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Divine Fatherhood: Re-examining the Paradigm

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This study examines various approaches to the understanding of the father-God concept, recognizing that much that has been said up to this point has been heavily influenced by sources other than either the Hebrew Scriptures or their Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context. It briefly traces the development of the concept from the time of Origen through to modern times, noticing that biblical texts have been minimized through Greco-Roman paradigms or anthropocentric concerns. This is followed by a brief survey of Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian and Ugaritic concepts of their father-gods which are then compared and contrasted with references to the Hebrew Scriptures. The resulting picture may be more different than commonly accepted.

Key Words: Fatherhood of God, father-gods, Father-God, Sumerian gods, personal gods, Babylonian gods, Egyptian gods

1. Introduction

The Christian religion, like every other religion, stands or falls by its conception of God, and to that conception of God the idea of the Fatherhood of God is integral.

William Boothby Selbie[1]

How do we understand the concept of God? Where do we draw our ideas from? This study takes up the challenge of Selbie's perceptive and provocative statement in three steps: first, through an historical overview of Christian theology; second, through an examination of ideas from the Ancient Near East (ANE); and third, through an exploration of Old Testament theology.

2. Historical-Theological Overview

Origen recognizes that the fatherhood of God lies at the heart of the Christian faith. However, he takes it somewhat for granted, and often uses the

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[1]   William Boothby Selbie, *The Fatherhood of God* (New York: Scribners, 1936), 11.

word "father" merely as a synonym for God.[2] Nevertheless, he links middle Platonist thought and biblical ideas in his attempts to define God and the world,[3] and is thus the first theologian to attempt any analysis of the idea of God as father. Basically, he presents a caricature of God formed by combining Hebrew Scriptures and Greek philosophy, then contrasts this caricature with the Christian father-God—before whom humans stand in love rather than fear.[4]

It is not until Athanasius in the fourth century that the fatherhood of God becomes an issue of sustained discussion, more for the purpose of Trinitarian debate and as a polemic against Arius and the Alexandrian school than as an investigation of the fatherhood of God, per se.[5] His position becomes orthodoxy in the hands of his successors, the Cappadocian fathers and Augustine.[6]

In other words, from the time of Origen on, discussion on the fatherhood of God serves mainly to explain the metaphysics of the Godhead. Under Gnostic influence and with the tools of Greco-oriental theology, a great gulf is fixed between God and his creation,[7] with an impact on the understanding of the fatherhood of God that is maintained by the Protestant Reformers centuries later. For example, Luther portrays God as a "consuming fire,"[8] inflicting punishment in a "fatherly spirit,"[9] and as an "iron wall, against which we cannot bump without destroying ourselves."[10] Similarly, Calvin declares that no "ruined" man "will ever perceive God to be a Father,"[11] and that humans may only call God "father" because he is Christ's father.[12] Calvin's systematized theological structure is founded on the con-

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[2]   Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 7.

[3]   Ibid., 9.

[4]   Ibid., 253.

[5]   Ibid., 1, 136, 159–60.

[6]   Ibid., 255.

[7]   Selbie, *Fatherhood of God,* 66.

[8]   Martin Luther, "Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 1–39," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; 30 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1969), 16:55.

[9]   Ibid., 54.

[10] Martin Luther, "Selected Psalms I," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; trans. L. W. Spitz Jr.; 30 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1969), 12:312. Luther describes the impossibility of humans approaching God "naked," i.e., unclothed without Christ. Martin Luther, "First Lectures on the Psalms II, Psalms 76–126," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; 30 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1969), 11:208–9.

[11] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. John Allen; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 1:51.

[12] John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church* (trans. Henry Beveridge; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 2:40.

trast between God's sovereignty and human remoteness,[13] and the ideas of atonement and God's fatherhood are considered forensically incompatible.[14]

In a late-nineteenth-century reaction to the autocratic theism of Calvinism, Clarke, Peabody, and Rauschenbusch formulate a "social gospel."[15] For them, God is father of all humanity and all men are brothers. These new "liberal" ideas about God are the culmination of a universalistic perspective evolving over centuries.[16] Rob S. Candlish and Thomas J. Crawford vigorously debate whether God's fatherhood is universal, or whether he can only be called "father" in Christ. [17] The final death of the wicked at the *eschaton* is offered as proof that God's fatherhood does not apply to all.[18] Rather, one must be "blameless and harmless" before he can be called a child of God.[19] This is a revival of Origen's idea that only a person free from sin has the right to call God "Father."[20]

From these debates an anthropocentric approach to God's fatherhood develops, with an emphasis on understanding it from the perspective of human experience. To some extent, Sigmund Freud systematizes and popu-

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13 Selbie, *Fatherhood of God,* 75.

14 Ibid., 72.

15 Janet Forsythe Fishburn, *The Fatherhood of God and the Victorian Family: The Social Gospel in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 136–39. This emphasis is based exclusively on the parable of the prodigal son, focusing on God's patience, pity, and willingness to forgive. Ibid., 140.

16 Washington Gladden, *How Much Is Left of the Old Doctrines? A Book for the People* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 23. Gladden speaks of the universal hunger for a God whom people can know and love. Walter Lippmann observes that the God of medieval Christianity is like a great feudal lord, duty-bound to treat his vassals well; the God of the Enlightenment is like a constitutional monarch, who reigns but does not govern; and the God of Modernism is the sum total of the laws of nature, or an expression of some kind of deified constitutionalism. Walter Lippmann, *Preface to Morals* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 54–55, cited by Harriet Crabtree, *The Christian Life: Traditional Metaphors and Contemporary Theologies* (HDR 29; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 6.

17 For example, see Thomas J. Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God: Considered in Its General and Special Aspects and Particularly in Relation to the Atonement, with a Review of Recent Speculations on the Subject, and a Reply to the Strictures of Dr. Candlish* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1868), 275, and Rob S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God: Being the First Course of the Cunningham Lectures* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1867), 117.

18 Charles H. H. Wright, *The Fatherhood of God and Its Relation to the Person and Work of Christ, and the Operations of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 79–97.

19 Ibid., 193–94.

20 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius,* 109. For Origen, such a person assumes a new ontological condition that makes him/her constitutionally incapable of sinning. Ibid., 103.

larizes this approach. He largely draws his inspiration from Greek mythology, to develop a paradigm that holds fatherhood responsible for a range of guilt neuroses experienced throughout the lifespan.[21] It is not surprising, then, that the motif of the fatherhood of God has been labeled as the "Achilles' heel"[22] of the Judeo-Christian religion.

The fatherhood of God motif attracts little attention in twentieth century biblical studies until feminist theology, which draws heavily upon, and expands, the work of Freud.[23] The most prominent feminist theologian to tackle the motif of God's fatherhood is Mary Daly, who takes Freud's theories to their logical conclusion and blames fatherhood for a self-alienation that produces rape, genocide, and war.[24] As Catherina Halkes observes, "it is hardly possible to call to mind a single feminist theologian, whatever her phase of development may be, who does not find the image of the Father-God a challenge and a direct confrontation."[25]

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[21]   Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (trans. Katherine Jones; International Psycho-Analytical Library 33; London: Hogarth, 1951), 187–89. His hypothesis that all moral authority springs from the father impugns God with the responsibility for human dysfunction. Annemarie Ohler observes that "the broad aftereffect of the Freudian Hypothesis about the 'Oedipus Complex' has contributed in no small measure to the darkening of the image of the father." Annemarie Ohler, *The Bible Looks at Fathers*, (trans. Omar Kaste; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), xix. The son can only succeed if he "kills" his father, a "law of nature" that suggests a son cannot succeed without first disposing of his father in some way. In response, Ohler suggests that Freud should have visited America. As early as 1830, the aristocratic Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville notes that there fathers actively encourage sons to strike out on their own, in contrast to the continental practice of fathers tightly reining in their sons until after their own retirement. Ibid.

[22]   Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 5–7.

[23]   With the possible exception of Liberation theology, which uses the concept of God as Father in an attempt to avoid "speculative philosophical language," portraying him rather as "the merciful Father who is revealed to the simple" as "our solicitous, infinitely able Parent." Ronaldo Muñoz, "God the Father," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (ed. Ignacio Allacuría and Jon Sobrino; trans. Robert R. Barr; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 406, 413.

[24]   Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 114–22. She could have made a much stronger case if she had not appealed to Greek mythology, for in so doing she legitimizes Augustine's use of Plato to arrive at the conclusion of the woman only being complete in the man.

