receptor culture for contextualized gospel proclamation.

Theological Reflection

Theological reflection necessitates biblical exegesis and is “The beginning point for ministry formation and the most significant element within the internal structure of the spiral.”⁵⁴ The Missional Helix proposes missionaries use God’s Word to develop a biblical understanding of contextually appropriate ministries such as expository preaching or evangelistic proclamation (if not in the pulpit). The missionary begins their sermon development with a theological foundation rooted in the gospel metanarrative understood through the *missio dei* and practiced through the Great Commission, then proceeds to

⁵² Van Rheezen. *Missions*. 309-310.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 309-311.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

follow the appropriate hermeneutical principles for exegeting the biblical text. These appropriate principles guide the cross-cultural communicator in remaining faithful to the biblical text while preparing a sermon for a different cultural context.

Akin, Curtis, and Rummage provide ten basic principles of hermeneutics when exegeting a biblical text to help ensure faithful theological reflection. The first two establish the foundational principles of, 1) “The Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God” divinely revealed and authoritative and 2) “The primary goal of hermeneutics is the discovery of the author’s intended meaning” through carefully studying the words, grammar, style, and the contexts of culture, history, geography, and theology influencing the author. Principles 2–10 expound the second foundational principle showing how the author’s intended meaning of a biblical text: 3) “...is found within complete units of thought” such as sentences, paragraphs, pericopes, and books; 4) “...is always discovered within its own unique grammatical content” framed within the text’s literary elements such as word usage and genre; 5) “...is always discovered within its own unique cultural context” of the original audience for whom it was written; 6) “...should be interpreted literally, unless the use of figurative language suggests otherwise” assuming the authors used plain language the audience would understand; 7) “...should be informed by the writings of other biblical authors on the same concepts” relying on the unity of theological concepts; 8) “...may have a fuller meaning, but that meaning can only be determined on the basis of subsequent biblical revelation and the whole canon” realizing the progressive nature of divine revelation; 9) “...will never be in contradiction to his own writings or the rest of the canon” dividing Scripture’s unity; and 10) “...has a theocentric/christological purpose, and as a result, it has significance for all people, in all places, at all times” solidifying relevance

for any receptor culture.⁵⁵ These guiding principles help anchor the “spiraling” through the Missional Helix in the text to ensure that the missionary’s theological reflection on a given cultural text, product, issue, or trend remains theologically grounded.

Cultural Analysis

Cultural analysis—the next element in moving through the Missional Helix—requires the missionary to exegete the receptor culture holistically—texts, products, worldview, beliefs, and behaviors—to develop a healthy literacy of the culture. By excluding cultural analysis (or cultural exegesis) in ministry formation and expository preaching, the missionary aimlessly imports foreign ideologies, worldviews, and even theologies into the receptor culture that fit the missionary’s heritage and worldview, and not that of the receptor culture’s. Yet as Van Rheezen wisely asserts, “The beginning point of theologizing in a new culture is always a thorough analysis of the culture on a worldview level.”⁵⁶ Keller illustrates the necessity of cultural analysis/exegesis of the receptor culture’s texts referencing the Apostles’ preaching: “The early Christian communicators knew the culture intimately and spoke in terms that were never incomprehensible, no matter how startling. They reframed the culture’s questions, reshaped its concerns, and redirected its hopes....[They] did not merely confront the culture....[They] adapted to it in order to confront it in the most compelling and loving way possible.”⁵⁷ Cultural literacy gives the missionary a window into the hearts and passions of the receptor culture— often

⁵⁵ Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 37–55.

⁵⁶ Van Rheezen, *Missions*, 312.

⁵⁷ Keller, *Preaching*, 99.

revealed through the receptor culture's texts— so his preaching can relate to, yet confront, the receptor culture with the gospel.

Cultural literacy and contextualized Bible exposition require an astute analysis of the texts produced by the receptor culture because “...cultural texts...exist not only to be read but to be used as interpretive frameworks” and “...serve as the lens through which we view everything else and as the compass that orients us toward the good life.”⁵⁸ The compelling expositor should not only have a comprehensive understanding of the biblical text but a thorough understanding of the cultural narratives guiding the listener's thought processes and behaviors expressed through that culture's texts. “Christians must read culture theologically in an expository rather than impository manner in light of the biblical account of creation, fall, and redemption that sets culture in its real context.”⁵⁹ Cultural texts often comprise words and phrases but are not limited to just products containing alphanumeric symbols composing an idea. They can include any product created by the receptor culture that portrays a baseline cultural narrative such as, but not limited to: printed literature (fiction, non-fiction, historical, self-help, religious, academic articles, civil documents, etc.), poetry, the lyrics and composition of music, movies, commercials, self-published videos (such as those put on social media sites such as YouTube™ and Instagram™) blogs, websites, social media forms, artwork (digital and physical), consumer product labels, newspapers, billboards and other advertisements, magazines, pottery, quilts, clothing, tools, architecture, and rituals such as weddings and funerals.

⁵⁸ Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology*, 36.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

Vanhoozer details several guidelines for exegeting cultural texts—many of which mirror the basic premises of the biblical hermeneutical guidelines propounded by Akin, Curtis, and Rummage (reference Appendix 1 for full comparison chart)—which equip the missionary communicator to understand the “The meaningful works that convey either explicit messages or implicit pictures of the world” for the receptor culture.⁶⁰ Vanhoozer’s ten principles are:⁶¹

1. “Try to comprehend a cultural text on its own terms (grasp its communicative intent) before you ‘interpret’ it (explore its broader social, political, sexual or religious significance).”
2. “Attend to what a cultural text is *doing* as well as saying by clarifying its illocutionary act.”
3. “Consider the world *behind* (e.g., medieval, modern), *of* (i.e., the world displayed by the cultural text), and *in front of* (i.e., its proposal for your world) the cultural text.”
4. “Determine what ‘powers’ are served by particular cultural texts or trends by discovering whose material interests are served.”
5. “Seek the ‘world hypothesis’ and/or ‘root metaphor’ implied by a cultural text.”
6. “Be comprehensive in your interpretation of a cultural text; find corroborative evidence that makes best sense of the whole as well as the parts.”
7. “Give ‘thick’ descriptions of the cultural text that are non-reductive and sensitive to the various levels of communicative action.”
8. “Articulate the way of being human to which a cultural text directly or indirectly bears witness and gives commendation.”
9. “Discern what *faith* a cultural text directly or indirectly expresses. To what convictions about God, the world, and ourselves does a cultural text and/or trend commit us?”
10. “Locate the cultural text in the biblical creation-fall-redemption schema and make sure that biblical rather than cultural texts have the lead role in shaping your imagination and hence your interpretation framework for your experience.”

These guidelines instruct the missionary communicator on how to “...describe what is going on in a cultural text at various levels and from a variety of perspectives” in order to answer the necessary questions: “Who made this cultural text and why? What does it mean

⁶⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁶¹ Listed on pages 59–60 of *Everyday Theology* and expounded on pages 44–59.

and how does it work? What effect does it have on those who receive, use, or consume it?”

⁶² Answering these baseline questions helps the missionary communicator relate the meaning of the biblical text to the receptor culture’s search for meaning in life as communicated—whether implicitly or explicitly—through their cultural texts.

Historical Perspective

Van Rheezen emphasizes the importance of historical perspective in developing contextualized ministry praxes to avoid unfamiliarity of what the receptor culture has experienced. “*Historical perspective* narrates how things got to be as they are, based on the interrelated stories of the particular nation, tribe, lineage, the church, and God’s mission.”⁶³ Cultures record these interrelated stories through the cultural texts they produce and give invaluable insight into how the receptor culture’s worldview and behaviors developed. Therefore, the missionary communicator must exegete not only the texts that record the culture’s history but also the philosophical implications resulting from previous events and worldview shifts. Missiologists John Terry and J.D. Payne admonish, “Since the past influences and guides future behavior, strategists need to know history. This includes knowledge of the significant historical matters that presently affect a group’s receptivity to the gospel.”⁶⁴ Knowing how the receptor culture has interpreted the biblical text also provides valuable insight on how to approach teaching Scripture in the receptor culture.

Each culture records their historical narratives through oral tradition and recorded texts, giving the missionary communicator a wealth of cultural texts to interpret so his

⁶² Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology*, 48.

⁶³ Van Rheezen, *Missions*, 309.

⁶⁴ John Mark Terry and J.D. Payne, *Developing a Strategy for Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013), 12.

preaching and teaching relate to the histories of the people. Listening to older members of the culture educates the missionary on historical events and the emotional or philosophical responses of the people to those events in previous years (oral tradition). Library archives and online databases provide texts, sometimes spanning the entire history of a culture, useful to the missionary for understanding how the receptor culture has evolved to its current worldview structure (recorded texts). Likewise, the missionary communicator exegetes cultural texts such as newspapers and social media posts (recorded texts) while simultaneously listening to the community conversations related to current events (oral) to understand the receptor culture's perspective of recent history. With a healthy perspective of the past narratives that produced the worldviews and behaviors present in the receptor culture, the missionary communicator can begin addressing expositionally how those past narratives continue to negatively or positively shape the receptor culture's way of life.

Strategy Formation

With the goal of spiritual formation in the gospel, the fourth element of the Missional Helix, strategy formation, asks the missionary to develop contextualized ministry practices which "...draw deeply from cultural and historical understandings to theologically discern what God is saying about the practice of ministry and develop actual practices to implement the strategies."⁶⁵ This phase of the helix ties directly to the earlier discussion on critical contextualization for the purposes of theological reflection, cultural analysis, and historical perspective lead the missionary communicator to critically reflect on the ministry model or praxis to ensure its appropriateness for the context.⁶⁶ Expository

⁶⁵ Van Rheezen, *Missions*, 309.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 315.

preaching, as a strategic form of practical ministry (Strategy Formation) that seeks to proclaim Christ from the Scriptures and to appreciate yet challenge the receptor culture, requires exegeting the biblical text faithfully (Theological Reflection) and the receptor culture's texts critically (Cultural Analysis) and historically (Historical Perspective) in order to effectively communicate the gospel appropriately within the receptor culture.

Properly exegeting the biblical text helps the missionary present gospel truth accurately and perceptively exegeting the culture's texts help the missionary connect the gospel truth to the listener's heart and mind. In essence, biblical exegesis and cultural exegesis form the essential foundation for the practical ministry of preaching the Bible. Tim Keller expounds a healthy view of expository preaching⁶⁷ that fosters spiritual formation in showing how the expositor must preach Christ to the culture saying, "In the end, preaching has two basic objects in view: the Word and the human listener...the communicator must give great time and thought both to presenting the truth accurately and to bringing it home to the hearts and lives of the hearers."⁶⁸ He provides six practices for preaching to and engaging a culture that fits well with Van Rheenen's intent of strategically forming and implementing contextualized ministry praxis.

First, "Use accessible or well-explained vocabulary."⁶⁹ Using "Christian" words and theological definitions unfamiliar to the receptor culture only confuse the listeners. Instead, Keller advises defining theological words and concepts in the receptor culture's

⁶⁷ Keller gives three "levels" of word ministry or "preaching" on pages 1–4 in his book *Preaching*: 1) informal basic teaching and admonition conveying biblical truth; 2) verbalizing biblical truth through personal exhortation, evangelism, instruction, and counseling; and 3) formal sermons. *Preaching* serves to equip those engaging in levels 2 and 3.

⁶⁸ Keller, *Preaching*, 14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 103–106.

language. Here, studying the culture's texts gives the missionary communicator a new vocabulary from which he can use to explain the concepts from his study of Scripture.

Second, "Employ respected authorities to strengthen your theses."⁷⁰ Referencing sources outside the biblical text reinforces the argument being made and reveals how the receptor culture already seeks biblical truths. Paul uses this technique in Acts 17:28 when he quotes a pagan author to explain a biblical concept. Here, biblical exegesis grounds the expositor in God's absolute truth while he analyzes and relates a secular author's text to the points of his sermon.

Third, "Demonstrate an understanding of doubts and objections."⁷¹ The missionary communicator relates best to the receptor culture when he "...[remembers] very well what it is like not to believe, all the while maintaining that it is possible to come to real assurance of God's reality and love."⁷² Studying the receptor culture's texts can reveal many objections and doubts of the people and provide key insights on how to relate Scripture to those objections.

Fourth, "Affirm in order to challenge baseline cultural narratives."⁷³ Embedded in each culture are subconscious themes presumed true of everyone that often go unquestioned.⁷⁴ The missionary communicator must affirm what can be appreciated in these cultural narratives yet challenge them with a counter-worldview shaped by the gospel. Van Rheenen explains:

Christian ministry does not occur in a cultural vacuum; it occurs in cultural contexts, where rival perspectives of reality vie for human allegiance. Missionaries

⁷⁰ Ibid., 106–110.

⁷¹ Ibid., 110–114.

⁷² Ibid., 110.

⁷³ Ibid., 115–116.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 115.

must therefore become adept at differentiating worldview types and discern how these types influence the host culture. These understandings enable missionaries to communicate God's message so that it interacts with the culture's perspective of reality.

Studying cultural texts (such as movies, music, books, and magazines) and listening intently to people as they share their own beliefs often reveals their worldview presumptions based on these baseline narratives.

Fifth, "Make gospel offers that push on the culture's pressure points."⁷⁵ Beyond affirming and challenging the culture's narratives, the missionary communicator must show how the gospel offers a better understanding and fulfillment of the narratives underlying the culture's worldview-level beliefs. Doing so places tension between a person's presumed beliefs and the truths offered in Scripture, giving the missionary an opportunity to "Press on these issues with questions, offers, illustrations, and examples that make the tension they feel more acute and the incongruities more troubling."⁷⁶ Here, cultural literacy helps the missionary communicator know exactly which pressure points to address with the gospel to bring the person closer to an awareness of his or her own deficiencies.

Sixth, "Call for gospel motivation."⁷⁷ To ensure the message communicated engages both the believer and non-believer in the receptor culture, the missionary communicator addresses how the gospel solves each individual's problems. The gospel encourages the believer in their sanctification, providing deeper intimacy and instruction yet also points the nonbeliever to the One who can provide ultimate satisfaction. Therefore,

⁷⁵ Ibid., 117–118.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 118–120.

understanding deeply the truths of the gospel enables the missionary communicator to evangelize and edify in the same sermon (or teaching, counseling, etc.).

Practical ministry with the goal of making disciples in a new culture must convey to the receptor culture that the missionary understands and loves them. When communicating biblical truths within the receptor culture through practices such as expository preaching, the missionary must strategically and discerningly infuse into his message how the gospel provides the only solutions to the questions left unanswered by the people's foundational cultural narratives and worldview.

Conclusion: The Goal Of Spiritual Formation

The goal of exegeting biblical and cultural texts is not to simply be relevant to the receptor culture through contextualization but to expose the sinful cultural narratives or "life foundations" of the people and show how Christ redeems and restores their life.⁷⁸ Keller explains that preaching the gospel is expositing God's authoritative text with faithfulness to both believers and nonbelievers to "...[capture] the hearer's interest and imagination and [persuade] her toward repentance and action."⁷⁹ While different in many respects, biblical hermeneutics and cultural hermeneutics function in tandem, equipping the missionary to understand both the narrative of Scripture and the narratives of the receptor culture. Grasping these produces contextualized gospel communication that relates God's truth to the hearts and minds of the people leading to lives spiritually transformed by the gospel.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 20–21.

Spiritual formation happens as individuals and churches in the receptor culture begin exegeting Scripture to know and love God more fully and exegeting their own cultural texts to comprehend the cultural narratives competing for their affections. The task of exegeting both Scripture and culture is challenging, yet essential for the end goal of disciples made of all nations to be realized. Gailyn Van Rheenen's *Missional Helix* provides an instructive framework for through exegeting Scripture (Theological Reflection), exegeting a culture's texts (Cultural Analysis), perceiving how the past has shaped the present worldview of the receptor culture (Historical Perspective), and forming ministry practices that foster healthy spiritual formation. The role of the missionary communicator requires depth in understanding Scripture, literacy of the receptor culture's worldview and baseline narratives, and ability to contextualize ministry practices fitting the receptor culture—a role required in the Great Commission but with the promises of Christ's global authority in heaven and on earth and his continual presence with his disciples.

APPENDIX 1

Comparison Chart Of Vanhoozer’s Guidelines For Everyday

Theological Interpretation Of Culture With Akin, Curtis, Rummage’s Basic Principles Of Hermeneutics

<p>Vanhoozer’s Guidelines for Everyday Theological Interpretation of Culture⁸⁰</p>	<p>Akin, Curtis, and Rummage’s Basic Principles of [Biblical] Hermeneutics⁸¹</p>
<p>1. “Try to comprehend a cultural text on its own terms (grasp its communicative intent) before you ‘interpret’ it (pg. 59)</p>	<p>2. “The primary goal of hermeneutics is the discovery of the author’s intended meaning.” (pg. 38)</p>
<p>2. “Attend to what a cultural text is <i>doing</i> as well as saying by clarifying its illocutionary act.” (pg. 59)</p>	<p>6. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text should be interpreted literally, unless the use of figurative language suggests otherwise.” (pg. 43)</p>
<p>3. “Consider the world <i>behind</i> (e.g., medieval, modern), <i>of</i> (i.e., the world displayed by the cultural text), and <i>in front of</i> (i.e., its proposal for your world) the cultural text.” (pg. 59)</p>	<p>4. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text is always discovered within its own unique cultural context.” (pg. 41)</p>
<p>4. “Determine what ‘powers’ are served by particular cultural texts or trends by discovering whose material interests are served.” (pg. 59)</p>	<p>9. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text will never be in contradiction to his own writings or the rest of the canon.” (pg. 53)</p>
<p>5. “Seek the ‘world hypothesis’ and/or ‘root metaphor’ implied by a cultural text.” (pg. 59)</p>	<p>3. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text is found within complete units of thought.” (pg. 39)</p>
<p>6. “Be comprehensive in your interpretation of a cultural text; find corroborative evidence that makes best sense of the whole as well as the parts.” (pg. 59)</p>	<p>8. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text may have a fuller meaning, but that meaning can only be determined on the basis of subsequent biblical revelation and the whole canon.” (pg. 48)</p> <p>7. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text should be informed by the writings of other biblical authors on the same concepts.” (pg. 46)</p>

⁸⁰ Listed on pages 59–60 of Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology* and expounded on pages 44–59.

⁸¹ Listed and explained in Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 37–55.

7. “Give ‘thick’ descriptions of the cultural text that are non-reductive and sensitive to the various levels of communicative action.” (pg. 59)	4. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text is always discovered within its own unique grammatical content.” (pg. 41)
8. “Articulate the way of being human to which a cultural text directly or indirectly bears witness and gives commendation.” (pg. 60)	10. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text has a theocentric/Christological purpose, and as a result, it has significance for all people, in all places, at all times.” (pg. 54)
9. “Discern what <i>faith</i> a cultural text directly or indirectly expresses. To what convictions about God, the world, and ourselves does a cultural text and/or trend commit us?” (pg. 60)	10. “The author’s intended meaning in a biblical text has a theocentric/Christological purpose, and as a result, it has significance for all people, in all places, at all times.” (pg. 54)
10. “Locate the cultural text in the biblical creation-fall-redemption schema and make sure that biblical rather than cultural texts have the lead role in shaping your imagination and hence your interpretation framework for your experience.” (pg. 60)	1. “The Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant word of God.” (pg. 37)

APPENDIX 2

A Response To Norman Geisler's Critique Of Paul Hiebert's Hermeneutical Community

In response to Paul Hiebert's article "The Gospel in Human Contexts" in *Missionshift*, Norman Geisler warns that a group of people can be just as biased collectively as they can be individually, leading to a biased theology derived from a subjective treatment of hermeneutics. "Adding more people (a whole community or even the whole Church) using the wrong method of interpretation will not bring us to the truth."⁸² Geisler's critique of Hiebert's hermeneutical community raises the question of how a local church in a specific context can "self-theologize" without succumbing to syncretism?

First, the community must interpret the biblical text to understand God's truth as he intended it to be understood, not in a manner fitting their culturally bound worldview.⁸³ Paul Hiebert encourages missionaries to equip a local church in a new context to own the responsibility of doing the work of biblical *and* cultural exegesis as a "hermeneutical community" in order to protect against syncretism. Hiebert offers these three checkpoints to ensure the objective truth of the Scriptures (intended meaning) is preserved during the exegetical process: "First, we need to take the Bible seriously as the rule of faith and life;" "Second, we need to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers open

⁸² Norman L. Geisler, "A Response to Paul G. Hiebert: 'The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization' and to Darrell Whiteman and Michael Pocock," in *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (ed. David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer; Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 138– 139.

⁸³ Postmodernism advocates that truth comes from the general consensus of a community without critical regard to the communal biases shared by the individuals of said community. The evangelical church, in contrast, advocates that truth comes from God and therefore remains unchanged, regardless of the viewpoints drawn from the community's cultural biases.

to God's leading;" and "Third, we need the church to be a hermeneutical community that seeks to understand God's Word to it in its particular contexts."⁸⁴

Second, the community must critically evaluate their own culture in light of Scripture to understand how their own "...[i]nterpretations are shaped by [their] social, cultural, psychological, and historical contexts and that these need to be checked by others from other cultures who can help us see these biases."⁸⁵ All hermeneutical communities, regardless of their cultural context, must be willing to exegete its own texts, trends, customs, beliefs, history, and worldview in light of the transcultural truths of Christian theology to ensure their interpretation and application of Scripture aligns with the universal truth of God. Any localized expression of theology developed within a culturally influenced hermeneutical community (local church) runs the risk of evolving into syncretistic or ethnocentric theologies simply because they are produced within the singular, localized worldview of that hermeneutical community. Therefore, critical self-evaluation or self-exegeting requires the guidelines of a healthy biblical hermeneutic and the input of Christians from various cultural backgrounds and throughout history to ensure the local church's interpretation of Scripture remains consistently objective as it continuously works through the process of self-theologizing.

⁸⁴ Hiebert, "Gospel in Human Contexts," 97–98.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

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BORN OF WATER AND SPIRIT IN JOHN 3:5

Larry A. Tyler, Ph.D.*

Introduction

One of the best-known interpretive problems in John's Gospel is found in Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5b NKJV).¹ This statement by Jesus occurs in the Gospel's first major exposition about eternal life. Edwyn Hoskins was correct when he affirmed that Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus "is not a discourse, but The Discourse, the subject matter of which is repeated in all subsequent discourses."² Obviously, the importance of understanding this statement cannot be stressed enough since it proclaims one of the most basic concepts of our faith—the doctrine of the new birth.

Therefore, one must attempt to determine the most plausible meaning of "born of water and the Spirit" in John 3:5. First, a survey of leading interpretations will reveal the individual strengths and weaknesses of each category. The second section will then examine the key concepts, contextual background, parallel expressions, and syntactical features in order to suggest the most plausible meaning of this important passage.

Survey Of Leading Interpretations

Before one examines John 3:15, one must analyze the major lines of interpretation. Six leading views will be summarized and evaluated according to contextual and

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¹ All quotes from the Holy Bible will come from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated.

² Edwyn Clement Hoskins, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), 203.

theological considerations. The first category contains two traditional interpretations, Christian baptism and John's baptism, while the other five examine the views of more recent scholarship.

*Ritualistic Views*³

Some ritualistic views contrast water (ὕδωρ) and spirit (πνεῦμα) believing water refers to Jewish ritualism and spirit to Christian baptism. Lucetta Mowry, looking at the fourth gospel as an anti-Essene polemical tract, views Jesus as adding an explanatory element of cultic character. Rebirth comes only as one is born of water and spirit. In order to become a member of the Christian community, one must undergo the rite of baptism. This rite goes beyond the promises that the initiates of the Essene cult swore to fulfill. That binding oath was to keep the law of Moses. The difference between the Essene and Christian rite lies in the difference between a serious ethical attitude and the need for a complete change in nature.⁴ Mowry therefore equates water (ὕδωρ) with the Jewish ceremonial washings and spirit (πνεῦμα) plus water (ὕδωρ) with Christian baptism. Her interpretation views not only ritual purification but also spiritual reformation as necessary for salvation.

However, R. E. Brown is not convinced of Mowry's approach. Brown admits that the Jewish ceremonial washings may have entered into the scope of John's Gospel, but argues that no clear evidence for it exists within Johannine literature. He states, "The clear statement that Nicodemus was a Pharisee would be rather misleading if John's main

³ The categories for the major lines of interpretation come from Linda Belleville's article, "'Born of Water and Spirit': John 3:5," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 125–34.

⁴ Linda Mowry, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Background for the Gospel of John," *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (1954): 92.

purpose was to convince Essenes. Until we have more evidence, it seems to me that we must be cautious in introducing Qumran elements into every phase of the Johannine literature.”⁵

D. W. B. Robinson is another who interprets the verse as relating to Jewish ritualism. According to him γεννηθῆ ἐξ ὕδατος represents the entire Jewish ceremonial observance while πνεῦμα represents the transforming work of God through the Holy Spirit. His view is based on a presupposed theological coherence in chapters 1–4. Support is found in chapter 1 where John the Baptist, representing the old system, is contrasted with the coming work of the Holy Spirit (1:26, 33). In chapter 2 Robinson views ὕδωρ as symbolic for the purification ceremonies of the Jews. Chapter 3 contrasts σὰρξ with born of the πνεῦμα and chapter 4 contrasts worship around Jacob’s well with worship in πνεῦμα and ἀλήθεια.⁶

Linda Belleville, while considering Robinson’s proposal to be an attractive solution to an enigmatic phrase, thinks it to be improbable for the following reasons:

It breaks the parallelism of vv 3, 5, 6b, and 7. (2) The single preposition and the conjunction καί (‘and’) form a conceptual unity, not two contrasting entities.

Ὑδωρ and πνεῦμα are not contrasted, as in 1:26, 33, but coordinated (καί). (4) It would be plausible only if Nicodemus had made some reference to Jewish ritualism in v. 4. (5) It harmonizes neither with the concept γεννηθῆ of the σὰρξ (v 4) nor with γεννηθῆ of the πνεῦμα. (6) The point of contrast in chap. 4 is between two types of ὕδωρ ζων (‘living water’) physical and spiritual, not between ὕδωρ and πνεῦμα. (7) Γεννηθῆ ἐξ ὕδατος = ‘to be born under the law’ has no contemporary literary parallels.⁷

⁵ R. E. Brown, “The Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 202–3.

⁶ D. W. B. Robinson, “Does John 3:5 Refer to Baptism?” *Reformed Theological Review* 25 (1966): 20.

⁷ Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 126–27.

Many interpreters believe both ὕδωρ and πνεῦμα refer to the sacrament of Christian baptism and the Holy Spirit. C. H. Dodd asserts, “The instructed Christian reader would immediately recognize a reference to baptism, as the sacrament through which the Spirit was given to believers, and by which they were initiated into that new order of life described as the Kingdom of God, which was historically embodied in the church.”⁸ Beasley-Murray also insists, “As in John 6:11ff the exposition on eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking His blood cannot fail to bring to mind the Lord’s Supper, so the reference to new birth by water and Spirit inevitably directs attention to Christian baptism.”⁹

Support for the Christian baptism interpretation is based on the sacramental references made elsewhere in John’s Gospel. In 1:26–34 John records much about John the Baptist and particularly notes that John was sent to baptize with “water.” In verse 33 “water” and “Spirit” are closely associated. Moreover, in 3:22 and 4:1, John emphasizes the baptizing ministry of Jesus and his disciples. Further support for a sacramental interpretation is found in John 6.

Critics of this view point out that the mere mention of “water” has evoked an assumed reference to baptism rather than a proven one. James D. G. Dunn states, “It is a sad commentary of our own immediate experience of the Spirit that when we come across language in which the NT writers refer directly to the gift of the Spirit and to their experience of it, either we automatically refer it to the sacraments and can only give it

⁸ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 309.

⁹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1963), 228–29.

meaning when we do . . . or else we discount the experience described as too subjective and mystical in favor of a faith which is essentially an affirmation of biblical propositions, or else we in effect psychologize the Spirit out of existence.”¹⁰ Moreover, Zane Hodges adds, “If the fourth Evangelist really did connect the waters of baptism in some way with the experience of new birth, it is nothing short of astounding that he has everywhere neglected the opportunity to say this directly. No one could possibly read this Gospel and miss the transparent fact that faith is absolutely indispensable to the acquisition of eternal life. But if the reader is to deduce that baptism is also essential to this—or even important!—he can only do so by catching a less than totally obvious reference to it in 3:5.”¹¹

Some advocates of this view link Christian baptism and πνεῦμα as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Dodd maintains that πνεύματος is a reference to the gift of the Spirit that accompanies Christian baptism.¹² Sanders and Mastin referring to John 3:5 state, “This I take to be John’s own gloss on Jesus’ words, identifying baptism, which he believed to convey the gift of the spirit, as the occasion of the new birth, and seeing in it the fulfillment of the Baptist’s prophecy in 1:33, of the baptism in holy spirit.”¹³

However, Robert McCabe has noticed that baptism does not fit well with the parallelism in the surrounding verses of the passage. “Because ‘born of water and the Spirit’ is parallel with ‘born from above’ in vv. 3, 7 and ‘born of the Spirit’ in vv. 6, 8, this

¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 225–26.

¹¹ Zane C. Hodges, “Water and Spirit—John 3:5,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978): 208–9.

¹² Dodd, *Interpretation*, 311.

¹³ J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), 124.

indicates that the emphasis of this passage is on a birth produced by the Spirit.”¹⁴ In addition he maintains that the visibility of baptism does not fit the analogy in verse 8 where the spirit is compared with wind. Therefore he concludes that the Spirit’s work in regeneration is not connected with the external rite of baptism.¹⁵

Others view ὕδωρ as a reference to John’s baptism and πνεῦμα to the new birth. Godet states, “The baptism of John was producing at that time an immense sensation in Israel, so that the thought of Nicodemus, on hearing the words, *birth by water*, must have turned immediately to that ceremony.”¹⁶ Support is drawn from John 1:33 where water baptism and spirit are mentioned and in John 3:23 where reference is made to John’s baptizing ministry. The synoptics tells us that John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. So with this view, “water” is an outward symbol of an inward repentance. There are two interpretations with this view. Some see both the baptism of repentance and the new birth as requirements for entrance into the kingdom of God. Others see John’s baptism, while important, as not being sufficient for entrance into the kingdom of God. In other words, there must also be a spiritual birth.¹⁷

McCabe notes that this view is deficient for the same reasons as the Christian baptism proposal. It does provide more contextual support, but it is not substantive. In his opinion, “The point of the references to John’s baptism is not to emphasize its importance, but rather to stress its comparative insignificance, as clearly presented in 1:23, 26, and

¹⁴ Robert V. McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit’ in John 3:5,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (1999): 101.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 101–2.

¹⁶ Frederick Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1886), 379.

¹⁷ McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit,’” 102.

3:30.”¹⁸ Belleville also points out that this view makes mandatory a rite was superseded by Christian baptism.¹⁹

Symbolic Views

Some scholars view ὕδωρ as a symbol for the Word of God. They believe regeneration involves the Word of God in conjunction with the working of the Holy Spirit. Support is drawn from Eph. 5:26 where it is recorded that Christ gave himself for his church “that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” In addition 1 Pet.1:23 states, “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.” Further support is drawn from James 1:18, “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”²⁰

Most would agree that the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God in regeneration. However, does John 3:5 emphasize the Spirit’s use of the Word in the same way as 1 Peter 1:23 does? McCabe thinks not. He notes that all the other uses of ὕδωρ in John picture spiritual vivification, therefore he concludes John 3:5 should also. Since Ephesians 5:26 is used to support taking “water” as the Word [ῥήμα] of God then it would seem more likely that ῥήμα would be used in John 3:5 instead of ὕδωρ.²¹

A variation of this view interprets ὕδωρ as a symbol for the Torah. As support it is claimed that ὕδωρ ζων is found in rabbinic literature as a symbol for the Torah. However ὕδωρ (water) is not the symbol used most often of the Torah. Rather, כּאֵר (well) not מֵיִם (=

¹⁸ Ibid., 103.

¹⁹ Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 127.

²⁰ McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit,’” 103.

²¹ Ibid.

ὕδωρ) is the symbol found most often used for the Torah. When ὕδωρ and the Torah are related, the purpose would be to compare the Torah to the life sustaining and purifying capabilities of ὕδωρ. The symbolic interpretation in John 3:5 of ὕδωρ as the Torah is improbable since the concept of “birth by water” is not found in rabbinic literature.²²

Other scholars view γεννηθῆναι ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος as symbolic for a two stage process of regeneration. According to this view ὕδωρ represents the renunciation of the “old man” and πνεῦμα represents the “new life.”²³ Belleville rightly concludes that this interpretation “presupposes in ὕδωρ καὶ πνεῦμα a primary reference to Christian baptism and early Christian symbolism that attended the act of immersion.”²⁴ The same criticisms that applied to Christian baptism would also apply to this view.

Physiological Views

Advocates of this view argue that γεννηθῆναι ἐξ ὕδατος in verse 5 and γεννηθῆναι ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς in verse 6 are parallel statements. Carl Laney states,

In Jesus’ analogy, then, the fleshly, or natural, birth corresponds to being “born of water.” During pregnancy the unborn child floats in the amniotic fluid within the mother’s womb. During delivery, this water is expelled. The child is literally born “out of water” (*ek hudatos*). The expression “of water” is used here as a figure for physical birth.²⁵

Therefore, ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος refer both to natural birth and a spiritual birth. One must experience physical and spiritual birth in order to enter the kingdom of God. They draw support from Nicodemus’s reference to a mother’s womb in verse 4 and Jesus remarks in

²² Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 130.

²³ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ J. Carl Laney, *John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 78.

verse 6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.”²⁶ Belleville comments that this view “expands the content of ἄνωθεν [verse 3] while at the same time clarifying Nicodemus’ question about a second birth, as no other interpretation of ὕδωρ can.”²⁷

McCabe, however, believes this view presents some syntactical problems. The syntactical linkage of ὕδωρ with πνεῦμα by using only one preposition, ἐξ, affirms that one birth associated with ‘water’ and ‘spirit’ is in view. Therefore this view contradicts the syntax of ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος as a conceptual unity.²⁸ D. A. Carson adds that he has found no ancient sources that picture natural birth as “from water.” He states, “It is true that in sources relevant to the Fourth Gospel water can be associated with fecundity and procreation in a general way, but none is tied quite so clearly to semen or amniotic fluid as to make the connection here an obvious one.”²⁹

Another physiological view considers γεννηθῆ ἐξ ὕδατος to be based on the rabbinic use of טפ"ט (drop) for the male semen. John 3:5 is seen to be parallel to John 3:6 and ἄνωθεν in John 3:3 is interpreted as not only being born again but also being born from above. D. G. Spriggs finds two difficulties with this view. First, the interpretation of water in terms of semen seems obscure to him. He questions whether the readers of the gospel were aware of such rabbinic niceties. Secondly, he translates γεννάω as “beget” rather than “bring forth” while explaining that the verb is frequently used in the New Testament of giving birth. If it means, “beget” in 3:5 then Nicodemus clearly misunderstood because of his reference to the mother’s womb. He understood it as “give birth.” Therefore, he

²⁶ McCabe, “The Meaning of Born of Water and the Spirit,” 104.

²⁷ Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 131.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 191.

concludes that a natural birth rendering suits the context better than equating water with semen.³⁰

Cosmological View

Zane Hodges believes the phraseology “of water and of the Spirit” to be imbedded in ancient and modern versions of John 3:5 to such an extent that practically no one ever calls the correctness of the translation into question. He points out that πνεῦμα can also be translated “wind” as well as “spirit.” “Water and wind” would be a more natural semantic combination since both are elements in the physical world.

Hodges therefore, suggests that Nicodemus most likely understood ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος as meaning “unless a man is born of water and wind.” Furthermore, he suggests this is exactly how Jesus expected him to understand it. Therefore, ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος in verse 5 unfolds the crucial meaning of ἄνωθεν in verse 3 in its significance of “from above,” He believes the Lord is directing his attention to natural phenomena which originate in heaven but have a vital effect upon earth like the rains that are blown in by the wind. They were indispensable for human life.

Moreover, Hodges believes the expression “of water and wind” evokes familiar imagery from the Old Testament that would have been familiar to a “teacher of Israel” such as Nicodemus. This would be the essential role of the expression. Consequently it appears the expression “of water and wind” serves as a double metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit as that work reflected in the Old Testament. Thus the Lord chose a metaphor that

³⁰ D. G. Spriggs, “Meaning of ‘Water’ in John 3:5,” *Expository Times* 85 (1973–74): 150.

would evoke the Old Testament doctrine of “new birth.” The Lord was amazed that a teacher of Israel did not understand such a fundamental reality (John 3:10).