[25]   Catherina Halkes, "The Themes of Protest in Feminist Theology against God the Father," in *God as Father?* (ed. Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeck; trans. David Smith; Concilium 143; New York: Seabury, 1981), 103. This antipathy against God arises from a perceived hierarchical and patriarchal authoritarian structure based on the Lord-God, father of all, who directs the "Holy Father," ecclesiastical head of pastoral rulers and spiritual "fathers," then on down to the prince, "father of his coun-

One final issue concerning God's fatherhood is the popular misconception that "the idea of God as Father is essentially a New Testament concept."[26] In modern times, this opinion can be traced to the influential Wilhelm Bousset,[27] who lays the foundations on which his student Rudolf Bultmann builds.[28] Bultmann, in turn, influences a generation of New Testament scholars, including Joachim Jeremias,[29] the scholar most responsible for the current popular view.[30] The general contemporary understanding is that the fatherhood of God has particular significance in the New Testament,[31] but is "thin and underdeveloped" in the Old Testament.[32] Underlying this misconception is a presupposition, based largely on the writings of Paul but reflecting Origen's conclusions, that the benevolent father God of the New Testament must be contrasted to the "ruling master" God of the Old Testament.[33]

On the other hand, in the search for the origins of the New Testament position, contrary positions have sometimes been overstated and only muddy the waters. "The Fatherhood of God is a characteristically Jewish doctrine, found in equal abundance in the Old Testament and in Rabbinic literature."[34] This view is supported by Marianne Meye Thompson, who states that the portraits of God as father in the Old and New Testaments are

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try" (i.e., ruler over the fatherland), finally to the father over a family, head over his wife, and owner of his children. Thus, "authority and right come from above; obedience, dependence and reliance operate below." Jürgen Moltmann, "The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassianism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?," in *God as Father?* (ed. Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeck; trans. David Smith; Concilium 143; New York: Seabury, 1981), 52.

[26] Thomas McGovern, "John Paul II on the Millennium and God as Father," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 99.7 (April 1999): 9.

[27] Wilhelm D. Bousset, *Jesu Predigt in ihrem Gegensatz zum Judentum: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

[28] See especially Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (trans. R. H. Fuller; New York: Meridian, 1956).

[29] See particularly, Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville: Allenson, 1967).

[30] W. E. Nunnally, "The Fatherhood of God at Qumran" (Ph.D diss., Hebrew Union College, 1992), 235.

[31] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "God," *ISBE* 2:501; Evert J. Blekkink, *The Fatherhood of God: Considered from Six Inter-Related Standpoints* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 32.

[32] J. D. W. Watts, "God the Father," *ISBE* 2:510. See also, Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:488.

[33] For example, see Rom 8:15, where Paul compares the "spirit of servitude and fear" with the "spirit of adoption" as sons. Cf. G. Ernest Wright, "The Terminology of Old Testament Religion and Its Significance," *JNES* 1 (1942): 404.

[34] Frederick John Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity. Part I, The Acts of the Apostles* (5 vols.; London: MacMillan, 1942), 1:401.

marked more by continuity than by discontinuity.[35] It is also consistent with the findings of Nunnally in his review of unpublished prayers, psalms, wisdom literature, and legal testaments from Qumran, which he compares with the early Jewish midrashic and liturgical texts.[36]

As this brief survey of Christian history indicates, biblical texts have been sidelined, either in favor of Greco-Roman paradigms or of anthropocentric concerns. Added to this, "there has long been a certain traditional resistance among many western Europeans to any close links between Semitic and Indo-European material,"[37] especially since the Renaissance, resulting in Greek philosophical ideas being read back into biblical understandings of God. However, if biblical studies are to be credible, they must take account of the abundance of material that has been found in the period since Christian prejudices have become firmly fixed in favor of Greco-Latin traditions. The literature of the Ancient Near East is especially useful in informing us of much older paradigms, without which no modern biblical exegesis or paradigm can be complete.[38]

3. Ideas from the Ancient Near East

3.1. Sumer

The Sumerians are the first people in recorded history to develop ethical, religious, social, political, and philosophical ideas.[39] The study of the father-

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35 Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 19.

36 Nunnally, "The Fatherhood of God at Qumran," 238, 239. In this seminal work, Nunnally examines both published and unpublished Qumranic material, and shows quite conclusively that the Judaism of that era enjoyed a personal relationship with the father-God.

37 Stephanie Dalley, "Gilgamesh in the Arabian Nights," in *Gilgamesh: A Reader* (ed. John Maier; Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1997), 216. When Dalley refers to "Indo-European material" she means the classics from the Greco-Roman period.

38 See Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005), for an up-to-date bibliography of ANE sources.

39 Sumer covers the southern half of modern Iraq, from the region of Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. The region is later known as Sumer and Akkad, and later still as Babylonia. It may have originally been inhabited by colonists who had been an oppressed economic or religious minority, not unlike the first Europeans to settle in America. Their freedom of worship may have led to their religious creativity and expression, and later to their political organization. See Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 3; idem, *From the Poetry of Sumer: Creation, Glorification, Adoration*

hood of the gods must therefore commence with them. It is from the sacred stories of Sumer that we obtain the first glimpses of Ancient Near Eastern cosmogony: the account of the origin of their universe, an introduction to their gods, and the genesis of humanity.[40] Their doctrines become the "basic creed and dogma of much of the ancient Near East," but nowhere are they systematized.[41]

In Sumerian cosmogony, the primeval sea-goddess Nammu is "the primeval mother, the bearer of the senior gods."[42] Nothing is said of her origin or birth. Perhaps the Sumerians conceive of the primeval ocean as having existed eternally. But at some stage she gives birth to the cosmic mountain, consisting of the entwined gods An and Ki, a united heaven and earth, who in turn produce the air-god, Enlil. He subsequently separates his entwined parents, his father An carrying off heaven, Enlil carrying off his mother, Ki, the earth. The union of Enlil and mother earth sets the stage for the organization of the universe—the creation of man, animals, and plants, and the establishment of civilization.[43]

It is with Enlil that the real significance of the fatherhood of the gods in Sumerian thought becomes plain. While Nammu, the primeval ocean, precedes any father-god, it is only when Enlil breaks up the cozy arrangement between his enmeshed parents that there is a positive and perpetuating progress in the creation of earth and its cultures.[44] No wonder he is considered "by far the most important deity" of the Sumerian pantheon.[45]

Enlil is called the "bull that overwhelms,"[46] a powerful metaphor highlighting his fertility. He is the god responsible for planning and maintaining the most productive functions of the cosmos, ensuring prosperity for all. As "father of the gods," he adjudicates in the highest court available to gods and humans, and upholds divine laws that "like heaven cannot be over-

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(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 51, 52; idem, *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1981), xix.

[40] Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1972), 30.

[41] Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 145.

[42] Jacob Klein, "Enki and Ninmahê," *COS* 1:516.

[43] Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 82, 83; idem, *Sumerian Mythology*, 39–41.

[44] Gertrud Faber, "The Song of the Hoe," *COS* 1:511.

[45] Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 88.

[46] Zimmern KL II.1–6, in Stephen Langdon, *Sumerian Liturgies and Psalms* (The University of Pennsylvania Museum—Publications of the Babylonian Section 10/4; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1919), 292. See also H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "The Disputation between Summer and Winter," *COS* 1:585.

turned" nor "shattered."[47] As father of kings, he gives earthly monarchs sovereignty, prospering their reigns and subduing their enemies.[48]

Apart from the main pantheon, there are lesser deities, regarded as personal gods for the people of Sumer. The personal god intercedes for the human supplicant in the assembly of the gods.[49] He engenders, provides, protects, and claims personal obedience.[50] The relationship is perpetuated through the generations by god and goddess incarnate in human parents. The personal god of the father passes from the body of the father to the son from generation to generation, hence the term "god of the fathers."[51] This is a comfortable arrangement, in light of the Sumerian view of parents generally—"the father is respected," and "the mother is feared."[52]

So the Sumerians primarily see the fatherhood of their gods as procreative, and secondarily as the source of wisdom. The divine law dispensed by the father-god ensures human progress and prosperity, reconciliation and sovereignty.

3.2. Babylon

Babylon comes from the same geographic region as Sumer. The Babylonians speak a different language, but borrow copiously from Sumerian theology and culture, adapting them to their own purposes.[53] Although Sumerian influence is evident in the pantheons of the three main extant Babylonian literary works—the *Gilgamesh Epic*,[54] the *Atrahasis Epic*,[55] and the *Enuma Eliš*,[56]—the Babylonian Marduk and Ishtar are ascendant.

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[47]   "Hymn to Enlil," in Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 91.

[48]   Ibid., 89.

[49]   Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 126, 127.

[50]   Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 158.

[51]   Ibid., 159.

[52]   Kramer, *Poetry of Sumer*, 68.

[53]   Within a few decades, Akkad, a previously insignificant town near the city of Babylon, becomes the fear and envy of nations as far-flung as the highlands of Anatolia to the north, the Mediterranean to the west, and the Indus Valley to the east. Although the economic and military activity of its dynasty lasts only from ca. 2310–2160 B.C.E., its cultural and linguistic influence dominate the whole of Mesopotamia and much of the Near East for two and a half millennia. The kings of Akkad represent the ideal monarchy, and their statues appear in the sanctuaries of the great urban centers. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade: The Texts* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 1.

[54]   The latest and best-known version dates to the end of the Middle Babylonian period, about 1000 B.C.E. It is written on twelve tablets in Akkadian, the main Semitic language of Assyria and Babylonia. With earlier versions extant up to 1100 years earlier,

The language of fatherhood is especially used with reference to the god presiding over the heavenly council. By virtue of his position, the head of the pantheon is creator-judge and father presiding over the council of the gods to ensure the maintenance of the divine order. Anšar presides over the council of the gods in the *Enuma Eliš* and Enlil in the *Myth of Zu*. When Marduk summons the full assembly of the gods he addresses Anšar (presiding over the assembly) as father and father-creator,[57] and he speaks of the other gods there collectively as "my ancestors."[58] He protests "the evil [perpetrated] against the gods my fathers" when challenging Tiamat to lend credibility and legitimacy to his challenge against her.[59] When he defeats Tiamat and the gods rejoice together, he is promoted to head of the pantheon and addressed as the provider for the father gods, and the one to care for their sanctuaries.[60] The link between the motifs of creator and judge is thus reinforced and a cyclical element added to the picture.

3.3. Egypt

Gods proliferate in the scattered Egyptian religio-political centers, especially Heliopolis, Memphis, and Thebes. Each center had its own theology, and approximately 740 different gods are mentioned by the time of Tuthmoses III (1504–1450 B.C.E.).[61]

The Heliopolitans believe Atum rises from the chaotic primordial watery abyss, dispels the darkness, and fathers children, even before completing the created realms.[62] He becomes the father of humanity, but only be-

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it is possible to document its evolution over that time. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

[55] The most complete edition was copied during the reign of Ammi-tsaduqa, great-great-grandson of Hammurabi (ca. 1600 B.C.E.), although most extant copies date to ca. 700-650 B.C.E. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 5.

[56] It is commonly refereed to *The Babylonian Epic of Creation* or as *When on High*, after the opening words in translation. It is seven tablets long and is composed around 1200 B.C.E., apparently for the purpose of legitimizing Marduk's ascendancy over the earlier established pantheon. S. Langdon, *The Babylonian Epic of Creation: Restored from the Recently Recovered Tablets of Aššur, Transcription, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923); Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

[57] "The Creation Epic," Tablet II.112; *ANET*, 64.

[58] Benjamin R. Foster, "Epic of Creation (iii.6)," *COS* 1:395.

[59] Foster, "Epic of Creation (iv.84–86),"*COS* 1:398.

[60] Foster, "Epic of Creation (vi.109–160),"*COS* 1:402.

[61] Veronica Ions, *Egyptian Mythology* (New York: Peter Bedrick, 1983), 34.

[62] Ibid., 35.

cause the human race arrives unexpectedly through the tears of anxious grief he sheds as he loses sight of his children playing in the watery abyss. [63] He also becomes known as the "Lord of Totality" reflecting his role in bringing the material world into being.[64]

The relationship between the gods and humanity does not seem very positive. When the first humans revolt against the harsh conditions imposed by the gods, only Ra's sense of justice averts human annihilation.[65] The gods escape to their own realm, and Ra abdicates his earthly kingdom, which ends up in the care of the pharaohs, [66] who claim that the gods are their fathers. The pharaohs then maintain the order of creation and civil order, using elaborate public religious ceremonies and rituals to prevent the re-emergence of primeval chaos. The common people thus enjoy peace and prosperity through the hands of the pharaohs.

Funerary texts enrich our understanding of the father-god motif by describing the individual roles of the gods. Ra is the most important father-god, for he provides not only barley, spelt, bread, and beer for this life;[67] he also provides for the afterlife. He sets the ladder for the resurrected soul to ascend into the sky,[68] sends his messengers to ensure it arrives safely,[69] and becomes the focus of attention as the resurrected king enters the heavenly realm.

Geb is called "father" because of his role in putting all the bones of the deceased back together, restoring intestines and eyes,[70] and providing a helping hand on the journey through the sky.[71] He affectionately welcomes the resurrected king into the heavenly realm and places him at the head of the other resurrected beings.[72] He facilitates the acceptance of the newcomer

[63]   James P. Allen, "From Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (1.9)," *COS* 1:14–15.

[64]   James P. Allen, "Coffin Texts Spell 261 (1.11)," *COS* 1:17, see also note 3.

[65]   "Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction," *ANET*, 10–11.

[66]   Ra first hands rulership of the earth over to Thoth (the moon), who restores light to the world. *ANET*, 8. However, power is passed from demigod to demigod, until it eventually ends up with the pharaohs. Pascal Vernus, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; New York: John Braziller, 1998), 83.

[67]   Ut.205.121a, in *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (trans. Raymond O. Faulkner; Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 37.

[68]   Ut.271.390, in ibid., 791.

[69]   Ut.214.136, in ibid., 41.

[70]   Ut.14.9c, Ut.15, Pyramid Text of Pepi II, in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Religion of Resurrection: Illustrated After Drawings from Egyptian Papyri and Monuments* (London: P. L. Warner, 1911; reprint, New York: University Books, 1961), 2:314.

[71]   Ut.485A.1030, in *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 172.

[72]   Ut.373.655-656, in ibid., 123, 124

by the other gods, naming the resurrected pharaoh as his rightful heir in whom he is satisfied,[73] and transferring his honor to his son, the king.[74]

In Memphite theology, Ptah, "father of the gods," is described in much the same way as Atum of the Heliopolitans.[75] A new addition to the myth is that the son is idealized as protector and preserver of the father-deity, and is even called the "Saviour of his father."[76] The mother figure also obtains more rights and privileges for her son through tricking the aged father.[77]

For the Thebans, Atum is the sustainer of those left behind at a pharaoh's death,[78] and the one who makes living eternally possible.[79] Ra is still affirmed as the "father of the Fathers of all the gods," whose substance is unknown.[80] But he is also the focus of joy for the "common folks," the source of "sweetness" and "love," and the reason for all existence[81] — in contrast to earlier dynasties when only the pharaohs seem to have access to the gods.[82]

As in Memphis, the ruling pharaoh in Thebes is linked with the father-god, who ensures a long and stable reign.[83] As in Heliopolis, Ra provides a ladder between the two worlds for the resurrected soul.[84] Father Geb is again a key player, providing the guarantee of resurrection for a dead pharaoh,[85] keeping magic-stealing crocodiles out of the gods' domain,[86] and ensuring no coup or foreign attack succeeds as power passes from father to son.[87] Father Osiris has a key role in the resurrection, since it is his preroga-

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[73] Ut.127.80a, in Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts: In Translation and Commentary* (New York: Longmans Green, 1952), 44; Ut.3.3a, in ibid., 20.

[74] Ut.592.1615-1619, in *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 243.

[75] James P. Allen, "Hymn to Ptah," *COS* 1:20–21.

[76] J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's de Iside et Osiride: Edited with an Introduction Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: University of Wales Press, 1970), 344, 345.

[77] *ANET*, 12, 13.

[78] Spell 72.S3, in Thomas George Allen, *The Book of the Dead or, Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptian Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in Their Own Terms* (The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago: Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 37; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 65.

[79] Spell 170.S3, in ibid., 178.

[80] Spell 15A4.2–3, in ibid., 19.

[81] Spell 15B2.1–2, in ibid., 21.

[82] Vernus, *Gods of Ancient Egypt*, 97.

[83] Spell 175b.S3, in Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 184.

[84] Spell 153.S7, in ibid., 152.

[85] Spell 69a.S2–S4, in ibid., 63.

[86] Magic was needed to successfully navigate the various hazards along the way to the realm of the gods. Spell 31b.S, in ibid., 41.

[87] Spell 47.S3, in ibid., 51.

tive to preserve the flesh of the deceased.[88] And corresponding to a similar theme in Sumerian and Memphite theology, Horus is extolled for rescuing his father, showing the ascending importance of the son over the father.[89]

In all these instances, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the relationship between gods and humans in general. Most of the spells and utterances seem to be quite manipulative, ensuring the success of the human supplicant in the afterlife. Even the joyous ceremonies enjoyed by the commoners may primarily be tools of the pharaohs to guarantee present peace and prosperity and future security. Certainly, the relationship of the masses to Ra must be colored by the early human attempts to rebel, despite the later softening of his attitude.