Since “water and wind” is understood as a dual metaphor for the work of God’s Spirit, Hodges concludes that both images are subsumed under the explicit mention of the Holy Spirit in 3:6. Here he notes a semantic shift caused by the word σάρξ. In association with σάρξ, πνεῦμα is more understandable if translated as “spirit.” This translation, combined with the explicit reference to the Spirit in verse 8, unites the metaphor “of water and wind” with the reality it signifies. This furnishes Nicodemus the key to the spiritual meaning of the expression. If he had originally understood πνεύματος as a reference to wind, now he understood it as a reference to “Spirit.” Being sensitive to the background of the whole discussion, Nicodemus would also see “water” in exactly the same sense.³¹

Belleville criticizes this view for its inconsistency. The translation of the anarthrous πνεῦμα in verse 5 and 6 must be the same. If one translates πνεῦμα as wind in both verses, it results in contextual absurdity.³²

Implied Dualism Views

Advocates of this view contrast “things above” that is, heavenly things, with “things below” that is, earthly things. One view of this category sees ὕδωρ and πνεῦμα as representing pure and liquid elements. This is contrasted with the earthly nature of man. They believe John 3:5 teaches that one must set aside the flesh and become like “water and air” in order to move upwards.³³

³¹ Zane C. Hodges, “Water and Spirit—John 3:5,” 216–18.

³² Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 134.

³³ *Ibid.*

Hugo Odeberg on the other hand sees “born of water and spirit” as a hendiadys for spiritual seed. This is in contrast with physical seed. Support for his view comes from rabbinic and Jewish mystical literature. Odeberg contrasts “born of water and spirit” in verse 5 with Nicodemus’s reference to earthly birth in verse 4. This is probable because of the σάρξ/πνεῦμα contrast throughout the dialogue, the use of the idea of spiritual seed in 1 John 3:9, and the thought of life-giving water in John 4:10, 14, and 7:38–39.³⁴

However, Odeberg’s rabbinic and Jewish mystical references are not convincing. None use ὕδωρ in conjunction with the concept of regeneration. Moreover his view assumes too much of Nicodemus and of the reader with the association of ὕδωρ with seed.³⁵

Figurative Views

Those who hold this position argue that ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος refers to the Holy Spirit’s purifying and life-giving work. Καὶ is understood either of two ways. The first understanding is exegetical and the expression would read “water, namely the Spirit.” The second understanding of καὶ is to coordinate the two independent nouns: the resulting expression would read “water as the Spirit’s instrument of purification and renewal.”³⁶ Proponents believe Jesus tightly connects ὕδωρ and πνεῦμα in order to remind Nicodemus of Old Testament promises that focus on God’s purifying activity on behalf of his people. Ezekiel 36:25–27 refers to “water and spirit” in the future purification of Israel. Advocates of this view believe God’s promises to the nation of Israel are also presupposed to individuals.³⁷

³⁴ Hugo Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel* (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner, 1968), 50.

³⁵ Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁷ McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and Spirit,’” 105–6.

There is much to support this view. Frequent mention is made of water and spirit in the Old Testament as symbols of cleansing and renewal.³⁸ Judaism also emphasizes how in the future the Holy Spirit will work an inner change of heart. Evidence from apocryphal and rabbinic writings reveals that the ideas of purification and creation by God's Spirit were circulating at the time of Jesus. Moreover, this interpretation is consistent with the symbolism of John's Gospel where ὕδωρ represents the operation of the Holy Spirit without any direct connection to baptism.³⁹

Scholars like Westcott object to the exegetical use of καί. They insist that καί can only be coordinating and discard any figurative use of ὕδωρ.⁴⁰ Others object to interpreting ὕδωρ as inanimate "water" and interpreting πνεῦμα as animate "Spirit" which violates the syntax of the passage.⁴¹

An Examination Of John 3:5

With his examination of John 3:5 the present writer will attempt to determine the most reasonable meaning of the text. He will do so by analyzing key concepts, contextual background, parallel expressions, and syntactical features.

Key Concepts

Jesus introduces His remarks with a double "Amen" in John 3:5 in order to stress the importance of His teaching. Then He explains to Nicodemus the condition for entering the kingdom of God; one must be "born of water and Spirit." The verbal phrase, "born of"

³⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 284.

³⁹ Belleville, "Born of Water and Spirit," 134.

⁴⁰ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1908), 1. 108.

⁴¹ Belleville, "Born of Water and Spirit," 134.

(γεννηθῆναι ἐξ), includes an aorist subjunctive passive verb followed by a preposition. In John 3:3–8, an aorist passive form of γεννάω, followed by ἐκ or an equivalent, is used five times to express the concept of the new birth. The passive voice stresses the passivity of the new birth for humans. Therefore, the passive voice emphasizes the Spirit as the agent who produces the new birth. One should observe that the Old Testament does not specifically use any metaphors for the new birth. However, John uses it to refer to God’s sovereign role in regeneration more than any other New Testament writer. John mentions it six times in his gospel and ten in 1 John.⁴²

In John’s Gospel ὕδωρ is used twenty one times, thirteen times for literal water and eight as a metaphor. When used as a metaphor for “living water” it is symbolic for life produced by the Spirit.⁴³ In John 4:14, “water” is referred to as “a well of water springing up to eternal life. In 6:63, “it is the Spirit who gives life.” In 7:38–39, “from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. But this he spoke of the Spirit.” The consistent use of these metaphorical examples of “water” to represent spiritual life suggests that “water” in John 3:5 is also used in a similar way.⁴⁴

In John 3:3–12, John uses πνεῦμα five times. Belleville shows how rabbinic literature links the Spirit to an obedient life. The rabbis viewed blessing and moral renewal as impossible in the present age. It was reserved for the age to come. The “Spirit” was viewed as the proper reward for a righteous life.⁴⁵ However, in John 3:5 one finds the

⁴² Ibid., 87.

⁴³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 230.

⁴⁴ McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit,’” 89.

⁴⁵ Belleville, “Born of Water and the Spirit,” 139.

“Spirit” not as a reward but rather as the necessary condition for entering God’s kingdom. “The work of the “Spirit” in man demands nothing less than a second γενέσις.”⁴⁶

The concepts of “new birth,” “water,” and “Spirit” are further linked with the “kingdom of God.” Contrary to prevailing views, Jesus sets forth a redefining of the “kingdom of God.” To participate in God’s kingdom requires a new birth. Moreover, God’s Spirit is the agent of this new birth. This was a radically new concept to Nicodemus. By virtue of his obedience to the law, he would have considered himself already to be a part of the kingdom of God.

Contextual Background

The Judaism of Jesus’ day understood two separate concepts of the “kingdom of God”: the present [eternal] reign of God and the future eschatological kingdom. While the expression itself does not occur in the Old Testament, the concept does. Actually when a “kingdom” is ascribed to Yahweh, it is only in the derivative sense that it denotes the rule of God over his people. This rule was realized in the law to which one was obliged to vow obedience to the law. The prophets additionally presented the concept of a future kingdom yet to come. In the last days the Messiah would restore the splendor of the Davidic kingdom and would subject to Himself all nations. The expression “he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” fits neither of the two prevailing concepts of the “kingdom of God” current in Nicodemus’ day.⁴⁷

One should notice that Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand the things of which he spoke. He asks in John 3:10b, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 136.

things?” Jesus apparently presumed a knowledge of the Old Testament for understanding the meaning of being “born of water and Spirit.”

John 3:3–12 focuses on the “spirit.” The word πνεῦμα is used five times in these verses. What in the Old Testament could have prepared Nicodemus for these statements?

Genesis 2:7 reveals that God breathed into man the breath of life, and Ezekiel 37:1–6 reveals that God at some future time would put breath into Israel so that they might have spiritual life. Therefore, the association of birth and life with breath [πνεῦμα] should have been a familiar concept to a “teacher of Israel.”

The Old Testament also looks forward to a time when the Spirit will be poured out on all mankind (Joel 2:28). This pouring out of His Spirit is significant because of the Spirit’s power to transform the human heart. Moreover, it includes a cleansing from sin and a spiritual renewal of God’s people. In Ezek. 36:25–27 God declares to Israel, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.” Belleville notes that the outpouring of God’s Spirit was central to Jewish eschatological hope. It signaled the arrival of Messianic times. Therefore, any mention of the Spirit by Jesus should have suggested the arrival of the Messianic age.⁴⁸

The Old Testament references to water also provide an informative background for John 3:5. Many references attest that water was used in the Old Testament as a symbol for cleansing. In Ezek. 36:25 the prophetic hope included a future sprinkling with “clean

⁴⁸ Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 138–39.

water” that would cleanse from all filthiness and idolatry. Exodus 29:4 required the Aaronic priests to be ceremonially clean before serving. This cleansing or purification began by washing their hands and feet with water. Not only was water associated with cleansing, it was also used figuratively for renewal. Water was used in the Old Testament as a symbol for spiritual life. In Isa. 55:1 the prophet issues an invitation to abundant life. He proclaims, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” Also in Jer. 2:13 the Lord states, “For my people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water. It is important to note that the Lord is the source of this cleansing, purifying, and life-giving water. Moreover, the terms “water” and “Spirit” are frequently linked together as agents of renewal and blessing. For example in Isa. 44:3 the Lord promises to bless and renew Israel. He states, “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring.”

One should also ask how John expected his readers to understand the passage. Most likely his targeted readers were hellenistic Jews and Jewish proselytes whom he was trying to evangelize. His message is clear. They must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. John emphasizes a radical transformation and the fulfillment of Old Testament promises that anticipate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

D. A. Carson notes the importance of the new birth as applied to a man of the caliber of Nicodemus. He asks, “If Nicodemus, with his knowledge, gifts, understanding, position, and integrity cannot enter the promised kingdom by virtue of his standing and works, what

⁴⁹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 196.

hope is there for anyone who seeks salvation along such lines?”⁵⁰ Carson further explains, “Even for a Nicodemus, there must be a radical transformation, the generation of new life, comparable with physical birth.”⁵¹ John surely intended for his readers to understand this. The religious thought of Jesus’ day believed that all Jews would be admitted into God’s kingdom unless guilty of deliberate apostasy or extraordinary wickedness.⁵² It was therefore, necessary to emphasize that the Messiah brought a new order and with it the need for transformation, for new life from another realm, and for the intervention of the Spirit of God.

Parallel Expressions

Five parallel references to rebirth through the work of the Spirit are mentioned in John 3:3–8: (Author’s translation)

- “born from above” in 3:3
- “born of water and Spirit” in 3:5
- “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” in 3:6
- “born from above” in 3:7
- “born of the Spirit” in 3:8

Klyne Snodgrass observes that when John repeats a statement, it was his style to include minor variations in the repeated statements. He states, “Such variation of expression is not intended to convey different ideas, but is typical of the style of the Fourth Gospel.”⁵³

One should initially notice that “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” in verse 6 and “born of the Spirit” in verse 8 are restatements of verse 5 with the elimination of “water

⁵⁰ Ibid., 190.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 189.

⁵³ Klyne R. Snodgrass, “That Which Is Born from *Pneuma* Is *Pneuma*: Rebirth and Spirit in John 3:5–6,” *Covenant Quarterly* 49 (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1991): 16–17.

and.” This suggests that Jesus is emphasizing a birth produced by the Spirit. Also, one should notice that “born of water and Spirit” in verse 5 is an expanded restatement of “born again” in verse 3.

There has been much controversy over whether ἀνωθεν in verse 3 should be translated “from above” or “again” since both are lexical possibilities. Those who take ἀνωθεν in a temporal sense interpret it as “again.” They use John 3:4 as support. Nicodemus asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can He enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born”? Therefore, Nicodemus’ failure to understand Jesus is more easily explained. On the other hand, McCabe believes this view has a problem since John reveals that Nicodemus misconstrues Jesus’ statement in verse 3. Jesus’ point is that one needs an impartation of new life by the Spirit.⁵⁴ Support for the “from above” translation is garnered from the three other uses of ἀνωθεν in John 3:31; 19:11, 23. In each case the context would favor “from above.” Actually the word can be taken in three ways since some advocate a double meaning. McCabe, while acknowledging that a double meaning is possible, discounts it because he believes it misses the force of Jesus’ argument in John 3:3–8.⁵⁵ Belleville also adds that “John’s device of misunderstanding . . . does not depend on verbal ambiguity.”⁵⁶

If ἀνωθεν is taken to mean “from above,” it would better support the context of the passage. This would be another way of clearly indicating that one must be born of the Spirit. Moreover, this translation adds tightness to strengthen the parallelism in the five

⁵⁴ McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit,’” 95.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Belleville, “Born of Water and Spirit,” 138.

previously mentioned references in John 3. Thus, this tight parallelism provides assistance in understanding what it means to be “born of water and Spirit.”

Syntactical Features

Two important syntactical items regarding γεννηθῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος in John 3:5 need to be discussed. The first involves the preposition ἐκ. This single preposition governs two independent nouns (ὕδατος and πνεύματος) that are joined by καὶ, indicating that the phrase should be viewed as a conceptual unity. The phrase may be interpreted either epexegetically as a “water-spirit” source or coordinate as a “water-and-Spirit” source of birth. It should be mentioned that neither of these interpretations suggests that there are two separate births, physical and spiritual. Moreover, neither interpretation suggests a contrast between an external element of “water” with an inner renewal by the “Spirit.”⁵⁷

The second item involves the two nouns, ὕδατος and πνεύματος, being anarthrous. Some have considered them as descriptive, thereby emphasizing the nature or quality of the second birth.⁵⁸ Support for this is found in John 4:23, a syntactical parallel. The phrase states, “True worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ). Like John 3:5, a preposition (ἐν) governs the two nouns coordinated by καὶ. Therefore, advocates of this view believe πνεῦμα not to be a reference to the person of the Spirit but rather to the nature of spirit. Others however, view ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος as suggesting agency. The Holy Spirit Himself is the agent of the new birth.

⁵⁷ McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit,’” 96.

⁵⁸ Among others, D. A. Carson and Linda Belleville adhere to this view.

McCabe lists three reasons for this argument. First, since an anarthrous noun may be definite,⁵⁹ and if so, then πνεῦμα in John 3:5 may be treated as a definite noun referring to the Holy Spirit. Support is found in John 7:39 where πνεῦμα is used twice, the first with the article and the second without. Yet both are references to the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, “When the noun is the object of the preposition, it does not *require* the article to be definite: if it has the article, it *must* be definite; if it *lacks* the article, it *may* be definite.”⁶⁰

Second, ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος argues for a conceptual unity. McCabe refers to Matt. 3:11 as support for taking this as a “water-and-Spirit” birth. Here John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus would “baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire” (βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί). Again, like John 3:5, a preposition (ἐν) governs two anarthrous nouns (πνεῦμα and πῦρ). One sees that Jesus’ baptism would be accomplished by the Holy Spirit and fire with the preposition ἐν embracing both agents. Therefore, McCabe suggests that the prepositional phrase in John 3:5 is analogous to Matt. 3:11. Since “born of water and Spirit” in John 3:5 is parallel with “born from above” in verses 3 and 7 and “born of the Spirit” in verse 6, 8, this provides support for considering a “water-and-Spirit” birth as a conceptual unity and identifying the Holy Spirit as the agent of regeneration.

Third, McCabe notes that Johannine literature uses a passive form of γεννάω with the preposition ἐκ (“born of”) in referring to the new birth originating with God. “Born of” is used fourteen times in Johannine literature. Excluding John 3:15, the object of preposition identifies the source from which the birth is produced in each case. In twelve of the thirteen examples, God or the Holy Spirit is the agent used to produce spiritual birth.

⁵⁹ Daniel C. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 246.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

In the exception, John 3:6, the use of “flesh” as the object of ἐκ does not violate the argument because that which comes from “flesh” is “flesh.” Therefore, since John 3:5 contains the same type of construction, McCabe suggests this refers to the person of πνεῦμα rather than a reference to the nature of πνεῦμα.⁶¹

Conclusion

Many able scholars have attempted to interpret of John 3:5 resulting in many diverse views. This paper has surveyed the leading interpretations acknowledging both their strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, the key concepts, contextual background, parallel expressions, and syntactical features were examined to determine the most plausible meaning of “born of water and Spirit.”

The interpretive problem focuses primarily on the term “water.” Traditionally, the most popular interpretation views it as a reference to Christian baptism. However, this interpretation assumes a reference to baptism. Nowhere has John stated this to be the case. Neither does it fit the parallelism of John 3:3–8. Rather the parallelism emphasizes a new birth produced by the Spirit. Notice that “born of water and Spirit” in verse 5 restates and attempts to explain “born from above” in verse 3 and that “born of the Spirit” in verse 8 also parallels verse 5. In fact, “water” is neither mentioned nor explained in the verses that follow John 3:5.

The analysis of the syntactical features revealed that “water and Spirit” should be taken as a conceptual unity. The phrase may be interpreted either expegetically as a “water-spirit” source or coordinate as a “water-and-Spirit” agent of birth. Those who favor

⁶¹ McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit,’” 97–98.

a “water-spirit” source believe the phrase is a reference to the nature of spirit. However, the “water-and-Spirit” view seems more likely due to the arguments set forth earlier in the syntactical section by McCabe. The phrase, as a conceptual unity, thus would refer to the person of the Holy Spirit who acts as an agent to bring the new birth.

Finally, the examination of the contextual background revealed the Old Testament to be most likely background for the passage. In John 3:10 Jesus presumed that Nicodemus had knowledge of the Old Testament since he was a “teacher of Israel.” Of the many Old Testament references where “water” and “spirit” are used together, Ezek. 36:25–27 was most striking. Ezekiel’s prophecy predicts that God would put His Spirit into His people to effect spiritual regeneration. God would give them a new heart and cleanse them from their sin. The fulfillment of this prophecy would signal that the Jewish eschatological hope was at hand as well as the arrival of a new age with a new covenant.

Therefore, taking the phrase “born of water and Spirit” as a conceptual unity, one could best understand it as a reference to a new birth effected by the Holy Spirit Himself. Only those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit can enter into the “kingdom of God.

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ATHEISTS LOVE THE OLD TESTAMENT COMMAND TO KILL THE CANAANITES

Timothy J. White, D. Min.*

Introduction

New Atheist Richard Dawkins marshals his arguments against believing in God by using the Old Testament command to kill the Canaanites:

The Bible story of Joshua’s destruction of Jericho, and the invasion of the Promised Land in general, is morally indistinguishable from Hitler’s invasion of Poland....The Bible may be an arresting and poetic work of fiction, but it is not the sort of book you should give your children to form their morals.... Joshua’s action was a deed of barbaric genocide.”¹

Dawkins calls God a moral monster: “What makes my jaw drop is that people today should base their lives on such an appalling role model as Yahweh—and even worse, that they should bossily try to force the same evil monster (whether fact or fiction) on the rest of us.”²

It is ironic that some evangelicals with a low view of Scripture, such as C. S. Cowles, also compare the holy war of the Old Testament to Hitler’s genocide. Moses commanded all the Canaanites including women and children in Deuteronomy 7:2 to be killed. This command was obeyed in Joshua 6:21. Cowles calls this the “genocidal destruction of Canaanite children”³ and compared what happened in Canaan to the Nazis dumping truckloads of Jewish children into the flames at Jewish concentration camps.”⁴ Cowles also contends that “the God portrayed in the OT was full of fury against sinners,

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¹ Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006) 280, 292.

² *Ibid.*, 282.

³ C. S. Cowles “The Case for Radical Discontinuity” in *Show Them No Mercy*, ed. Stanly N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

but the God incarnate in Jesus is not.”⁵ What both atheistic Dawkins and evangelical Cowles glaringly overlook is God’s predominate acts of mercy and compassion throughout the Old Testament. For example, God commanded Zechariah to tell His people: “Oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger (immigrant or refugee), nor the poor” (Zechariah 7:10). God’s desire to help the marginalized is replete in the Old Testament. When Nineveh repented under the preaching of Jonah, God spared the entire nation from judgment. Jonah responded by affirming God’s loving nature: “I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity” (Jonah 4:2).

The provision of receiving pardoned from judgment was built into every message and prophecy of judgment in the Old Testament because God is merciful and full of compassion according to Jeremiah 18:8: “If that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.”

Evangelicals with a high view of Scripture also explain away what appears as the plain meaning of the command to exterminate the Canaanites. Douglas Groothuis in *Christian Apologetics* rejects the idea that God commanded the killing of noncombatant Canaanites in the conquest. He contends that all the cities that Joshua “utterly destroyed” were military forts. The nations listed in Joshua 11:1-5 first attacked Israel and Joshua and his army were only defending themselves.

He writes that “the Israelites did not target nor did they kill noncombatants... the biblical text of Joshua nor that of Judges supports any genocide. The attacks on Jericho and

⁵ Ibid., 28.

AI were assaults on military targets. The major wars that Israel fought were defensive.”⁶ Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad writes about what is called “The Manual of War” in Deuteronomy 20.⁷ Von Rad disagrees with the view of Groothuis that Israel’s war was only defensive: “The author conceives of the holy wars as predominantly wars of religion, in which Israel turns offensively against the Canaanite cult which is irreconcilable with the faith of Yahweh.”⁸

Joshua 6:21 records that “they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.” Children did not belong to the military. Neither did women nor the elderly belong to the military.

Evangelical Paul Copan elaborates on this argument that Israel only fought against military fortresses in which, he contends, were no elderly, women, nor children. He bases his argument on Ancient Near Eastern practices of hyperbolic language such as “utterly destroyed” when all were not eliminated. Perhaps Joshua was following this Ancient Near

⁶ Douglas Groothuis. *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011) 674-675.

⁷ This manual of war has two parts. The first part is the Manual of Ordinary War for nations outside of Canaan (20:1-15). Here was instruction for fighting nations “at a distance” in 20:15 or outside of the Promised Land. In this case only the men were to be killed not the women and children because of the likelihood of intermarriage and adoption of their gods was less likely. These nations were not as wicked as the Canaanites. Also “Aramean women adopted the religions of their husbands. Abraham, for example, insisted that his servant get a wife from the Aramean culture for Isaac and not a Canaanite woman (Gen. 24).” (Jack S. Deere. *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985). In the second part was the Manual of Holy War for the Canaanite nations (20:16-20). For the nations within Canaan the command was total annihilation because of their incurable wickedness and the threat of intermarriage and adoption of the Canaanite false religions (20:19-20). Sometimes the argument is made that God’s command to kill the Canaanites cannot be accurate because God could not make up His mind on the subject as Deuteronomy 20 allegedly shows. Cowles states that God “kept changing his mind about his genocidal will” (Cowles, *Show Them No Mercy*, 40). That was not the case. God had different military strategies for two very different kinds of nations as just explained.

⁸ Gerhard von Rad. *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958) 118.

Eastern practice in Joshua 10:40, but in 23:7 Joshua clearly states the real situation that all the Canaanite nations were not annihilated. Joshua then strongly warns Israel because they did not fully obey the Lord's command, now Israel will have to battle against worshipping the Canaanite gods and these Canaanite nations will be "a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you" (23:13).

This use of exaggerated speech doesn't mean many were not put to death as recorded by Joshua 6:21. Copan also notes that the description of "utterly destroying" the women and children was another example of Ancient Near Eastern embellishment to mean only that the military in the city was defeated.⁹

The major problem in Canaan was idolatry that could only be eradicated through annihilation and the overwhelming majority of Canaanites were guilty (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:16-18). The idolatry in Canaan was not limited to the military. The women of Canaan were also guilty of leading the Israelite men into gross immorality, which was part of their false worship, as recorded in Numbers 25. This is a case in point why God gave the command of killing the sexually deviant Canaanites, which included the women. The command to also kill the Canaanite will be addressed later in this article.

Richard Hess who is professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Denver Seminary argues similarly with Grootius and Copan: "The text refers to Rahab with her family. She is involved with the inn. However, no other noncombatants are singled out. . . .

⁹ Paul Copan. *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) 182, Kindle Edition.

All of this coincides with the portrait of a small and militarized center.”¹⁰ The reason Rahab is singled out is because she alone of all the Canaanites, as far as is recorded, exercised faith in the Lord which inducted her into the Hall of Fame chapter of Faith in Hebrews 11. Only Rahab being mentioned does not prove she was the lone noncombatant which is an argument from silence.

Gerhard von Rad clearly believed the Yahweh wars in the Old Testament were literal, historical events when he outlined the references and common characteristics to Holy War in the Old Testament in his book *Holy War in Ancient Israel*.

Cowles, however, believes that another way to explain away the offense of the command to kill the Canaanites, was to reject it as literal. Cowles approves Duane L. Christensen’s use of allegorizing these texts: “It is this spiritual battle to which this text speaks” (*Deuteronomy*, WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991, 32).¹¹ Dawkins also uses this argument to reinforce his attack on the Bible. After referring to God’s command to drive out the Canaanites, Dawkins responded to the apologists who reject the literal interpretation of these narratives: “They cannot get away with it, not even if they employ that favorite trick of interpreting selected scriptures as ‘symbolic’ rather than literal. By what criterion do you decide which passages are symbolic, which literal?”¹² Did we just hear an argument for the literal, historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics from an atheist?

Here are some of the characteristics of these literal holy wars according to Gerhard von Rad. What these characteristics show is that God used a ragtag army of amateurs who

¹⁰ Richard S. Hess. “The Jericho and Ai of the Book of Joshua,” in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (vol. 3. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbranus, 2008) 36.

¹¹ C. S. Cowles, *Show Them No Mercy*, 37.

¹² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 280.

did not use the sophisticated military equipment nor tactics of the surrounding nations whose victories obviously came from the Lord.

- 1) Holy Wars commenced with the blowing of the trumpet (Judges 6:34-35).
- 2) Israel prepared for battle by consecrating themselves (Deuteronomy 23:9-14).
- 3) Israel fought in “the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26).
- 4) The Lord caused Israel’s enemy to lose courage (Joshua 5:1).
- 5) God directly defeated the enemy (Joshua 10:11).
- 6) Israel sometimes aided the Lord (Judges 5:23).
- 7) The highpoint was the *herem*, the consecration of the booty to Yahweh (Joshua 6:18).
- 8) After the battle, Yahweh commanded “To your tents, O Israel” (2 Samuel 20:1).¹³

Clearly from these references, there were literal holy wars in the Old Testament fought in obedience to God’s command. The question is why? Why did God initiate holy war?

Theological Justification For Holy War

John M. Frame states that “theodicy means literal justification of God. It is used to describe proposed solutions to the problem of evil.”¹⁴ This paper will provide a theodicy or a justification for God’s righteousness in commanding the use of force in eliminating Canaanites and answer other objections or questions raised in the discussion of this ethical issue.

¹³ Gerhard von Rad. *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 49.

¹⁴ Frame has an interesting approach to the problem of evil. He references Job’s problem with evil and suffering. Job believed he was suffering undeservedly and expressed those feelings by blaming God in 19:7. Frame writes, “Notice also that Job never learns why he has had to endure suffering.... The book provides no answers to these questions.... We need, to be cautious in probing the problem of evil.... God may sometimes do things that appear to our finite minds to be contrary to that divine righteousness. When that happens, we must not demand explanations, but rather trust (John M. Frame. *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2015) 167, 175, 179. It could be argued, if one believes that Job wrote the book that bears his name, that God did eventually reveal to Job the reasons for his sufferings when the Holy Spirit superintended Job in the writing of inspired Scripture.

Israel was the chosen nation through whom God would bring salvation to the world through the future Jewish Messiah. This God given mission was to be fulfilled in the Promised Land. For example, the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem in Judah (Micah 5:2). Consequently, Israel was the only nation authorized to be involved in holy war and Israel was only to be involved in holy war when God commanded them. Attempts on their own failed (1 Samuel 4:1-11). Paul Copan notes the uniqueness of this Old Testament command: “This was a unique, unrepeatable historical situation, and we could not justify Israel’s attacking the Canaanites *unless* God had commanded this by special revelation.”¹⁵ Merrill makes this application for our generation: “If no case could be made for Yahweh war without Israel’s participation in the Old Testament times, surely none can be made today whether done in the name of Christ, Allah, or any other authority.”¹⁶ There are three theological justifications for holy war and God’s command to kill the Canaanites in the Old Testament.

The Command To Kill The Canaanites Was Justified Because Israel And The Nations Needed To Be Taught The Character And Intentions Of The One True God

The Canaanites through great difficulty learned who God was through Old Testament times of judgment. Rahab testified to this knowledge in Joshua 2:10-11: “For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when you came out of Egypt; and what you did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because

¹⁵ Paul Copan. “How Could God Command the Killing of the Canaanites?” *Enrichment Journal* (2019): http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201004/201004_138_Canannites.cfm.

¹⁶ Eugene Merrill, *Show Them No Mercy*, 85.

of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” Dawkins complains that “the ethnic cleansing begun in the time of Moses is brought to bloody fruition in the book of Joshua, a text remarkable for the bloodthirsty massacres it records and the xenophobic relish with which it does so.”¹⁷ Neither the Exodus nor the Conquest were racial cleansing, for in the future when Israel sinned, Israel suffered a similar fate at the hands of the Babylonians. Lamentations 2 provides the sad story that recounted this judgement. “God was concerned with sin, not ethnicity.”¹⁸ All of Canaan had the same knowledge of the one true God as Rahab, but they hardened their hearts.

The Command To Kill Canaanites Was Also Justified Because Of The Irremediable Hardness Of The Hearts Of The Idolaters.

Merrill wrote that the process begins with one’s hardening of oneself and ends with the confirmation of that hardening by the Lord, who then brings about the only avenue available to him--- the destruction of the irredeemable rebel.¹⁹

An example is Pharaoh who hardened his heart (Exodus 7:13) before God responded in hardening Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 9:12). This also was the case in the Canaanite conquest. Joshua is giving a summary of the Northern Campaign in 11:16-23, when he notes that none of the cities made peace with Israel, save only the Gibeonites, because the Lord had hardened their hearts that he might “destroy them utterly” (11:19-20). Donald Campbell writes that this hardening happened because “the Canaanites’ day of grace was gone.”²⁰

¹⁷ Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. 280.

¹⁸ Paul Copan. *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*, 165.

¹⁹ Merrill Tenny. *Show Them No Mercy*. 86.

²⁰ Donald K. Campbell. *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John Walvoord, Roy Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985) 354.

Finally, The Command To Kill The Canaanites Was Also Justified Because Of The Need To Protect Israel Against Spiritual Corruption.

In two prescriptive passages God instructed Israel to annihilate the wicked Canaanites lest the nation Israel fall prey to the Canaanite idolatry and false teaching (Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and 20:16-18). Idolatry cannot be separated from pagan nations who were idolatrous; therefore the idolatrous nations had to be annihilated.

God had told Abraham that Israel was going to be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13). But when the iniquity of Amorites was full, then Israel would enter the Promised Land. Howard writes, “for many years, the Canaanites’ sins apparently would not justify the annihilation that would come when the Israelites took the land. However, that time would arrive, and we see that it did arrive by the time of Joshua.”²¹ Clay Jones notes the evidence of the moral decline in Canaan: “Although early Canaanite laws proscribed either death or banishment for most forms of incest, after the fourteenth century BC, the penalties were reduced to no more than the payment of a fine.”²² This follows the 400 years in Egypt and coincides with God’s command to Joshua to punish the extreme wickedness of Canaan.

In Leviticus 18:3, Moses recorded the command of the Lord to the children of Israel: “after the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwelt, shall you not do: and after

²¹ David Howard, Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993) 81.

²² Clay Jones. “Killing the Canaanites,” *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 33, Number 4, (2010): http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAF3334_ORIGINAL.pdf Harry Hoffner, Jr. an American professor of Hittitology writes that several centuries prior to the fourteenth century the incest and bestiality were punishable by banishment or death among the Hittites. After the fourteenth century, the laws changed so that “the human offender could continue to live in the city without bringing the wrath of the gods upon it.” “The same pattern of ameliorating the older and more rigorous penalties and replacing them with simple fines can be seen again and again in Hittite laws themselves” (Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., “Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East” *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. Germany: Neukirchen Vluyn, 1973) 85-90.

the doings of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, shall you not do: neither shall you walk in their ordinances.” Then the heinous sins of Canaan are listed and described in 18:6-23: incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality. Howard notes that “Archaeological excavation has shown that the practice of child sacrifice was especially the province of the Canaanites.”²³

The reason for the *herem* (the command to “utterly destroy”) was to keep Israel from being polluted with the sins of idolatry of the Canaanites. Howard stated that Israel had already “yielded to temptation and the Baal of Peor in the wilderness” (Numbers 25; 31:1-4). In Deuteronomy, the Lord had made His desires clear: ‘You shall utterly destroy them ...precisely so that they might not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done on behalf of their gods (20:17-18).’²⁴

Clay Jones argues that one of the reasons for the command to kill the Canaanites was the capital punishment for their sins:

The “new atheists” call God’s commands to kill the Canaanites “genocide,” but a closer look at the horror of the Canaanites’ sinfulness, exhibited in rampant idolatry, incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality, reveals that God’s reason for commanding their death was not genocide but capital punishment.²⁵

²³ David Howard, Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, 82.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁵ Clay notes that most of the sins of the Canaanites were simply imitations of their false gods: Like all Ancient Near East (ANE) pantheons, the Canaanite pantheon was incestuous. Baal has sex with his mother Asherah, his sister Anat, and his daughter Pidray, and none of this is presented pejoratively. About the sin of bestiality, Clay writes that “probably the ultimate sexual depravity is intercourse with animals. As with incest, the penalty for having sex with animals decreased about the fourteenth century BC... This explains why, in certain cities, Yahweh sentenced to death everything that breathes. If they had sex with just about every living thing they could get their hands on, and they did, then all had to die (Clay Jones. “Killing the Canaanites” *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 33, Number 4, 2010):http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAF3334_ORIGINAL.pdf.

Clearly these three reasons justify God's command to kill the wicked and unrepentant Canaanites. Another troubling question that is often asked in this discussion is what will next be addressed: "Why were the innocent Canaanite children included in the command to annihilate the Canaanite nations?"

Justification For God's Command To Kill Canaanite Children

As previously mentioned, Hawkins compared the Joshua's campaign against Canaan to Hitler's invasion of Poland. Of course, in the bombing of Polish cities innocent men, women, and children were killed. Cowles calls Moses' command to kill Canaanite children in Deut. 7:2 "genocidal destruction of Canaanite children" and compared it to the Nazis dumping truckloads of Jewish children into the flames at Jewish concentration camps.²⁶ This is a legitimate question: Why were children included in the corporate capital punishment of the Canaanites? There are, however, answers to this disturbing question.

In the Deuteronomy 7, God commanded Israel: "Neither shall you make marriages with them; your daughter you shall not give unto his son, nor his daughter shall you take unto your son. For they will turn away your son from following me, that they may serve other gods."

In the Deuteronomy 20, God called on Israel to "utterly destroy" the Canaanites including children and added a similar reason for the command: "That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should you sin against the Lord your God" (20:18). Had the Canaanite children been spared, they would have grown up and married the Old Testament people of God and turned them away from

²⁶ C. S. Cowles. *Show Them No Mercy*, 31.

the one true God. The result of these marriages and turning from God would have been eternal separation from God. The downfall of Solomon tragically illustrates why God commanded Joshua to kill the Canaanites, which Joshua did not complete. It is recorded in 1 Kings 11 that “Solomon love many foreign women of Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites,” (the Canaanite nations that Joshua failed to destroy). This resulted in precisely the apostasy that God predicted: “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods.... For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (11:1-5).

William Lane Craig in discussing the command to kill the Canaanites brings out this gracious act of God in the command to kill the Canaanite children:

Moreover, if we believe, as I do, that God’s grace is extended to those who die in infancy or as small children, the death of these children was actually their salvation. We are so wedded to an earthly, naturalistic perspective that we forget that those who die are happy to quit this earth for heaven’s incomparable joy. Therefore, God does these children no wrong in taking their lives.²⁷

Had the Canaanite children grown up in the wicked Canaanite culture of idolatry, upon death they would have spent eternity in judgment. But as the case was, these Canaanite children who had not yet reached the age of accountability, went to Heaven with whom all of God’s people will for eternity enjoy fellowship.

The next time there is holy war will be in the future when God begins again to deal with the nation of Israel.

²⁷ William Lane Craig. “#16 Slaughter of the Canaanites,” Reasonable Faith, August 06, 2007. Accessed 8-1-2018, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/slaughter-of-the-canaanites/>.

The Future Holy War

After the church is raptured and the seven-year Tribulation begins, Yahweh war commences again when God once again starts working with the nation of Israel. Jeremiah called the Tribulation period “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (30:7). Holy war is depicted graphically in Revelation 12:7-9: “there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels... and the great dragon was cast out... called the Devil, and Satan... he was cast out into the earth.” “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman (Israel) which brought forth the man child” (12:13). At this point, Satan starts rallying his armies in Revelation 16:13-16 “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (16:14) at Armageddon (16:16). In Revelation 19:11-21, like the Old Testament holy wars, God initiates this war, carries it out, and brings the victory when Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords returns with his armies and utterly destroys the armies of the anti-Christ. So much for Cowles’ argument that “the God portrayed in the OT was full of fury against sinners, but the God incarnate in Jesus is not.”²⁸

Holy wars come to an end after the millennial reign of Christ when Satan is released from the abyss where he has been incarcerated for 1000 years. Then Satan “deceives the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle” (Revelation 20:7-8). The warrior God for the last time quickly puts down this last rebellion: “and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:9-

²⁸ C. S. Cowles. *Show Them No Mercy*, 28.

10). Unlike the holy wars in the Old Testament, where Joshua and the Israelites only partially defeated the enemy, Jesus will completely judge and annihilate God's opponents. What follows these last holy wars is the 1000-year reign of peace when "the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace" (Isaiah (9:6)).

Warfare Today

Since holy war is behind and before us in reference to Israel, what kind of warfare is the present day Christian battling. As far as for Christians today, "the Christian must....be guided not by the Old Testament principles and practices of Yahweh war, for they were relevant to the Israelite theocracy only and pertinent primarily to the dispossession and / or annihilation of the Canaanite peoples, who illegally occupied the land of promise."²⁹

Jesus in his end-time sermon called the Olivet Discourse did not allude to holy war. In none of his sermons (the sermon on the mount, the upper room discourse) did Jesus make any reference to the Old Testament holy wars. New Testament authors speak of spiritual warfare but nothing about the church taking up arms to do battle for the Lord (Ephesians 6:10-18, etc.). Paul reminds Christians that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood." Jesus, however, never condemned war and even recognized the inevitability of war (Matthew 22:7; Luke 14:31-32).

Nevertheless, Jesus uses something well known to his audience, warfare, to illustrate his point, and in so doing could be taken as implicitly recognizing not only the reality but also the legitimacy of warfare at times in a fallen world. After all, Israel itself gained its Promised Land by divinely sanctioned and aided warfare. It seems hard to believe that Jesus would use something intrinsically evil (war) to

²⁹ Eugene Merrill. *Show Them No Mercy*, 92.

illustrate something good (discipleship and counting the cost) without further clarification.³⁰

Paul recognized the importance of human government in Romans 13:1-7 who does not bear the sword in vain which many Bible scholars believe includes going to war to defend one's nation in "just war." Another question raised in the discussion of God's command to kill the Canaanites that needs to be answered is the question of how can believers justify holy war in the Old Testament and just war theory for today which some say is so like Islamic Jihad?

The Difference Between Holy War, Just War, And Islamic Jihad

In the analysis of God's command to kill the Canaanites, a comparison with modern day Jihad is often brought up. Here is a question fielded by William Lane Craig:

I have heard you justify Old Testament violence on the basis that God had used the Israelite army to judge the Canaanites and their elimination by Israelites is morally right as they were obeying God's command (it would be wrong if they did not obey God in eliminating the Canaanites). This resembles a bit on how Muslims define morality and justify the violence of Muhammad and other morally questionable actions (Muslims define morality as doing the will of God). Do you see any difference between your justification of OT violence and Islamic justification of Muhammad and violent verses of the Quran? Is the violence and morally questionable actions and verses of the Quran, a good argument while talking to Muslims?

Craig provides a more accurate contrast between the Old Testament Holy war with modern day Islamic jihad.

Now how does all this relate to Islamic jihad? Islam sees violence as a means of propagating the Muslim faith.... By contrast, the conquest of Canaan represented God's just judgement upon those peoples. The purpose was not at all to get them to convert to Judaism! War was not being used as an instrument of propagating the Jewish faith. Moreover, the slaughter of the Canaanites represented an unusual historical circumstance, not a regular means of behavior.... But Muslims and

³⁰ Kenneth Gardoski. "Jesus and War." *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Baptist Bible Seminary Spring. Vol.14. Number 1, 2010) 34.

Christians differ radically over God's nature. Christians believe that God is all-loving, while Muslims believe that God loves only Muslims. Allah has no love for unbelievers and sinners. Therefore, they can be killed indiscriminately. Moreover, in Islam God's omnipotence trumps everything, even His own nature. He is therefore utterly arbitrary in His dealing with mankind. By contrast Christians hold that God's holy and loving nature determines what He commands.³¹

Jihad is not the same as holy war in the Old Testament nor does Jihad qualify as just war today. The biblical view of just war for today, however, has a connection to "holy war" in the Old Testament. Mike Stallard makes that connection between Old Testament holy war and the present just war theory:

Virtually no Christian argues that the Old Testament supports pacifism. Divinely sanctioned war seems assured if all one has is the Old Testament text. All believers then must hold to the fact that in history there have been at least some biblically justifiable wars. One of the most striking examples is that of Moses' instructions to the children of Israel as they await the soon conquest of the Promised Land: When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you.... you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them (Dt. 7:1-2; NKJV) For someone who accepts the Old Testament as canonical, it is hard to dismiss the fact of justified warfare based upon these and many other examples.³²

Mike Stallard next goes to the New Testament to justify just war theory:

The strongest arguments in behalf of a just war are the statements that affirm the government's right to use force. Paul does this in Romans 13:1-7. The government can "bear the sword" (existence of just war and punishment) but does so in the context of being ministers of God to punish evildoers (right motive and intentions). Furthermore, the passage seems to imply that Christians are to be submissive to the government in all things (a participatory approach if your country is at war would be consistent with this command).³³

³¹ William Lane Craig. "#16 Slaughter of the Canaanites," Reasonable Faith (August 06, 2007): Accessed 8-1-2018. <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/slaughter-of-the-canaanites/>.

³² Dr. Mike Stallard. "Is There Such a Thing as a Just War?" Baptist Bible Seminary Faculty Forum (January 24, 2002): Accessed 8-2-2018. <http://our-hope.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/JustWar1.pdf>.

³³ Stallard provides eight criteria of a just war which is also an admission that not all war is justified. Stallard in his article elaborates on the criteria of a just war.

1. Only proper and competent authorities may declare and wage war.
2. Such authorities must have a just cause.
3. Violence may only be used as a last resort after all other options have failed.
4. The nation declaring the just war must have the right intention or legitimate aim in doing so.
5. There must be a high degree of probability for success for the nation waging a just war.

Another argument for just war is the self-defense of one's nation. Eugene Merrill put forth this case:

We prefer to come down on the side of those who understand the Christian to be a citizen of two realms---the earthly and the heavenly---with their respective privileges and responsibilities. In a fallen world this sometimes means that the believer must take sword in hand in defense of home and country in recognition of the fact that the “[human] authorities that exist have been established by God” (Rom. 13:1).³⁴

Self-defense was allowed in Exodus 22:2 in the case of a thief breaking and entering one's house at night. The home owner was permitted to use force to kill the invader to protect himself and his family. R. A. Cole agrees: “To kill a thief digging through the mud-brick wall (Ezek. 12:5) is justifiable homicide, if done after dark. He may be an armed murderer, for all the householder knows.”³⁵

Just as a nation has the obligation to not bear the sword in vain in militarily defending itself against enemy intruders, the Bible allows for the individual believers to use force to defend their homes and families. This allowance admittedly will be rare if ever. Nevertheless, the responsibility is provided in Scripture. Dr. Stallard in his discussion of just war for a nation makes this association with an individual: “Can a man legitimately defend himself and his family from rape, pillage and murder? If the answer is yes, the defense of some form of just war theory is virtually won as application can more easily be

6. There must exist just means for the just war that are both discriminate and proportional.

7. Only one side in the war can be justified.

8. The war must be fought in a proper spirit of love.

Dr. Mike Stallard. “Is There Such a Thing as a Just War?” *Baptist Bible Seminary Faculty Forum* (January 24, 2002): Accessed 8-2-2018. <http://our-hope.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/JustWar1.pdf>.

³⁴ Eugene Merrill. *Show Them No Mercy*. 92.

³⁵ R. A. Cole. *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 2, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973) 179.

extended from individuals to governments.”³⁶

Christians are divided on this subject of the individual Christian’s use of force in self-defense. Following the Supreme Court ruling on the Second Amendment that permitted the individual citizen to own and keep a firearm in his house, John Piper was asked, “Are you opposed to people owning guns?” Piper referred to Jim Elliot and the other missionaries who had guns but did not kill the attacking Auca Indians because to have done so would have sent them to hell. Yet Piper says he believes in the military protecting our nation and the police bearing arms and protecting our families from criminals. He, however, does not keep a gun in his house and advocates that Christians should not store guns in their house so that if an unsaved home invader breaks into the Christian’s house, that unsaved home invader will not be sent to hell. Piper wrote, “We don't need guns in our houses. Those who live by the gun will die by the gun.”³⁷

Justin Taylor while admitting the difficulty of this issue advocates the wisdom of allowing Christians to use force in cases of self-defense:

We now have to deal with the regular threat of mentally unstable people, jihadist terrorists, and others using guns to commit mass killings.... Blunt strategies of simply outlawing guns don’t work, and they violate the Second Amendment. Yet there must be legal, constitutional ways for us to alleviate the threat of mass shootings by making it harder for terrorists, the mentally unstable, and others to commit them. It is unseemly for Christians to be pro-gun zealots who automatically say “no” to even the most modest reforms. Yet we also know the nature of man, and the nature of governments. Sometimes, as a people and a nation, we must confront forces of violence by using armed force in return.³⁸

³⁶ Mike Stallard. “Is There Such a Thing as Just War?” *Baptist Bible Seminary Faculty Forum* (January 24, 2002) 3. <http://www.our-hope.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/JustWar1.pdf>.

³⁷ Piper, John. “Are you opposed to people owning guns?” *Desiring God* (October 13, 2008): <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/are-you-opposed-to-people-owning-guns>.

³⁸ Justin Taylor. “Should Christians Support Gun Control?” *The Gospel Coalition* (June 22, 2016) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/should-christians-support-gun-control/>.

It is understandable not to want to be responsible for sending the unconverted into eternity. But if it is permissible for the military and the police to bear arms for our protection and to send people to eternity who are not prepared for heaven so should the Christians as a last resort be permitted to own and keep a gun in his house for the protection of their family.

Stallard defended the idea of self-defense in the New Testament:

The Apostle Paul appeals on numerous occasions for military protection for himself. This appears, at the very least, to set up an implicit sanction for just war in case of self-defense (Acts 16:37-39; 22:25-29; 23:12-27; 25:11). It is hardly befitting a man who would want to emphasize avoidance of all use of force. While working on F-16s as an engineer I was once asked why I was working at a place that made weapons to kill people while I was going to seminary at the same time. Was this not a contradiction in my life? (The person asking the question did not know that Baptists like to fight!) My immediate response was that it is not a spiritual thing to let your family or your country be destroyed (a classic appeal to the idea of self-defense).³⁹

Conclusion

God was justified in commanding the rebellious, wicked, and unrepentant Canaanites to be killed. God initiated the Old Testament holy wars and while holy wars are not for today, this action by God teaches us the concept of just war, not all wars, but just war is valid. When God deals with Israel in the future, He will initiate holy war again. While all wars are not just or holy, when the criteria are met, some wars are just.

God has given government the “sword.” If a nation’s military can wield the sword to defend and protect America and the police can use force to guard our communities, then individuals should also be able to defend themselves and their families against unjust, murderous intruders.

³⁹ Mike Stallard, “*Is There Such a Thing as a Just War?*” Baptist Bible Seminary Faculty Forum (January 24, 2002) 15. <http://www.our-hope.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/JustWar1.pdf>.

These uses of force, however, are exceptional and not the norm for God's people. The Old Testament corporate capital punishment of the Canaanites was unique to the ancient times. Just war for today is the defense of our nation during war times. Christians use of personal force in the defense of themselves and their families again will be rare if ever. Piper said referring to Christians who own guns: "Those who live by the gun will die by the gun." Christians don't live by the gun. Some Christians keep a gun in the house only to be use in the most extreme case of home invasion with the potential of harming their families.

We should remember that God so loved the world of sinners and His enemies that He gave His Son for their salvation. Just as God in the Old Testament was full of compassion and mercy so is He today. Paul not only taught that God has ordained government for the protection of our country in Romans 13:1-7, but in Romans 5:6-8, Paul exalts God's sacrificial love for His enemies: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God's Son allowed his enemies to crucify him and then he publically prayed for his murderers: "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing (Luke 23:34). Jesus teaches us to follow his selfless example in what is the norm for Christians, which is to "love our enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them who despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF DEUTERONOMY: EVIDENCE FOR MOSES' AUTHORSHIP

Jason Seymour*

Introduction

Deuteronomy, being a recounting of Israel's wilderness journey from Egypt to the eastern edge of the Jordan River, includes a great number of geographical references. Since many critical scholars¹ believe that this book was written in 621 BC by an unknown priest from Jerusalem instead of by Moses around 1400 BC, the geographical references contained in Deuteronomy may be important for dating purposes. If these references are inconsistent or unlikely with the knowledge and perspective a person like Moses would have had in 1400 BC but are consistent or likely with the knowledge and perspective a priest from Jerusalem would have had in 621 BC, then these references can be used to bolster the later dating. But if the inconsistency is with the priest from Jerusalem in 621 BC, then these geographical references give support to the earlier dating. And in fact, the geographical references are more consistent or likely with Moses in 1400 BC than a priest from Jerusalem in 621 BC. Both the geographical perspective and the specific geographical references in Deuteronomy are more consistent and likely with Mosaic authorship around 1400 BC than with an authorship by a priest from Jerusalem in 621 BC.

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¹ cf. Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 179.

Geographical Perspective

The geographical perspective in Deuteronomy can be seen first by where it indicates the events are happening, second by what places it mentions in relation to where the events are happening, and third by what places it assumes are familiar to those it addresses. The first will be shown by Deuteronomy's mentions of the Jordan River, the second by its mentions of the promised land of Canaan, and the third by its mentions of Egypt. Following the discussion of these, the geographical perspective of Deuteronomy 34 related to the tribal territories will be considered.

The Jordan River

Both 1:1, 1:5, and 4:45-46 state that Moses spoke the words recorded in Deuteronomy "on this side of the Jordan,"² and 1:5 and 4:46 make it clear that this side of the Jordan is the eastern side by respectively adding "in the land of Moab" and "in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites." In three other places (3:8, 4:41, 4:47) the phrase "on this side of the Jordan" is also used to indicate the eastern side. In 3:25 Moses desired to see the land (i.e. promised land) that was "beyond the Jordan," in 3:20 Moses speaks of the land to be inherited by the nine and half tribes as "beyond the Jordan," and in 11:30 two mountains in the land of Canaan are said to be "on the other side of the Jordan." In fifteen other places (2:29, 3:27, 4:21, 4:22, 4:26, 9:1, 11:31, 12:10, 27:2, 27:4, 27:12, 30:18, 31:2, 31:13, 32:47), it is indicated that to reach the promised land of Canaan the Jordan must be *crossed*, indicating a position from the eastern side of the Jordan. Two times (3:17, 4:49), the Jordan is mentioned in such a way that it does not affect the geographical perspective.

² The Bible version used throughout is the New King James Version.

Therefore, in not one of the twenty-six times the Jordan River is mentioned in Deuteronomy is a geographical perspective west of the Jordan assumed. If a person from Jerusalem in 621 BC were to have written Deuteronomy, it would not be surprising if a geographical perspective west of the Jordan occasionally manifested itself, but Moses, writing and speaking from the east side of the Jordan as presented in the text itself, would never have occasion to slip into a geographical perspective west of the Jordan. Therefore, the complete consistency of a geographical perspective east of the Jordan River as evidenced in Deuteronomy is more consistent and likely for Moses.

The Promised Land of Canaan

There are at least one hundred and fourteen references to Israel's promised land of Canaan in Deuteronomy (though few of the instances use the word "promised"). The wording surrounding many of these references is something like "go up/in and possess it/the land." Another common wording includes some form of "land which you cross over the Jordan to possess." By far though, the most common sort of wording is something to the effect of "land which the LORD is giving you." These and few other less commonly used wordings account for the majority of references to the promised land of Israel. As can be seen, in each of these the geographical perspective is that of someone outside the promised land who is speaking/writing to a group who has not entered the promised land. On the other hand, at least thirty-two references to the promised land appear at first glance to present a geographical perspective from inside the promised land or after the entering into the land. All but two of these, though, are easily seen in context to be a statement of something to occur at a later time after the entering into the land (ex: 6:23, 26:10), and the

geographical perspective is still from the outside of the land before the land has been entered.

Nevertheless, there are still two references to the promised land that appear to be instances where the geographical perspective is not prior to entering the land and therefore are not so easily dismissed. One of these is 4:38 which says, “driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day.” The “as it is this day” would seem to indicate that Israel had already conquered the promised land of Canaan; but there is an alternative land that the text might be referring to. As S. R. Driver says, “The reference may be either to the territory East of Jordan, or (by an anachronism) to Palestine generally” though he favors the second option.³ If it is a reference to the land east of Jordan, then the geographical perspective already evidenced is not affected. Considering that the context (cf. 4:26, 4:40) assumes this geographical perspective and that the context (4:45-49) also mentions defeating and possessing the two kingdoms of the Amorites, it is more likely that 4:38 is a reference to the land east of the Jordan than to the land of Canaan.

The other difficult reference is 2:12 which says, “The Horites formerly dwelt in Seir, but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their place, just as Israel did to the land of their possession which the LORD gave them.” C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch say that the words of the last part of this verse “do not presuppose the conquest of the land of Canaan or a post-Mosaic authorship” but instead refer to the land east of the Jordan that was given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-

³ S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed. The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 77.

tribe of Manasseh.⁴ Driver, though, disagrees wholeheartedly, asserting that “the words could clearly not have been penned until after the Israelites had taken possession of Canaan,” and he bases this on the fact that the subject of the land received here is Israel not just the two and half tribes.⁵ While Driver is correct about the subject being Israel and not the specific tribes, it is a pointless assertion since this is a common practice as can be seen by how Israel is repeatedly the subject of the possession of the land of Canaan though it is known that only nine and half tribes would be living in it specifically and that even these tribes would have specific territories assigned to them (cf. Num 34:13). In addition, the context clearly supports this being a reference to the land east of the Jordan. Deuteronomy 2:12 is part of one of two parenthetical sections in chapter 2, and each are about people who were dispossessed of their land by either Edom, Moab, or Ammon. Each are also immediately connected in the context to how God told Israel they were not to bother these nations since these nations’ lands were a possession given to them by God. After being told this about Edom, Moab, and Ammon, finally God told *Israel* that they could take Sihon’s land and *possess* it (the Hebrew word for “possess” in 2:24 is the root word for the Hebrew word “possession” used in 2:12⁶). So, the context of 2:12 is clearly leading up to a climax, namely Israel dispossessing someone of their land through God’s power as had occurred with Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Therefore, 2:12 makes good sense in context if it is referring to the land east of Jordan but not good sense if referring to the conquest of Canaan.

⁴ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, n.d.), 293.

⁵ Driver, 38.

⁶ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible: with their renderings in the Authorized English Version*, in *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 52.

Consequently, it can be asserted that there are *no* references to the promised land in Deuteronomy that do not evidence a geographical perspective outside of the promised land of Canaan and before the entering into it. This consistency over so many references is more consistent and likely for Moses than for a person living in Jerusalem (i.e. in the land of Canaan) more than several hundred years after Israel entered into it.

Egypt

There are fifty references to Egypt in Deuteronomy. All but about two of them (17:16, 26:5) clearly indicate one of the following three things: First, that the departure from Egypt was something still fresh to these people of Israel. This can be seen by how often the second person is used related to the departure from Egypt (ex: “brought you out of Egypt”) or by the indications that the departure was still in the recent past (ex: “after they came out of Egypt”). Second, that the people of Israel were personally familiar with what life had been like in Egypt (ex: “where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden” 11:10). Third, that the people of Israel were personally familiar with the circumstances of the Exodus (i.e. the plagues and the Red Sea). This can be seen in phrases like “terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known” (7:15) and “diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid” (28:60).

In addition, outside of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers (books that even the critics say were written a good deal before Deuteronomy), the rest of the books of the Old Testament besides Deuteronomy mention Egypt only two-hundred and ninety one times though they contain over twenty-five times as many pages as Deuteronomy. In other words, though Deuteronomy is only 4% of the total number of pages, it has 14% of the references. Deuteronomy has an average of 1.28 references to Egypt per page while these books

average only .28 references per page. This would at least appear to indicate that to the author of Deuteronomy Egypt was important and familiar. Thus, the geographic perspective related to references to Egypt (i.e. familiarity) is more consistent and likely for Moses and his time period than for a priest living in Jerusalem in 621 BC.

Deuteronomy 34

In Deuteronomy 34:1-3, Moses is shown “all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.” Since this chapter mentions the territories of Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah though they had not been allotted yet and also mentions Moses’ death, it is likely that someone such as Joshua wrote this chapter (though Moses could have written it prophetically). Regardless, these lands reflect the *original* tribal allotments (the “Dan” in 34:1 is discussed later) and are consistent with a geographic perspective of someone living a few years after Moses when the lands were allotted (Josh 18). On the contrary, the lands mentioned would not be what a 621 BC author would know as Israel’s territory since by then the northern kingdom of Israel (including the former territory of Naphtali, Ephraim, and Manasseh) had been gone for a hundred years, the land of Gilead was not under Jewish control, and Judah’s territory did not extend to the Western Sea because of Philistia.⁷

⁷ cf. “THE REIGN OF JOSIAH,” map, *Holman Bible Atlas: A Complete Guide to the Expansive Geography of Biblical History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 153.

Specific Geographical References

Specific geographic references in Deuteronomy for the purposes of this paper include three things: cities, countries/territories, and miscellaneous terrain/topography/toponyms mentioned in Deuteronomy. Since many critics hold to the documentary hypothesis and thus accept that Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers were written prior to Deuteronomy and since some critics hold that Joshua and Judges are a continuation of the J and E documents⁸ and that parts of 1 and 2 Samuel are to be dated near to Solomon's time⁹, only the information given in Deuteronomy that is not also supplied by these other books will be presented for these three things (from here on, the term "other books" will be used to refer to these other books being considered). Following the presentation of these three, the specific geographic references will be considered as a whole.

Cities

Deuteronomy 3:10 says, "all the cities of the plain, all Gilead, and all Bashan, as far as Salcah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan." The city of Edrei is here presented a point of reference for one end of the territory of Og that was defeated by the Israelites, something not indicated in the other books. Elath, a "town on the northern edge of the Gulf of Elath (or Gulf of 'Aqabah) of the Red Sea,"¹⁰ is not mentioned in any of the other books considered but is mentioned in connection with Edom (Esau) in Deuteronomy 2:8 which says, "And when we passed beyond our brethren, the descendants of Esau who

⁸ cf. Pfeiffer, 295-296, 315-316.

⁹ Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 313.

¹⁰ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), s.v. "Elath."

dwelt in Seir, away from the road of the plain, away from Elath and Ezion Geber, we turned and passed by way of the Wilderness of Moab.” Deuteronomy 3:11 says, “For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the giants. Indeed his bedstead was an iron bedstead. (Is it not in Rabbah of the people of Ammon?) Nine cubits is its length and four cubits its width, according to the standard cubit.” While Rabbah is mentioned in the other books, its connection with Og’s bed is only found here. Deuteronomy 34:3 says, “the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.” While Zoar is mentioned in the other books, here it is used as a point of reference apparently at one of the extreme southern ends of the land of Canaan or at least one of the ends of the plain of the Valley of Jericho.

Deuteronomy 34:1 says, “Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan.” The Dan mentioned in this verse is not the city of the tribe of Dan, Dan Laish; Dan Laish was not in Gilead (cf. Judges 20:1) as the Dan in this verse is. The Dan here is Dan Jaan, only mentioned as such in 2 Samuel 24:6, though it is probably also the Dan mentioned in Genesis 14:14. In Deuteronomy 34:1, it is used as a point of reference for the extreme end of Gilead, something not indicated by any of the other mentions of it.

Countries/Territories

Deuteronomy 2:26 says, “And I sent messengers from the Wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying.” It would appear then from this verse that Sihon’s territory, and perhaps even the city of Heshbon, was near the Wilderness

of Kedemoth, which is correct.¹¹ This is a detail not discoverable in the other books. Deuteronomy 3:1 says, “Then we turned and went up the road to Bashan; and Og king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei,” and 3:13 says, “The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to half the tribe of Manasseh. (All the region of Argob, with all Bashan, was called the land of the giants.” That Bashan is on a road route and that it was called the land of the giants are details not given in the other books. Deuteronomy 11:10-11 says, “For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven.” These verses, by comparison with Canaan, indicate that Egypt was flat and did not receive much rain. While there is debate¹² as to the meaning of “watered it by foot,” it might be referring to irrigation.¹³ In none of the other books does it specify these details.

Deuteronomy 2:23 says, “And the Avim, who dwelt in villages as far as Gaza—the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and dwelt in their place.” None of the other books mention Caphtor. Deuteronomy 3:4 says, “And we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan,” and 3:13-14 says, “The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to half the tribe of Manasseh. (All the region of Argob, with all Bashan, was called the land of the giants. Jair the son of Manasseh took all the

¹¹ “THE LEVANT FROM 1200-1000, B.C. THE IRON I PERIOD,” map, *Holman Bible Atlas*, 78.

¹² L. Eslinger, “Watering Egypt (Deuteronomy XI 10-11),” *Vetus Testamentum* 37, no. 1 (1987): 85-89.

¹³ W. L. Alexander, *Deuteronomy*, The Pulpit Commentary, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 194-195.

region of Argob, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maachathites, and called Bashan after his own name, Havoth Jair, to this day.)” In these two passages, the region of Argob is mentioned in connection with Bashan, but it is not mentioned at all in any of the other books.

Miscellaneous Terrain/Topography/Toponyms

Deuteronomy 1:1 poses many geographical difficulties. It says, “These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain opposite Suph, between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab.” This is because Suph, Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab have puzzled many, and still there is debate on how they are to be understood or even identified.¹⁴ Suph (unless it is to be identified with the Red Sea), Paran (unless it is to be identified with El Paran, Mount Paran, or the Wilderness of Paran), Tophel, Laban, and Dizahab are not even mentioned in the other books.

Deuteronomy 1:2 says, “It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea.” This information is not mentioned in any of the other books. Deuteronomy 2:8 says, “And when we passed beyond our brethren, the descendants of Esau who dwell in Seir, away from the road of the plain, away from Elath and Ezion Geber, we turned and passed by way of the Wilderness of Moab.” None of the other books make a specific mention of the Wilderness of Moab. Deuteronomy 2:26 says, “And I sent messengers from the Wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying.” While Kedemoth is mentioned elsewhere, none of the other books mention

¹⁴ Zecharia Kallai, “Where Did Moses Speak (Deuteronomy I 1-5)?,” *Vetus Testamentum* 45, no. 2 (1995): 188-197.

the Wilderness of Kedemoth. Deuteronomy 3:8-9 says, “And at that time we took the land from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were on this side of the Jordan, from the River Arnon to Mount Hermon (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir),” and Deuteronomy 4:48 says, “from Aroer, which is on the bank of the River Arnon, even to Mount Sion (that is, Hermon).” None of the other books indicate that Mount Hermon was also called by these other names.

Deuteronomy 10:6 says, “Now the children of Israel journeyed from the wells of Bene Jaakan to Moserah, where Aaron died, and where he was buried; and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his stead.” While Bene Jaakan is mentioned elsewhere, this is the only reference to its wells. In addition, Moserah is not mentioned in the other books, and Mount Hor is the place always mentioned elsewhere as Aaron’s death place. Deuteronomy 10:7 says, “From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land of rivers of water.” None of the other books mention Gudgodah or that Jotbathah was a land of rivers. Deuteronomy 32:49 says, “Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho; view the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel as a possession.” In none of the other books is Mount Nebo indicated to be across from Jericho. Deuteronomy 33:2 says, “And he said: “The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand Came a fiery law for them.” None of the other books mention Mount Paran. Some other miscellaneous geographical mentions that are not found in the other books are a “valley opposite Beth Peor” (3:29, 4:46), “cities of the mountains” (2:37), a “road of the plain” (2:8), and a “plain opposite Suph” (1:1).

Specific Geographic References Considered As A Whole

In 621 BC, Judah did not control “the Gilead province or other districts of Transjordan.”¹⁵ In fact, it apparently did not have much control or presence on the east side of the Jordan or to the south in Josiah’s time or even in several hundred years, and in the majority of the years since the fall of Israel, the Assyrians, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites controlled these territories.¹⁶ It would appear that Moab had not been controlled by Judah since the time of Solomon¹⁷ and “written sources, both biblical and Assyrian, [...] point to this small country as very active, with a considerable military capability and successes to its credit in clashes against Judah and the Arabs.”¹⁸ Also, Ammon apparently had not been under Judah’s control but one period since Solomon’s reign.¹⁹ This period, during the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham (2 Chron. 26:8, 27:5), apparently only involved tribute, not occupation, and had ended by 730 BC. All in all, Ammon was actually a very important nation in the 7th century.²⁰ As far as Edom is concerned, Judah had lost control of it around 850 BC during Joram’s reign (2 Kings 8:28) and only regained it during the reigns of Amaziah and Uzziah (2 Kings 14) around 800-742 BC. For Edom, this time period of Assyrian domination (which included Josiah’s time) was “the period of Edom’s greatest prosperity,” and it at some times had even taken control of the most southern parts of Judah.²¹

¹⁵ Yahanon Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1967), 350. cf. Ephraim Stern, *The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods 732-332 BCE*, vol. 2 of *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 134-138.

¹⁶ Stern, 236-237.

¹⁷ Aharoni, 307.

¹⁸ Stern, 267.

¹⁹ maps, *Holman Bible Atlas*, 118, 125, 135, 144.

²⁰ Stern, 238.

²¹ Stern, 268-270.

Therefore, considering how little presence in the Transjordan and in the south Judah had in 621 BC or had had consistently for several hundred years, the amount of geographical information unique to Deuteronomy for these areas is impressive. A person trying to pass his work off as another's from several hundred years before is unlikely to add material to his account that is unique because of the chance that an anachronism will be made to expose his work, but the author of Deuteronomy even went so far as to name places that are not mentioned at all elsewhere. It is very likely that Moses, who actually lived through these events and walked in these places, would add such unique specific geographic information. But it is rather unlikely that a priest, hundreds of years after the events he purportedly records, would add such unique specific geographic information about places that he was unlikely to know personally since his country had not even controlled or had a presence in these places consistently for several hundred years and thus take the chance that what he wrote of these places could have been shown to be inaccurate geographically or historically.

Conclusion

The evidence from references to the Jordan, the references to the promised land, the references to Egypt, the tribal territory references in ch.34, the references to cities, the references to countries/territories, and the references to miscellaneous terrain/topography/toponyms in Deuteronomy has been presented. What then is the inevitable conclusion reached by the sum total of this evidence? Part of the answer must be that both the geographical perspective and specific geographical references that are on display in Deuteronomy are *not* very consistent or likely for a priest living in Jerusalem in

621 BC to have written. The rest of the answer is that both of these *are* very consistent and likely for Moses to have written around 1400 BC.

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JESUS' SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND SELF-IDENTIFICATION AS THE MESSIAH

Alfred A. Nyamiwa*

Introduction

The subject of Jesus' self-understanding and self-identification as the messiah may be approached from various points of view. Apologetic approach may comprise classical, evidentialist, reformed, historical Jesus findings, and integrative apologetic methods. Biblical approaches could instigate systematic or biblical theology through book by book study, or testament by testament, depending on the specific research interest. The New Testament canon especially the Synoptic gospels,¹ John and the Pauline epistles are the main accounts of the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and subsequent ascension of Christ. Donald Guthrie in his early works comments that, "it is customary to think of the Gospels as the accounts of the life of Christ, but it is at once apparent that they are not strict biographies, because their purpose is not facts but to proclaim the good news, (Grk εὐαγγελίου)."²

The general style for this subject often involves a brief look at the background of John's Gospel and purpose, coupled with an assortment of important motifs on Jesus's self-identity. The research sometimes includes certain resources from the three Synoptic gospels as well. To address the subject matter widely, an examination of certain scholarly

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¹ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki & Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 111. "The Synoptic Gospels are Mathew, Mark and Luke, which reflect many similarities to each other, in contrast to John's Gospel which provides a different (albeit complimentary) picture of Jesus."

² Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1965), 13.

views, are usually assimilated in the research for richer outcomes. Such resources might somewhat find coherent and cogent treatments within apologetic insights and appropriate theological basis for the subject matter or be less informative. The investigation could be exhaustive in a way that offers important reflections on pertinent issues or not, depending on the author's viewpoints. The intended outcome in many cases is often aimed at providing plausible arguments which reflect Jesus' self-understanding and identification as the Messiah. These and many others, are methods that are often employed for addressing the subject matter.

Methodology For The Research

The specific approach for this research diverges slightly from those structures stated above but certain themes, remain pertinent. The two strong schemes which capably captures a broader scope for this investigation are those of Ben Witherington and Peter Kreeft with Ronald Tacelli. Kreeft and Tacelli have provided an important plan in their *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, that is suitable for handling how Christ perceived His divine reality. In a summary, they state that,

“Jesus called Himself the Son of God –that is of the same nature as God (John 10:30). He also claimed to be sinless by questioning His critics “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (John 10:46). He likewise claimed to save us from sin and death (John 11:25). Jesus also changed Simon's name to Peter, which only God could do according to the Jewish understanding (John 6:51), He kept pointing people to Himself saying ‘come to Me’ (Math 11:28), but Buddha said, ‘Look not to me.’ Finally, Jesus said, ‘before Abraham was I am’ (John 8:58),”³ an assertion apparently set beyond mortal timelines.

³ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 58-9.

Kreeft and Tacelli's summary parallels that of Ben Witherington's outline on the same subject. According to Witherington, any adequate theory of Jesus' self-understanding must explain these thirteen established features of the historical Jesus:

“1. His independent approach to the Law, 2. His feeding of the 5,000, 3. His interpretation of his miracles, 4. His proclamation of the kingdom of God as present and inbreaking in His ministry, 5. His choosing of 12 disciples, 6. His use of “the Son of Man,” 7. His use of “amen,” 8. His use of “Abba,” 9. His distinguishing Himself from all his contemporaries, 10. His belief that one's future with God is hinged on Him, 11. His death necessary to rectify matters between God and humans, 12. His sense of mission to Israel, especially to sinners and outcasts, and 13. The rising questions of His Messianic reality in repeated patterns of controversy with His contemporaries.”⁴

Though Witherington's scheme is wider, the fusion of these two lists into three broader categories, provides comprehensive information required for the subject study. The panoramic framework of the lists captures the Christological, soteriological and the divine prerogative awareness of Jesus Christ, concerning Himself as the Messiah. The lists aptly accentuate Christological details within systematic, biblical and apologetic shades which are pertinent to the inquiry. Both lists also include soteriological highlights revealing the redemptive assertions, that disclose Jesus' Messianic self-awareness.

The Date For John's Gospel

The traditional, Christological, and theological imports of John's Gospel, have led to many critical questions. Critics have specifically questioned the person of John and his gospel's authorship, more than the three Synoptics gospels combined. The authorship of John is explicitly complex, especially when traditional views of internal and external

⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Christology of Jesus*, (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1997), 268.

evidences are evaluated. Therefore, answering to such questions, may be too extensive for this research concern, except for certain brief appraisals.