The relationship between pharaoh and the father-god is clearer. There is a fusion of their identities, with the father-god deferring to his pharaoh-son. Such preferential treatment certainly reinforces the notion that the masses did not really count for much.

This much is certain. The Egyptian gods are called "father" in the context of the generation of other gods, the world, and everything in it. They are also called "father" in relation to the pharaohs, and in relation to assisting souls in the afterlife into the presence of Ra. Thus it is in the context of creation and resurrection that their fatherhood is made evident. But as for the exact nature that this relationship assumed, we must reserve judgment.

3.4. Ugarit

Our understanding of second-millennium B.C.E. Canaanite mythology has been "significantly enhanced" through what has been touted as the most important archaeological discovery of the early twentieth century: the library of a chief priest of the storm-god in the ancient city of Ugarit.[90] The

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[88]   Spell 155.S1, in ibid., 153, 154; Spell 181*d*.S.1, in ibid., 194.

[89]   Spell 78.S16, in ibid., 69.

[90]   John W. Miller, "God as Father in the Bible and the Father Image in Several Contemporary Ancient Near Eastern Myths: A Comparison," *SR* 14.3 (1985): 349. As a vassal state in the Hittite empire, Ugarit falls "squarely within the Hittite sphere of influence." Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1949), ix. The library tablets date between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E., at the height of Ugarit's international trade. Ibid., ix, x. They are written in a previously unknown language using a cuneiform script, deciphered soon after their discovery due to the relative simplicity of the characters. Johannes C. de Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), vii, viii. The significance of Ugaritic religious literature lies in its strategic position between the Hittite nation and Israel, forming a possible ideological bridge between them. The inhabitants of Ugarit distance themselves from the Canaanites, but their culture is largely Canaanite, allowing data from there to give "a fairly accurate view of

"family tree" of the Canaanite pantheon is difficult to determine,[91] since the simple use of the designation "father" is insufficient to establish filial relationship. [92] El does not physically conceive all the gods—he crafts some out of clay—yet he is still called "father of the gods."[93] This gives him the highest authority.[94] However, other clues are needed to develop an understanding of the nature and quality of fatherhood among the Canaanite gods. One source may be the narrative poems with their chronicling of human-divine relationships. In reviewing these, it appears that El is the only god in the Ugaritic pantheon spoken of as "father" in relation to both gods and humanity.

In both the Kirta and Aqhat epics, the "father of mankind"[95] provides progeny for his earthly subjects and sufficient resources to maintain them. El as father-god is moved with pity for his earthly son Kirta, and arranges circumstances so that Kirta sires a number of children.[96] El is not only the clansman-protector of Kirta, but as "the king" and "father of years" exercises dominion over all humanity.

On the other hand, El becomes inebriated at a feast and needs to be carried home.[97] As well as that, his daughter ʾAnat sometimes outwits him and he cowers at her wilting words.[98] He also shows ineptitude when he accedes to Yamm and Nahar's demand for Baal to be taken from the assembly

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the Canaanite pantheon." Jonathan N. Tubb, *Canaanites: Peoples of the Past* (London: British Museum, 1998), 73. See J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), for a recent treatment of the subject.

91   Although there is no creation account as such in Ugaritic literature, Mullen argues that the struggle with, and eventual defeat of, Yamm, the sea, constitutes the "first phase of creation—the restriction of the bounds of the sea—the separation of water and dry land." E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980), 13. Unfortunately, that debate cannot be pursued here.

92   The genealogy of the gods is difficult to determine because of who calls whom father. Mullen, *Divine Council*, 16–17, 19–22; Conrad E. L'Hereux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods: El, Baʿal, and the Rephaʾim* (HSM 21; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 12–14; N. Wyatt, "The Titles of the Ugaritic Storm God," *UF* 24 (1992): 406.

93   Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 78.

94   Ibid., 79.

95   Denis Pardee, "The Kirta Epic," *COS* 1:334.

96   Ibid., 338.

97   Theodore J. Lewis, "El's Divine Feast", 19; *CAT* 1.114 15–22; Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 195.

98   Aqhat, 4; *CAT* 1.17 V:4–55; 5; *CAT* 1.18 I:1–20; Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 62–64.

of gods.[99] When Mot (death) swallows Baal, El hopelessly mourns in the dust and covers his loins with sackcloth,[100] and it is left to Baal's sister 'Anat to rescue him from the underworld.

The fatherhood of El therefore has many facets. It is seen in the context of creation, presiding over the heavenly council, and may sometimes be understood in terms of harshness and vindictiveness but here it seems pliant in the hands of demanding children. On the other hand, the myth of Baal may be yet another example of the transition of power from an older to a younger god, and El's delay before manifesting his divine prerogative may be seen as a father's deliberate and measured response to the premature demands of his children.

3.5. The Ancient Near East in Summary

In summary, the fatherhood of the gods has wide scope across the Ancient Near East. It is evident in the dynamic activity of creation, in the maintenance of civil and divine order, in the accountability of gods and men in judgment, in the provision of hope for the future, and finally in resurrection from the dead. The way humans relate to the gods is largely positive, but kings do seem to have some advantage. However, there is insufficient data to compare the levels of devotion shown by kings and commoners to their father-gods.

We now turn to the Hebrew concept of God's fatherhood. Has the understanding of ANE gods informed it, has there been significant borrowing or was a new paradigm developed to function as a polemic against the father-god theology of the surrounding nations?

4. An Old Testament Theology of God as Father

In contrast to Ancient Near Eastern myths, the Old Testament creation accounts do not picture creation as the result of gods being engaged in sexual activity. Human origins in the Sumero-Akkadian and Egyptian accounts seem manipulative and accidental. In contrast, in the Old Testament, God shows forethought, design, dignity, blessing, provision, and satisfied approval (he blessed them, Gen 1:28), as he stoops first to form Adam then to construct Eve (Gen 2:7, 22).

The Old Testament linking of God's fatherhood to creation means that he is recognized as father of all creation for all time, so no one people has

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[99]   Mark S. Smith, "The Baal Cycle," 8; *CAT* 1.2:30–38; Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 100–1.

[100]   *KTU* 1.5 VI:14–17; Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 149.

exclusive rights to him (Isa 64:8). There is neither time nor place where he is unable to be father to his children. The gods of the ANE may appear as impotent, remote, inaccessible, self-indulgent, and bitter. But the God of the OT is always there for his children (Ps 103:13–17), and nothing—from either the natural or supernatural realm—is able to separate him from them.

There are 18 references in 17 verses of the Hebrew Scriptures that explicitly call God "father."[101] Five of these refer to God as the father of David and his dynasty,[102] eleven to him being the father of his people,[103] and twice his love is compared to the love of a father for his child.[104] Although they range across the breadth of the canon, there are strong thematic and linguistic parallels that may be observed common among them.

The subject of God's fatherhood is not an afterthought in the Hebrew Scriptures, and although it may not immediately be seen in association with major themes of creation, exodus, or covenant, its prominence may still be evidenced by the significance given to the passages that contain them. Note the superlative descriptions which some commentators give to many of the biblical father-God passages: Albright opines that the Song of Moses is one of the most impressive religious poems in the entire Hebrew Scriptures;[105] Kruse suggests that there is hardly any "prophecy" in the Old Testament that has had so many repercussions in biblical literature as the oracle Nathan gave to king David;[106] Gordon thinks that 2 Sam 7 is not only the ideological summit of 'Deuteronomistic History', but also of the OT as a whole;[107] Dahood observes that Ps 68 is widely admitted as textually and exegetically the most difficult and obscure of the psalms;[108] Weiser notes that Ps 103 is "one of the finest blossoms on the tree of biblical faith,"[109]

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[101] This includes only verses that call God father (אָב), and does not include references where the relationship is implied, or described in different terms, as in the "son" texts (e.g., "you are my son," Ps 2:6; Exod 4:22–23; Hos 11:1; etc.). This has been an arbitrary decision of delimitation—the "son" texts would make a separate study in themselves.

[102] 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps 89:27 [26].

[103] Deut 32:6; 1 Chr 29:10; Ps 68:6 [5]; Isa 63:16 (2x); 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10.

[104] Ps 103:13; Prov 3:12.

[105] W. F. Albright, "Some Remarks on the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32," in *Essays in Honour of Millar Burrows* (ed. Martin Noth; Leiden: Brill, 1959), 339. Note that Deut 32 is understood here as the Song of Moses, in contrast to Exod 15, which is sometimes given the same name.

[106] Heinz Kruse, "David's Covenant," *VT* 35 (1985): 139.

[107] Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 235. See also A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas: Word, 1989), 112.

[108] Mitchel Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100* (AB 17; Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 133.