Keith Crim suggests an unclear position for John's date saying that "John was probably written near the end of the first century and after the Synoptics."⁵ Stephen Smalley on the other hand posits that "an earlier date than AD 150, is irrelevant. We know that John's gospel was familiar to Gnostics like *Ptolemaeus* and used by him in the middle of the second century. It was also used by the writers of the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* (AD 150), and the Valentinian document *The Gospel of Truth* (AD 150), which forms part of the codex of *Chenoboskion*."⁶ Smalley's argument for John's date is most considerable, compared to that of Crim, and hence credible and substantial for this writer's validation of John's date.

The Purpose And Christology Of John's Gospel

Many purposes emanate from reading the Gospel of John. Allan Culpeper has suggested certain approaches for studying the Gospel of John as "theological, sociological, traditional, and political according to the subject matter."⁷ However, such corpuses are too wide for this research. Smalley has observed that, "it is not easy to separate the background of the fourth evangelist from that of his readers..."⁸ Internal evidences reveal that Christological titles found in John were answering pertinent questions of Jesus' identity, asked by various characters in the book of John.

⁵ Keith Crim, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Vol, An Illustrated Encyclopedia (Nashville, TN: Parthenon, 1976), 482.

⁶ Stephen Smalley, *John: The Evangelist and Interpreter* (Milton Keynes: The Paternoster Press, 1978), 83.

⁷ Allan Culpeper, *The Gospel of Luke: The New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville TN; Abingdon 2000), 8-9.

⁸ Smalley, *John: The Evangelist and Interpreter*, 40.

Craig detects that “Christianity claims is bound up with the historical Jesus having done and said certain things on this earth at identifiable times and places, things which disclose the meaning and significance of his person and work and which may not be jettisoned without undermining the very heart of the Christian faith.”⁹ These works and words of Christ in many ways, provide evidences of His authentic self. The most important intimations of His statements for example the I AMs (John 6:35, 48; 8:12; 9:5; 8:58; 10:9; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1), gracefully demonstrate His redemptive purpose in the Gospel of John.

The Christology of John also employs such a lofty language, which unreservedly reveals the sublime permeation of Jesus’ life, into the life of creation. Culpeper observes that, “the pivotal role of incarnation in John’s gospel, helps to clarify the relationship between theology and Christology.” “...What Jesus reveals of God comes from what Jesus reveals of himself. Therefore, Jesus titles change how one talks about God”¹⁰. The purpose of John’s gospel is therefore salvific by way of revealing the person of Christ, on Whom that salvation is hinged. John offers the account of the Creator’s involvement with His creatures’ affairs with an end of bringing a solution to their greatest ruin.

Comparison Of John To The Synoptics On Christ Self-Awareness

The four gospel narrators had the honor of revealing the life of Christ historically, just as Jesus also did personally. Their accounts find an unequivocal place for this research apart from the rest of the New Testament canon authors. Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli

⁹ William L. Craig, *Reasonable faith: Christian truth and apologetics* Rev. ed., (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books 1994), 196.

¹⁰ Culpeper, *The New Interpreters Bible; The Gospel of John*, 496.

have recognized that “the four gospels... inform us about the claims, He made about himself and the claims others made about him.”¹¹ A look at the Synoptics reveal detailed commonalities in their content different from the content of John.

The humanity of Christ is emphatically juxtaposed with His divinity in the three Synoptic gospels. The Messianic identity is concealed in Mark more than it is in Mathew and Luke, an issue which is popularly labelled as the Messianic secret. However, the full-blown divinity of Jesus, is embedded in John’s account with superior ingresses, in comparison to the Synoptics. The semantic, uniqueness and loftiness of John’s gospel, separates it from possible dependence on the three Synoptics, as the Synoptics are supposed by numerous scholars to bear various internal interdependences.

The Gospel of John is such a unique substratum of Jesus’ life account, that is far removed from the Synoptics in various ways. Jesus’ self-identity is most explicit in John’s Gospel than in the Synoptics. For example, John’s Jesus has an unusual relationship with God the Father from whom he draws uncommon authority, and openly tells people about it through unfamiliar assertions. Owen Crouch correctly analyzes the gospel of John, saying that “John reveals the eternal cosmic Christ in the laboratory of time, subject to the scrutiny of the ear, eye and hands of men.”¹²

Jesus’ self-awareness is more overt in John, in that He identifies Himself as related to God, uniquely as his own Father (John 14:9-10). It is this unusual boldness and flamboyant claims, coupled with extraordinary performances, that culminates into Jesus’ death charges. Craig notes that, “Jesus *comes* on the scene with an unheard-of authority,

¹¹ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 58.

¹² Crouch Owen, *When God Became Human* (Joplin Missouri: College Press Publishing, 1991), 5.

namely with the authority of God, with the claim of the authority to stand in God's place and speak to us and bring us to salvation."¹³ The very nature and activities of Jesus in John, directly explain or imply His mission to humanity.

Jesus' Christological Self-Awareness

The first broad concept of Jesus' self-understanding as the Messiah, is His Christological awareness as the "Son of Man" (Luke 1:35), flanked by the awareness as the "Son of God" (John 1:18). These two titles emphasize the divinity and humanity of Christ and thus, the consequential application of His Christological entitlements. Kreeft and Tacelli compliment Witherington in considering these titles as vital to Christ's self-understanding.¹⁴ Jesus' saying that 'before Abraham was I am' (John 8:58),¹⁵ is divinely framed with a similar import.

The compounding of these self-acclaimed titles with the direct address of God within a filial relationship, reveal that Jesus knew who He was, and who His Father was, and what He was on earth to do. Norman Geisler says, "Jesus was the Son of God and as such could not deceive. For God 'does not lie' (Titus 1:2). Indeed, 'It is impossible for God to lie' (Heb. 6:18). His 'word is truth' (John 17:17). 'Let God be true and every man a liar' (Rom. 3:4)."¹⁶ Therefore, Jesus' Christological identity was amply revealed through His own self-acclamations. He declared who he was because He understood Himself.

¹³ Craig, *Reasonable faith: Christian truth and apologetics* Rev. ed., 249–253.

¹⁴ Kreeft and Tacelli say "the title is of the same nature as God (John 10:30)." Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 58. Witherington says, "he distinguished himself from his contemporaries, including John the Baptist, the Pharisees, Jewish revolutionaries, and the disciples," Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 268.

¹⁵ Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 268.

¹⁶ Norman L. Geisler, "Accommodation Theory" in *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 2.

Jesus' Christological Awareness In The Gospels

The gospel writers present the accounts of Jesus' assertions as the "Son of God" in various ways. John uses the title "Son of God," according to what Jesus' personally calls Himself (John 11:4). Culpeper observes that "in other instances John lets the character in the story speak."¹⁷ Jesus refers to Himself in John as *μονογενῆς θεός* "the only begotten of God" in 1:18; and *Υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ* the "Son of God" in 10:36. In some cases John adds "the only One" as in, 3:16, 18. John the Baptist calls Him "Son of God" in 1:34 as well as Nathaniel in 1:49 together with Martha in 11:27.

Jesus speaks directly to people about Himself saying, "he that believes on the Son of God has everlasting life 3:36," and "those who are dead will likewise hear the voice of the Son of God" 5:25. His disciples confess Him by the same title, fixing the word "living" to it, (John 6:69). Jesus questions a healed man "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" 9:35. He is later charged for using that same title in John 19:7. These strong assertions here depict His own self-awareness as the Messiah in the Gospel of John. Thus, the Johannine Christology is replete with public acknowledgement of Jesus' personal identity as the Messiah.

However, in Mark's gospel, the title "*Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ*" (Mark 1:1), is copied in parenthesis or italics in some manuscripts, but variously translated as "Son of God." Joel Marcus observes that "Most manuscripts including good and early ones, add this ending 'the Son of God' to 'Christ' but it is absent in *Sinaiticus* and several other important textual witnesses, which are early scribe's additions."¹⁸ Jesus vividly, calls Himself the "Son of

¹⁷ Culpeper, *The Gospel of Luke: The New Interpreters Bible*, 496.

¹⁸ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday 1999), 146.

Man” in Mark but not the “Son of God” (2:10; 2:28; 8:31; 8:38) depicting Daniel and Ezekiel’s references. For John’s gospel, Wilhelm Bousset observes that, “the ‘Son of Man’ title becomes the comprehensive designation of the preexistent and eternal glory of the Jesus, who surpasses everything earthly in comparison with which, the earthly sojourn of Jesus is only an episode.”¹⁹ But for Mark this title is vital to its plot.

Until Mark 8:29, no one acknowledges Him as the Messiah or Son of God. But God Himself calls Jesus “My beloved Son.” Spirits confess Him as the “Son of God” in Mark 3:11 and 5:7. Todd Twist notices that “Mark records an unlikely character recognizing and declaring Jesus’ true nature after his death: the Roman Centurion... ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’” (15:39).²⁰ The minimal appearances of the two titles in Mark, has led to various hypotheses.

Marcus mistakenly imagines that, “Jesus functioned in Mark as an epithet for the ‘Messiah,’ but not as a divine being.”²¹ And Daniel Boyarin, links the title “Son of Man” epithet to the Enoch traditions growing out of Enoch 14 and Daniel 7 as an exalted divinized human, ...a tradition of a second God like Redeemer who comes down to save Israel.”²² Such propositions are greatly debatable since Christ reveals Himself beyond those imperfect and allayed embodiments.

¹⁹ Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (Nashville: Abingdon Pres, 1970), 213.

²⁰ Todd E. Twist, *Study Like a Pro: Explore Difficult Passages from Every Book of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 240.

²¹ Marcus, *Mark 1-8, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 146.

²² Daniel Boyarin. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (The New Press, 2012), 87.

Jesus' Christological Awareness In Apologetics

The striking Christological features in apologetical arguments concerning Christ self-awareness, are his fulfilment, use and interpretation of Scriptures, especially the Old Testament canon. What He did and said regarding what was written, significantly reveal His identity. For example, to begin with, Jesus asserts that “before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). While such statement connects the Old Testament canon to the New, it pointedly reveals the unique attribute of Jesus Christ’s divinity. Kenneth Boa discovered that “the evidentialist apologists are especially impressed by the fulfilled prophecies in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. That the Gospels, especially Matthew, strongly emphasize the idea that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.”²³

Notwithstanding, Boa accounts that Norman Geisler plainly refutes that position saying, “fulfilled prophecy does not prove the existence of God, but it does show that unusual events predicted in His name that come to pass are evidence of his special activity.”²⁴ Geisler is plausible in the sense that when Jesus subjectively ascribes a divine entitlement to Himself like that in John’s Gospel (John 8:58), such assertion goes beyond mere fulfilment of scripture in weight, since it is purposive, prerogative and declarative, more than passive and neutral.

J. K. S. Reid argues that, “the relation of Jesus to the Law, is not an act of infidelity: His unique position entitles Him to transcend the Law in fulfilling it. In this case, Gentiles are properly admitted into the Christian Church without being obliged to obey the Law in

²³ Kenneth Boa, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005). 234.

²⁴ Boa, *Faith Has Its Reasons*: 234.

all its detailed requirements.”²⁵ Therefore, Boa is right in asking the questions, “Did Jesus claim to be God? Or did He regard Himself as a prophet? Who did Jesus of Nazareth claim to be?”²⁶ Craig replies Boa saying, “those who deny that Jesus made extraordinary personal claims, face the very severe problem of explaining how it is that the worship of Jesus as Lord and God came about at all in the early church.”²⁷ Jesus’ personal assertions provide the relevant responses to Boa’s queries.

The next significant argument in apologetics is how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament scriptures. His interpretation of scripture was unusual and completely removed from the Jewish teachers and their methods. Reid recognizes that, “Justin Martyr developed his general argument in dialogue with *Trypho* (c.160), ...paying attention to the Jewish criticism that Jesus set aside the Law contained in the Old Testament.”²⁸ While they could not accuse Jesus with evidence that He broke the scriptures, they alleged that, “his authoritative use of scripture was unusual” (Mathew 7:28-29). Douglas Groothuis declares that “after the Sermon on the Mount the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority.”²⁹ Thus, Jesus’ prerogative handling of scripture was such an important evidence to His personal deity awareness.

Geisler lists various ways in which Jesus used the Old Testament. When He spoke and said, “it is written” (Mat 4:4, 7), He was affirming the divine authority of the Old

²⁵ J. K. S. Reid, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 48.

²⁶ Boa, *Faith Has Its Reasons*: 234.

²⁷ Craig, *Reasonable faith*, 243.

²⁸ Reid, *Christian Apologetics*, 48.

²⁹ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 481.

Testament.³⁰ “He also affirmed its imperishability, unbreakably, ultimate supremacy, factual inerrancy, historical reliability and scientific accuracy.”³¹ Norman rejoinders that “what Jesus affirms, critics deny.” Therefore “if Jesus is the Son of God, then the Bible is the Word of God, including what it says about the authors and the events. And if the Bible is not the Word of God then Jesus is not the Son of God.”³² Craig summarizes this whole argument that, “the Christian religion stands or falls with the person of Jesus Christ. Judaism could survive without Moses, Buddhism without Buddha, Islam without Mohammed; but Christianity could not survive without Christ.”³³

Jesus’ Soteriological Self-Awareness

The second broad concept of Jesus’ self-understanding as Messiah is how He “claimed to be the humankind’s Savior from sin and death (John 11:25).”³⁴ This claim asserted His understanding that His death was necessary to rectify matters between God and His people. Likewise, was His sense of mission to Israel, especially to sinners and outcasts, which led Him to table fellowship with such.³⁵ Jesus continued “pointing people to Himself saying ‘come to Me’ (Mathew 11:28),”³⁶ and the ensuing feeding of 5,000 with two fishes and five loaves, recorded in all the four gospels are soteriological in weight.³⁷ They all reveal the messianic capabilities which are unique to Him and resonates with the

³⁰ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Introduction Bible*, Vol 1 (Minneapolis MI: Bethany House, 2002), 268.

³¹ Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Introduction Bible*, Vol 1, 266-8.

³² Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Introduction Bible*, Vol 1, 273.

³³ Craig, *Reasonable faith*, 232.

³⁴ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 58.

³⁵ Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 268.

³⁶ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 58.

³⁷ Mathew 14:14-21; Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:11-17; and John 6:5-14.

popular expectations of a Messiah, yet with “significant conflicts and controversies with his contemporaries.”³⁸ Jesus understood His divinity well in His humanness.

Jesus’ Soteriological Awareness In The Gospels

Jesus’ use of scripture, was unusual due to the authority He manifested in handling them. In some instances, He reinterpreted scriptures and in others, He gave direct commands apart from claiming to have the capacity to fulfil them as well.³⁹ Norman Geisler affirms that “It is well known that Jesus expressed a high view of Scripture in the New Testament. He *fully* accepted its divine authority (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).”⁴⁰ His reinterpretation was both salvific and prerogative; the former idea being that, God teaches humans His saving knowledge (John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:3-13), and the latter that God gives humans direction through His Laws (James 4:12).

The Gospel of Luke describes an important paradigm of this salvific idea. By using parables, Jesus revealed the kingdom where He reigns. The import of parables concerns a kingdom where Jesus is the only One who can admit humans to its domain. Mark Strauss explaining the return of the Prodigal son, observes that “we can almost hear Luke’s readers saying, “...that boy has to earn his way back!” But Jesus’ revolutionary message is that God’s grace cannot be earned. It is freely and joyfully given, as a father gives to a child.”⁴¹ Therefore His salvation is free and full to all who respond to Him by faith.

³⁸ Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 268.

³⁹ Mt 5:17 “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Mt 5:33 “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:” (KJV).

⁴⁰ Geisler, “Accommodation Theory” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 1.

⁴¹ Strauss, L. Mark, *Study Like A Pro: Explore Difficult Passages from Every Book of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 243.

The Gospel of Mark on the contrary discloses a disturbing intent of Jesus' teaching methods especially by parables, that reflects a divine election prerogative.⁴² Mark conveys the reason for parabolic teachings as divinely selective and judicial. The debate concerning this insight and interpretation could be endless. However, the preceding and proceeding contexts of (Mark 4:1-20), literally affirm the Divine election prerogative that invites human responsibility by responding to God through faith in Christ.

John emphasizes various soteriological missions of Jesus to mankind. His titles revealed in John, shapes a basic soteriological strategy. John 1:1, 14 discloses Him as the Word of God. John the Baptist and his disciples are first to answer identity questions about Him. John bears witness of Him as the Light (1:7, 8, 9). However, Bossuet perceives that “twice Jesus Himself makes the claim: *Ἐγὼ εἶμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου*, (I am the Light of the Word), (8:12; 9:5).”⁴³ Jack Dean assesses that, John functions here in a fulfillment role according to “Mal. 3:1, as the latter-day Elijah who fulfils the end time expectations associated with Elijah by restoring all things.”⁴⁴ So, John through Baptism of Jesus brings Him on the stage of redemptive work for humanity.

John unites the Divine Logos with humanity establishing the Only Begotten of the Father in 1:14. Jesus Christ is recognized as the only Begotten Son in 1:18. John the Baptist declares Him as the Lamb of God in 1:29, 36 and the Son of God in 1:34. His disciples confirm that He is the Master in 1:38, Messiah the Christ in 1:41, and the One whom Moses

⁴² And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them, Mark 4:11-12.

⁴³ Bossuet, *Kyrios Christos*, 232.

⁴⁴ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark, Jesus Authorities, Disciples*, (Fortress Press, Minnesota, 1989), 33.

and the prophets talked about in 1:45. Jesus is therefore understood as the Son of God, and the King of Israel in John 1:49. Lee Strobel stresses that, “No man ever spoke like Jesus, no one ever answered questions the way he answered, not only propositionally, but also in his person. Existentially we can test it out, empirically, we can test it out.”⁴⁵ So, by revealing these redemptive titles, John unites Jesus’ personhood with His mission-hood.

The titles of Jesus in chapter one, are afterward repeated in the entire gospel of John. The Master title recurs in 1:38; 4:10; 8:4; 9:2; 11:8, 28; 13:13, and 14. The Messiah title reappears in 1:41; 4:29; 7:26-27, 41; 12:34 and is inquired about in 7:25-29; 8:12-20 and 25. Messiah the Christ or Χριστοῦ, is the analogous of Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ rendered “Messiah” or the “Anointed One” from the root מָשַׁח which implies to anoint.⁴⁶ The root verb מָשַׁח, with its spinoffs, occurs 140 times in the Old Testament and also in “an unpublished *Ras Shamra* tablet [*sm*]n *msht ktpm*], denoting ‘oil for the anointing of sorcerers.’”⁴⁷ It is used to refer to, a Messianic prince in Daniel 9:25, a king of Israel in 1 Samuel 24:26, a high priest of Israel in Leviticus 4:6, Cyrus as a personalized king by Yahweh in Isaiah 45:1, and lastly the patriarchs as ‘the anointed kings in 1 Chron 16:22.

The use of מָשַׁח proposes anointing of a specific official or an object to separate such for God's service. The anointed like “David (1 Samuel 10:1; 2 Samuel 12:7), had heavenly empowerment by the Spirit of God (1 Samuel 10:6; 1 Samuel 16:13) and arrived as promised liberators.”⁴⁸ Therefore, the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ, denotes God’s appointed One, portraying, the exclusive Messianic official whom God enabled by His Spirit (Acts 10:38,

⁴⁵ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 152.

⁴⁶ F. Brown, S. Driver and C. Briggs. *The Brown- Driver- Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 603.

⁴⁷ Mitchel Dahood, S. J. *The Anchor Bible Psalm 1-50*, New York, (Doubleday Inc., 1965), 8.

⁴⁸ Brown, & Briggs. *The Brown- Driver- Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 603.

Luke 4:18-19); “Jesus the Anointed One.” Though for that reason Jesus came and was so named the Christ, Larry Hurtado recognized that “the Messianic issue is made public only in John 4:29; 7:26-27, 41; and 12:27, but some parts of John express a Messianic secret like Mark.”⁴⁹

John also reveals an additional salvific paradigm by the “I AM” statements. The method discloses the writer’s opinion, that Jesus is the final Savior and directed by God. In John 6:35 and 48, Jesus is: “I am the bread of life,” in 8:12, 9:5 He is “I am the light of the world,” in 8:58 “Before Abraham was, I am,” in 10:9 “I am the door,” and in 10:11 “I am the good shepherd.” Jesus also states, “I am the resurrection and the life in 11:25, and “I am the way, the truth, and the life” 14:6. Lastly in 15:1, Jesus is “I am the true vine.” “These titles provide the opportunity for proper response to John’s gospel that the reader may believe in Jesus Christ and have life through His name 20:30-31,”⁵⁰ in Culpeper’s verdict.

Jesus’ Soteriological Awareness In Apologetics

The miraculous signs, belief, and life are key to John’s book, with an application linked to receiving something from Jesus Christ as Lord. Apologetically, we can agree that this belief in Jesus is salvific in proposition yet flanked with a rational acquiescence. It is the true consent and receipt of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (20:31), with a truly conscious mind and heart that brings salvation to the human soul. An important question here is “Why Jesus, and not another individual or any other religious figure as the object of faith?”

⁴⁹ Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 358.

⁵⁰ Culpeper, *The New Interpreters Bible; The Gospel of John*, 497.

The apologetic answer to this question is so broad. But to put Jesus in this context, the word “believe” alone is used over 94 times in John’s gospel yet linked to Jesus as its predicate object for eternal life (3:16; 6:37; 10:10:28-29). The belief has results that can only proceed from Jesus Christ Himself. McCready Douglas affirms that “a specific purpose with the signs is that one may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, one may have life in his name (20:31).”⁵¹ Therefore, if signs confirmed the miraculous personality of Jesus to the aid of belief on Him, then signs also pointed humans to their true object for eternal hope.

Craig records that “God became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, being born of a virgin, that he performed various miracles, exorcised demonic beings, and that, having died by crucifixion, he rose from the dead.”⁵² But David Hume is most skeptic with miracles that appeared through the life of Jesus, as the Christ. Hume has reasons why miracles should be ignored and not to be emphasized saying,

First, no miracle in history is attested by a sufficient number of educated and honest men, who are of such social standing that they would have a great deal to lose by lying. Second, people crave the miraculous and will believe the most absurd stories, as the abundance of false tales of miracles prove. Third, miracles occur only among barbarous peoples. And fourth, miracles occur in all religions and thereby cancel each other out, since they support contradictory doctrines. Hume concludes that miracles can never be the foundation for any system of religion. “Our most holy religion is founded on *Faith*, not on reason,” pontificates Hume, all the while laughing up his sleeve.⁵³

Hume’s controversy may sound intellectually honest in relation to educated minds, but the question that Hume’s argument raises is “Did Jesus die only for the intellectuals or

⁵¹ McCready Douglas, *He Came Down from Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith*. (Down Grove Illinois: Intervarsity Press: 1994), 78.

⁵² Craig, *Reasonable faith*, 126.

⁵³ Craig, *Reasonable faith*, 131.

for all sinful humankind?” Hume may attract his own class of thinkers but the salvific import of belief in Jesus, aided by these miraculous signs clearly shows that, “knowing Jesus, determines one’s destiny of eternity with God.”⁵⁴ If Jesus didn’t do miracles, some unlearned people would not have had something to relate to His uniqueness, though the intellectuals themselves so “termed” were similarly deluded. Therefore, John emphasizes that these miracles were accomplished as signs that support the human belief in the person of Jesus Christ (John chapter 2).

Jesus’ Divine Prerogative Awareness

The third and final broad concept of Jesus’ self-understanding as the Messiah, is what He said and how He said them, coupled with what He did and how He did them. His use of scripture with an expression of authority coupled with His works of miracles, were unusual. Robert Stein says “within the four canonical gospels we find numerous occasions of exaggeration on the lips of Jesus. At times the exaggeration is hyperbolic in that what is commanded or portrayed is literally impossible or inconceivable.”⁵⁵ The impossibility of such statements only reveals the human’s limitation in the face of a Divine Being’s revelation.

Kreeft and Tacelli assert that, “Merely a ‘good man’ is one thing Jesus could not possibly be. By claiming to be God He eliminated that possibility.”⁵⁶ For example, “His proclamation of a kingdom present, and inbreaking by His ministry. His establishing of

⁵⁴ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 373.

⁵⁵ Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Passages in the New Testament: Interpreting Puzzling Texts in the Gospels and Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 143.

⁵⁶ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 64.

that kingdom by choosing the 12 apostles as its foundation.”⁵⁷ Among those whom He chose, He changed Simon’s name to Peter, (John 6:51). The use of authority in such a broad manner, reveals a King speaking out rather than a subject of a kingdom. Thus, the belief in such a Divine One, becomes the reason for writing John’s Gospel, and the real source of life for humanity, (John 20:31).

Jesus also claimed to be sinless by saying “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (John 10:46).⁵⁸ He could forgive human sins as well, which thing, was unheard of before (Mat 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24). Craig examines these types of claims saying, “This ... claim to authority is explicable only from the side of his deity. This authority only God himself can claim. Regarding Jesus there are only two possible modes of behavior: either to believe that in him God encounters us, or to nail him to the cross as a blasphemer.”⁵⁹ If He had sin, He would not have been able to forgive sins!

Kreeft and Tacelli believes that “when we consider for example, the extraordinary deeds attributed to Jesus and the special relationship He claimed to have with the Father (i.e., God), it is difficult to avoid some conclusions.”⁶⁰ The three conclusions that they propose are “either Jesus was a sincere lunatic or a demonic fraud, or He really was the Son of God.”⁶¹ Garry Morgan fitly corrects such deductions that, “We look to Jesus not just as a gifted teacher and a moral example but as our Savior.... Jesus established the truth of his claim to be God’s unique Son—fully human and fully divine—and provided the

⁵⁷ Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 268.

⁵⁸ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 58.

⁵⁹ Craig, *Reasonable faith*, 252.

⁶⁰ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 114.

⁶¹ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 114.

means of salvation for humankind, separated from God by sin.”⁶² Thus, John’s call is vital, “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.” (John 20:31).

Conclusion

Jesus self-understanding and self-identification as the Messiah involves the contents of the incarnation, His attitude towards God and life, and His own death. The claim that His death was necessary to rectify matters between God and humans was unusual in its consequences. However, His vindication that came by His final triumph over death, through the power of resurrection and His subsequent ascension to heaven, are special credentials of His eternal person and victory.

His independent approach to the Law and works of miracles like the feeding of the 5,000 with two fishes and five loaves, are examples of His glorious wonders. His personal address and answers to questions concerning Himself, are convincing proofs of His deity for no man ever spoke like Jesus! Therefore, His personal proclamation of a kingdom built on Himself, are evidences of someone who was on a mission than on a fate of life. Jesus Christ is God!

⁶² Garry R. Morgan, *Understanding World Religions in 15 Minutes a Day* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 22.

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POLITICS AND THE APOSTLE PAUL: THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO SECULAR GOVERNMENT

John Wiley*

Introduction

In the words of the editorial board of *The Wall Street Journal*, America is currently experiencing the dramatic effects of “The Politicization of Everything.”¹ Such an extreme phenomenon might cause some Christians to find their identities in political movements, while others may be so disillusioned so as to think that politics are completely unnecessary for believers. While the Bible is not a book primarily concerned with politics, it does speak to political concerns and general principles of governance. The Apostle Paul, in particular, has some of the most relevant statements for the believer's responsibility to secular government. Pauline principles of a Christian citizen's obligation of obedience to governing authorities are clearly present in his writings, but the question of conscientious objections is also arguable. The military, warfare, and capital punishment are other governmental functions considered by Paul. Taxation is yet another governmental matter into which Paul delves, and his commands are consistent with the rest of Scripture. Finally, issues of politics and citizenry rights will be investigated as accurately as possible from a Pauline theological perspective, along with contemporary discussions from recent debates. There remains room for conscientious and reasonable disagreement in certain matters of public policy among believers. Nevertheless, the examples and exhortations of the Apostle

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¹ “The Politicization of Everything,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-politicization-of-everything-1506291118>.

Paul in regards to the government offer the Christian clear and basic principles for the Christian to follow.

Obedience And Conscientious Objections To Government

One of the most thorough passages in the Bible pertaining to a Christian's responsibility to a secular government is Romans 13. Paul begins with an imperative to every person: "be in subjection to the governing authorities"² (ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω). Although ἐξουσίαις can be used for a term denoting authority in non-governmental roles, the rest of the context makes it clear that Paul is primarily referring to leaders in the government.³ Every authority figure, however, governmental or otherwise, is "established" or "assigned" by God (vs. 1). But anyone who opposes such authority is actually opposing God (vs. 2). Louw and Nida define this root verb to mean, "to oppose someone, involving not only a psychological attitude but also a corresponding behavior."⁴ In verse 3, Paul changes terminology for "ruler" with the Greek term ἄρχων, which seems to be more distinctively governmental in nature. A ruler, Paul says, can cause fear to those who do "evil" (κακῶ, derived from κακός). This term is distinct from πορνεία (sexual evil), and while it does contain a spectrum of possible meaning, some lexicographers emphasize how κακός is often used in reference to the harm of others.⁵ Therefore, Paul is probably not thinking of private forms of evil, but ones that inflict harm upon other people, such as theft, assault, or perhaps even libel. God will still judge those clandestine sins, but rulers

² Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

³ Paul used the same term in First Corinthians 11:10 to describe how a wife has a symbol of "authority" on her head.

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 491.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 753.

carry “the sword” against those who practice κακός. Paul even calls a governmental ruler a διάκονος, which is the same word used in Scripture that can apply to the office of deacon, though it is also translated “minister” or “servant.”⁶ The Christian is to be in subjection to these “ministers” for two reasons: the fear of wrath (from the ruler) and a clear conscience (before God). Thus, taxes must be paid by the Christian, not just because of the ruler’s authority to exert a form of punishment against the objector, but because it is ultimately God who put that “minister” in place.

There are numerous considerations that can be concluded from this important text of Romans 13, but the first principle is simply the Christian’s required obedience to government. Paul is in no way revealing a mystery of the Christian faith; the teachings of Jesus were just as lucid. According to W. Robert Cook, “The *locus classicus* on our Lord’s teaching regarding the state is Matthew 22:15-22 (Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-26). Therein He taught submission, with qualification, to the heathen, totalitarian Roman state.”⁷ Just as Jesus distinguished between Caesar and God, Paul mandated governmental obedience to God’s “ministers” (which could include a ruler similar to Caesar) and God Himself. Yet, it is a plausible question of justness to consider why God would institute a ruler, such as Nero, who has committed and would continue to commit acts of great evil, but is conversely seen as being a minister “for good.” Erich D. Schwartz explains, “Nero was not godly...but he was the minister of God for good, in that he, though inadvertently, promoted goodness through fear.”⁸ While mysterious, God is somehow able to raise up evil rulers,

⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998).

⁷ W. Robert Cook, “Biblical Light on the Christian’s Civil Responsibility,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:505 (January 1970), 49.

⁸ Erich D. Schwartz, “Let Every Soul Be Subject,” *Bible and Spade* 26:1 (Winter 2013), 19.

and while not condoning their actions, these rulers are used of God to restrain evil in the general populace. Charles C. Ryrie has provided a practical clarification, “While the Apostles wrote frequently about the Christian’s relationship to the social institutions of their day, their teaching was more concerned with how to live within the framework of those existing institutions than with how to change them.”⁹ The Christian, then, is obligated to obey, pray for, and respect even evil rulers.¹⁰

While the Bible is abundantly clear that Christians are required to obey governmental authorities, there also appears to be some exceptions. However, as Ovidiu Hanc has written, “The Roman Empire was often beneficial for Paul’s mission. Paul wrote in a socio-political context that allowed him to present the governing authorities not as maleficent. Hence, he did not have to speak of the alternative, namely resistance.”¹¹ Stanley E. Porter has proposed that Paul simply had “just” rulers in mind, but such a proposal seems to contradict the very inclusive language utilized by Paul in regards to rulers that ought to be obeyed.¹² A more common view among evangelical theologians would seem to be that Christians must obey their government in all things, with the only exception being if they are mandated by a governmental power to disobey God’s revealed will. Yet, there are different ways in which Christian scholars have precisely explained such a view. Ryrie has summarized, “[T]he Christian is to obey freely and fully, unless to do so would directly violate God’s laws.”¹³ Speaking more distinctively on the way in which Christians might

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, “Perspectives on Social Ethics: Part IV: Apostolic Perspectives on Social Ethics,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:536 (October 1977), 314.

¹⁰ See also First Timothy 2:1-4.

¹¹ Ovidiu Hanc, “Paul and Empire: A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 65:2 (2014), 316.

¹² For an overview and criticism of Porter’s view, see Paul D. Feinberg, “The Christian and Civil Authorities,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1999), 91.

¹³ Ryrie, “Perspectives on Social Ethics: Part IV: Apostolic Perspective son Social Ethics,” 316.

disobey, Norman L. Geisler has stated, “Christian noncompliance to oppressive laws should be a *refusal*, but not a *revolt*. That is, their disobedience should be *passive*, not *active*. They can be insubmissive, but they must not be insubordinate. Even when a believer cannot submit to the law he must be willing to submit to the consequence of that law.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, O. Palmer Robertson has reminded readers, “A clear distinction must be made between the responsibility of the individual and that of the state in promoting proper moral behavior. The state has the power to enforce proper moral behavior under certain circumstances and within certain limits. But the use of force in the promotion of public morality is not the place of the individual.”¹⁵ Overall, the view that Christians must obey government, with the exception of cases when a ruler requires them to disobey God, is widely accepted and can be biblically verified.

In Paul’s own writings, objecting to a governmental decree on the basis of a contradiction to God’s will is less clear than others. Acts 5:29 is the most famous text on Christian disobedience to government. Peter and the other apostles insisted in the face of suppression against preaching the gospel, “We must obey God rather than men.” Geisler has sustained, “[G]overnments and laws can *permit* evil but they cannot *command* it. For example, they can *allow* citizens to worship idols but they cannot *insist* that all do so. The authority of government ends where the conscience of the believer begins.”¹⁶ However, neither Romans 13:1-7 nor any other Pauline text explicitly refers to civil disobedience. Perhaps the best conclusion is that Paul argued for a broad principle of Christian obedience

¹⁴ Norman L. Geisler, “A Premillennial View of Law and Government,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:567 (July 1985), 262. Italics original.

¹⁵ O. Palmer Robertson, “Reflections on New Testament Testimony Concerning Civil Disobedience,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33:3 (September 1990), 351.

¹⁶ Geisler, “A Premillennial View of Law and Government,” 262. Italics original.

to the government. His concern in Romans 13 seems to be an admonition for Christians to be honorable subjects to the government, and to warn them about repercussions, both from civil rulers and from God, if they do not follow their governmental laws. Furthermore, Paul would not attempt to contradict the other apostles in regards to inspired literature (Acts 5:29), so the rare exception for governmental disobedience would not be a problem in Pauline theology.

The Military, War, And The Death Penalty

Paul may not have been in the military, but he does not appear to have been a pacifist. In Romans 13, the apostle teaches that the government wields “the sword” in reference to capital punishment, which shows Paul’s confidence in a government’s right to inflict the penalty of death at least on the domestic level. Ryrie has presented a robust argument to defend a government’s God-ordained right to institute capital punishment, even though Christ has fulfilled the Law of Moses:

Dispensational distinctions do recognize that the law of capital punishment for certain crimes was done away with in Christ, but this does not include capital punishment for murder. If the New Testament gave a replacement for the standard of Genesis 9:6, then it would no longer be valid. But since it does not, then the dispensational teaching concerning the end of the Law is irrelevant to Genesis 9:6, and the principle of that verse apparently still applies today.¹⁷

Stephen A. James has similarly concurred, “[T]he Noahic covenant is universal and permanent, and cannot be altered or ended by any subsequent event while the earth remains. Therefore, the duty of all civil governments to practice retribution, and especially to

¹⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, “The Doctrine of Capital Punishment,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:515 (July 1972), 217.

execute murderers, is universal and permanent.”¹⁸ Thus, when Paul wrote in Romans 13 about “the sword” of government in his own day, he was once again patterning his theology on older biblical teaching. Now, when it comes to Pauline teaching on a Christian’s role in the military, it can be said that at the very least the apostle occasionally invoked military terminology for analogies to Christian living. In Second Timothy 2:3-4, Paul implored Timothy to suffer “as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” Paul also called Epaphroditus a “fellow soldier” (Philippians 2:25). The Christian life is communicated in warfare terminology, requiring spiritual armor and weaponry, according to Ephesians 6:11-18. Whether or not Paul preferred interventionism or isolationism in terms of geopolitical philosophy, the Bible does not explain.¹⁹ But Paul did maintain the view that the government possessed the authority to issue capital punishment to offenders and he was willing to analogize the Christian life by referencing military terminology, which would infer that Paul was not opposed to military or perhaps even war, as these were within the sphere of a government’s domain.

Taxation

Paying taxes could hardly be considered a favorite task of any Christian, but similarly to how Jesus mandated paying taxes, so too did Paul. Today, the tithe is popularly

¹⁸ Stephen A. James, “Divine Justice and the Retributive Duty of Civil Government,” *Trinity Journal* 6:2 (Fall 1985), 208.

¹⁹ At the same time, Christians should have the liberty to debate such important public policy issues based on morality, philosophy, and historical evidence. Theologically, debates of interventionism, isolationism, and other geopolitical views would be extra-biblical arguments, but not necessarily anti-biblical ones. A helpful example of how Christians can integrate their faith and foreign policy views is the journal, *Providence*, published by the Institute on Religion & Democracy and The Philos Project. Rather than being a lamentation of America’s drift away from earlier religious foundations, contributors to *Providence* have made excellent observations in attempting to analyze democratic ideas, military strategies, national security procedures, and many other concepts from a distinctively Christian worldview.

referred to as the Christian's financial responsibility in support of a local church, but as David W. Jones has clarified, "[U]nder Old Testament Law the tithe was akin to a tax in that it was mandatory, supported civil government, fostered social and cultural life, and helped to care for the poor."²⁰ Christians do not actually "tithes" in the Old Testament sense today in the technical, governmental form by giving to their local churches, but they are required to give their due amount to whatever government in which they live. Romans 13:6 begins with a description of why Paul's audience pays their taxes, using the indicative verb *τελεῖτε*. They obey out of fear due to the "wrath" that the ruler can wield, but also because they do not want to live contradictorily to their consciences (verse 5). But Paul reinforces a command in verse 7, *ἀπόδοτε πᾶσιν τὰς ὀφειλάς* ("render to all what is due them"). Thus, Paul is saying that taxes are an "obligation" or even a "debt" owed to a government, which logically follows into the command in verse 8: "owe nothing to one anyone except to love one another." Christians do not necessarily need to be passive in arguing for sound tax policies. Indeed, Christian economists and politicians can help influence a society to flourish in promoting wise and fair taxes. Nevertheless, the question of whether or not Christians must pay taxes is already a settled matter: "Render...tax to whom tax is due."²¹

²⁰ David W. Jones, "The Ethics of Taxation: A Biblical Precipis," *Faith and Mission* 24:2 (Spring 2007), 19.

²¹ Jones has listed ten compelling reasons why Christians must pay their taxes: "1. The institution of taxation has been accepted and used by God. 2. Taxes were prescribed for God's people under the Old Testament Law. 3. Jesus paid taxes. 4. Not paying taxes may offend the governing authorities. 5. Jesus commanded the payment of taxes. 6. One's conscience should call for the payment of taxes. 7. Government has been established by God and divinely invested with the power to vent wrath against the tax register. 8. Paul assumed that the early Christians would pay taxes. 9. The governing authorities are God's ministers. 10. Paul commanded the payment of taxes." *Ibid.*, 22. Bible references were redacted for the purpose of brevity and clarity.

Politics And Citizenry Rights

The nature of politics is much different in a democratic republic, such as the United States, compared to the Roman Empire of the first century. Still, there are general principles from the life and writings of Paul that apply to politics and citizenry rights. In Acts 22, Paul was accused of wrongdoing, but the apostle appealed to his rights as a Roman citizen. He asked a centurion in verse 25, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?” In verse 28, the Roman commander revealed that he acquired his own citizenship by “a large sum of money,” while Paul countered that he was born a citizen. This example reveals that while Paul may not have been politically involved in the modern sense of lobbying for particular governmental policies, as such would be anachronistic, he was civically informed enough to know about his rights as a citizen. Likewise, he believed in a Christian’s right to utilize the full legal privileges granted to him. Furthermore, Paul urged believers to pray for “kings and all who are in authority” (First Timothy 2:1-2). In this latter passage, the reason for such prayers was overtly for the promotion of religious freedom: “so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (verse 2). Paul was silent about how a Christian can engage in political discourse in a distinctively democratic republic form of government since that was not the system in which he lived as a Roman citizen. At the same time, he was unambiguous in his commands for believers to obey those in government (Romans 13:1-7) and to pray for them, with the desire that religious liberty would result (First Timothy 2:1-2).

From Paul’s statements to Timothy about the pursuit of Christians living peaceably in a secular, Roman state, an important debate sensibly follows. Among conservative Christians, there are at least two perspectives on how a Christian ought to seek a “tranquil

and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” in a modern, liberal democracy. Richard Land’s view represents one perspective that attempts to propagate Christian morality and values to the rest of society. Land has stated, “Christians must enter the public square and bring their biblically-based morality with them. They have the right, and the obligation, to share their faith-informed moral values with the nation and to advocate the adoption of those values through the democratic process.”²² Geisler, however, has argued for a much more pluralistic society. He has reasoned that government is fundamentally based on general revelation, rather than special revelation, and much of his vision for government is founded on natural law instead of God’s revealed Law.²³ Geisler established his argument in opposition to a type of theocratic postmillennialism by saying:

The premillennial position bears no obligation to make distinctly Christian laws. It works rather to assure that the laws are not anti-Christian. Along with this it recognizes that the unregenerate cannot live out the demands of God’s laws. It believes that society must be changed from the inside out, not from the outside in. Premillennialists believe that transformation must come by evangelization, not by legislation.²⁴

In Geisler’s view, for example, Christians should not attempt to require other citizens, specifically unbelievers, to follow the Ten Commandments, as this would prohibit freedom of religion.

Theoretically, both Land’s and Geisler’s views could allow Christians to live a “tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” The difference between them concerns how explicitly “biblical” morality is enforced in laws, which can be distinguished from natural law. While the former is based on special revelation, the latter is based on general

²² Richard Land, “Being Salt and Light in an Unsavory and Dark Age: The Christian and Politics,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11:4 (Winter 2007), 89.

²³ Geisler, “A Premillennial View of Law and Government,” 257-258.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 256.

revelation. Undoubtedly, all Christians ought to affirm that biblical morality is binding on every believer, but the debate here pertains to whether or not biblical morality ought to be legally binding on even unbelievers. It should further be mentioned that Geisler still insists that there is a “common moral basis for society,” which is derived from the law of God being “written in their hearts” (Romans 2:15).²⁵ Although Jonathan David Beeke holds to starkly different eschatological views than Geisler, Beeke has added to some of Geisler’s perspective by stating:

Christ’s kingdom...permits us to make outward use of legitimate political ordinances of whatever nation in which we live, just as it permits us to make use of medicine or architecture or food, drink, and air. Neither does the gospel introduce new laws for the civil realm. Instead, it commands us to obey the present laws, whether they have been formulated by pagans or others.²⁶

Thus, perhaps it would be best to conclude that a believer must obey government, but can positively contribute to the lawmaking process by advocating laws that would permit religious freedom for Christians (and others as well). Where the Apostle Paul has spoken, he has been abundantly clear. On matters where he was silent, there is liberty for Christians to seek wisdom in determining what would help their societies to flourish.

Conclusion

Christians throughout church history have had varied understandings of the Christian’s responsibility under a government. Augustine of Hippo referred to two cities in an analogy of the Church and the world, saying, “The one [city] consists of those who wish to live after the flesh, the other those who wish to live after the spirit; and when they

²⁵ See *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁶ Jonathan David Beeke, “Martin Luther’s Two Kingdoms, Law and Gospel, and the Created Order: Was There a Time When the Two Kingdoms Were Not?,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 73:2 (Fall 2011), 191.

severally achieve what they wish, they live in peace, each after their kind.”²⁷ G. Joseph Gatis has summarized the governmental views of John Calvin, explaining, “The state is to have jurisdiction over temporal matters and the church is to have jurisdiction over doctrinal and spiritual matters, though both are to be religious. Theocracy and religiosity were fundamental to Calvin’s Reformed society, since he believed that the entire state should be ruled by God, draw its laws from God, and be devoted entirely to Him.”²⁸ Nevertheless, as Cook has simply stated in regards to what the Bible teaches, “Whether we like it or not, there is no specific instruction given on what is the proper form of government.”²⁹ Although the amount of content written by the Apostle Paul pertaining to a Christian’s responsibility to a secular government is limited in scope, what he has commanded is utterly clear and ought to be followed by Christians everywhere. Christians must obey the government, follow the laws, pay their taxes, and pray for their leaders with the desire that religious liberty would prosper. Surely, believers can explore political topics found outside of the Bible, but before they do, obedience to what is prescribed is most necessary. And among all the biblical writers, the writings of the Apostle Paul provide some of the clearest mandates for the Christian under a secular government.

²⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 14.1. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁸ G. Joseph Gatis, “The Political Theory of John Calvin,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October 1996), 449.

²⁹ Cook, “Biblical Light on the Christian’s Civil Responsibility,” 56.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE SCRIPTURAL COMPATIBILITY OF THE USE OF ESSENTIAL OILS BY THOSE WHO PROCLAIM FAITH IN THE CHURCH AGE

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Introduction

Essential oils are becoming more popular. While already a global phenomenon with “around 200 different types of essential oils [being] consumed all over the world annually,” research shows that as of 2015, the essential oils market is worth more than three billion dollars in the United States alone and is expected to continue to grow for the foreseeable future.¹ “Key players include Biolandes SAS, Young Living Essential Oils, doTerra International, Ungerer Limited, The Nature’s Bounty Co., Aurora Cacia and others” which market essential oils as being beneficial for aromatherapy, hygiene, healthcare, bug repellent, and fragrance.² With the increasing popularity of essential oils, believers would be wise to educate themselves on the biblical compatibility of their use as Christians are likely to be afforded the opportunity to consume this product – in at least one of its many facets – eventually. Also, it is especially important for those in Christian leadership to have an understanding of the biblical ramifications of this widening phenomenon in order for them to rightly guide their constituents in this matter. As such, in this paper, the author examines the foundational theology for the use of essential oils by Christians living in the church age. The author of this paper examines neither the medical evidence nor promotes

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¹ “U.S. Essential Oil Market Analysis by Product (Frankincense, Tea Tree, Sandalwood, Clove, Eucalyptus, Lemon, Lemongrass, Cedarwood, Rosemary, Thyme, Basil, Citronella), by Application (Flavors, Fragrances, Aromatherapy), and Segment Forecasts, 2018-2024,” Grand View Research, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/us-essential-oil-market>.

² Ibid.

the effectiveness of the oils as a treatment for any sort of condition. It also is not the author of this paper's intent to examine every passage of Scripture where oils are mentioned in depth. In order to determine whether or not the use of essential oils by believers today is compatible with Scripture, the author will consider is humanity's attachment to nature in creation, specific references to the use of oils, and arguments against the use of oils.

Humanity's Attachment To Nature In Creation

The details of mankind's creation and sustenance are important to the discussion of essential oils because of David Stewart's assertion, "because God created plants for us (Genesis 1:11-12, 28), their oils can serve many of the same purposes for us as they do in plants."³ In making this claim, Stewart is arguing for both the supernaturally endowed compatibility of mankind with the created environment as well as the beneficial role of plant life for human sustenance. In order to substantiate this claim scripturally, humanity's natural compatibility with nature must be demonstrated. Since essential oils are produced from fruits (such as orange, lemon, and grapefruit), vegetables seeds (such as carrot seed and celery seed), trees (such as eucalyptus and pine), and a variety of other plant sources, it is important to understand what functions different aspects of plant life are given for human sustenance in Scripture as well. Thus, the method of mankind's creation and the bearing this has on humanity's compatibility with nature as well as the role of plants in human sustenance will be investigated.

³ David Stewart, *Healing Oils of the Bible* (Marble Hill, MO: Care Publications, 2014), 16.

The Creation of Mankind

Humans are first mentioned in Scripture in Gen 1:26-28 as being created by God on the sixth day of creation. Further details on how Adam – the first human to ever exist – was produced are recorded in Gn 2:7. Here, the reader discovers that the first human was constructed in two steps 1) the construction of the physical form and 2) the gift of life. The construction of Adam’s body is stated as being “of the dust of the ground.”⁴ The word translated “dust” means “dry, fine crumbs of earth.”⁵ Thus, unlike other aspects of God’s creation, human bodies were not spoken into existence, but produced mediately via the work of God sculpting Adam’s body from the dirt of his freshly created planet earth.⁶ Therefore, humans have always been tied directly to the elements of creation in a special way. While Adam’s body had been formed, he was not a living being until God bestowed upon him the gift of life which occurred when the Lord “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” The word translated “breathed” simply means “blow.”⁷ To bring life to the sculpture that was Adam’s pre-existent body, God blew air into it. Thus, while the animation of Adam into a lifeform was a miracle of God, this did not change the elements that made up his original form. Before his body was animated, Adam was made entirely of dirt which was then transformed into flesh and blood upon receiving the gift of life. This demonstrates both the special care God took in creating the first human being as well as

⁴ All Scripture references are taken from the Authorized King James Version.

⁵ H. Van Dyke Parunak, et al, ed., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia with Westminster 4.2 Morphology*, electronic ed. (Glenside, PA.: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996), s.v. Gen. 2:7. All references to the biblical Hebrew are from this source. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1980), 2: 687.

⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch argue for a more divine interpretation of this passage as opposed to “a mechanical sense.” However, what is important to the author of this paper is the attachment humanity has with nature due to the mediate creation of his physical body. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch* (Peabody, M.A: Hendrickson, 2011), 49.

⁷ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 586.

the attachment of humanity to the elements that surround him. In short, humans are “related to their environment.”⁸

The creation of the first woman is recorded in Gn 2:20-22. In this text, Adam becomes aware of his lack of complementary companionship as it is recorded in verse twenty, “there was not found an help meet for him.” The word translated “help” means “helper” and carries the idea of an assistant.⁹ Despite having seen and named all of the animals in the Garden of Eden, Adam found himself without a suitable companion. To remedy the situation, God performed what is apparently a surgical operation on Adam, removing one of “his ribs” and using it to make Eve. The word translated “ribs” in verse twenty-one is used on multiple contexts to refer to the side of something.¹⁰ Thus, a portion of Adam’s body was removed by God and with it “made he a woman” according to verse twenty-two. The word translated “made” means to “build” or “rebuild.”¹¹ God used a portion of Adam’s body as the foundation for Eve’s body. As Adam was formed from the ground, Eve was now made up of the same elements by extension.¹² Therefore, the bodies of both the man and the woman were constituted of the elements of nature around them via the means of their creation.

God’s Plan for Human Sustenance

Humanity is further connected to nature through the means by which God intended for them to be sustained both nutritionally and medicinally. God’s original plan for human

⁸ Kenneth A. Matthews, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 1A, *Genesis 1-11:26* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 195.

⁹ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 661.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 768.

¹¹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1980), 1: 116.

¹² Matthews, 216.

nourishment is recorded in Gn 1:29 and 2:16.¹³ In Gn 1:29, two categories of foodstuffs are mentioned: 1) “herb bearing seed” and 2) “fruit of a tree yielding seed.” The word translated “herb” refers to “non-woody tissue vegetation.”¹⁴ The phrase “bearing seed” is important because it differentiates the diet of humans from that of animals as recorded in Gn 1:30 as being “every green herb.” Keil and Delitzsch describe the difference as being “corn and fruit” vs “vegetables or green plants, and grass.”¹⁵ Humans were intended to eat foods that grew from the ground such as corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, etc. while animals ate grass, flowers, and leaves. Humans were also intended to eat “fruit,” as recorded in verse twenty-nine, which means “the fruit of a tree.”¹⁶ Thus, humans were also intended to consume apples, pears, oranges, and other seed-bearing fruit produced by trees. In Gn 2:16, God is recorded as informing Adam that he is permitted to eat “of every tree of the garden” with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil later designated in verse seventeen. The lack of the inclusion of the phrase “yielding seed” when describing the fruit of the tree in this passage is likely because God is differentiating between the trees Adam – and, later, Eve – is permitted to eat from and the one which he is not as opposed to human vs animal diets. As such, humanity was originally intended to draw their physical nourishment from the fruits and vegetables of their habitat.

¹³ Humanity was also permitted to eat meat as recorded explicitly in the postdiluvian context of Gen 9:3-4. There are only vague antediluvian references to man’s interactions with animals in passages such as Gen 3:21 and 4:4. However, since there are no essential oils made from meat products, such a discussion is beyond the purview of this study being undertaken.

¹⁴ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 2: 700.

¹⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, 40.

¹⁶ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 2: 734.

The medicinal use of plant life is mentioned in Scripture in Ez 47:12.¹⁷ In context, the prophet is being shown via a vision the temple which is to exist during the millennial reign of Christ. In Ez 47:1-12 specifically, Ezekiel is being shown the river which will flow from the temple. According to verses seven through ten, wherever the river flows will be blessed with both plant and aquatic life. In verse twelve, the trees which will grow on the banks of this future river are detailed as being extraordinarily healthy with leaves which will not wither and the ability to provide an endless supply of a variety of fruits. Of interest to the author of this paper is the end of verse twelve where the prophet records “the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.” Here, a distinction is made between the function of the fruit of the trees and the leaves of the trees. The word translated “meat” means “food” denoting the fact the fruit produced by the trees will benefit the population as a food source.¹⁸ When referring to the leaves of the trees, the word translated “medicine” means “healing.”¹⁹ While one’s diet contributes heavily to their overall state of wellbeing, the leaves of these trees are designated as being of medicinal value as opposed to serving primarily as foodstuffs. “Not only will... the trees along the millennial river of life bear fruit abundantly, but the leaves thereof will produce healing medicines.”²⁰ The mention of this serves as scriptural validation of God’s using plant life to function in a medical role. Stewart refers to the medicinal value of essential oils referring to them as “the essential oils [God] created for us as medicines and promoters of well-being.”²¹ If it is

¹⁷ Given the lack of human frailty until after the fall of man (Gen 3:19), the omission of the mention of the medicinal value of plant life in the pre-fall state makes sense.

¹⁸ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 1: 39.

¹⁹ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 2: 839.

²⁰ David H. Sorenson, *Understanding the Bible*, vol. 6, *Jeremiah through Ezekiel* (Duluth, MN: Northstar, 2008), 803.

²¹ Stewart, 47.

possible for essential oils to serve the same functions in humans as they do in plants, this would be entirely conceivable.

Conclusion

Humanity has a very strong connection with the environment as the human body is a mediate creation formed from the elements of the earth. Furthermore, God intended for the human body to be sustained through the consumption of fruits and vegetables taken from man's habitat. Plant life can also benefit the human body medicinally. Therefore, to the extent essential oils can be drawn directly from that which is naturally produced in man's habitat, Stewart's claim is accurate. However, it is notable that none of the passages examined thus far mention oils, meaning that which is converted into an oil may not be as beneficial for the human body in the form of an oil as it would be in its pre-oil state. Thus, the author of this paper believes the closer a plant food or medicine product is to its optimal natural state, the healthier it is for the human body. Also, it is notable that the passages considered to this point were recorded in the context of the pre-fall condition and the millennial reign of Christ. Thus, none of the plants had been infected with any sort of ailment. Therefore, the author of this paper is not suggesting people should utilize plant products indiscriminately. Instead, plant life intended to sustain a person either nutritionally or medicinally should be both as close to optimal condition as possible and deemed safe for human consumption.

Specific References To The Use Of Oils

Having demonstrated the potential value of essential oils based on mankind's connection to nature via their method of creation as well as the function of plant life in

human sustenance, specific references to the use of oils can now be pursued. However, determining what constitutes a biblical reference to an essential or other oil can be challenging. The challenge lays in “how to tabulate mentions of an actual oil versus mentions of the aromatic plants from which the oils are produced.”²² While there are those who proclaim there to be a grand number of biblical references to essential oils in Scripture, a quick reading of the passages will often reveal the supposed oils are not in the form of an oil at all, but in their natural plant form. These references are included by some because “plants mentioned only as a plant were also sources of essential oil in that time.... In these cases... we count it as a reference to essential oils, which it truly is.”²³ The inherent problem with this perspective is that modern essential oil producers are not in the business of selling plants, but the oils themselves. A broad perspective regarding what constitutes a biblical reference to an essential oil may be either joyfully adopted or quickly dismissed depending on one’s level of favourability toward the appropriateness of the oils. Therefore, for the sake of accuracy, the author of this paper will take a more stringent perspective requiring the substance in question to be in either the form of an oil or at very least a reduced state such as a powder. Furthermore, the author of this paper is interested in the use of oils as applicable to the church age believer. With these parameters in mind, biblical references to the use of oils can be divided into four categories: 1) consumer products, 2) fragrances, 3) medical supplies, and 4) holy anointing oil. There is also another oil – olive oil – which stands in a category all its own, which must be discussed as well because of

²² Stewart, 100.

²³ Ibid.

both the potential for it to be confused with essential oils as well as to recognize its own merit.

Consumer Products

There are five passages wherein essential oils are demonstrated in Scripture to be consumer products: Gn 37:25; 43:11; Sg 3:6; Ez 27:17 and Rv 18:13. In Gn 37:25, the Ishmeelites to whom Joseph's brothers sold him were stated to be carrying a load of "spicery and balm and myrrh" to Egypt. The word translated "balm" refers to "a gum material obtained usually from the bark of a tree" which could serve as both a perfume and a medicine.²⁴ In this context, it was a consumer product extracted from a plant which Stewart states to be "*commiphora obalsamum*" [italics in original].²⁵ This beneficial product appears again in Gn 43:11 – as a good will offering from Israel (formerly Jacob) to Egypt – as well as in Ez 27:17 as an item typically sold by merchants. In Sg 3:6, myrrh and frankincense are categorized alongside "all powders of the merchant" which refer to "scent powders."²⁶ While not in oil form, these plant extracts are in a reduced state and were available as consumer products just as essential oils are in the current age.

Fragrance

Literal Fragrances

There are six passages which demonstrate essential oils – or products closely related to them – functioning as fragrances. Recorded in Est 2:12 is the fact that each virgin who was appointed to spend a night with king Ahasuerus was required to spend six months

²⁴ James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Hebrew Old Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. 7661.

²⁵ Stewart, 233.

²⁶ Harris, Archer, and Waltke:1, 8.

being treated with the “oil of myrrh” followed by another six months with other aromatic products. In Ps 45:8, God’s attire is characterized as bearing the scent of “myrrh, and aloes, and cassia.” In Prv 7:17, the strange woman claims to have “perfumed [her] bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.” Recorded in Sg 3:6 is reference to one being “perfumed with myrrh and frankincense.” Mk 14:3 and Jn 12:3 record Mary committing the “ointment of spikenard” being kept in an “alabaster box” to Jesus. In each of these passages, essential oils or products similar to them, are being used as fragrances demonstrating their suitability for such purpose.

Metaphorical Fragrances

There are Greek words of interest used to refer to metaphorical sweet smelling savours and odours which are acceptable to God. The first word (ὄσμη (*osmē*)) which means “the scent of odor of a substance” – appears in 1 Cor 2:14, 16; Eph 5:2 and Phil 4:18.²⁷ The second word (εὐωδία (*euōdias*)) means “a pleasant or sweet-smelling odor” appears alone in 2 Cor 2:15 and alongside the first word (ὄσμη (*osmē*)) in both Eph 5:2 and Phil 4:18.²⁸ While Stewart asserts that these verses “reference to essential oils . . . but the specific oils are not named and cannot be identified,” the author of this paper finds that none of them refer directly to literal essential oils at all.²⁹ In 2 Cor 2:14 the “savour” is used to refer to the knowledge of God perpetuated by the apostle Paul and his companions.

²⁷ F. H. A. Scrivener, *The New Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881), s.v. 1 Cor 2:14, et al. All references to the original Greek are taken from this source. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 698. The accusative singular form (ὄσμήν (*osmēn*)) appears in 1 Cor 2:14 and Eph 5:2.

²⁸ Louw and Nida.

²⁹ Stewart, 242.

In verses fifteen and sixteen the apostle Paul and his companions are the savour themselves. “Paul thus likens the knowledge of Christ to that of a pleasant aroma His thought is that to God they were an aroma (or fragrance) of Christ, both to the saved and the unsaved.”³⁰ While these aromas may have been used as allegories of common practices involving scents, they do not refer to literal scents. Furthermore, the apostle Paul refers to literal scents in neither Eph 5:2 nor Phil 4:18. In Eph 5:2, Paul is encouraging the Ephesians to live an upright, moral lifestyle and refers to Jesus’ sacrifice for the sins of man as a “sweetsmelling savour” directed “to God.” “What Jesus did at Calvary was the ultimate sweet-savor offering of which God was well pleased.”³¹ In Phil 4:18, Paul is writing to the Philippians regarding the monetary support they had given him. He refers to it as “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” Richard Melick states, “Paul pointed out that their gift was an acceptable Christian sacrifice.”³² Both Sorenson and Melick comment about the connection between what the apostle Paul wrote in these passages and the Old Testament sacrificial system. Leviticus 1-3 contains information about a variety of sacrifices and their procedures. In chapter two, frankincense is mentioned four times in verses one, two, fifteen, and sixteen and is the only specific element mentioned as is the case with Rv 18:13. Stewart refers to frankincense as “widely used in worship, as well as a cure-all for disease.” The aroma of frankincense is stated to be “spiritually uplifting, invoking a calm, prayerful, meditative state of mind.”³³ Thus, while

³⁰ David H. Sorenson, *Understanding the Bible*, vol. 10, *I Corinthians through Philemon* (Duluth, MN: Northstar, 2008), 188.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 387.

³² Richard R. Melick, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 32, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 157.

³³ Stewart, xviii.

these metaphorical references do not refer to literal fragrances, they do demonstrate the use of essential oils as a fragrance.

Medical Supplies

In Jer 8:22, “balm” is referred to as something a doctor would use to encourage healing. Specifically, the prophet refers to the healing power of the “balm in Gilead.” Gilead “was famous for its healing ointment made from the resin of a tree whose identity is uncertain.”³⁴ Despite the potential for uncertainty – Stewart identifies it as “*commiphora obalsamum*” [italics in original] and Gary Young believed it to be “*commiphora gileadensis*” [italics in original] – what is certain is its use as a healing agent.³⁵

Holy Anointing Oil

Another use for the essential oils in Scripture is for the concoction of a special holy anointing oil that was reserved by God for exclusive purposes. This oil mixture is discussed in Ex 30:23-33 and then referenced in both Neh 13:5 and 1 Chr 9:29. The recipe for holy anointing oil is given in Ex 30:23-25 where it is stated to consist of myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, cassia, and olive oil. Verses twenty-six through thirty detail that this special oil is to be used on the tabernacle, the tabernacle furniture, and the priests as a means of sanctifying them for service. This is followed in verses thirty-one to thirty-three with a warning that if anyone attempted to replicate the oil’s formula or misused the holy anointing oil, this was punishable by death.

³⁴ F. B. Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary*, vol. 16, *Jeremiah Lamentations* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 117.

³⁵ Stewart, 233. Mary Young, *D. Gary Young The World Leader in Essential Oils* (Lehi, UT: Young Living Essential Oils, 2015), 284.

Olive Oil

Another category of oil needing to be addressed is that of olive oil. While Stewart promotes the health benefits of olive oil in his text, he refers to it as “The Other Healing Oil of the *Bible* [emphasis and capitals in original]” as to differentiate it from an essential oil.³⁶ Stewart classifies an essential oil as “necessary for the life of the plant” and “composed of tiny molecules that can penetrate into every cell, administering healing therapy at the most fundamental levels of our bodies.”³⁷ Olive oil, as well as other such oils, differ from essentials oils because “fatty oils are composed of molecules much too large to penetrate to cellular levels.”³⁸ Like essential oils, olive oil is recorded in Scripture as a consumer product, a fragrance, and of medical significance.

Olive Oil as a Consumer Product

Two examples of olive oil being referenced in Scripture as a consumer product are Rv 6:6 and 18:13. In Rv 6:6, the third seal judgment has been opened, unleashing a black horse and rider. In context, this judgement is the effect of the warfare taking place on earth at this time leading to food being scare and expensive. According to Kenneth Easley, the “oil and the wine” are mentioned as “not essential for life but certainly an expected part of everyday diets in the first century.”³⁹ The word translated “oil” simply means “olive oil.”⁴⁰ The same word is used to refer to oils in Rv 18:13 where it is revealed that merchants will bemoan their loss of commerce with the fall of Babylon.

³⁶ Stewart, 162.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

³⁹ Kenneth H. Easley, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, vol. 12, *Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 107.

⁴⁰ Louw and Nida, 77.

Olive Oil as Anointing Oil

The same Greek word is used again to refer to anointing oils in both Heb 1:9 and Jas 5:14.⁴¹ As such, a biblical case for the use of olive oil can be made based on these verses. In the Hebrews passage, the biblical writer is discussing the heavenly royalty of Jesus Christ. In verse nine, it is recorded that “God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness.” According to Sorenson, “the oil of gladness referred to was an holy ointment used on occasions of great joy. It was also used for the anointing of kings in the Old Testament.”⁴² It is also used for anointing the sick in Jas 5:14. “The oil in question was olive oil and anointing was the practice of applying (even pouring) it upon the head of the one being anointed.”⁴³ Thus, olive oil played a role in both the anointing of kings as well as the anointing of the sick. While Sorenson asserts the olive oil “obviously has no medicinal value,” Stewart argues “prayer can work without oils. Oils can work without prayer. When both are used together, each increases the power of the other... This is no coincidence.”⁴⁴ While the actual medical effectiveness of olive oil in this case is in dispute, its use in Scripture as an anointing oil is not.

Medical Significance of Olive Oil

Olive oil is also demonstrated to have medical applications in both Is 1:6 and Lk 10:34.⁴⁵ In Is 1:6, the prophet alludes to the sinful nation of Southern Israel as a body suffering from intense, untreated injuries. In reference to the open wounds with which this

⁴¹ While ἔλαιον (*elaion*) appears in Heb 1:9; Rev 6:6, and 18:13, the dative neuter singular form of the same word - ἐλαίῳ (*elaiō*) - appears in Jas 5:14.

⁴² David H. Sorenson, *Understanding the Bible*, vol. 11, *Hebrews through Revelation* (Duluth, MN: Northstar, 2008), 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁴ Sorenson, *Hebrews through Revelation*. Stewart, 93.

⁴⁵ Stewart, 162.

metaphorical body has been inflicted, the prophet states, “they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.” The Hebrew word translated “mollified” means “be soft.”⁴⁶ The word translated “ointment” is means “olive oil.”⁴⁷ The illusion in this verse is to a severely injured body that has not received proper medical care which would have included the use of olive oil. Referring to the wounds mentioned in this verse, Keil and Delitzsch state, “these require softening with oil, that the coagulated blood of swelling may disperse.”⁴⁸ In Lk 10:34, another fictional account of the medical use of oil is offered by Jesus Christ. In this passage, Jesus is responding to the question “who is my neighbour?” posed by a lawyer in verse twenty-nine. Jesus’ answer consists of the parable of the Good Samaritan and in verse thirty-four the Samaritan provides medical assistance to the injured man which included him having “bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.” The word translated “oil” in this verse is once again (ἐλαιον (*elaion*)) one of two generic terms for olive oil. Stewart asserts “it would not be uncommon, in those days, for travelers, such as the Good Samaritan, to carry a quantity of wine containing myrrh along with a flask of scented olive oil wherever they went.”⁴⁹ Robert H. Klein refers to this procedure as “basic first aid.”⁵⁰ While neither Is 1:6 nor Lk 10:34 reference either a literal person or scenario, these references do demonstrate the use of oil in treating injuries.

⁴⁶ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 2: 848.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 937.

⁴⁸ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7, *Isaiah* (Peabody, M.A: Hendrickson, 2011), 55-56.

⁴⁹ Stewart, 162.

⁵⁰ Robert H. Klein, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 24, *Luke* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 318.

Conclusion

Even using a more stringent perspective than some others have in the tabulation of biblical references to oils, there is enough information to establish the uses of oil in Scripture. Both essential oils – or products close to them – were available as consumer products made available by merchants. As a tribute to their resiliency, ointments, and odours are mentioned as non-essential commercial products in the book of Revelation which will not be harmed during the famines that will occur due to the warfare of the era and will remain purchasable commodities at least until the fall of Babylon. Both literal and metaphorical references are made to oils use as fragrances. Esther and her counterparts are stated as using them to prepare for their night with the king in Est 2:12. The strange woman of Prv 7 is recorded as claiming to have used them to prepare her bed for her sinful behaviors. They are also used to provide scent to God's attire in Ps 45:8 as well as the man in Sg 3:6. The pleasantly scented "oil of spikenard" is mentioned as being in Mary's possession in Mk 14:3 and Jn 12:3. Metaphorically, Paul alludes to the Old Testament sacrificial system when mentioning savours and odours in his works. However, Paul's writings are not specific regarding which – if any – essential oils are being referenced. A reading of Lv 1-3 reveals the role of frankincense being established, however. An essential oil is also given medical significance in Jer 8:33 and a variety of them are included in the recipe for the holy anointing oil in Ex 30. One potential source of confusion is the generic terminology which limits the oils mentioned in several passages to olive oil. While olive oil is mentioned in Scripture as a consumer product in Rv. 6:6 and 18:13, an anointing oil in Heb 1:9 and James 5:14, and is noted to play a role in first aid in Is 1:6 and Lk 10:34, it is differentiated from essential oils by Stewart. This is, however, partly mitigated by

Stewart's mention of wine containing myrrh, which is an essential oil and included in the first aid applied by the Good Samaritan. Albeit the presence of myrrh is not stated specifically in Scripture and this does not change the reality of olive oil not being an essential oil.

Arguments Against The Use Of Essential Oils

Theologically, there are two main arguments against the use of essential oils: 1) the warning of God not to reproduce the holy anointing oil of Ex 30 and 2) the use of essential oils in pagan religions. As to the first argument, Ex 30 contains the last of the instructions regarding the tabernacle. In verses twenty-two through thirty-eight, the Lord commands Moses to have a special holy anointing oil made for the purpose of anointing the tabernacle, the tabernacle furnishings, and the priests (Aaron and his sons). The Hebrew nation was warned not to reproduce this oil in verses thirty-two and thirty-three with the penalty for reproducing the holy anointing oil or abusing the portion commissioned by God was to be "cut off from his people" according to verse thirty-three Keil and Delitzsch state this phrase "denotes not rejection from the nation, or banishment, but death."⁵¹ For those believers who value their existence, duplicating an oil recipe bearing the death penalty could be cause for concern. Stewart addresses this concern stating "According to most authorities, the prohibition against using the formulas for holy anointing oil and holy incense in Exodus 30 . . . [are] no longer in effect" before leaving this matter in the hands of his readers stating "It is a matter you will have to decide for yourself."⁵² Stewart's understanding of the prohibition being nullified is based on a dispensational theology which with the author of

⁵¹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 143, 461.

⁵² Stewart, 69.

this paper is in agreement. In Mt 5:17, Jesus informed his disciples that he had come to “fulfil” the law, not to “destroy” it. The word translated “fulfil” means “to give the true or complete meaning to something.”⁵³ According to Craig L. Bloomberg, the purpose of Jesus’ life and ministry was to “bring the law to its intended goal.”⁵⁴ This goal was partially realized when Christ paid for the sins of mankind and humanity was granted the opportunity to approach God without the use of the Old Testament sacrificial system as symbolized by the tearing of the veil recorded in Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; and Lk 23:45. Under the new covenant, Jesus – having offered the ultimate sacrifice for sin – is the high priest and all believers are free to approach him (Heb 4:14-16; 10, 1 Tm 2:5). The purpose of the Old Testament law was to demonstrate the existence of sin which was paid for by Christ, thus commencing the post-law dispensation (Rom 5:13; 7:4-6). This is not, however, to claim that the writings of the Old Testament are useless as they are stated to be “for our learning” according to the apostle Paul (Rom 15:4). It does mean – as with the sacrificial system – the Old Testament law is not in effect during the age of grace which includes the prohibition against the holy anointing oil. Since it is possible the sacrificial system will return during the millennial reign of Christ, the prohibition would have to come back into effect during that period as well.⁵⁵

The second major argument against the use of essential oils is the use of said oils in pagan religions. “Many aromatherapists associate holistic aromatherapy with the theories of life force, vital energy, meridians and chakras, all of which are rooted in Taoist,

⁵³ Louw and Nida, 404.

⁵⁴ Craig L. Bloomberg, *New American Commentary*, vol. 22, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 104.

⁵⁵ Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (July-September 1995): 279-289.