[109] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (trans. H. Hartnell; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster), 657.

while McConville reports that Jer 31:19 is said to be "among the most poignant" in the book of Jeremiah;[110] and Kaiser calls Mal 2:10–16 "one of the most important and one of the most difficult pericopes in the book of Malachi."[111] Added to these chapters that highlight God's fatherhood, 1 Chr 17 serves as the climax to which the genealogical foundation of the book leads.

God's fatherhood is introduced (at least to public religious life) in a public assembly called to "proclaim the name of the LORD" (Deut 32:3)—a phrase echoing the answer given when Moses asked God to show his face (Exod 33:18–20). In the resulting theophany at Mt. Sinai, God gave specific characteristics to describe himself (34:5–7). These descriptions would later appear in the Song of Moses, and in other father-God passages (especially Ps 103) with the following keywords/ or thoughts: רַחֻם "motherly yearning;" חַנּוּן "gracious," אֶרֶךְ "slow to anger"—also refers to [eagle] pinions, see Ps 103:5), חֶסֶד "faithfulness," and אֱמֶת "truth," forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, not clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation. The word for "yearning" (from the root רחם) is especially interesting in that it includes qualities that, humanly speaking, belong to the mother.[112]

Significant because it is the first extended portrayal of God as father, the linguistic backdrop to the Song of Moses (Deut 32) is painted in the subtle color of creation theology. It commences with calling heaven and earth to attention—an echo of the ten times in creation when God spoke, and a theme seen in other father-God passages.[113] Creation themes become a backdrop for the father-God panorama (the hendiadys of "heaven and earth" in the exordium of v. 1). Exodus and the covenant dominate the foreground. A contrast is drawn between the father-God of covenant faithfulness, who initiated (at creation) and established (during the exodus) a relationship with his people, and the people who are described as "foolish" and "unwise" (v. 6) for their ingratitude and rejection, and their insistence in worshiping "worthless idols" (v. 21). This tension between the fickleness of humanity and the abiding faithfulness of God is witnessed right up to the

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[110] Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, to Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 43.

[111] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Divorce in Malachi 2:10–16," *CTR* 2.1 (1987): 73.

[112] Although it may be argued that רַחֻם can no longer be influenced by the gender implications of רְחֶם, Sarah J. Dille makes a case for רַחֻם to maintain its function in feminine imagery. Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (JSOTSup 398 / Gender, Culture, Theory 13; New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 39.

[113] Echoed by the use of certain keywords in the Nathan-vision corpus (בָּנָה "build," כּוּן "establish," heaven and earth [1Chr 29:11], plus Ps 68:8; Ps 89:6–19 [5–18]; Prov 3:19–20; Isa 64:8–9; and Mal 2:10).

time of Malachi (Mal 1:6; 2:10). However, although reference to God's fatherhood in the Song of Moses is cast in the context of a Hittite suzerainty treaty, the alliance described is more in terms of relational closeness than legal bonds. God deals with the situation as a father, gently, but firmly, guiding his errant children, rather than as a conquering king wiping out all opposition.

God's fatherhood, as portrayed in Scripture, is quite unlike the father-gods of the ANE in at least one important regard. Nowhere in the biblical account is there a hint of humans becoming gods, unlike the pharaohs, for example, that became gods on their ascension to the throne. There are a number of places that spell out, at length for example, that once a human always a human (e.g. "He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" [Ps 103:14]). This is also seen in the lengths taken to outline Solomon's genealogy. God would raise up a "son," not by his own procreative powers, (as seen in the sexual procreative acts of the ANE father-gods) but through David's act of procreation (2 Sam 7:14). Solomon, then, becomes a son by "adoption," or in other words, his relationship with God is a spiritual, not physical one, yet it profoundly affects every area of the new king's life. This forms the pattern for the father-son relationship with all his children (note that Prov 3:12; and 2 Sam 7:14 both feature the word יכח "discipline" to ensure covenant continuity).

The father nurtures his children to the place where they may live life responsibly and accountably, like a young eagle that must learn to fly (Deut 32:11—the eaglet is tipped off the back of a coaching parent in its flying lessons). He nurtures by building and establishing: a name (2 Sam 7:9); and a dynasty (v. 16) for David; and a throne for Solomon (v. 13). He assures their long-term viability (1 Chr 17:14), sometimes seen in re-establishing his scattered people (Jer 31:7–9). He promises to "plant" his people so that they may have a place free from the oppression of wicked men (2 Sam 7:10), and where they may maintain their social/political stability (1 Chr 22:12–13). David is confident in asking God to establish the hearts of his people toward the father to ensure continuing loyalty (1 Chr 29:18–19), but if they fail, God assures them that their sins have been removed to the remotest extremes (Ps 103:11–12), and that he forgives sin and heals their sickness (v. 3).

The theme of the father-God judging is made prominent in the passages dealt with in Psalms and Proverbs. In Ps 68 he ascends to his throne (v. 19 [18]) from where he deals out the "just deserts" to the oppressors of his people (vv. 2–3 [1–2]; 13 [12]; 15–19 [14–18]; 24 [23]; 31 [30]); he shows himself triumphant over the forces of evil—and to the mind of someone from

the ANE, the forces of the underworld (Ps 68:3 [2]); and he restores the prosperity of his people (vv. 4–13 [3–12]; 20 [19]; 23 [22]; 36 [35]).

The father-God's judicial acts take place from the throne of his sanctuary in heaven, which is described in terms of righteousness, justice, mercy and truth (Ps 89:15 [14]), and it is established for those who keep his covenant (Ps 103:19). This means he not only deals with oppressors of his people, but with their rebellion against the divine order as well. He declares that he will punish his sons if they forsake his laws and judgments, statutes and commandments (vv. 31–33 [30–32]). The idea of God rebuking his children is explained in terms of showing them favor (Prov 3:11–12)—to prevent their ultimate self-destruction. The "son" is admonished neither to forget the father's commands (v. 1) nor to despise the discipline of the LORD, as his discipline is administered because of his love (v. 12). As "the potter," God is given the right to continue to mould and shape human destiny to bring out the best work of art from the human lump of "clay" (Isa 64:8).

Divine-human accountability is backed up by God's memory,[114] which serves not merely of bringing his children to account, but rather functions as a guarantee for covenant continuity and stability. He remembers, "we are dust" (Ps 103:14), and he remembers the Exodus (Isa 64:11) when humans forget. This becomes a long-term reality check, effective in situations such as when "unfaithful Judah" (Jer 3:4–5) used her pious pretense of loyalty to manipulate God's bounty, while at the same time pursuing the hunt for lovers, and covering her "promiscuity" with the hypocrisy of her religious professions by calling on God as her father.

Therefore, God's fatherhood is not something forced upon the unwilling. The "child" of God was given the right of veto. The prospect of divine discipline remained for the one choosing to turn aside, should s/he opt to reject the חֻקִּים "statutes" and מִשְׁפָּטִים "judgments" that God had given to Moses. Initially these decrees were given as a token of parental love (Prov 3:12), and the bond between humanity and God was made sure by virtue of God's faithfulness (חֶסֶד), even if there were times when the human part of the agreement broke down. It is clear that the human is free to break away from the arrangement, even though a number of Bible writers outline both the warnings and the results of pursuing such a course (e.g. Ps 89:47–51 [46–50]).

After repeated attempts of breaking free of the father's yearnings for them, the people repeatedly end up in hopeless despair, rendering the fatherhood of God even more poignant to them. The "not-yet" stance of Isaiah means that sometimes the father may appear frustratingly silent,
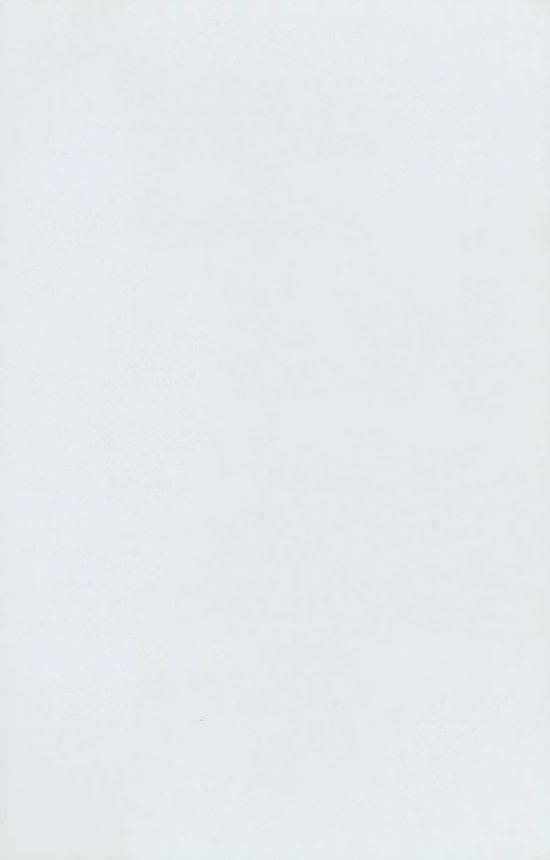
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[114] God "remembers" in Ps 103:14; Isa 64:11; Jer 2:2; and 31:20.

when he should, at least to human eyes, be down here rattling a few mountains (Isa 63:19 [64:1]). Perhaps the reason he does not is because he has a more gentle approach. He leads the most vulnerable along the most accessible and gentle roads (Jer 31:9)—like a father with a fumbling child—at a pace that may make the Bible writers impatient.[115]

However, what counts in the end, is the exuberance expressed by the people for their father-God—shining above their despair. Psalm 68 expresses a hymn of praise for the father who has jurisdiction over every realm, and old and young celebrate together in the streets (Jer 31:13). What is pictured here is a relationship that at times shows incredible intimacy—experienced on an individual level, and celebrated corporately—between the father-God and his people. Even though many of the passages in this study are based on the Davidic covenant, it appears the common people took this personally, and applied its benefits to themselves. They saw God as their father, and trusted in his care for them.