Hindu and other eastern philosophies and religions.”⁵⁶ The use of oils in the practice of pagan religions is something Stewart recognizes in his text, but argues against using grammatical arguments and claiming that modern pharmaceuticals have “satanic roots.”⁵⁷ The theological solution to this argument is found Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8, where the apostle Paul wrote on the subject of Christian liberty. In both passages, Paul discusses general problems within the respective churches caused by differing positions taken regarding diets as well as attaching significance to particular days in Rom 14. Paul classifies those with more restrictive perspectives as being “weak” in Rom 14:2 and 1 Cor 8:7. In Rom 14:2, the word Paul uses to refer to the weak means “to be weak” or “to be limited in” whereas in 1 Cor 8:7 the word he uses carries more of an idea of physical weakness.⁵⁸ In the Romans passage, the apostle Paul is referring to those who limited their diets to herbs as yet spiritually immature, whilst the Corinthians who might be offended by those who partake in dining on meat offered to idols are viewed as spiritually fragile. Paul was evidently concerned the immaturity of the herbalists had produced strife within the Roman church as they held a negative view of those who approved of a less conservative diet and vice versa (Rom 14:3). “The tendency of those who eat whatever they want is to look down on those...unable to exercise the same freedom.... On the other hand.... A natural consequence of the more restrictive perspective is to condemn those who are enjoying greater freedom.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, when writing to the Corinthians, Paul comments on the potential for a spiritually fragile believer to suffer harm if they violate their conscience.

⁵⁶ George Smith, “Aromatherapy,” *Triple Helix* (winter 2004): 5.

⁵⁷ Stewart, 43.

⁵⁸ Louw and Nida, 678, 700.

⁵⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *New American Commentary*, vol. 27, *Romans* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 252.

“The careless practices of more mature Christians may have led them to so stumble. The aftermath was discouragement for yielding to the temptation.”⁶⁰ The root cause for the weakness of both the Roman herbalists and the spiritually fragile Corinthians was a lack of understanding regarding the acceptability of those things they had chosen to shun (Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 8:8). For the herbalists, Paul states that the only reason the meat was unacceptable to them was because they had deemed it so. “The old taboos on certain ceremonial foods were no longer in force.... Although no food is unclean in itself, if someone regards it as unclean, then for that person it is.”⁶¹ For the spiritually fragile Corinthians, Paul argues for the lack of authority held by any idol and thus their inability to defile anything (1 Cor 8:4-6). Therefore, those who were categorized as “weak” by the apostle Paul were those who had restricted their own freedom unnecessarily. What makes the restriction unnecessary is fact that what was being restricted was not doctrinally unacceptable. A potential pitfall of one’s understanding of Christian liberty is believing lifestyle standards are subjective. “He was not teaching that as long as we think something is okay it is okay for us. Scripture clearly teaches that certain things are wrong.”⁶² Therefore, one must not consider oneself “strong” because they permit sinful behaviors in their life.

However, those who refuse to use essential oils on the basis of their inclusion in pagan religious practices are unnecessarily restricting their own freedom in the same fashion as the Roman herbalists and spiritually fragile Corinthians. Paul informed the

⁶⁰ David H. Sorenson, *Understanding the Bible*, vol. 10, *I Corinthians through Philemon* (Duluth, MN: Northstar, 2008), 75.

⁶¹ Mounce, 255.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 256.

Corinthians of the powerlessness of idols and the corresponding acceptability of those meats which had interacted with them in some way. This reasoning can also be applied to the use of oils in pagan religions. Pagan religions are as powerless as the idols discussed by Paul because of the worship of false deities or other spiritual figures. As such, not only are they unable to defile edible items, it would be erroneous for believers to think it necessary to shun everything that might be associated with pagan religions. Thus, like the Roman herbalists, those who find fault with the use of essential oils on the basis of their use in pagan religious practices are making them subjectively unacceptable. Despite the evident acceptability of the use of essential oils, Paul also discussed the need to restrain oneself from the use of those things which might cause a weaker believer to stumble. In Rom 14:21, Paul states that it is worthwhile for those who are stronger to abstain for the sake of a weaker believer's spiritual health. "While freedom is a right, it is not a guide for conduct... Rights are to be laid aside in the interest of love."⁶³ This is again stated by Paul in 1 Cor 8:13 where he pledges to abstain from questionable meats if doing such serves to benefit the spiritual wellbeing of another. Thus, while the use of essential oils is not sinful, avoiding their use may be necessary if the spiritual wellbeing of a weaker believer is at stake.

Conclusion

Based on the information offered in Scripture by the apostle Paul in Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8, the two major theological objections to the use of essential oils are answerable. The prohibition against the recreation or misuse of the holy anointing oil in Ex 30 was nullified

⁶³ Mounce, 257.

as the moment Jesus had fulfilled the purpose of the Old Testament law. Along with the sacrificial system as a whole, the holy anointing oil became obsolete with the arrival of the new dispensation. As to the objection to the use of essential oils because of their involvement with pagan religions, like the idols in the city of Corinth, pagan religions are powerless to defile those things with which they are involved. Just because a false religious practice includes an oil, does not mean it is off limits to Christians. For believers, shunning a behavior or item should be a matter of biblical authority as opposed to personal preference. However, some believers may be wise to forgo the use of oils for the benefit of those who are less spiritually mature as to avoid offending their consciences.

Conclusion

Essential oils are getting more popular and it is important for believers to have an understanding of their compatibility with Scripture. To understand this, one must grasp humanity's attachment to nature in creation, know of the specific references to the use of oils in Scripture, and recognize the arguments against the use of oils. Humans have always shared a special bond with their created environment as signified by the method of their original production. Adam was a mediate creation from the dust of the ground meaning the first human to ever exist was composed of the very elements of his environment. When the first woman was introduced to creation, her body was constructed from a piece of Adam's body. Thus, while she differed from Adam, she was comprised of the same basic elements. Furthermore, God designed the fruits and vegetables grown in the surrounding habitat to serve as food sources meaning humans are meant to be nourished by that which is produced from the creation from which they were originally built. Furthermore, recorded in Ez 47:12 is the medicinal value of plant life. Here, the prophet differentiates between plant life used

as a source of food and plant life being used for medical reasons. Given the natural connection humans have with their habitat and the ability for that which is naturally produced in said habitat to nourish and sustain them, it stands to reason that naturally occurring essential oils could serve the same purpose.

Even with a stringent perspective, essential oils appear in the text of Scripture as consumer products, both literal and metaphorical fragrances, as medical supplies, and as the ingredients for the holy anointing oil in the Old Testament. Alongside essential oils is also olive oil, which – while not to be confused with an essential oil – is considered a healing oil by Stewart and has been shown to have its own merits as a consumer product, as an anointing oil, and with its own medical applications.

The two major theological objections to the use of essential oils are answerable. For those who object to their use because of the prohibition against the reproduction and misuse of the holy anointing oil detailed in Ex 30, a proper understanding of dispensational theology should satisfy said objections. Jesus fulfilled the law, thus ending the need for the sacrificial system and all of its components – including the holy anointing oil – until such time as it possibly resumes during the millennial reign of Christ. For those who object to the use of essential oils because of their inclusion in the practices of pagan religions, understanding Christian liberty should resolve such concerns. The lack of ability of the object of a pagan religious behavior to defile that which is included in its worship as well as the lack of biblical instruction to abstain from the use of essential oils should serve as indicators of their acceptability amongst believers. However, should a spiritually immature or fragile believer struggle with the acceptability of the use of essential oils, the more mature believers around them would be wise to avoid their use for the weaker one's benefit.

Therefore, due to the built-in connection humans have to their environment, the biblical examples of oils being used in Scripture, and the answerability of the major theological objections to the use of essential oils, the author of this paper believes there is no sound basis for rejecting their use so long as said use aligns with the biblical paradigm. Both Christian leadership and laity can embrace the commercial availability of essential oils and employ them a fragrances, for anointing, for their medical applications alongside the many other products available.

As a final word of caution, the author of this paper is not encouraging the use of every product referred to as an essential oil. While the use of essential oils is biblically compatible, the consumer should be careful to do their own research to ensure what they are purchasing is of the appropriate quality. The author of this paper is also only condoning the use of essential oils in accordance with the biblical paradigm.

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THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST: THE HEALING OF A WOMAN WITH
THE ISSUE OF BLOOD AND THE RAISING OF THE RULER'S DAUGHTER
(9:18-26)

Patrick Nasongo*

Introduction

Matthew 9:18–26 is a lone literary device in Matthew called the ‘sandwich technique.’ It is a feature commonly used by Mark in the second Gospel. Matthew preserved this account but condensed it in nine verses, while Mark uses twenty-three verses (Mark 5:2–43) and Luke uses seventeen (Luke 8: 40–56). What then is a sandwich technique? James Edwards describes:

The Second Gospel frequently interrupts a story or pericope by inserting a second, seemingly unrelated, story into it. For example, in chap. 5 Jairus, a synagogue ruler, begs Jesus to heal his daughter (vv. 21–24). A woman with a hemorrhage interrupts Jesus en route to Jairus’s house (vv. 25–34), and only after recording the woman’s healing does Mark resume with the raising of Jairus’s daughter, who had died in the meantime (vv. 35–43).¹

It is striking to note that Matthew 9:18–26, though abbreviated, appears in the same sequence of A B A¹ as Mark and Luke. Thus, the structure, contents, and characters involved are similar with a few variations. However, each author has a different focus in his account. For instance, Mark’s focus is mainly faith and discipleship, while Luke emphasizes Christology and discipleship, and Matthew focuses on Christology and faith. This paper will focus on Matthean emphases.

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¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company 2001), 11.

This pericope appears between Matthew 8–9.² In this section, Matthew presents ten miracles. These miracles reveal Jesus’ compassion, display his authority, and affirm his identity. The miracles also validate Jesus’ claim to be Israel’s king, particularly the healing of two blind men (9:27–31). These two men recognized Jesus as the Son of David, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on us” (v. 27). Finally, these miracles demonstrate that Jesus has power and authority over every aspect of life, especially the healing of the ruler’s daughter and the woman with the issue of blood. The last category will be examined in detail.

Furthermore, Jesus delegated the ministry of preaching and healing to his disciples (Matt. 10:7-8). In his lifetime, Jesus witnessed his disciples carry out this task. He later re-emphasized the same pattern in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20). Jesus’ power enabled the disciples to preach and heal all manner of diseases. It was a genuine power because the disciples reported to Jesus the results (Luke 10:17–19). Gromacki correctly writes, “A mark of genuine authority is one ability to delegate that power to another. When Jesus sent the Twelve out to preach, He gave to them the authority to do exactly what he did (10:7–8).”³ A caveat is in order: The fact that Jesus delegated to his disciples the ministry of preaching and healing does not imply that power is imparted by ministers to other individuals today. This act ceased after the apostles passed away. It was meant to authenticate their ministries and lay the foundation for the church. In fact, this writer does

² The three sets of miracles in Matthew 8–9: a) Regarding physical maladies: cleansing a leper in 8.1–4; healing a paralyzed man in 8.5–13; and healing Peter’s mother-in-law in 8.14–17; b). Spiritual maladies: calming the storm in 8.23–27; demonic possession in 8.28-34; and healing a paralyzed man in 9.2-8; c). Metaphorical healing: Jairus daughter in 9:18–19, 23–25; Hemorrhage woman in 9:20–22; healing two blind men in 9:27–31; healing possessed man in 9:31-34.

³ Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2008), 80.

not advocate for faith healing propelled by charismatic faith healers. God heals through his word, prayer, and medical physicians.

The author plans to exegete Matthew 9:18–26, where this literary device is displayed outside the Gospel of Mark. The author will also investigate three themes revealed in this pericope. The author will start with the assumption that Matthew’s sandwich device, though unique, shares a common message with other synoptic Gospels.

Finally, given time, the author plans to investigate the sources of this pericope in the synoptic gospels. As one reads this passage, some questions arises: how comes these two miracles appear in the same sequence of A B A¹ in the synoptic gospels? Did the writers rely on each other’s material or to what extent were they independent? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in writing this passage? However, due to a limited scope, this task will be undertaken at another time. The outline of this passage will follow the format of A B A.¹

Exegesis of Matthew 9:18-26 (Mark 5:20-43; Luke 8:40-56)

Matt. 9:	English (KJV)	Matt. 9:	Greek (UBS)
v. 18	While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.	18	Ταῦτα αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος αὐτοῖς, ἰδοὺ ἄρχων εἷς ἐλθὼν προσεκύνει αὐτῷ λέγων ὅτι Ἡ θυγάτηρ μου ἄρτι ἐτελεύτησεν· ἀλλ’ ἐλθὼν ἐπίθεε τὴν χειρὰ σου ἐπ’ αὐτήν, καὶ ζήσεται.
v. 19	And Jesus arose, and followed him, and <i>so did</i> his disciples.	19	καὶ ἐγερθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.

v. 20	And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind <i>him</i> , and touched the hem of his garment:	20	Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ αἰμορροῦσα δώδεκα ἔτη προσελθοῦσα ὀπισθεν ἤψατο τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ
v. 21	For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.	21	ἔλεγεν γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῇ, Ἐὰν μόνον ἄψωμαι τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι.
v. 22	But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.	22	ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς στραφεὶς καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὴν εἶπεν, Θάρσει, θύγατερ· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε.
v. 23	And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,	23	Καὶ ἐλθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἄρχοντος καὶ ἰδὼν τοὺς αὐλητὰς καὶ τὸν ὄχλον θορυβούμενον
v. 24	He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.	24	ἔλεγεν, Αναχωρεῖτε, οὐ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν τὸ κοράσιον ἀλλὰ καθεύδει. καὶ κατεγέλων αὐτοῦ.
v. 25	But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.	25	ὅτε δὲ ἐξεβλήθη ὁ ὄχλος εἰσελθὼν ἐκράτησεν τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς, καὶ ἠγέρθη τὸ κοράσιον.
v. 26	And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.	26	καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἡ φήμη αὕτη εἰς ὅλην τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην.

Jesus Responds To The Ruler's Desperate Faith, VV. 18–19

These verses introduce the pericope which employs the sandwich technique marked as A. In v.18, Matthew reminds the reader of what Jesus was doing (9:14–17). *Ἰδοὺ* is added for emphasis on Jesus, not the ruler. Matthew deliberately omits his name (Jairus) for that purpose. He simply designates him as ἄρχων εἰς, “a certain ruler.” Perhaps Matthew’s

failure to identify the ruler by name is deliberate. Matthew wants to make Jesus preeminent in every way possible. The ruler approaches and προσεκύνει, “worships” Jesus (8:2; 15:25; and 18:26). Only Matthew describes how a ruler “knelt”, a posture for worship. However, the ruler does not refer to any of Jesus’ titles. The ruler indicates that his daughter is ἄρτι ἐτελεύτησεν, “even now dead.” The verb τελεθῶ means “to fulfill” “complete”, “come to an end”, or simply “dead.” The word indicates that the daughter had died.⁴ The ruler expresses great faith in the ability of Jesus to restore life. He says, αὐτήν, καὶ ζήσεται, “... she shall live.” The verb ζάω, a future for life (ζωή) is used instead of ἀνάστασις, “resurrection.” This implies that Matthew, by use of ζάω, connects this healing to Jesus’ mission of salvation, “... σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, “he shall save his people” (Matthew 1:21). This writer holds to the opinion that the healing of the woman has a double focus: salvation for forgiveness of sins and physical healing. In instance, healing is salvific in nature. In v.19, Matthew writes that Jesus arose (Mark 5:25; Luke 8:42-43) and followed. The verb ἀκολουθέω, “to follow”, an aorist, indicates that Jesus had already started before the next event. The phrase ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus” is put in front of the clause because Matthew wants to make Jesus stand out. Matthew writes that Jesus took the disciples with him. However, in Mark and Luke’s account, he took Peter, John, and James into the room where he brought the daughter back to life.

Jesus Is Moved By The Haemorrhage Woman’s Bold Faith, VV. 20–21

As noted earlier, verses 20 and 21 is the second part of the pericope employing the sandwich technique (Mark 5:25–33; Luke 8:43–47). A woman (could be an obstacle to

⁴ Mark indicates that the daughter was ἐσχάτως ἔχει, “at the point of death” – Mk 5:23), whereas Luke αὐτὴ ἀποθνήσκω, “she lay a dying” (8:42).

the ruler's request) intrudes in the path of the ruler. She was needy too. The woman had lost blood for twelve years. Matthew does not reveal the reason why Jesus attends to this woman first before the ruler's dead daughter. This writer thinks that Jesus did so due to the unfair treatment of women in that culture. Jesus wants to restore lost worth in her. The choice of one over the other is not based on need. Otherwise the ruler's daughter will have priority. Ἰδοὺ here parallels that in v.18. There, the ruler was approaching to worship Jesus, but here, the woman approaches and touches Jesus. Matthew, as usual, excludes the details of the woman suffering to allow Jesus to stand out.⁵ Also, Matthew and Luke add the 'hem' (Num. 15:38–39).” The μόνον modifies touching. Gundry notes, “Jesus's authority is so great that for a miracle cure, it only needs but a little exercise.”⁶ On a similar note, Craig also writes, “Like the girl who is dying, this woman would be viewed as ritually unclean, an even greater stigma than her physical problem (Lev. 15:19–33).”⁷ Thus, approaching Jesus from behind to touch him made sense. Bloomberg notes, “Her faith seems mixed with superstition because she believes that she merely needs to touch the edge of Jesus' garment.”⁸ It is a touch of faith.

V. 22 (Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48). Again, Matthew omits most of the materials in Mark to place Jesus on the foreground. However, Matthew re-introduces the name ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus”, which is absent in Mark and Luke's account. He inserted the phrase, “turning and seeing the woman.” Jesus may have known about the thoughts of this woman (9:3). So, he

⁵ Mark describes her struggle:” endured much under many physicians and spent all that she had; and was no better, but rather grew worse’ (5:26).

⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann's Publishing Company, 1994), 27.

⁷ Craig L. Bloomberg, *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. The New American Commentary Vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 160.

⁸ Bloomberg, *An Exegetical Theological Exposition of Holy Scriptures*, 160-161.

turned around to give her attention. This woman's faith alone in Jesus brought about the conditions that made healing possible. Jesus declared,... θύγατερ· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε, "Daughter...thy faith hath made thee whole" (v.22). Two words are significant in this phrase: θύγατερ, "daughter" and the verb σέσωκέν, "whole." In regard to Jesus pronouncing her as 'Daughter', Wilson notes: "By recognizing the woman as 'daughter', Jesus has given the socially and religiously ostracized woman status, inclusion and social standing, 'relations defined not by patriarchal household but by the divine kingdom: in the language of medical anthropology, she has been both "cured" and "healed."'"⁹ The word σέσωκέν, a perfect from σώζω, indicates that the results of the completed action, thus, the restoration of the woman continues to the present.

The noun θύγατερ is a vocative case. This case lacks the particle ὃ which carries with it some emotions and emphasis. However, Daniel Wallace note, "The voc ... seems to be occasionally emotional even without this particle... It may be that the 'naked vocative' is really a catch-all, encompassing both simple address and emphatic/emotional address."¹⁰ It should be noted that the word σωθήσομαι, "healed" in v. 21 and σέσωκέν in v. 22 literally means "saved." The word fits better in the context of Jesus' mission (Matt. 1:21) than the situation of the woman. In this reference, Hagner notes, "The synoptics use the term 'save' because physical healing here functions as emblem for spiritual healing."¹¹

⁹ W.T. Wilson, *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew: Reflections on method and Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 210.

¹⁰ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 68.

¹¹ Hagner, 1993b.

Furthermore, Gundry notes that "...the general verb 'save' makes the woman's deliverance a symbol of Jesus' saving his people from their sins (1:21)."¹²

Jesus Revisits The Desperate Faith Of The Ruler, VV. 23–25

V. 23 (Mark 5:35–40; Luke 8:49–53). Matthew now returns to the previous episode of the ruler. This is the final portion of this pericope, marking the end of a sandwich technique. Matthew omits to report her as dead as he did in v. 18, leaving out Mark and Luke's details. Matthew's focus again is on Jesus (mentioned in vs. 19, 22, and 23). In this incidence, Jesus comes (ἐλθὼν) by himself, unlike in Mark and Luke where Peter, James, and John accompany him.

V. 24. Beginning from verses 23-25, Jesus takes charge of the scene as soon as he enters the ruler's house (cf. vv. 23-25). This is a Matthean preference of placing in the front line. Even the father's daughter (the ruler) is absent from the scene (although present in mark and Luke's account). Jesus commands the minstrel to 'depart' (Ἀναχωρεῖτε). Minstrel are professional wailers hired to conduct the funeral. Jesus declares to the minstrel that "the maid is not dead, but sleepeth." The crowd appears to take Jesus' words literally and thus laugh him off. But the literal understanding is off since the daughter is certainly dead. Eugene Boring notes:

The use of "sleep" for "death" here is not a hiding of the reality of death, nor is it a general statement about the nature of death as "only sleep", but a Christological statement about the power of Jesus. From the post-resurrection perspective of the church's faith expressed in this story, Jesus is pictured as the one for whom death is already vanquished, and he raises the young woman from the "sleep" of death as he will raise all at the eschaton."¹³

¹² Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church...*, 174.

¹³ M. Eugene Boring, *General Articles on the New Testament; Matthew; Mark*, Vol. VII: The New Interpreters Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 238.

In verse 25, Jesus entered (εἰσελθών) in the house by himself (no disciples or crowd). ἐκράτησεν τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς, “he took her by the hand,” Matthew does not refer to any of Jesus’ words or actions (cf. Mark and Luke). Matthew simply records ἠγέρθη τὸ κοράσιον, “the maid arose,” τὸ κοράσιον is the subject of the verb ἠγέρθη means “to raise up” both in the sense of lifting her out of bed and coming back to life. Matthew, known for his economy of words, records one of Jesus’ greatest miracle to date (in addition to Lazarus in John 11 and widow’s son, Luke 7:11–17). Like the previous miracle, Gundry notes, “this healing takes place as a result of Jesus’ merely taking hold of the girl’s hand thus complements the healing of the woman because of her touching Jesus’ garment (vv. 20–21).”¹⁴ The miracle shows the power of Jesus. Again, Matthew leaves out Mark’s details.

V. 26. Matthew ends the story without emphasizing this great miracle. He is concerned with Jesus and the deed. He writes that ἡ φήμη “the fame” of Jesus (v. 26), not the healing of the girl (Mark 5:42) or prohibition for publicity (Mark 5:43; Luke 8:56). Matthew does not give any prohibition of the messianic secret as indicated by Mark (5:43). He wants Jesus to be known by the exercise of his power and authority. The Matthean Jesus takes center stage and is preeminent in every situation.

Matthean Focus: Faith, Authority Of Jesus, And Christology

Three themes stand out in this pericope: faith, authority of Jesus, and Christology. Both parties in the two miracles exercised their faith in Jesus differently. The ruler (Jairus) expressed his faith by believing that Jesus can miraculously resurrect his daughter back to life. He said, “... but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live (9:18b).” The

¹⁴ Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church*.

woman suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years was convinced that touching the hem of Jesus would bring healing. Touching the hem of Jesus was her way of calling attention to Jesus himself. Jesus affirmed that faith by healing her (v. 22).

The authority of Jesus is demonstrated in both miracles. It is simple yet powerful. To the woman, Jesus declares, "...they faith hath made thee whole" (9:22). Jesus used these simple words and the woman was made whole immediately, "... that hour" (v. 22). concerning the ruler's daughter, Matthew writes, "he went in and took her by the hand, and the maid arose" (v. 25). The miracle took place by a simple touch of Jesus. It demonstrates the greatness of Jesus' power. Matthew excludes words that Jesus used in Aramaic, *Ταλιθα κουμι*, "arise" (Mark 5:41). The result is reported with precise but direct words. The miracle is so great that there is no need to add anything. It all points to the person and authority of Jesus.

The final theme implied in this pericope is Christology. This theme is revealed in three ways. First, it was noted that when Jesus healed the woman, he uses the word *σέσωκέν*, from *σώζω*. The healing not only restored physical maladies, but revealed the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus' mission is to save his people from their sins (Matt.1:21). Second, Jesus was touched by the woman with the issue of blood. According to the Levitical laws (Lev. 15:19–33), anyone getting in touch with such a woman was made unclean. Was Jesus made ritually unclean? Jesus could not become unclean because he is the messiah. Third, it was noted that Jesus use of the words "sleep" for "death" is Christological. The word *καθεύδω*, "sleep" (Matt. 25; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52) is not used literally as the minstrels thought but has a Christological implication. The raising of the ruler's daughter points to his post-resurrection mission of redemption.

Similarities Of The Two Miracles

When the two miracles are closely examined, several similarities are evident. The little girl was twelve years (Mark 5:42; Luke 8:42), while the woman had suffered for twelve years (Matt. 9:20); the girl was restored by the touch of Jesus (9:25), also the woman (9:22); for both, faith in Jesus is the pathway to healing and life. Jairus had faith on behalf of his daughter (9:18), and the woman had faith in Jesus herself by touching the hem of his garment (9:21). In both situations, the reader is forced to ask: who is this person who can heal intractable diseases and raise the dead? In both situations, the parties involved were so hopeless. The ruler (Jairus) is deceased (9:18), the woman has a continuous flow of blood (9:20). Both parties involved appear to be Jews. The ruler was overseeing the affairs of the synagogue (9:18), while the woman, due to her uncleanness based on the Levitical law (Lev. 15:19–33), was not allowed in the synagogue. Jesus also called this woman “daughter”, a reference to a Jewish woman. Thus, she sought healing from Jesus so that she could be restored back to fellowship. This is the author’s assumption.

Conclusion

The two miracles teach everyone that faith in Jesus is key to healing. It has been observed that the ruler trusted in Jesus, knowing that he was able to heal his daughter. At the same time, the woman with the issue of blood trusted in Jesus beyond anything else. She was rewarded by her faith. Both the woman and the ruler recognized Jesus as their object of faith. Believers are called upon to emulate this example by trusting the person and works of Jesus to receive healing.

Furthermore, the healing of Jesus is holistic in nature. Jesus met the physical maladies of the dead girl and the woman with the issue of blood. But the healing was more

than physical healing. For instance, a ruler had asked: "... come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live" (9:18). The Greek work used is ζήσεται which has a root of ζάω, meaning 'to live.' The same word is used again in reference to Jesus healing of the woman with blood: '... thy faith hath made thee whole' (9:22). Greek uses the word σέσωκέν, for 'to save.' These two words looks back to Matthew 1:21, "σώσει" from σώζω, which means to 'save.' Therefore, the usage of these words implies that the healing of Jesus was part of his messianic mission. Jesus' mission entails preaching the gospel, healing, saving or restoration to life (Luke 4:18).

Again, the word "power" is no where used in the context of Matthew 9:18–26. There are no use of δύναμις, ἐξουσία or κράτος." In contrast to charismatic movement which emphasizes on power, Jesus did not use any of those words in this context. Jesus' authority and words were enough. This is a simple but powerful model to emulate.

The healing of Jesus validates his person and mission. It proves that Jesus is the true Messiah. Matthew states in v. 26 that his fame went across the world. The healing of Jesus is what was called "the sign of the messiah." When John the Baptist sent his disciples ask Jesus who he was, Jesus responds. "...Go and she John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are *cleansed*, and the deaf hear, *the dead are raised up*, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:4, 5). The italics emphasize the immediate miracles discussed above. Therefore, Jesus is who he claimed to be. Matthew is encouraging the Christian community to trust Jesus. He is our only hope and healer. All of us have the daily responsibility of proclaiming him until the whole world knows him.

A final word of caution to charismatic faith healers evident. The practice of using handkerchiefs as a medium for power transfer is unbiblical. The woman was healed, not by the hidden power in the garment, but by Jesus himself. On this note, R. C. H Lenski writes: “She believes that divine, omnipotent power resides in Jesus; that he can answer the secret, unspoken trust of her heart; that all she needs is the Word and the preaching by which he has made himself known, and she uses the touch of his garment only in some way to come into contact with him.”¹⁵ Conclusively, everyone has a responsibility to proclaim him by building the true faith rooted in the Word of God. Like Matthew, Jesus should take the first place, place him in the foreground, and make him our focus in every ministry undertaking.

¹⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 374-5.

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THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

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The mission of the church is world evangelization. In Mark 16:15, our Lord Jesus commands us, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to every creature." Nothing could be clearer: Go everywhere and tell everyone.

The Great Commission leaves us no option. Our first task as local churches is to extend the kingdom of God to every nation on earth, including our own. Everything else must be subordinate to that cause. Every time we are considering a new plan or a new program or a new building we must ask the test question of every decision: Is this helping to fulfill the Great Commission on this earth or not?

The church does not exist for itself. In 2 Cor. 5:14-21, Paul teaches us that believers are called to be ambassadors for Christ. We are sent out to represent Him in a lost world. He has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. There can therefore be no argument about which comes first -- home or foreign missions. There is only *one* harvest and *one* Lord of the harvest. We all need to work together and support each other in the common task of "going into all the world and preaching the Good News to every creature" and of "making disciples of all the nations."

Prioritizing the Great Commission in our churches will not be an easy task. Each individual believer is assigned a different place in the harvest. Each of us has different gifts and interests. That's why we need to fully understand the Great Commission and the

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principles of the kingdom. Even though the church is comprised of many different parts, and each part is different, love should be the rule among us. One of the saddest things I find today is that many Christians don't understand this principle. Satan has deceived them into thinking that other things are more important than the kingdom. Usually that "other thing" is *their* church or *their* ministry. Too often we're building up our own little kingdoms instead of the kingdom of God. Often the result is bitter competition. Can you see why "self" must be nailed to the cross for us to have unity? Conflict is inevitable in the Lord's work. Jesus promised as much. But it must be with our *real* enemies, not with our fellow Christians.

If our churches were truly committed to the Great Commission, it would show in a lifestyle that matches our response to a lost and dying world. In Paul's lengthy passage on Christian stewardship (2 Cor. 8-9) he describes the economics of the kingdom. He reminds us of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became poor for us even though He was rich. Paul adds, "I don't mean that others should have relief while you have hardship. *But there should be equity.* Your abundance should supply their needs."

Can you imagine what would happen if our churches in America were to grasp this principle of equity and of sharing our wealth and applying it to the needs of the Gospel around the world? Could it be that our materialism is keeping the world in darkness about the Good News? Shocking statistics published recently report that:

According to the World Christian Encyclopedia of all the money designated for "missions" in the U.S. only 5.4% is used for foreign missions. Of that 5.4%, only 0.37% is used to take the gospel to unreached people who don't have access to the gospel. That's about two cents out of every dollar given to missions! The rest goes towards efforts to further evangelize reached people.

Again, let me stress that there is no one-size-fits-all pattern of giving. All churches are called upon to find ways to prioritize the kingdom as the Holy Spirit directs. The most important principle to keep in mind is to employ material things for the kingdom of God rather than for ourselves. This is the true test of where our priorities lie. God may ask us to forgo building that new sanctuary, giving up our Sunday School quarterlies (and using the Bible instead), or sacrificing our padded pews. Many will think you're crazy if you do things like this. The Christian media often measure success in terms of big numbers, big buildings, and big programs. God, I think, measures success differently. He is calling each of us to be a bondsman to a world in need. We are called to be foot-washers for Jesus. We are invited to accept the call to live a life of radical Christian servanthood wherever we are and wherever we go in the world. Today I believe God is calling out an army of Americans who will feel His heartbeat and answer that call.

The conclusion is inescapable: In light of the commands of our risen Lord and Savior and in view of the present desperate condition of a lost world, we must give everything above our basic necessities to finish the task of world evangelization. We cannot serve God and Wealth at the same time. Money will either be our master or our slave. We are to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven -- not on the earth. 1 John 3:16-18 gives us our marching orders:

This is how we can know the love of God, because He laid down His life for us. We too should lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Whoever has this world's goods and sees his fellow believer in need and shuts up his compassion for them -- how can the love of God dwell in that person? My dear children, we must love not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

The whole purpose of the church can be summed up in that one concept: sharing. We are never commanded in the New Testament to do many of the things we are currently

doing (paying out lavish salaries, building huge worship centers, etc.). This is not evil in and of itself, of course. But the Bible clearly commands us to "share what we have with God's people who are in need" (Rom. 12:13). What a rebuke this verse is to the pleasure-loving and disobedience of so many Christians and churches today in America. How much longer will we allow our desire for comfort and "the good life" to be the bottleneck that prevents world evangelization?

Today every evangelical church stands at the crossroads on the question of priorities. Will we surrender to the spirit of the age, or will we join the company of the committed? Will we make a deliberate decision to accept sacrifice and suffering for the sake of Christ, or will we continue the pattern of extravagance and waste that has become the norm of our evangelical subculture?

Jesus said, "I did not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many." Jesus lived for the Great Commission. Should we not also?

O AVANÇO DO EVANGELHO POR MEIO DA PRÁTICA DA DIACONIA UM EXEMPLO A PARTIR DE ATOS 6:1-7

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Introdução

A Igreja de Cristo cresceu de forma rápida e natural, no sentido de sem muito esforço humano direcionado para isso, sem planejamento, e sem grandes estruturas, conforme descrita no Livro de Atos. Como resultado da primeira pregação do apóstolo Pedro após a ascensão de Jesus, no Pentecostes, já se uniram a ela por meio do batismo quase três mil pessoas em apenas um dia (At 3.41). Nos dias que se seguiram a este acontecimento extraordinário, muitos outros também se uniam à Igreja, dia a dia, e passavam a vender os seus bens e a utilizar o valor destas vendas para que as necessidades de todos fossem sanadas (At 2.42-47). Quando o leitor chega ao capítulo 4 de Atos recebe a informação que o número de homens participantes da igreja, sem contar as mulheres e crianças que também faziam parte da comunidade,¹ está próximo de cinco mil (At 4.4). Avançando um pouco mais na leitura já se encontra uma multidão participando do grupo dos discípulos de Jesus (At 4.32), todos vivendo em comunhão, compartilhando dos bens uns dos outros, os quais, na verdade, iam passando para a comunidade, sendo administrados

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¹ Era normal que crianças e mulheres não fossem contadas com os homens naquela época, mas é claro que elas também faziam parte da comunidade ao lado de seus familiares homens.

pelos apóstolos. Como diz o texto, os que possuíam bens imóveis, terras e casas, os vendiam e “depositavam aos pés dos apóstolos” (4.35, 37 e 5.2). Expressão esta, “pés dos apóstolos”, que, segundo Daniel Marguerat, possivelmente reflete um costume bastante antigo, que mostra a submissão ao poder dos apóstolos como enviados de Deus para a comunidade. Os pés, neste texto, assim como em 1 Samuel 25.24, 2 Samuel 22.39, Salmo 8.6, Lucas 7.38, 8.35 e 41, 17.16 e Atos 22.3, funcionam como símbolo do poder.²

Percebe-se que a igreja nascente ainda estava aprendendo a lidar com seus problemas, o que era muito normal naquele início. Os apóstolos eram a base de tudo, mas o crescimento rápido logo os obrigaria a tomar decisões que envolveriam a divisão de tarefas, para melhor suprir as necessidades do grupo. Assim, é possível de encontrar neste texto de Atos 6.1-7 o relato a respeito de um momento de crise na Igreja Primitiva. Crise causada por um bom motivo, pelo seu crescimento numérico espetacular. Como foi visto, os capítulos anteriores do Livro de Atos mostram o crescimento vertiginoso da igreja (At 2.37-41, 46-47; 4.1-2, 32; 5.14) e este, o capítulo 6, já em seu início, menciona o que estava por trás do problema, destacando a multiplicação do número dos discípulos (At 6.1 e 7).

Era normal que com o crescimento da igreja dificuldades como as apresentadas aqui, e outras mais, surgissem, pois isso faz parte do convívio em sociedade. Contudo, mais importante do que criticar a igreja do início de Atos por esta sua aparente fraqueza, o que de fato não é, é perceber as lições que podem ser aproveitadas do seu modo de agir. Pode-se dizer que a Igreja, naquele momento de crise, agiu como uma igreja diaconal, no sentido primário da palavra, como uma igreja que serve e cuida das pessoas que estão debaixo de sua influência. Assim, analisando o texto em foco, pode-se perceber como se comporta

² Marguerat, 2003, p. 188.

uma igreja diaconal, servidora e cuidadora, e aplicar os mesmos princípios para igrejas atuais que desejem atuar de forma semelhante e, com isso, contribuir para a expansão da proclamação do Evangelho.

O texto destacado (At 6.1-7) faz parte de uma unidade maior que, segundo Parsons, vai de Atos 6.1 até 8.3, descrevendo, principalmente, o testemunho e a morte de Estevão. Seu propósito é duplo: providenciar um exemplo de como a comunidade cristã inicial resolvia conflitos e, ao mesmo tempo, introduzir Estevão e Felipe na narrativa.³ O foco aqui, neste artigo, está na resolução dos conflitos, e o assunto será apresentado da seguinte forma: 1) O texto em sua íntegra, na forma em que aparece na versão conhecida como *Revisita e Atualizada de João Ferreira de Almeida (RA)*, com destaques de palavras gregas em pontos estratégicos ao lado da tradução para o português. A intenção aqui é mostrar para o leitor, com base na leitura original, onde se encontram os termos que necessitam ser esclarecidos; 2) Análise de algumas palavras de destaque no texto, com a intenção de deixar mais clara a compreensão do tema focado; 3) Interpretação e aplicação do texto, parte por parte, em quatro unidades distintas, que mostrem a ação do cuidado diaconal da igreja descrita em Atos; e 4) Demonstração do resultado advindo desta atitude de cuidado que a Igreja Primitiva lançou mão no momento da dificuldade.

O texto grego que está por trás da análise é o da 27^a edição de Nestle-Aland,⁴ consultada durante todo o trabalho, e as transliterações do grego seguirão a proposta própria de um dos autores deste artigo e que se encontra na obra *Gramática Instrumental do Grego*⁵, editada por Edições Vida Nova. Já o artigo em si mesmo é o desenvolvimento

³ Parsons, 1994, p. 1092.

⁴ Nestle-Aland, 2001.

⁵ Gusso, 2013.

de um capítulo de livro publicado pelos seus autores no ano de 2015, pelo Núcleo de Publicações da FABAPAR, na cidade de Curitiba, no Brasil.⁶

Dadas estas explicações iniciais necessárias para a clareza do tratamento do assunto, agora se passa a apresentar o seguinte, em grandes divisões que contarão com outras subdivisões: 1) O texto em análise; 2) A análise das expressões e palavras de destaque no texto; e 3) Uma interpretação seguida de aplicação geral do texto analisado.

O Texto Em Análise - Atos 6:1-7

Para facilitar a compreensão do leitor a respeito do assunto tratado, pois ele todo está baseado na unidade de Atos 6.1-7, segue o texto na versão em português conhecida como *Revista e Atualizada (RA)*, mesclado com algumas palavras gregas de destaque entre parênteses. As palavras gregas estarão ao lado das portuguesas que nem sempre conseguem deixar claro o significado do original. Nem todas as palavras gregas serão tratadas em profundidade neste artigo, mas todas elas são importantes para uma melhor compreensão, e estão destacadas aqui, também, para ajudar nas futuras pesquisas do estudante desejoso de se aprofundar no conhecimento deste texto bíblico específico.

O texto em português com os destaques gregos é o seguinte:

- 1 Ora, naqueles dias, multiplicando-se o número dos discípulos, houve murmuração dos helenistas (*Hellēnistōn* - Ελληνιστῶν) contra os hebreus (*Hebraiūs* - Εβραίους), porque as viúvas deles estavam sendo esquecidas na distribuição (*diakonia* - διακονία) diária.
- 2 Então, os doze convocaram a comunidade dos discípulos e disseram: Não é razoável que nós abandonemos a palavra de Deus para servir (*diakonein* – διακονεῖν) às mesas.
- 3 Mas, irmãos, escolhei dentre vós sete homens de boa reputação (*martyrumenus* - μαρτυρουμένους), cheios do Espírito (*plēreis pneumatōs* – πλήρεις πνεύματος) e de sabedoria (*sofias* - σοφίας), aos quais encarregaremos deste serviço;

⁶ Gusso, 2015, p. 29-46.

- 4 e, quanto a nós, nos consagraremos à oração e ao ministério (*diakonia*) da palavra.
- 5 O parecer agradou a comunidade; e elegeram Estêvão (*Estefanon* - Στέφανον), homem cheio de fé (*pisteōs* – πίστewος) e do Espírito Santo, Filipe (*Filippon* – Φίλιππον), Prócoro (*Prochoron* - Πρόχορον), Nicanor (*Nikanora* - Νικάνορα), Timão (*Timōna* - Τίμωνα), Pármenas (*Parmenan* - Παρμενᾶν) e Nicolau (*Nikolaon* - Νικόλαον), prosélito (*prosēlyton* - προσήλυτον) de Antioquia.
- 6 Apresentaram-nos perante os apóstolos, e estes, orando, lhes impuseram as mãos.
- 7 Crescia a palavra de Deus, e, em Jerusalém, se multiplicava o número dos discípulos; também muitíssimos sacerdotes obedeciam à fé.

Como já foi anunciado, algumas das palavras gregas destacadas no texto serão tratadas no decorrer da interpretação e aplicação, conforme se faça necessário, outras aparecerão no próximo ponto, o qual trata da breve análise de palavras de destaque, mas aqui também é interessante adiantar um pouco do assunto com base no texto grego. Por exemplo, como pode ser percebido no texto acima, todos os nomes das pessoas escolhidas para ocuparem o novo cargo que se fez necessário na igreja do início do Livro de Atos são de origem grega. São eles: Estevão, Filipe, Prócoro, Nicanor, Timão, Pármenas e Nicolau. O fato dos nomes serem de origem grega tem levado alguns, como, por exemplo, Horton, a concluir que o grupo, sem dúvida, era formado apenas por helenistas.⁷ O mesmo concluiu Trenchard, ao escrever que foi uma decisão sábia escolher apenas helenistas para administrarem a questão, como, segundo ele, os nomes gregos dos escolhidos demonstram.⁸ Contudo, outros, como John Stott, defendem que o fato dos sete escolhidos possuírem nomes gregos não confirma que todos eles eram do grupo dos helenistas, como alguns têm defendido⁹ com tanto destaque. Na verdade, é bom lembrar que no próprio

⁷ Horton, 1983, p. 75.

⁸ Trenchard, 1969, p. 303.

⁹ Stott, 1994, p. 134.

grupo dos apóstolos se encontravam pessoas que tinham nomes gregos e, mesmo assim, não eram helenistas, como é o caso de Filipe e André. Ou seja, não se pode dar muita ênfase na profundidade da divisão destes grupos apenas com base nos nomes dos que foram separados para suprir a necessidade que havia surgido. Seria precipitado afirmar que, para apaziguar os helenistas, todos os escolhidos faziam parte da mesma cultura dos queixosos, ainda que esta opção não esteja descartada de maneira nenhuma.

Análise De Expressões E Palavras De Destaque No Texto

Um esclarecimento básico a respeito de algumas das expressões e palavras que aparecem no texto pode ser útil para uma melhor compreensão do todo. Assim, seguem os destaques, em especial a respeito das qualidades e características dos escolhidos para fazerem frente à demanda daquela ocasião.

Boa Reputação (Martyrumenus - Μαρτυρουμένους)

O verbo como aparece neste ponto, na voz passiva, não causa dúvida. Os sete escolhidos deveriam ser pessoas de quem os outros falavam bem. O linguista Waldyr Carvalho Luz, em sua tradução interlinear deste texto, sem se importar com a beleza da tradução, mas tentando chegar o mais próximo possível do significado literal, traduziu *martyrumenus* (μαρτυρουμένους) pela expressão “que são testemunhados”¹⁰. Isto mostra que os outros deveriam testemunhar a respeito deles, no sentido de falar bem de suas qualidades.

Scholz, em seu *Dicionário Grego-Português do Novo Testamento*, apresenta como possibilidades para se verter o termo *martyreō* (μαρτυρέω) as seguintes possibilidades:

¹⁰ Luz, 2003, p. 397.

testificar, testemunhar, ou ser testemunha. Acrescenta ainda o falar bem de alguém e o elogiar.¹¹

Louw e Nida destacam que *martyreō* (μαρτυρέω) envolve o dar informações sobre alguém ou, mesmo, sobre um acontecimento a respeito de quem ou do qual o falante tem conhecimento direto.¹² Desta forma, o próprio grupo interessado na solução do problema é quem deveria, diante das informações em primeira mão que tinham, indicar os ocupantes do cargo. Em outras palavras, deveriam ser pessoas notadamente confiáveis, como bem captou a versão bíblica conhecida como *Nova Tradução na Linguagem de Hoje* (NTLH) ao traduzir o termo de forma dinâmica pela palavra “confiança”. Os escolhidos deveriam ser pessoas de confiança do povo.

Cheios Do Espírito (Plēreis Pneumatos – Πλήρεις Πνεύματος)

Entre as características que deveriam ser observadas nos candidatos ao cargo que esperava preenchimento está a qualidade de ser “cheio do Espírito”. O testemunho que a comunidade deveria dar a respeito deles deveria estar baseado na evidência de que estes eram homens espirituais, controlados pelo Espírito de Deus. Ainda que o termo grego *pneumatos* (πνεύματος) possua muitos significados, dependendo do contexto em que se encontra, como por exemplo, o sentido de “poder de inspiração e ação do homem”¹³, o que indicaria uma condição da disposição humana. Ou seja, poderia apontar para homens apenas muito bem-dispostos para a tarefa, diante do contexto geral, parece que as versões que optam por traduzir por "Espírito", com letra inicial maiúscula, em uma referência direta

¹¹ Scholz, 2018, p. 129.

¹² Louw; Nida, 2013, p. 374.

¹³ Rusconi, 2003, p. 379.

ao Espírito de Deus, estão de acordo com o sentido expresso pelo autor de Atos. A maioria concorda que não se trata apenas de boa disposição, mas de presença de Deus na vida deles. Isto de tal modo que muitas versões, como a NTLH, por exemplo, não traduzem apenas cheios do Espírito, mas vão um pouco mais longe, utilizando uma tradução com base na equivalência dinâmica, e acrescentam a palavra Deus, ficando “Espírito de Deus”, para melhor informar aos leitores a respeito do que se trata. Outras, ainda, como é o caso da versão *Almeida Século 21*, acrescentam o adjetivo Santo depois da palavra Espírito, demonstrando que entenderam que se trata mesmo do Espírito Santo.

Uma pergunta que pode, naturalmente, ser levantada neste caso é a seguinte: Mas qual a razão de se escolher pessoas cheias do Espírito de Deus para um trabalho como este que, à primeira vista não tem nada de espiritual? A resposta poderia ser a seguinte: Nas igreja de Cristo não há espaço para trabalho que não seja espiritual, por mais que alguns deles, como a parte administrativa de igrejas locais possam parecer seculares. Em outras palavras: todo trabalho desenvolvido na Igreja de Cristo, para Cristo e seu povo, é espiritual.

Cheios De Sabedoria (Plēreis Sofias – Πλήρεις Σοφίας)

Os escolhidos para o cargo além de espirituais deveriam ser pessoas sábias. Ou seja, pessoas “com capacidade para entender e, em razão disto, agir com sabedoria”.¹⁴ Esta qualidade esperada mostra que o cargo era importante e teria que ser exercido de forma inteligente. Ainda que à primeira vista pareça ser uma atividade corriqueira que espera solução, os apóstolos a viram como espiritual e, ao mesmo tempo, necessitada de pessoas

¹⁴ Louw; Nida, 2013, p. 344.

inteligentes para que a executassem da forma esperada.

Com certeza os apóstolos não estão colocando aqui a sabedoria humana acima da direção divina, pois é certo que eles sabiam que o temor ao Senhor é o princípio da sabedoria (Sl 111.10). O que se destaca nesta observação é que a atividade envolvia espiritualidade e sabedoria, ainda que fosse algo que pudesse ser encarado como secular por alguns.

Assim, dois pontos importantes se destacam no texto em referência às atividades desempenhadas na igreja de Atos e que podem ser aplicadas às igreja de todos os tempos: Na visão dos apóstolos elas deveriam ser executadas por pessoas capazes e, ao mesmo tempo espirituais. Não só capazes, mas, também, não só espirituais. As duas qualidades deveria estar presentes, o que, certamente, evitou muitos problemas para a comunidade. Esta parece ser uma boa orientação para as igrejas em geral.

Cheio De Fé (Plērēs Pisteōs – Πλήρης Πίστεως)

Estevão aparece no texto identificado com mais uma qualidade: homem cheio de fé (At 6.5). Isto não significa que os demais não o fossem, mas o autor destaca que entre os escolhidos está um que desponta por esta qualidade, a qual fica clara no decorrer da história que segue, neste e no próximo capítulo de Atos, onde já vai ser narrada a morte deste grande personagem. Michel, para explicar o conceito fé (*pisteos* - πίστεως), em seu verbete apresentado no *Dicionário Internacional de Teologia do Novo Testamento*, utilizou nada menos do que onze páginas e meia, o que bem aponta para a variedade de possibilidades.¹⁵ Contudo, neste contexto de Atos, envolvendo Estevão, pode-se dizer que

¹⁵ Michel, In: Coenen; Brown, 2000, pp. 809-820.

a palavra significa confiança a toda prova. Confiança que Estevão guardou a tal ponto que morreu por ela.

Como afirmam Louw e Nida, ao se traduzir *pisteuō* (πιστεύω) seria um erro empregar algum termo que expressasse apenas “dependência”, ou algo semelhante. Isto porque o termo grego expressa de forma firme o significado de crença e confiança.¹⁶ Parece que isso está claro nas palavras de Estevão na hora de sua morte. O texto bíblico diz: “E enquanto o apedrejavam, Estevão orava: Senhor Jesus, recebe o meu espírito” (At 7.59).

Prosélito (Prosēlyton - Προσήλυτον)

O termo prosélito (*prosēlyton* - προσήλυτον) identificando um dos escolhidos, o Nicolau, aponta claramente para a receptividade que imperava na igreja do início de Atos. Pois, de acordo com Becker, no judaísmo do primeiro século, o termo era empregado para os pagãos que haviam se convertido ao judaísmo. Depois de convertidos ao judaísmo eles passavam pelo rito da circuncisão, pelo batismo e, ainda, ofereciam um sacrifício no Templo.¹⁷ Após cumprirem estas etapas, em especial a circuncisão, eram considerados judeus. Como bem destaca France, a adesão era tão marcante que, na realidade, estes convertidos ao judaísmo passavam por uma mudança de nacionalidade.¹⁸

Assim, percebe-se que a igreja, desde seu início, recebia, além de Judeus “puros”, hebreus ou helenistas, também aqueles que haviam se convertido do paganismo ao judaísmo. E mais ainda, estes também poderiam alcançar cargos de liderança como no caso aqui

¹⁶ Louw; Nida, 2013, p. 337.

¹⁷ Becker, In: Coenen; Brown, 2000, p. 423.

¹⁸ France, In: Alexander, 2010, p.531.

apresentado.

Levando-se em conta os esclarecimentos até aqui agora é possível partir para a interpretação e aplicação do texto com mais segurança, como segue.

Uma Interpretação E Aplicação Do Texto De Atos 6:1-7

A explanação seguirá a sequência natural do texto bíblico. Nele podem ser encontradas, pelo menos, três atitudes da igreja diante da dificuldade que surgiu. Antes de entrar no assunto é bom lembrar que neste texto encontram-se lições para as igrejas atuais, sim, mas, de forma alguma ele apresenta modelos que têm que ser seguidos. Os princípios é que devem ser levados em conta como bons exemplos que são.

A Igreja Diaconal E O Cuidado Das Necessidades Dos Seus Membros (V.1)

Boa parte dos comentaristas bíblicos, que trabalha com o Livro de Atos, gosta de destacar neste texto a murmuração que estava havendo da parte dos helenistas contra os hebreus. Este, de fato, é um ponto importante do texto. Mas, mais importante ainda do que a discussão entre dois grupos dentro da comunidade parece que é perceber que a Igreja, desde seu início, já desenvolvia um serviço de ajuda às viúvas. Ainda que naquele momento o serviço não estivesse sendo feito de forma a contentar a todos, o que suscitou a murmuração dos helenistas, a verdade é que ele estava sendo feito. Havia a preocupação de se cuidar dos membros necessitados, naquela ocasião as viúvas, e percebe-se ainda, no próprio texto, que o problema foi solucionado de forma cabal.

Talvez nesta parte seja importante esclarecer quem são os helenistas, os hebreus e, também, as viúvas. John Stott acha que a identificação destes dois primeiros grupos, o dos helenistas e o dos hebreus, não pode estar baseado apenas nos fatores geográficos e

linguísticos, como alguns têm feito. Como se os helenistas fossem aqueles que foram para Jerusalém a partir da dispersão e falavam grego, enquanto os hebreus eram nativos da Judéia e falavam o aramaico, visto que Paulo se chamou de hebreu, ainda que tenha saído de Tarso e de também falar grego. Assim, a origem dos termos deve estar mais na cultura do que na origem e na língua. Neste caso, os helenistas não apenas falavam grego, mas estavam imersos na cultura grega pensando e agindo como gregos, enquanto os hebreus, além de falarem o aramaico, estavam arraigados à cultura hebraica. Segundo ele, citando Richard Longenecker, uma boa descrição diferenciadora poderia ser: judeus gregos e judeus aramaicos,¹⁹ o que ainda não ajuda muito. Em poucas palavras pode ser dito: eram dois grupos culturais diferentes que, mesmo cristãos, tinham visões antagônicas a respeito de muitas coisas, em especial, do judaísmo, ao qual ainda estavam relativamente ligados por aquela época, pois, como igreja, cultuavam nas casas, mas, também, no Templo e nas sinagogas, onde se reuniam judeus cristãos e não cristãos.²⁰

Para entender um pouco mais a respeito das viúvas pode-se dizer o seguinte: Judeus velhos passavam a morar em Jerusalém para passar religiosamente seus últimos anos de vida. Era comum, depois que eles morriam deixar suas viúvas em situação de dificuldade financeira.²¹ Também Marshall afirma que “muitas viúvas vinham da Dispersão para terminar seus dias em Jerusalém. Não podiam trabalhar para se sustentar, e se esgotaram o seu capital, ou o doaram, poderiam estar grandemente necessitadas”.²²

¹⁹ Stott, 1994, p. 133.

²⁰ Paulo se chamou de hebreu de hebreus em Filipenses 3.5. Segundo Martin, esta expressão confirma que Paulo e seus antepassados foram educados falando o hebraico e eram da cultura Palestina (2008, p.142).

²¹ Comblin, 1988, p. 147.

²² Marshall, 1982, p. 123.

A reclamação dos helenistas era que as viúvas do grupo deles estavam sendo, momentaneamente, “esquecidas na distribuição (*diaconia* - διακονία) diária” (At 6.1b). Isto mostra, com certeza, o lado negativo do esquecimento destas por parte dos responsáveis por atendê-las, o que não deveria e não deve ocorrer, mas, da mesma forma, também aponta para o ponto positivo: A igreja exercia uma *diaconia* (serviço) voltada para os seus membros necessitados. O problema era que as viúvas dos hebreus estavam sendo atendidas enquanto as dos helenistas estavam sendo deixadas de lado. Para Bruce, isto pode estar mostrando que a caridade estava aos cuidados dos hebreus.²³ Mas, mais do que isto, o texto mostra que estava mesmo era sob a administração dos doze apóstolos e que estes não estavam dando conta de tanto trabalho.

Hoje as igrejas não possuem um grupo específico de “viúvas” que necessitam de cuidados, mas existem outros necessitados, material e espiritualmente falando, e uma igreja que deseja ser diaconal (servidora), seguindo o exemplo do Mestre e dos primeiros cristãos, deve estar atenta para estas dificuldades. Cuidar das necessidades de seus membros é agir como uma igreja diaconal.

A Igreja Diaconal E O Cuidado Das Questões Materiais (Vs.2-3)

O Livro de Atos não descreve como, mas de alguma forma a murmuração dos helenistas contra os hebreus chegou ao conhecimento dos apóstolos. Estes, denominados no texto como o Grupo dos Doze, provavelmente contando com a presença de Matias em substituição a Judas, o traidor, agindo em conjunto diante da dificuldade, convocaram a multidão dos discípulos para que pudessem resolver a questão.

²³ Bruce, 1970, p. 128.

Pela segunda vez aparece no texto um termo ligado à *diaconia*, agora em sua forma verbal, que foi traduzida na *Versão Revista e Atualizada de João Ferreira de Almeida (RA)* como “servir”, mais precisamente, em conjunto com o substantivo mesa no plural, dando a expressão “servir às mesas” (At 6:2b).²⁴ Expressão esta que aponta para o cuidado imediato das viúvas que aparecem no texto, sim, mas que, também, pode ser aplicada a todo e qualquer trabalho administrativo desenvolvido pelas igrejas como instituições divinas, mas, também, terrenas.

A palavra grega *trapezais* (τραπέζαις) que tem sido traduzida, normalmente, por mesas no português, pode significar mesas comuns para a alimentação ou, ainda, mesas, ou bancas, dos cambistas, como em Mateus 21.12,²⁵ se referindo assim a dinheiro, como os tradutores da *Nova Tradução na Linguagem de Hoje* entenderam, ao traduzirem: “- Não está certo nós deixarmos de anunciar a palavra de Deus para tratarmos de dinheiro” (At 1.2b).²⁶ Esta tradução está de acordo com a opinião de Pierson que trata o termo “servir às mesas” como sendo a administração das ofertas recolhidas.²⁷

Ainda que não se possa ter certeza absoluta a respeito do significado da figura de linguagem “servir às mesas” que aqui foi utilizada, pois o texto não qualifica o tipo da mesa, que pode ser tanto uma de refeição quanto uma onde se trabalha com dinheiro, a verdade é que a expressão aponta para uma atividade que normalmente é classificada como secular. Não muda muito, seja ela a distribuição de alimentos a cada dia para as viúvas, ou seja a repartição do dinheiro das ofertas para que as viúvas pudessem adquirir o seu

²⁴ Bíblia Sagrada, 2000b.

²⁵ Rusconi, 2003, pp. 460-461.

²⁶ Bíblia Sagrada, 2000a.

²⁷ Pierson, 2000, p. 58.

sustento, como optaram os tradutores da *Nova Tradução da Linguagem de Hoje* (At 6.1),²⁸ pode se aplicar esta atividade como o cuidado com as coisas materiais, necessárias aos crentes e à igreja como um todo.

Uma igreja diaconal tem consciência de sua dupla essência, divina, corpo de Cristo, e humana, composta por gente, e cuida também das questões materiais, pois não está alienada do mundo. A importância disto fica evidente na escolha do grupo que deveria cuidar destas questões. Este encargo não era para qualquer um, não. Ele deveria ser formado por sete integrantes com as seguintes qualidades básicas: Boa reputação, cheios do Espírito Santo e de sabedoria (At 6.3). Certamente esta é uma boa orientação para as igrejas atuais no momento de separar pessoas para cuidarem das questões administrativas diversas tão importantes para o dia a dia da comunidade de Cristo. Que sejam escolhidas pessoas confiáveis (de boa reputação), notoriamente espirituais (cheias do Espírito Santo), e capacitadas (cheias de sabedoria) para a obra que terão o privilégio de executar. Quando estes elementos não são observados as igrejas correm o risco de, além de não solucionar os problemas que se apresentam, ainda, criar outros, quem sabe até mesmo mais graves do que os iniciais.

Sempre é bom lembrar que Atos 6.1-7 não está estabelecendo uma regra que deve ser seguida em seus detalhes por todas as igrejas cristãs. O importante é tirar lições dos princípios apresentados. Por exemplo, “A escolha de sete homens estava em consonância com a praxe judaica de nomear juntas de sete homens para deveres específicos”.²⁹ Contudo, isto não mostra que também as comissões atuais devam ser formadas por sete pessoas, ou,

²⁸ Bíblia Sagrada, 2000a.

²⁹ Marshall, 1982, p. 123.

menos ainda, apenas por homens.

A Igreja Diaconal E O Cuidado Das Necessidades Dos De Fora (V.4)

Com certeza a Igreja naquela época tinha problemas internos sérios para resolver. Isso, porém, não a desviou do seu dever de servir também os de fora. Parece que a tentação era grande para que os apóstolos, os líderes maiores da Igreja naquela ocasião, tomassem o encargo de eles mesmos administrarem aquela e outras dificuldades internas. Mas não foi o que aconteceu. Eles tinham consciência de que não poderiam se fechar entre “quatro paredes”, como se fossem um clube de pessoas de interesses mútuos, servindo uns aos outros e deixando de lado o resto do mundo que perecia, sem salvação. Assim, levaram a Igreja a escolher aquela comissão de sete homens para que administrassem aquele problema específico, enquanto eles, como testemunhas principais do ensino e do ministério de Jesus, continuariam se dedicando à oração e à *diaconia* (serviço, ministério) da palavra. Eles cuidariam dos de fora no sentido de ministrar o ensino cristão, levando adiante a proclamação do Evangelho.

Não há nada no texto que aponte para a supremacia de um dos ministérios sobre o outro, o que não exclui esta possibilidade que poderia ser analisada a partir de outros textos bíblicos. Contudo, neste texto, percebe-se que tanto o ministério interno quanto o externo são importantes e necessitavam de pessoas espirituais e bem preparadas para exercê-los. Para liderar o ministério interno foram escolhidos sete homens com características excelentes, assim como Jesus já havia escolhido, e preparado, os líderes para o ministério externo. Ainda que a *diaconia* da palavra (o mesmo que ministério da palavra) não fosse exercido apenas pelos apóstolos (é só continuar lendo o Livro de Atos para ver a atuação, por exemplo, de dois dos escolhidos neste texto, Estevão e Filipe, como pregadores de

grande sucesso), não há dúvidas que os apóstolos é que estavam mais bem preparados para liderá-lo, e não deveriam desviar suas atenções deste caminho.

Uma igreja diaconal, que serve como Jesus ensinou, procura não descuidar dos de fora. Por mais necessidades que os membros apresentem, estas, que devem ser tratadas e supridas, não podem levar ao desvio ou, pior ainda, ao esquecimento daqueles que ainda carecem do serviço da palavra, do testemunho a respeito das boas novas de Jesus, para que também venham a ser salvos e a fazer parte do Corpo de Cristo. Uma igreja diaconal cuida das necessidades dos de fora, e entre elas, com certeza, a principal é a necessidade de conhecer a Jesus por meio do serviço (ministério) da palavra que destaca o anúncio da salvação que há em Jesus Cristo, essência do Cristianismo. Não se pode esquecer jamais, a Igreja que deixa de se preocupar com os de fora, no sentido de levar a eles a salvação que há em Cristo, deixa de agir como igreja de Jesus e passa a ser uma simples associação de pessoas com interesses comuns, um clube, não uma agência do Reino de Deus, conforme as orientações de seu fundador.

A Igreja Diaconal E A Colheita Do Bom Resultado Do Seu Cuidado Integral (Vs.5-7)

O texto desta passagem que inicia de uma forma bastante preocupante, levantando o problema da murmuração dos helenistas contra os hebraístas, foi encerrado de uma maneira maravilhosa, mostrando que a Igreja, realmente, tinha consciência de sua vocação diaconal e que os resultados disso eram positivos. A orientação dos apóstolos foi muito bem recebida. Ela agradou a toda a comunidade (v.5) e não apenas aos queixosos. O problema foi solucionado. O texto bíblico diz: “Todos concordaram com a proposta dos apóstolos” (NTLH – At 6.5). Parece que todos concordavam que tanto os de dentro como os de fora deveriam ser servidos e cuidados. Assim, não foi difícil de chegar a uma decisão

satisfatória.

Digno de nota foi a forma democrática como os apóstolos agiram. Eles, mesmo com a autoridade que tinham como membros do Grupo dos Doze, escolhidos por Jesus, não se colocaram como “donos” da Igreja. Não fizeram prevalecer a vontade deles, ainda que estivessem à frente de todo o processo. Apenas orientaram a Igreja que, soberana, escolheu e separou aqueles que demonstravam ter as qualificações necessárias para a função. Devem, inclusive, ter lançado mão de um costume que a maioria já conhecia do convívio nas sinagogas, pois, como já foi dito, a escolha de sete homens estava de acordo com o costume judaico de nomear comissões para tratar de assuntos específicos.³⁰

O resultado de a igreja continuar exercendo sua vocação diaconal integral, servindo os de dentro e os de fora, foi muito bom: houve paz e ordem interna e, ao mesmo tempo, uma expansão ainda maior do trabalho de evangelização, empurrada, certamente, pelo testemunho dos apóstolos que agora era ainda mais intenso, com o alívio que receberam ao delegar parte da tarefa administrativa que lhes cabia. Eles, sabendo que as dificuldades internas estavam sendo bem cuidadas por pessoas espirituais e capacitadas, podiam se dedicar ainda mais, como declararam, à oração e à *diaconia* da palavra. Assim, os que estavam ligados à Igreja viviam em paz e o Evangelho era pregado, de tal forma que o número de discípulos, em Jerusalém, não parava de crescer. Isto de forma tão extraordinária que até mesmo muitos sacerdotes estavam passando a obedecer à fé cristã, como se vê em Atos 6.7, que diz: “E a Palavra de Deus era divulgada, de modo que o número dos discípulos em Jerusalém se multiplicava muito, e vários sacerdotes obedeciam a fé” (AS21).

³⁰ Marshall, 1982, p. 123.

Segundo Frank Stagg, parece que Lucas se referia aos sacerdotes menores ao falar dos que se convertiam ao cristianismo, aqueles que não se davam bem com os sumo sacerdotes. Para ele, assim como os apóstolos continuavam a tomar parte nos cultos realizados no Templo de Jerusalém (At 3.1), provavelmente, estes sacerdotes que se converteram, também continuassem a exercer o seu ministério. Tratava-se de judaísmo cristão até aquele momento.³¹

Se eram sacerdotes de menor expressão ou não, não se pode provar, o que importa mesmo é perceber que muitos, uma multidão (*oclos* - ὄχλος), conforme o texto original apresenta em Atos 6.7, se tornou cristã. Inclusive, como bem destaca Fabris, com base nos relatos de Flávio Josefo, a afirmação de Lucas a respeito dos muitos sacerdotes que abraçavam a fé está coerentemente ligada à realidade da época. Pois, calcula-se que nos tempos de Jesus o número de sacerdotes, subdivididos em 24 classes, andasse em torno de 8000. Levando-se em conta este número elevado de pessoas dedicadas ao culto, e partindo do princípio que entre elas havia muitas com boa sensibilidade religiosa (assim como, por exemplo, o sacerdote Zacarias, pai de João Batista – Lc 1.5-6), não se pode considerar exagerada a afirmação de Lucas a respeito dos muitos que partilhavam da fé cristã.³²

Conclusão

É possível de se dizer que este texto de Atos 6.1-7 pode ser analisado, pelo menos por duas perspectivas básicas, uma delas enfocando o problema e outra, mais do que enfatizar o problema, olhando com cuidado o bom exemplo da solução encontrada. Sim, o problema existiu e a Bíblia não esconde os problemas de seus heróis. Houve, em

³¹ Stagg, 1994, p. 93.

³² Fabris, 1993, p. 132.

determinado momento, negligência em relação a um grupo de pessoas dentro da igreja iniciante. Mas, muito mais do que isso, como ponto positivo, o texto mostra que já havia um cuidado especial para com os necessitados e, também, que a igreja agiu de forma muito boa, chegando a uma solução que não deixou margens para questionamentos.

Assim, como foi visto neste estudo, a igreja diaconal (servidora) não está isenta de problemas. Talvez os problemas até tenham sido maiores do que os apontados aqui, pois normalmente a escrita em livros foca o essencial deixando de lado detalhes, mas, interessada em servir, como parte de sua essência, ela está bem orientada para a solução das dificuldades que possam aparecer. Isto lhe dá paz interna e lhe ajuda no avanço externo, levando o Evangelho para aqueles que ainda não o conhecem. Acima de tudo pode ser dito: a igreja diaconal, empenhada em servir e cuidar dos de dentro e dos de fora, dando atenção e direcionando esforços de cuidados tanto à parte material quanto à espiritual, é a igreja que se desenvolve no mesmo sentimento de Jesus, pois Ele, sendo o fundador e modelo da Igreja, veio para servir e não para ser servido (Mt 20.28).

Para encerrar, vale destacar: O texto de Atos 6.1-7 não é um modelo de como deve agir toda e qualquer igreja cristã, em qualquer lugar e situação. Mas apresenta princípios claros do que vem a ser uma igreja diaconal, oferecendo exemplos gerais que, sendo seguidos, podem ser muito bem aproveitados. Basicamente, aplicando-se os ensinamentos da passagem em foco, se extrai o seguinte: A igreja diaconal, por meio de pessoas bem qualificadas, intelectual e espiritualmente falando, está apta para cuidar de questões materiais e espirituais, tanto dos de dentro da igreja como dos de fora, o que aponta para boas chances de paz interna e avanço externo, com a divulgação do Evangelho de Cristo.

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COSMOVISÃO CRISTÃ BÍBLICA E O SENTIDO DA FÉ: POR UMA PROPOSTA FORMATIVA DE EXCELÊNCIA

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Introdução

Há muito que o tema da formação humana vem sendo discutido em diferentes campos do conhecimento, principalmente os associados às ciências humanas. Isso é importante ressaltar, visto o alcance e a importância atribuídos quer sejam às pesquisas, como às descobertas efetivadas, inclusive as mais recentemente chamadas de neurociências. E isso ocorre pela necessidade que se tem de apresentar um caminho teórico-metodológico direcionado à ação educativa que objetiva conduzir à compreensão sobre a constituição e a estrutura do ser humano, em relação ao modo como ele se relaciona com a vida.

É claro que a tônica em desvendar a forma como o ser humano aprende, comporta-se e tece relações com objetos e o conhecimento é um desafio que se vislumbra com muito mais interesse pela área da educação. Nela, está situada a intenção da prática e do trabalho educativos a serem desenvolvidos, principalmente, quando se precisa pensar ou mesmo assegurar um processo educativo pautado na excelência.

Imagine este investimento no âmbito educacional, quando ele se localiza no contexto de comunidades eclesiais. Isso com certeza amplia não apenas a sua missão, como a sua responsabilidade, visto que não se trata apenas de uma transmissão mecânica,

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mas vivencial de princípios contidos na verdade revelada. O que já pressupõe que a forma como o conhecimento será transmitido requer de cada educador compromisso com a fé abraçada. Afinal, não se vive o que não se crê. A condição do viver está seguramente correlacionada a uma visão de mundo, a qual se atribui o nome de cosmovisão.

A cosmovisão, então, informa sobre o modo como homens e mulheres tecem leituras sobre a realidade e seu entorno. Ela diz do jeito de ser de um determinado grupo social, a partir da identificação de suas crenças, seus comportamentos, seus valores, sua cultura. Se se quer conhecer um grupo social, observe a forma como ele tece leituras, interpreta e valoriza a realidade em que se encontra inserido.

O modo como o grupo social transmite e defende suas verdades é implicador da maneira como a formação humana será conduzida. Isso condiz com os discursos veiculados, bem como com os posicionamentos defendidos e que traduzem na prática moral em que os comportamentos se encontram assentados. Por isso, que a cosmovisão é o canal que pode favorecer mudanças ou alterações na cultura estabelecida. O que implica em pensar que a cosmovisão não está fechada em si mesma, mas que para existir mudanças em uma cosmovisão é preciso demonstrar que a estrutura em que o sistema de crenças está fundamentado, não responde às questões mais essenciais levantadas pelo ser humano.

É por este motivo, que as cosmovisões secularista¹ e animista² quando confrontadas com as questões essenciais são desestabilizadas pela cosmovisão cristã bíblica, visto que

¹ O termo secularista refere-se à base pós-moderna em que se encontra a sociedade contemporânea. Essa base pós-moderna defende conceitos como relatividade da verdade; hedonismo; subjetividade; perspectiva construtivista. Para conhecer mais sobre esta visão de mundo, consulte os trabalhos efetivados por Darrow Miller; Zygmund Bauman; e Stanley J. Grenz.