Even though the human race may have deserted every covenant that God has made with them, he still remains their father because he created them in the first place. He can never cease to be their father.[116] The implication of his faithfulness (חֶסֶד) continuing into eternity (לְעֹלָם) is that the father-God restores the realm of creation—people and land—to its pristine condition in his last act of victory (Jer 31:10–14). Above all, his parenting style may be best described in terms of the two closely related synonyms רֶחֶם "pity, the yearning of a mother" and אָהֵב "love." This may not suit those who prefer to see God through a Hellenistic lens, and it may be uncomfortable for those feminist theologians who equate God's fatherhood with patriarchy, but this is the Father the Hebrew Scriptures describe.

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[115] Dille observes that inheritance of the land is in itself an indication of a father-son relationship, so the events described here of a return from exile reinforces the idea of a fatherly bond. See Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 31.

[116] In the ANE this relationship could be broken after a duly appointed public ceremony, in which the father said, "you are not my son." See Moshe Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature," *VT* 27 (1977): 188. There is no record of God saying this in Scripture.

DIVINE RITUALIZING AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF PAUL IN ACTS 9[1]

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The narrator's account of Saul's experience on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:1–20 is particularly rich in detail characteristic of rites of passage recorded elsewhere in Luke-Acts and in Greco-Roman narrative. This study will examine the account from the standpoint of ritual studies to consider the validity of such an approach and what it can tell us about the narrator's presentation of this event and its significance in the work of Luke-Acts as a whole.

Key Words: Paul, rite of passage, Acts, Luke, Josephus, Apuleius

1. Introduction

The story of Paul's encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus has long been recognized as pivotal in Luke-Acts' narrative structure and in its presentation of Paul. While the accounts in chapters 22 and 26 highlight and elaborate upon Paul's commission to the Gentiles, the initial account in Acts 9 focuses on the process of his transformation from enemy to witness of Jesus, in his ongoing zealous pursuit of God's will.[2] The contention of this paper is that Acts 9 ritualizes its presentation of Paul's transition, building on ritual themes evident in the rest of Luke-Acts as well as in both Septuagintal and Greco-Roman literary traditions. By so doing, Acts demonstrates Paul's ensuing actions to be properly begun and firmly anchored in ancient tradition by the direction of the Lord himself.

2. Rites of Passage in Luke-Acts

In the world of the Lukan audience, little was done without proper ritual. From birthing rites to puberty rites, betrothals and weddings, and the final funereal good-byes, the movement to each important stage in the human

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[1] The present study was first presented to the *Ritual in the Biblical World* consultation at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego, California, USA, on November 19, 2007.

[2] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (ed. Walter Brueggemann and J. R. Donahue; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 92.

life cycle was guarded by ritual.[3] Rituals of *advancement* ushered into office those individuals receiving positions of authority in society, such as magistrates, senators, rulers, and priests.[4] And *voluntary* rituals were available to men and women of various social levels for purposes such as healing or initiation into mystery religions and social associations.[5] Labeled as rites of passage by Arnold van Gennep a century ago,[6] these types of rituals share the common characteristics of involving purposeful and symbolic acts which accompany the transition of an individual or group from one stage or state in life to another.

Such rites are well-documented in the literature of the time. In narrative works such as Luke-Acts, however, where the lives of specific individuals are chronicled, these rites are often passed over as being too routine to be worthy of mention. Where a ritual is recounted, at least two primary factors seem to motivate its inclusion. In some cases the rite is the occasion for an event of dramatic interest, as in the attempt on Artaxerxes' life at his royal initiation as a Persian priest in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (3.1–4). In other cases reporting of a rite can be seen to advance other purposes of the author. For example Josephus, in his *Vita*, uses Jewish and Greco-Roman ritual traditions as a model for his arduous apprenticeship to all three Jewish sects and to the hermit Bannus in the wilderness, in order to demonstrate his full preparedness to enter into public life as an adult aristocrat and ultimately, in his opinion, an exemplary Jewish leader and historian.[7] And Galba's dream of Fortuna standing at his door at the time of his *toga virilis* ceremony, in Sueto-

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[3]   See, for example, Gen 17:10–14; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.238–2.274; *Contra Ap* 2:205; Suetonius, *Nero 6*; Ovid *Fasti* 3.771–90; Pliny Ep. 10.116; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (trans. J. Raffan; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 262–63; Fanny Lyn Dolansky, "Coming of Age in Rome: The History and Social Significance of Assuming the Toga Virilis" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1999); Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3–4, 37–42, 60–64, 138–43; Nigel M. Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education & Culture in Ancient Sparta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 38, 144–46; Paul Monroe, *Source Book of the History of Education for the Greek and Roman Period* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 302.

[4]   Cf. Exod 28–29; 40:13–16; Lev 8:1–9:24; Plutarch, *Numa* 7.3–8.3; *Artaxerxes* 3.1–4; Suetonius, *Nero* 6.7–8.

[5]   See, for example, Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.33; Hippolytus, *Philososphoumena* 5.8; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.21; Burkert, *Greek Religion*; idem, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[6]   Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (trans. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[7]   Steve Mason, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary. Volume 9: Life of Josephus* (10 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9:110–13.

nius' *Lives of the Caesars* (4.3), points forward to his impressive destiny as ruler of the Roman Empire.

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (bk. 11), both of the above-noted factors apparently stand behind the portrayal of Lucius' dramatic initiation into the mystery religion of Isis following his misadventures in the form of an ass and Isis' assistance in restoring him to human form. Here Lucius' initiation climaxes the novel, transitioning him to a newly pious life while also unveiling hints about the mysteries that have attracted readers from the second century C.E. onward. Both factors also seem to come into play in Luke-Acts, which gives particular attention to rites of passage, weaving together ritual with dramatic supernatural scenes to ground the unprecedented new beginnings there reported in both the solid ground of venerable tradition and in the sovereign will of God.

In the Gospel of Luke these rites are naturally clustered in the extended portrayal of the Gospel's momentous beginnings in Luke 1–2, the Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ which Mark (1:1) announces but describes simply in terms of John's baptism. The narrative opens with the ritual burning of incense in the temple where Gabriel announces the conception of a son, which would set the events of the Gospel in motion, and pronounces the name—and thus the identity—the child was to be given (Luke 1:5–25). The account quickly moves on to the traditional rites of circumcision and naming which follow John's birth (Luke 2:57–59; cf. Lev 12:3) and which are divinely attended by the Holy Spirit, who causes Zacharias to break out in prophetic poetry (1:58–79).[8] The obedient carrying out of the rites of naming and circumcision are considered worthy of report at Jesus' birth, too, and the name given is directed by divine command (1:31; 2:21).[9] In Jesus' case the ritual account is expanded with the reporting of a purification rite and a rite of dedication blended from earlier traditions (Exod 13:2, 12; Lev 12:2–8; 1 Sam 1:24–28) which again become the occasion of divine in-breaking and affirmation as two righteous individuals—Simeon and Anna—speak prophetic

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[8]   The rite of naming, though not anciently a part of the Jewish circumcision ritual, was. celebrated by Romans at this time and is later also attested in Jewish literature. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB 28; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 380.