² A perspectiva animista defende que o valor da vida está sob a direção e intervenção dos espíritos. A defesa desta visão de mundo concentra-se no slogan “tudo é um”. Por este motivo, que a realidade última está para além da esfera terrena. A esfera terrena não se confunde com a espiritual, antes é inferior a mesma e sem valor. (Miller, D. L. *Discipulando Naciones: el poder de la verdade para transformar culturas.* (Arizona, Estados Unidos: FHI, 2001), 40.

está última é a única que responde com coerência e objetividade sobre o sentido de ser e existir no cosmos, na medida em que oferece evidências sobre o ponto inicial da vida, da moralidade, do mal e do conhecimento. Ela, ainda, responde quanto à existência futura e o sentido da morte. A cosmovisão cristã bíblica é um sistema de crenças que fundamenta a fé³, porém não uma fé cega, irracional e sem propósitos. A cosmovisão cristã bíblica alicerça o sentido de ser e existir do/e no cosmos. Esse sentido confere significado ao modo como as leituras da realidade são interpretadas e vividas.

Parte-se, então, do entendimento de que a cosmovisão cristã bíblica é um sistema de crenças completo, pois as respostas oferecidas em relação às questões essenciais são produtoras de esperança e significado, visto que sua base se encontra fundamentada na própria revelação⁴ dada pelo Criador.

Diante disto, o presente artigo visa apresentar o valor da cosmovisão cristã bíblica na formação humana, à medida que discorre sobre o sentido de ser deste sistema de crença. Para tal, faz-se necessário conceituar o que se denomina cosmovisão, sua estrutura e finalidade. Neste intento, parte-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica e exploratória. Bibliográfica porque:

³Langston afirma que: “O argumento baseado na fé não é um argumento vão, porque a fé, é o alicerce de toda a vida, é também o alicerce de toda a ciência. A própria ciência física baseia-se na fé; temos fé na própria existência, na existência do mundo objetivo, na existência de outras pessoas; temos fé em nossas convicções em nossos princípios, na justiça e no direito; fé em nossas faculdades, fé em nossos próprios testemunhos. Enfim, sem fé é impossível a ciência. A fé é a base de toda a vida social, comercial e religiosa. Sem fé, as relações comerciais e sociais tornar-se-iam difícilimas e até mesmo impraticáveis. A facilidade com que os indivíduos e as coletividades se comunicam e mutuam é devido a fé que existe entre eles. Por isso, considere a fé um testemunho valioso para testificar da existência de Deus”. (Langston, A. B. *Esboço de Teologia Sistemática*. (Rio de Janeiro: JUERP, 2007), 79.

⁴ Acerca da revelação é preciso esclarecer que ela não se limita ao evento histórico, isso porque a presença do evento apenas demarca a ação de Deus na história, ou seja, ela informa sobre o acontecimento que se originou na revelação. A revelação parte do próprio Deus. Isso quer dizer que “a revelação sempre permanece sob o controle do próprio Deus, e dele não pode ser extraída pelos esforços humanos. Ela acontece somente quando Deus, por sua graça soberana, a torna acessível”. (Millard, J. Erickson. *Teologia Sistemática*. São Paulo: Edições Vida Nova, 2015), 172.

[...] refere-se à classificação do material selecionado como fonte de pesquisa como por exemplo: livros, coletânea de textos (citando o nome daqueles que foram consultados), teses e dissertações - Procedimentos metodológicos na construção do conhecimento científico: a pesquisa bibliográfica citações, periódicos.⁵

E exploratória, porque não é a intenção o esgotamento de tal objeto, mas o levantamento de suas bases e ainda, objetiva-se “o aprimoramento de ideias ou a descoberta de intuições”.⁶ É por esse motivo, que no ato da elaboração do texto, faz-se necessário eleger a seguinte problemática: de que forma a cosmovisão cristã bíblica favorece a formação humana? E ainda: Que respostas são oriundas desta cosmovisão e que contribuem efetivamente com o desenvolvimento integral do ser humano?

Na construção dos argumentos elege-se o seguinte caminho a ser ora perseguido em forma de tentativas: a primeira tentativa visa discutir sobre o sentido atribuído à cosmovisão num contexto formativo. Em seguida, explicita-se o lugar atribuído à cosmovisão no ato de significação do sistema de crença. Por fim, objetiva-se demonstrar que somente numa perspectiva teorreferente é que se poderá alcançar uma proposta educativa de excelência. Afinal, compreende-se que essa proposta é completa em si, pois emana do próprio Deus. E, sendo ele o Criador, sustenta e governa todas as coisas.

Da Cosmovisão À Sua Base Estrutural

O conceito de cosmovisão é o alvo a ser buscado, visto que sua finalidade é apresentar o significado atribuído a um objeto. A partir do significado produzido o sentido torna-se conhecido, o que possibilita a compreensão sobre o objeto no contexto em que ele emerge e é empregado. Esta ideia é endossada, quando se defende que a intenção do

⁵ Lima, T. C. S., Mioto, R. C. T. Procedimentos metodológicos na construção do conhecimento científico: a pesquisa bibliográfica. *Rev. Katálysis*. (Florianópolis: UFSC, v. 10, 2007), 42-43.

⁶ Gil, Antonio Carlos. *Como elaborar projetos de pesquisa*. 4ª ed. (São Paulo: Atlas, 2002), 41.

conceito é possibilitar que a ideia sobre um objeto seja reconhecida por meio da significação. Assim, “O significado de um conceito não pode ser alcançado independentemente do seu uso na sociedade e, por isso, deve-se considerar o contexto em que é utilizado e o universo temporal no qual se insere”.⁷

Neste diapasão, pode-se dizer que “um conceito é uma unidade de conhecimento, compreendendo afirmações verdadeiras sobre um dado item de referência, apresentado na forma verbal”⁸. E se a finalidade do conceito é apresentar afirmações verdadeiras, pode-se deduzir que para o mesmo objeto será validado o conceito, no sentido de que o mesmo se torne significante do sentido produzido.

A partir da explicitação sobre a finalidade destinada ao conceito, torna-se claro o motivo para que se apresente a definição do objeto eleito cosmovisão, visto que a pretensão é evidenciar o significado atribuído no contexto social. Assim:

[...] cosmovisão é um conjunto de crenças sobre as questões mais importantes da vida [...] é um esquema conceitual pelo qual, consciente ou inconscientemente, aplicamos ou adequamos todas as coisas em que cremos, e interpretamos e julgamos a realidade.⁹

A definição de Nash explicita sobre três pontos essenciais. O primeiro está vinculado à noção de conjunto, o que indica que a cosmovisão não está associada à singularidade, mas à complexidade, ou seja, ela não é formada por uma unidade, mas por uma soma de fatores relacionados à crença. O segundo ponto diz respeito ao aspecto de percepção e ação do ser humano, o que informa sobre o nível de consciência característico

⁷ Kirschner, Tereza Cristina. A reflexão conceitual na prática historiográfica. *Textos de História*. (Vol. 15, n. 1/2, 2007), 50.

⁸ Dahlberg, I. A referent-oriented analytical concept theory of interconcept. *International Classification*, (Frankfurt, v. 5, n. 3, p. 142-150, 1978), 143.

⁹ Nash, Ronald H. *Cosmovisões em Conflito: escolhendo o cristianismo em um mundo de ideias*. (Brasília, DF: Monergismo, 2012), 25.

da espécie humana. Este nível de consciência sinaliza para o grau de racionalidade envolvido no fazer humano, que pode ser intencional e não intencional. Por fim, o terceiro ponto reflete a resposta construída diante da realidade, por meio daquilo que se nomeia como valor ou crença, ou seja, é a manifestação e defesa do que se crê e aceita como verdade.

Outro conceito que se pode apresentar sobre cosmovisão revela que a cosmovisão é subjacente ao sentido atribuído pelo ser humano às representações que ele faz da vida e da realidade, o que significa o modo como as leituras, as relações e as respostas são construídas, por meio da lente de interpretação utilizada. Isso demonstra que,

O termo descreve nossa procura por respostas às questões intensamente pessoais com as quais todos temos de lutar – o clamor do coração humano na busca de propósito, significado e uma verdade grande o bastante pela qual viver. Ninguém pode viver sem um senso de propósito e direção, um senso de que a vida tem significado como parte da história cósmica.¹⁰

Essa procura possibilita que o ser humano explique a maneira como ele tece o sentido que permeia a sua vida no processo de leitura e interpretação. As leituras, bem como sua interpretação são que fundamentam o jeito de ser aceito, defendido, vivido e moldado por meio de um sistema de crenças. As crenças, necessariamente, não são uniformes, visto que encontram variações, de acordo com a cosmovisão abraçada pelos diferentes grupos sociais.

Um conceito que pode ser considerado completo em sua definição, indica que a cosmovisão abarca não apenas o nível cognitivo, mas afetivo e social e que está presente no sentido de ser humano, ou seja, ele confere significado à existência da pessoa, bem como da cultura em que se encontra inserida. Este conceito informa que:

¹⁰ Pearcey, Nancy. *Verdade Absoluta: libertando o Cristianismo de seu cativeiro cultural*. 3 ed. (Rio de Janeiro: CPAD, 3 ed. 2012), 61.

A cosmovisão está profundamente assentada nos recessos da mente. Cada pessoa e cultura têm uma cosmovisão. Se é inconsciente, foi recebida através da aculturação ou socialização. Se é consciente, a pessoa examinou criticamente suas suposições e consequências. Idealmente, todas as pessoas seriam ‘criticamente conscientes’ de seus sistemas de crenças¹¹.

Neste conceito é possível perceber que a cosmovisão pode ser transmitida a partir do processo de aculturação ou socialização, isto é, por meio do ato educacional que ocorre entre as gerações. Assim, o ato efetivado tem natureza geracional, ou seja, perpetua-se no tempo e no espaço históricos. O que é interessante ressaltar, visto que a forma como a cultura se estabelece está associada a este ato educativo e que se pode observar sua efetividade, em alguns trechos bíblicos contidos em Deuteronômio, principalmente na parte reconhecida como o *Shema* de Israel (Dt 6.4-9)¹².

As explicações ou os pressupostos que norteiam uma cosmovisão redundam, também, nas crenças e nas tradições que são constituídas historicamente e culturalmente. Isso indica que são perpetuadas de geração a geração, como herança a ser valorizada e transmitida. É neste momento que entra em cena a palavra fé, pois é preciso acreditar para transmitir o conteúdo de uma crença e/ou tradição. O que resulta no conceito de que a “cosmovisão é um conjunto de suposições em que se crê consciente ou inconscientemente, pela fé, com respeito à composição básica do universo e como ele funciona”.¹³ Assim, a questão mais elementar que uma cosmovisão visa responder é: De onde viemos? O modo

¹¹ Miller, Darrow, L. *Discipulando Nações: o poder da verdade para transformar culturas*. (Curitiba: Fato é, 2003), 35.

¹² “4-Ouve, ó Israel: O Senhor nosso Deus, é o único Senhor. 5- Amarás o Senhor, teu Deus, de todo o teu coração, com toda a tua alma e com todas as tuas forças. 6- E estas palavras, que hoje te ordeno, estarão no teu coração; 7- e as ensinarás a teus filhos e delas falarás sentado em casa e andando pelo caminho, ao deitar-te e ao levantar-te. 8- Também as amarrarás como sinal na mão e como faixa na testa; 9- e as escreverás nos batentes da tua casa e nas tuas portas.” *BÍBLIA SAGRADA*. Almeida Século 21. 2ª ed. (São Paulo: Edições Vida Nova), 2013.

¹³ Miller, Darrow, L. *Discipulando Nações: o poder da verdade para transformar culturas*, 34-35.

como essa pergunta é respondida por cada grupo social, demonstra ser sinalizadora da lente de interpretação utilizada para explicar e significar as suas crenças mais profundas.

Reitera-se que quando um grupo social assume uma perspectiva ou lente de interpretação, o que na verdade ele está sinalizando no ato de eleição, diz respeito aos seus posicionamentos éticos e morais. Esses posicionamentos éticos e morais retratam o modo como cada grupo social dirige suas vidas e seu jeito de ser e existir no cosmos. Esse jeito de ser e existir no cosmos impacta diretamente na prática formativa de homens e mulheres e que é interiorizado como verdade e forma de conduta aceita pela fé.

Myatt e Ferreira¹⁴ trazem, em forma de ilustração, a estrutura de uma cosmovisão, apresentando seus elementos constitutivos. Essa estrutura demonstra o processo de ação e movimento efetivados por uma cosmovisão.



Ilustração extraída de Myatt e Ferreira (2012)

A partir da imagem projetada por Myatt e Ferreira é possível dizer que há um escalonamento derivado de uma cosmovisão, resultando no ápice que representa o conjunto de axiomas que sustentam as razões da vida. Assim, infere-se que uma cosmovisão pode

¹⁴ Myatt, Alan; Ferreira, Franklin. *Teologia Sistemática*. (SP: Vida Nova, 2012), 20.

ser um elemento decisivo no enfrentamento das questões essenciais, quer estejam estas associadas ao passado, ao presente e ao futuro, ou seja, ela constrói respostas fundamentais e basilares que muitas vezes podem ajudar no processo de compreensão e decodificação do sentido do cosmos e da existência humana. Neste sentido, deduz-se que:

A cosmovisão envolve impactos na forma de ser e agir de diferentes grupos sociais, isto porque em seu interior há concepções relacionadas à forma como homens e mulheres tecem leituras sobre a realidade. Essas leituras evidenciam-se no contexto social a partir de decisões e respostas que são dadas frente às problemáticas levantadas na realidade.¹⁵

Sendo assim, é preciso demonstrar o modo como a cosmovisão cristã bíblica apresenta respostas, por meio de seu sistema de crenças. Esse sistema de crenças, contudo, pode variar de acordo com o grupo religioso (denominacional) cristão relacionado, devido ao corpo doutrinário defendido, embora a essência e o princípio gerador da fé sejam compartilhados, na medida em que nomeiam o mesmo ponto de partida. Deus, o Criador.

Ainda é preciso enfatizar que as respostas advindas do sistema de crenças irão influenciar diretamente no processo da formação humana, por meio da ação educativa exercida pelo grupo social. A partir da ação educativa pode-se visualizar os rumos a serem perseguidos, no tocante à fé abraçada. Isso porque, “não há como se distanciar do ato educativo, antes é ele responsável pela construção de conceitos e visões de mundo, ou cosmovisões”¹⁶, que neste caso especial diz respeito à cosmovisão cristã bíblica.

¹⁵ Domingues, Gleyds Silva. A influência da cosmovisão cristã na formação humana e a perspectiva da ética no ato educativo. *Anais do 27º Congresso SOTER: Espiritualidades e Dinâmicas Sociais: Memória-Prospectivas*, (Belo Horizonte: PUC, 2014), 165-175.

¹⁶ Domingues, G.S. *Diretrizes para a educação cristã bíblica: por uma nova proposta educacional*, (Curitiba: Editora Emanuel, 2018), 45.

Cosmovisão Cristã Bíblica, Pressupostos E Dimensões

Os pressupostos que norteiam a cosmovisão cristã bíblica podem ser encontrados nos trabalhos de Sire. Ele de uma forma muito simples apresenta oito bases em que se assentam a fé teísta. Não é intenção realizar a descrição pormenorizada das mesmas, mas a sua identificação. Essas bases são assim definidas:

- 1 Deus é infinito e pessoal (triúno), transcendente e imanente, onisciente, soberano e bom;
- 2 Deus criou o cosmo ex nihilo para operar com a uniformidade de causa e efeito num sistema aberto;
- 3 Os seres humanos são criados à imagem de Deus e assim possuem personalidade, autotranscendência, inteligência, moralidade, senso gregário e criatividade;
- 4 Os seres humanos podem conhecer tanto o mundo à sua volta quanto o próprio Deus, porque Deus os proveu com sua capacidade e assumiu um papel ativo na comunicação com eles;
- 5 Os seres humanos foram criados bons, mas pela Queda, a imagem de Deus foi desfigurada, embora não completamente arruinada a ponto de não ser possível de restauração; pela obra de Cristo, Deus redimiu a humanidade e começou o processo de restauração das pessoas para bondade, embora qualquer pessoa possa rejeitar essa redenção;
- 6 Para cada pessoa, a morte é ou o portão para a vida com Deus e seu povo ou o portão para a separação eterna da única coisa que completaria, em última instância, as aspirações humanas;
- 7 A ética é transcendente e está baseada no caráter de Deus como bom (santo e amoroso);
- 8 A história é linear, uma sequência significativa de eventos que convergem para o cumprimento dos propósitos de Deus para a humanidade.¹⁷

A partir das bases elencadas por Sire descobre-se a sua relação com três momentos que demarcam o percurso da história da humanidade: criação (Deus é a origem); queda (o ser humano pecou e sua imagem foi corrompida, o que gerou a crise de identidade); redenção (Jesus Cristo é o caminho perfeito). Diante destes três momentos, torna-se possível elencar seis dimensões em que a cosmovisão cristã bíblica encontra seu porto seguro. Essas

¹⁷ Sire, J. *Universo ao lado: a vida examinada, um catálogo elementar de cosmovisões*. (São Paulo: Hagnos, 2001), 30-47.

dimensões sinalizam sobre o sentido da fé materializado na lente de interpretação abraçada e que serão utilizadas no processo da formação humana. Assim, elegem-se as seguintes dimensões: Deus, o Criador; Cristo, o Senhor; Mordomia; Viver Relacional; Ética; e Base Bíblica.

Deus, O Criador

A primeira dimensão que vem à mente diz respeito à visão centrada numa perspectiva teorreferente. Afinal, nessa perspectiva Deus é o centro de todo o processo formativo. É a partir dessa perspectiva que se torna possível resgatar os fundamentos que foram abolidos pela visão humanista secular, tais como: criação, queda, restauração e redenção, no sentido de reintroduzi-los como passos fundamentais para se entender o propósito de Deus para o ser humano. Afinal,

A estrutura subjacente de todo o universo espelha a mente do Criador. Não há dicotomia fato/valor na narrativa bíblica. Nada tem identidade autônoma ou independente, separado da vontade do Criador. Em consequência disso, toda a criação deve ser interpretada levando em conta sua relação com Deus. Em qualquer área de estudos, estamos descobrindo leis ou ordenações da criação pelas quais o Criador estruturou o mundo.¹⁸

A partir desta afirmação, pode-se dizer que a cosmovisão cristã bíblica assume a perspectiva teorreferente, a qual revela que todas as coisas visíveis ou invisíveis têm sua origem em Deus, pois é Ele o criador, governador e sustentador de todas as coisas, o que remete para a identificação de um dos seus atributos: a soberania. A soberania de Deus sinaliza para que o ser humano compreenda que sua vontade independe da vontade humana. A vontade de Deus é boa, perfeita e agradável. Neste sentido, pode-se dizer que:

É no encontro com o Criador que ocorre o verdadeiro conhecimento. Conhecimento que gera aproximação, segurança, intimidade e promove a amizade, o que torna este relacionamento pessoal e sugere que a perspectiva assumida é a de um Deus

¹⁸ Pearcey, N. *Verdade Absoluta*, 2012, 37.

próximo da criação, bem presente na história e em seus desdobramentos, que em amor projetou um plano de redenção para toda a criação. Esta certeza produz convicção de fé.¹⁹

É por este motivo que se diz que a perspectiva teorreferente contrapõe-se à visão secularista, no que diz respeito à existência e ação do Deus-Criador, uma vez que ela afirma que “o universo ou cosmos é tudo que existe e tudo que jamais existirá. Tudo é matéria”.²⁰ Este posicionamento pressupõe que o universo é a realidade física tal qual se conhece, mantendo a capacidade autorregenerativa e evolutiva, capaz de adaptar-se diante de mudanças ou variações. A criação é gestada por si mesma.

No interior da perspectiva secularista, também, é pressuposta a ideia de que o existente tem um fim em si mesmo, assim não há o que esperar além do resultado determinado, talvez seja isso que dê origem ao sentimento de um vazio existencial, pois, se não há nada além desta realidade, então é preciso viver o hoje com muita intensidade. Afinal, a vida resume-se no aqui e agora. E se assim o é, como viver em esperança. De fato, não há o que se esperar. Triste pensar em uma existência destituída de missão e propósito.

A perspectiva teorreferente ao crer na soberania de Deus, reconhece seu desejo de relacionar-se com a criação. Isso porque, ele é um Deus relacional, pessoal. Ele tem um nome, atributos e vontade. “E é exatamente por ter o atributo de pessoa que sua ação pode ser sentida na criação, o que o torna imanente, mas ao mesmo tempo soberano em suas decisões”.²¹ Por esse motivo,

¹⁹ Domingues, G.S. *Cosmologias e Projeto Político-Pedagógico*: (Saardbrücken, Alemanha: Novas Edições Acadêmicas, 2015), 110.

²⁰ Geisler, Norman. *Enciclopédia de apologética*: respostas aos críticos da fé cristã. São Paulo: Vida, 2002, 188.

²¹ Domingues, G.S. *Diretrizes para a educação cristã bíblica*: por uma nova proposta educacional, (Curitiba: Emanuel Editora, 2018, 26.

É preciso lembrar que Deus ao se revelar ao ser humano possibilitou a construção de um caminho para se chegar a ele. Esse caminho consiste na própria materialização do processo de redenção construído em Cristo Jesus. Cristo é o caminho perfeito e excelente para que se conheça a Deus.²²

Jesus Cristo é a esperança de que a criação tem um propósito, e nisso inclui a vida do ser humano, que não foi jogado no mundo sem uma missão, antes ele é reconhecido como a coroa da criação. Que guinada! Quanta significação expressa por meio da revelação contida na perspectiva teorreferente.

Cristo, O Senhor

A terceira dimensão a ser abordada diz respeito ao lugar ocupado por Cristo no interior da cosmovisão cristã bíblica. Em Jesus Cristo, a história da humanidade é alterada. A partir de sua entrega por amor, a esperança ressurgiu nele, com ele e para ele. Vive-se em e com Cristo. É por este motivo que a tônica das Escrituras remete a Cristo, pois por seu intermédio a reconciliação e a regeneração se fizeram presentes. Isso é notório, na medida em que,

[...] aos olhos de Deus, só um sacrifício trará deleite ao seu coração. Só pode haver um substituto suficiente para nós, contra quem a sentença de morte foi promulgada, o Filho perfeito de Deus, Jesus Cristo, deve morrer em nosso lugar.²³

Jesus Cristo, o sacrifício perfeito. Só nele há salvação e perdão. Só por ele é que a imagem de Deus no ser humano é restaurada, o que implica em pensar no resgate da identidade do ser humano em Deus, que se reconhece como sua criação, cujo propósito de sua existência reside na glorificação.

²² Domingues, G.S. *Diretrizes para a educação cristã bíblica: por uma nova proposta educacional.*, 2018, 118.

²³ Nyquist, John W. O paradoxo do Evangelho. In: Carson, D.A (Org.). *A Verdade: como comunicar a um mundo pós-moderno.* (São Paulo: Vida Nova, 2015), 189.

Quando se profere Cristo como Senhor da vida, há uma ressignificação da própria existência do ser humano, visto que a condição de distanciamento é suprimida pelo perdão concedido por meio da graça salvadora. Pode-se dizer que os laços do ser humano com Deus são restaurados e uma nova condição é concedida, a de ser chamado de filho/a.

Na cosmovisão cristã bíblica, Cristo é a razão de ser do Evangelho, por isso que a centralidade não se encontra no ser humano, antes é ele um canal de expressão da adoração. Tanto é assim, que o ato educativo requer mudança de mentalidade, a qual se propõe a que o ser humano seja reflexo direto de Cristo, tanto na forma de pensar, sentir e agir. A partir da ação educativa o que se tem como meta é espelhar o caráter de Cristo. (Fp 3.13-14).

Mudar a mentalidade indica submeter à mente a Cristo e se assim o é, faz-se necessário a busca contínua pela reflexão da sua Palavra. A reflexão revela a necessidade de exercitar a mente, ou seja, pensar com cuidado e profundidade. Não se pode estacionar, mas desenvolver-se cognitivamente, espiritualmente e afetivamente. “Então, quem quer seguir a Cristo não pode colocar a mente em ponto morto”.²⁴ O exercício do pensar implica em observância e ação diante de situações problema a serem enfrentadas em prol de uma resposta objetiva e esclarecedora.

A forma como o caráter de Cristo se manifesta na prática de vida dos que abraçam a cosmovisão cristã bíblica resultará no exercício da ética e da mordomia. Isso porque, não se tem como seguir a Cristo distanciado do seu ensino que transformou e continua transformando vidas. Pode-se afirmar que seguir a Cristo implica em mudança e renúncia do eu, na medida em que a centralidade da vida do ser humano se encontre no testemunho fidedigno e presente com a verdade revelada.

²⁴ Hendricks, Howard. *Ensinando para transformar vidas*. Rio de Janeiro: JUERP, 1991, 46.

Mordomia

A terceira dimensão recoloca o ser humano na sua posição original de mordomo, isto é, aquele que zela pelas coisas do seu senhor com apreço, responsabilidade e dedicação. Na condição de mordomo, o ser humano não apenas cuida da criação, mas desfruta da mesma. Isso indica que a criação é fruto de um ato de bondade e amor do Deus, Criador. Sobre este prisma é preciso atentar que:

[...] a mordomia não significa dar a Deus uma parte do que nos pertence, um pouco do nosso tempo ou dinheiro. Tudo na vida nos foi confiado para nosso uso, mas ainda pertence a Deus e deve ser usado para servi-lo e glorifica-lo.²⁵

É por este motivo que se fala na entrega de um mandato cultural. Nele está contido a missão confiada ao ser humano, como administrador responsável pela criação. Imagine se fosse apenas permitido ao ser humano contemplar a criação, como se ela fosse uma bela obra de arte. Num primeiro momento, isso poderia até impactar, mas não traria vivência ou experiência real, visto que uma das necessidades do ser humano é aprender por meio das cores, das formas, dos sabores e sentidos. Ele precisa tocar, sentir, experimentar e ver. Isso acontece porque a criação expressa vida que gera nova vida.

A dimensão da mordomia revela que há propósito na criação. Ela não foi feita de forma aleatória e nem descomprometida. Antes, tudo o que Deus fez, o fez com uma intenção. E nisso tudo reside perfeito equilíbrio e harmonia. Assim, a criação manifesta o poder, a glória e a majestade do Deus, Criador.

A mordomia expressa não apenas a responsabilidade do ser humano diante da criação, mas a sua gratidão em forma de adoração ao Criador, por tudo o que ele é. Quando se compreende o princípio da mordomia, há um reposicionamento na cadeia de valores,

²⁵ Millard, J. Erickson. *Teologia Sistemática*, 2015, 478.

visto que tudo o que existe é reconhecido como ato e propósito de Deus, que pode ser desfrutado com parcimônia, sem desperdício ou exagero. Afinal, uma ação humana desmedida produz consequências que afetam toda a criação.

Viver Relacional

A quarta dimensão a ser desenvolvida relaciona-se ao processo educacional de excelência, o qual expressa o viver relacional, visto que Deus criou o ser humano para conviver com o outro. Não é sem propósito que os dois mandamentos explicitam que o objetivo da vida consiste em amar a Deus e ao próximo. E amar evidencia a necessidade da presença de outro, ou seja, amar além de si mesmo. Essa perspectiva relacional implica em pensar no significado da alteridade, reconhecendo-o como um fundamento a ser desenvolvido nas relações materiais e humanas. Diante disso, compreende-se que o ser humano se completa na relação com o outro, por intermédio de uma prática comunicacional.

A partir do significado de alteridade evidencia-se que não se tem um olhar direcionado para si mesmo, antes há a visão do outro. Esse outro é o que se pode chamar de “próximo”, ou seja, aquele que se faz presente na dinâmica da vida. É na dinâmica da vida que ocorre a manifestação efetiva da ação de responsabilização e que pressupõe o estabelecimento de uma prática comunicacional e de serviço. Afinal, é no exercício da alteridade que se pode materializar o princípio do amor ao próximo. Neste sentido, acredita-se que:

A perspectiva teorreferente não se impõe por meio da discriminação, mas por intermédio do amor, ela não se afirma pela imposição, antes sai intermediação é fundada no princípio de amar a Deus e ao próximo como a si mesmo. O amor constrange a ação daquele que observa e crê nessa verdade.²⁶

²⁶ Domingues, Gleyds Silva. *Diretrizes para a educação cristã bíblica*, 2018, 85.

Assim, o ato relacional presente nos mandamentos explicita que sua base é o amor, por isso que a atitude de amorosidade entre os seres humanos torna-se a essência das relações a serem desenvolvidas. Descobre-se, então, que a essência do amor vem de Deus, porque ele é a fonte do amor. Amor que se materializa na pessoa do Senhor Jesus de uma forma plena.

Assim sendo, no contexto da formação humana que se desenvolve por meio da ação educativa, pode-se dizer que o amor é essencial ao viver relacional. Isso porque, é na ação educativa que as relações são estabelecidas, visto ser ela “o processo pelo qual a experiência, isto é, a própria vida da pessoa, se transforma, desenvolve, enriquece e aperfeiçoa mediante sua relação com Deus em Jesus Cristo”²⁷, e isso implica diretamente nas interações que são construídas neste amor, o qual é direcionado e vivido na convivência com o outro.

Ética

A quinta dimensão diz respeito ao espaço ocupado pela ética. A ética não é apenas um modo de conduta, mas um conjunto de valores absolutos que precisam ser observados por aqueles que defendem e pautam suas vidas na cosmovisão cristã bíblica. Afinal, a ética é uma demonstração do exercício da moralidade presente na maneira de pensar, sentir, agir e relacionar de um grupo social.

A perspectiva da ética no interior da cosmovisão cristã bíblica é pautada nos valores absolutos, o que pressupõe que há verdades universais as quais devem ser observadas. A não observância produz consequências que afetam a vida do ser humano e dos que estão

²⁷ Báez-Camargo, Gonzalo. *Princípios e Métodos da Educação Cristã*. (Rio de Janeiro: Confederação Evangélica do Brasil, 2008), 333.

ao seu redor. Assim, fazer o que é moralmente correto é uma postura a ser assumida por aqueles que por fé aceitaram esta lente de interpretação.

A ética, portanto, não é um produto ou um valor que pode ser relativizado no âmbito das relações, antes a premissa se firma no amor a Deus e ao próximo como extensão de si mesmo. E isso é inegociável. Se se deseja viver conforme os padrões divinos, faz-se necessário observar a essência da ética que está no próprio Deus, que é o princípio orientador e primeiro da ética. Assim,

A ética numa perspectiva cristã busca desenvolver princípios que consideram a vida e a moralidade a partir da revelação bíblica sobre o sentido de ser e existir do ser humano, acreditando que ele possa cumprir sua missão em prol da transformação e do impacto que gerará na sociedade.²⁸

Neste sentido, o viver ético pressupõe a presença de uma missão. Essa missão é incorporada na prática relacional, cujo objetivo é promover a transformação da realidade em que este ser humano está inserido. Esta transformação é fruto de uma prática educativa que visa no ato da formação desenvolver princípios a serem exercidos no interior dos relacionamentos.

O ato educativo ao assumir a perspectiva da ética cristã deve atentar para os princípios e não somente para os juízos de valor, em que os fins justificam os meios, ou seja, é preciso avaliar o processo que desencadeou a ação, sua consequência e seu resultado. Deve-se ter em mente se a ação foi motivada ou não por um princípio.

É por este motivo que não se pode pensar no ato educativo desvinculado de uma proposta ética, visto que é ela que norteará a conduta moral a ser desenvolvida nos relacionamentos, quer seja entre pessoas afins ou não. A ética indica o modo como o ser humano conduzirá sua vida, no que diz respeito às escolhas e tomada de decisões.

²⁸ Domingues, Gleyds Silva. *Diretrizes para a educação cristã bíblica*, 2018, 57.

Base Bíblica

A sexta dimensão sinaliza para um ensino pautado em uma base bíblica. Isso indica que o processo educacional de excelência tem como fundamento a verdade revelada, pois é ela a bússola que norteia a vida do ser humano em relação a sua formação integral. Afinal, nela encontram-se orientações que ajudam o cristão em sua caminhada espiritual, emocional e material. O que se deseja é que os cristãos

[...] conheçam a Palavra viva de Deus, que estudem esse livro constantemente, permitindo que sua mensagem permeie a vida deles de tal modo que passem a odiar o que Deus odeia, e amar o que ele ama. E na medida em que forem aplicando as verdades dela à sua vida, e estas começarem a transformá-los, produzirão forte impacto em outros.²⁹

A verdade revelada mostra o sentido da criação, ou seja, sua finalidade e propósito fundamentado na ação de glorificar a Deus. Com isso pode-se perceber que todo o processo educacional se inicia e finaliza em Deus. Ele é o motivo, como também o significado do ato educativo. Em Deus, o ser humano se completa, porque ele é Senhor da vida e da história.

Ainda é preciso ressaltar que o caminho perfeito para que se conheça a Deus está em Cristo, o Senhor, sendo ele a base essencial da cosmovisão cristã bíblica. Em Cristo se tem acesso direto ao Pai, pois ele é a sua expressão completa e integral. Diante disso, não há como pensar na formação humana, distanciando-se deste princípio essencial à prática de ensino a ser efetivada. Nesse sentido,

A prática formativa na educação cristã bíblica volta-se, então, para trabalhar com a racionalidade e a fé, considerando-as como peças integrantes de um mesmo processo constitutivo do sentido de ser humano. Assim, há espaço para construção do pensamento, o que remete à utilização do ato reflexivo, criador e crítico.³⁰

²⁹ Hendricks, Howard. *Ensinando para transformar vidas*, 37.

³⁰ Domingues, Gleyds Silva. *Diretrizes para a educação cristã bíblica*, 2018, 89-90.

Defende-se, aqui, que a perspectiva da formação humana a ser firmada no ato educativo a partir da cosmovisão cristã bíblica, importa na inclusão das seis dimensões apresentadas, pois elas são referenciais que precisam ser observados por aqueles que atuarão no processo de ensino-aprendizagem. Estende-se, portanto, a tarefa formativa aos educadores, quer sejam pais, pastores, professores de ensino bíblico, discipuladores, líderes de ministérios etc.

Importa compreender que, enquanto educador, não se está efetivando um trabalho neutro ou desvinculado de um sistema de crenças, por isso é preciso reconhecer bem o que de fato está subjacente à sua cosmovisão. Dessa forma, a primeira atitude do educador é identificar os pressupostos que dão sustentação a sua leitura e interpretação da realidade. Segundo, faz-se necessário observar se as bases de sua fé são condizentes com a cosmovisão cristã bíblica; e terceiro é preciso aprofundar o seu estudo sobre essas bases. Afinal, o ato de ensinar evidencia-se pelo compartilhamento daquilo que se tem de maior valor, uma vez que o ensino de fato diz do educador e das suas crenças.

Considerações Finais

Ao trazer à tona a problemática inicial levantada: de que forma a cosmovisão cristã bíblica favorece a formação humana? E ainda: Que respostas são oriundas desta cosmovisão e que contribuem efetivamente com o desenvolvimento integral do ser humano? É possível inferir que a cosmovisão cristã bíblica não apenas favorece, mas apresenta diretrizes específicas para o sentido a ser atribuído ao ser humano, na medida em que parte do princípio de que ele foi criado à imagem e semelhança do Criador. Sua existência encontra sentido em Deus, que recebeu dele uma missão específica: cuidar e administrar a criação.

É preciso, ainda, reiterar que a cosmovisão cristã bíblica contribui com o desenvolvimento integral do ser humano, visto que não é dada ênfase apenas à questão cognitiva ou física, mas emocional e espiritual, ou seja, os pressupostos que norteiam essa cosmovisão sinalizam sobre o percurso trilhado pelo ser humano desde a criação. Ainda, apresentam a forma como este ser humano se distanciou do Criador e do seu propósito, mas isso não se tornou numa barreira para o plano de resgate efetivado em Cristo Jesus.

A partir da cosmovisão cristã bíblica compreende-se que o ser humano não é um ser jogado e entregue a sua própria sorte, visto que o fim não está nele mesmo. Antes, percebe-se que a finalidade de ser e existir do ser humano é doxológica, ou seja, para glorificação e adoração a Deus. Em Deus, o ser humano se encontra, enquanto imagem e semelhança, dotado de inteligência, liberdade de escolha e capacidade de tomar decisão.

Desta forma, o ato educativo a ser desenvolvido no âmbito da formação humana precisa afirmar os pressupostos da cosmovisão cristã bíblica e ainda trabalhar com as dimensões que se fazem presentes, visando a sua efetivação na vida e nos relacionamentos. Por intermédio das dimensões, o ser humano compreende o sentido de ser e existir no cosmos, além de estabelecer e examinar as bases que serão utilizadas na leitura, interpretação e compreensão da realidade. Ao fazer isso, o ser humano estabelece os fundamentos racionais da fé ora abraçada.

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