[9]   Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 376, notes that in Luke's presentation of Jesus, the rite of circumcision with its symbolic reference to incorporation into Israel provided an important foundation for Luke's contention that Christianity was a logical outgrowth of Judaism.

words of exaltation regarding the child.[10] Even the final pericope of the Lukan infancy narrative, Jesus' childhood visit to the temple, is centered in a ritual, the festival of Passover, thus concluding the tale of Jesus' birth and childhood just as it was begun—with a ritual celebration in the temple.[11]

More dominant in the work of Luke-Acts as a whole than these childhood rites is the ritual of baptism by which Luke introduces the main body of the Gospel and, as Conzelmann has argued, a new era in salvation history. For what "John came preaching" at the instigation of the ῥῆμα θεοῦ in Luke 3 was a ritual—a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"

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[10] By direct reference to Exod 13:2, 12, Luke 2:23 interprets this presentation as a response to God's command at the first "Passover" that every firstborn male, human or creature, be set apart as "holy to the Lord." In this passage, human first-borns were to be "redeemed" (Exod 13:13) and no requirement of a presentation at the temple is recorded in connection with this command either in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX, or the Mishnah, while in Numbers (3:47–48; 18:15–16), sons not of the tribe of Levi were exempted from the command by the payment of a five shekel redemption price. Luke's specific mention of a ritual presentation, then, may suggest a formal ritual enactment of Gabriel's declaration that Jesus would be a "holy child," remaining sacred to the Lord, as is also suggested by the omission of any mention of the redemption payment. François Bovon, *Luke I: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Hermeneia; trans. C. M. Thomas; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 99; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 425–26. Although the purification law Luke cites specifically required purification only for the mother (Lev 12:1–8), Luke speaks in the plural of "their" purification [τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν]. It is possible, as Bovon notes, that Luke alludes here not only to the ritual of purification for the mother, but also to a similar ritual to be enacted in certain cases for the purification of a Nazirite—one who, like Jesus, has been set apart as holy to the Lord (Num 6:1–12).

[11] Occurring at the age of twelve, this account may also suggest a ritual recognition of Jesus' passage from childhood to young manhood. Luke reiterates that this was "according to the custom of the feast" [κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τῆς ἑορτῆς], recalling certain traditions recorded in the Mishnah which suggest that boys of twelve were given special instruction toward a coming transition, at the age of thirteen, into a standing of full responsibility before God. *m. 'Abot* 5:21; m. Nid. 5:6; cf. *m. Meg.* 4:6; *b. Ketub.* 50; (cf. *Ant.* 5.348); Str-B 2.144–47; Frédéric Manns, "Luke 2, 41–50 tèmoin de la Bar Mitswa de Jésus," *Marianum* 40 (1978): 344–49; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 440, suggests that regulations concerning the expectation of full Torah observance beginning at the age of thirteen were known by Jesus' time, along with a custom of pious Jews involving twelve-year-olds in this pilgrimage; contra Bovon, *Luke I*, 111. (There is no evidence at this time of the terminology or characteristic practice of Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13.)

modeled apparently on traditional rites of water-purification.[12] This baptism is participated in by Jesus himself and its importance is further underlined by the later narrative aside that the Pharisees and law-experts, in not having been baptized by John, "had rejected God's purpose for themselves" (Luke 7:30). Acts further emphasizes John's repentance-baptism (Acts 1:21–22; 10:37; 13:24), but enhances it so that it becomes above all a baptism "in the name of Jesus" (e.g., Acts 2:38; 10:48).[13] Accompanied by the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:17; cf. Acts 1:5), this ritual represents the pivotal act in a new believer's transfer of allegiance to Christ and initiation into the Christian community (e.g., Acts 2:38–41; 8:12).

Rites of advancement are also highlighted in Luke-Acts, providing authority and empowerment at points of transition to new social positions using language from accounts of ancient commissioning rituals. These include (1) the interpretation, unique to Luke-Acts, of the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism in terms of the ancient Jewish rite of anointing (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:26–27; 10:38; 1 Sam 10:1; 16:13); (2) the formal appointment of twelve disciples to the role of apostle (Luke 6:12–16; 22:29–30; Acts 7:8; Josh 3:12); and later (3) the selection of seven to assist them (Acts 6:1–6; Num 8:10; 11:16–17); (4) of Paul and Barnabus to advance the mission (Acts 13:1–3; Num 27:18–23); and (5) of elders to lead the newly-formed churches (Acts 14:23; Num 11:16–17). In each of these rites, prayer is expressly noted as a key aspect, grounding these transitions, too, in the leadership of God.[14]

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[12] In the LXX tradition, the priest, the unclean, and others were commanded to bathe, or wash, in order to achieve ritual cleanliness before God, and such washing comes to be used metaphorically in the Psalms and the Prophets to refer to a cleansing of human hearts (λούω Isa 1:16; πλύνω Ps 50:9). Ezekiel 36:24–27 further speaks of a future cleansing (ῥαίνω) at a time when God would put his spirit within his people. By the time of Luke-Acts, various sorts of ritual cleansings in water had become increasingly widespread as suggested by such evidences as the prevalence of miqvaot in the archaeological record and, in literature, the bathings at Qumran (1QS 3.4), Josephus' mention of Bannus' day and night washings (*Vita* 11), the Sibyline Oracles' call to "wash your whole bodies in perennial rivers" in connection with repentance (4.165), and, possibly, certain references to the washing of the Jewish proselyte (*m. Pesaḥ* 8.8; *m. cEd.* 5.2). By the time of Luke such ritual washings were often described using the actual term βαπτίζω (cf. Sir 34:24, 29; Jdt 12:7, 8; Mark 7:4).

[13] See, for example, George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 100.

[14] Yet it is baptism which predominates. There is no evidence of Jesus' disciples practicing the rite of baptism in the Lukan Gospel. However, baptism is used in symbolic ways to interpret other major life transitions in the life of Jesus, such as his declaration in 12:50 "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!"

3. Ritual Interpretation of Acts 9:1–20

The narrative of Paul's transformation in Acts 9:1–20, is likewise a ritual account encompassing not one but a series of traditional ritual elements climaxing with Paul's baptism and subsequent incorporation into the Christian community and witness. Acts 9 is, in fact, the most extensive description of events surrounding the baptism of a single individual in a volume where baptism rites are ubiquitous. Such a layering of elements to create new ritual has been spoken of by Ronald Grimes as *ritualizing*—a ritualizing here presented as both divinely initiated, in the confrontation of Paul by the risen Lord, and divinely directed, through the agency of the disciple Ananias.[15] These elements reflect not only Jewish ritual tradition but also aspects of ritual experience and vocabulary common in the Greco-Roman world of Luke-Acts' day, as will be demonstrated by viewing it alongside the earlier-mentioned accounts in Josephus' *Vita* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

3.1. The Ritual Field as Laid Out in Acts 7–9

In the analysis of ritual and ritualized accounts, it has been recognized that ritual reshapes not only the ritual subject but relations between each of the individuals and institutions involved. In this saga, three named characters are gathered on the narrative stage, approaching events with markedly opposing goals and differing relationships. The *apparent protagonist*, Saul, has been portrayed thus far as an unremitting and increasingly passionate enemy of the ἐκκλησία of Jesus' followers, backed by a powerful faction of structural leaders in Jerusalem (Luke 20:1; Acts 4:1, 5–6, 17; 5:17, 21; 6:12). The risen Lord, whom Acts immediately displays as the *true protagonist*, has been identified in Luke as coming to preach the good news of God's reign to the marginalized (Luke 4:18, 43; 19:10), being crucified by this same power group, but ascending to God's right hand (2:33; 5:31; 7:55–56) and continuing to pursue his mission through the Spirit (Acts 3:6; 4:29–30) in his apostles (Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:8) and followers (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36). The third named character, Ananias, is an apparently hapless disciple and *agent* of this Jesus. Ananias represents, in the story, the church as a whole, personifying the competing motivations of fear and faithfulness evident in their scattering before the persecution (8:1; cf. 11:19) and yet their ongoing

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[15]   Ronald L. Grimes, *Reading, Writing and Ritualizing* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral, 1993), 5. See also Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 10.

preaching of the word (8:4–5, cf. 11:19–20).[16] As the story begins these competing factions come into direct conflict, with power relations—even in Gentile territory outside the borders of Judea—seeming from an earthly perspective to be skewed in Saul's favor.

The stage upon which Saul's transformation is about to take place is portrayed spatially as the Syrian city of Damascus and its environs, far from the Jerusalem center of religious meaning and structural power on which Saul was dependent both for his worldview and his authority. It is also beyond the reported extent of the flight of the Jerusalem believers who were said in Acts 8:1 to have been scattered by persecution "throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." Nevertheless the Lord is said to have a number of followers of "The Way" already attending the numerous Jewish synagogues there (Acts 9:2, 10, 19). The scene is located temporally, not according to the reckoning of calendar or empire, but within this ongoing saga of a marginalized people struggling in the face of persecution.

This multiply-emphasized distance from 'the center' has interesting correspondences with the observations of ritual theory regarding the process of a rite of passage. These rites have been described by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner as being comprised of three basic phases which Grimes points out are often interwoven and intermixed in the process of ritual.[17] Elements of *separation,* such as those just noted in Acts 7–9, often open a ritual, operating to remove the individual being initiated from everything that characterizes his former state or position in life. Elements of *reincorporation* generally complete the ritual, reuniting the individual with society in her new persona. In the borderland amongst and between an individual's initial separation and her reincorporation can be found the condition of *liminality* where many of the normal patterns and statuses of daily life are suspended and the *initiand* may encounter various experiences of paradox and riddle; complex and puzzling symbolisms including those of death and darkness, birth and rebirth; ordeals and humiliations; and strange and supernatural appearances; which have the potential to deconstruct and reconfigure former beliefs and assumptions. In the liminal absence of societal controls and rankings, the individual may also experience a sense of *communitas* characterized

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16   Daniel Marguerat, "Saul's Conversion (Acts 9, 22, 26) and the Multiplication of Narrative in Acts," in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; JSNTSup 116; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 139; Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 67.

17   Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 107; van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 11–14. On pp. 102–7 Grimes demonstrates the connections between van Gennep's three phases and Eliade's mystical death, return to origins, and spiritual rebirth that is part of his idea of initiation as a revelation of the sacred, and Joseph Campbell's (invented) separation, initiation, and return in the myth of the hero.

by a deep sense of egalitarianism and intense bondedness with others. As Carol LaHurd has pointed out, Acts 9 evidences aspects of each of these three phases.[18]

3.2. Saul's Transformation to Christ Follower

In the divine plan, according to Acts 9, the tale of Saul's transformation begins at the furthest reaches of *separation*. Like the setting of Josephus' apprenticeship to Bannus in the wilderness and Lucius' encounter with Isis in the darkness of a deserted beach, the sense of separation is further deepened by the setting of the first scene outside even the safety and social structure of the foreign city of Damascus (Acts 9:3). In this marginal position between two cities, Saul is involuntarily halted by an overwhelming experience of heavenly light (cf. Ezek 1:27–2:2)[19] which, in one brief moment, places him on the threshold of an unexpected and divinely guided rite of passage, separated from the high position signified by the high priestly letters, and flat on the ground like a dead man in the presence of a heavenly light.[20]

The voice Saul next hears does not immediately identify itself, but places him in suspense and even greater discomfiture with an interrogation challenging him with the mind-bending charge that his zealous persecution of the lowly Christians has actually and paradoxically been directed against a being of obviously heavenly status. To his stunned question, "Who are you, Lord," the reply comes, "Jesus whom you are persecuting," leaving Saul in a state of uncertainty concerning his suddenly perilous fate. This further isolation and confusion is in contrast to Josephus' ritual account, where Josephus makes no missteps and remains in full control throughout. It differs also, to some degree, with the narrative of Lucius, who receives little criticism from Isis who, rather, pities him for his "misfortunes." (Her priest, however, points the next day to his misadventures as reward for his "pursuit of slavish pleasures" and "ill-starred curiosity" [*Metam.* 11.5, 15].)

Saul next, in one liminal moment, is separated from his important status, from the mission he had set for himself, and from his control over his own life and future. There is a ray of hope however, as Beverly Gaventa notes, in the adversative ἀλλά (9:6) which introduces Jesus' command, "*But get up* (ἀνάστηθι) *and enter the city and it will be told you what you must*

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[18]   Carol J. LaHurd, "The Author's Call to the Audience in the Acts of the Apostles" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1987), 198–99.

[19]   Ibid., 193.

[20]   Marguerat, "Saul's Conversion," 141.

do."[21] In the deeply symbolic atmosphere of ritual this use of ἀνίστημι also augments the sense of hope, recalling Luke-Acts' repeated use of it both in commands of the Lord to his faithful ones (Luke 17:19; 22:46; Acts 8:26; 9:11; 10:13, 20), and also in reference to rising from the dead (Luke 9:19; 16:31; 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 2:24; 10:41; 13:34; 17:3, 31). Such symbolism of death and rising is found, as well, in the *Metamorphoses* (23) where Lucius describes coming to the boundary of death and returning as central to his own formal experience of initiation. Such a symbolic ritual appeal to such natural cycles as death and birth, Catherine Bell suggests, causes the underlying world-view of the ritual leaders, and/or text, to appear "nonarbitrary and grounded in reality," for it "roots the value system with people's most intimate experiences."[22]

In contrast to Lucius' restoration to human form hours after his initial encounter with Isis, Saul's humiliation and liminal status continue, as he is further ground down by his blind condition which places him in complete dependence on fellow-travelers to lead him by the hand into the city. This blindness and inability to find his own way, in juxtaposition with the heavenly light he has just experienced, may have reminded audiences of what they knew of the mystery religions, which Plutarch describes as involving "wanderings," and "frightening paths in darkness," followed by "some wonderful light"[23]—though for Plutarch the light came at the climax of the dark wanderings. This brilliant light as well as a divine encounter, is witnessed to also by Lucius who is said to experience it in his own later experience of formal initiation into the mysteries (*Metam.* 11.21, 23).

Though Saul has risen, he now moves into a new kind of separation, an alien in a city not his own, without sight and apparently alone in the darkness in a womb-like experience of liminal waiting.[24] Further emphasizing the dramatic distance between Saul's isolation and the normal routines of life, he abstains entirely for three days from eating and drinking, recalling Lucius' abstention from meat and wine in preparation for his initiation (*Metam.* 11.22–23, 28, 30), and Josephus' eating, with Bannus, only what grew of itself (*Vita* 11). This action also echoes Septuagintal traditions where fasting is practiced while seeking divine help and forgiveness in times of

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[21] Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light,* 58.

[22] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 135–36.

[23] Plutarch frg. 168, Sandbach = Stobaeus 4.52.49 cited from Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults,* 91–92.

[24] LaHurd, "The Author's Call," 198, points out Paul's status as an alien in Damascus.

transition and crisis (Neh 1:4–6; 9:1–3; Esth 4:3, 16; Dan 9:3–5).[25] In the context of various other symbols of death and new birth in the rite of passage experience, the oft-suggested allusion to the three days of Jesus' time in the tomb gains additional support. Allusion might also be seen to other times of *transition* and *liminal waiting* in Luke-Acts including Jesus' three days in the temple at the age of twelve, and the three years Stephen depicts the infant Moses spending in his father's home before emerging to his life as grandson of the Pharaoh and deliverer of Israel (Acts 7:20–21). A period of three years is likewise the time Josephus claims to have spent with Bannus in his ritualized transition to adulthood (12).

Saul's blindness continues during these days not only in a physical sense, but metaphorically in his uncertainty of what lay ahead.[26] Acts gives no explanation of what happened during these days, but in view of the connection of fasting and repentance and the transformation he undergoes, the three days in blindness and prayer suggest both time and impetus for the liminal activity of examining and restructuring some of the building blocks of his former culturally-shaped ways of thinking, in dialogue with the true "ritual director" who has confronted him with this riddle and with whom Ananias is told Saul is in prayer.[27] An even more extended period of waiting may be seen in the experience of Lucius before his full acceptance through initiation into Isis' cult. However, in contrast to Saul, Lucius already had assurance of what was to come, beginning with the physical restoration which was given to him within hours of his encounter with the goddess.

As the spotlight shifts to Ananias, one of Saul's erstwhile victims, the Lord who spoke to Saul outside Damascus continues to shape and direct events toward the desired conclusion. For Ananias, Jesus enacts a ritual of

[25]   Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (trans. J. Bowden; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 84.

[26]   "Though physically blind, Saul's eyes are being opened spiritually." Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 426. Hans Conzelmann notes that Saul's blinding is not to be viewed as a punishment, but an indication of the great persecutor's sudden helplessness. See Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 72.

[27]   As Stendahl suggests, there is no evidence here of a "psychological conversion" in which Saul completely disposed of all of his former beliefs, or of a previous load of guilt. Cf. Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199–215. While Saul disposed of the conception of Jesus as threat, and Christian as enemy, he also continued on as a devoted servant of the God of Israel. While the accounts of Acts 22 and 26 interpret this more in terms of the prophetic call Stendahl suggests, however, Acts 9 plays down this aspect of the story (contra Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990], 7).

commissioning similar to the traditional pattern of prophetic calls recorded in Scripture, including the formalized sequence of address, response, commission, objection, reassurance, and compliance (Exod 3:1–4:20; Judg 6:11–24; 1 Sam 3:10–14).[28] Despite the widespread fear evidenced in Ananias' expression of strong reluctance to carry out this apparently ill-conceived and suicidal mission (Acts 9:13–14), upon the revelation of the divine plan for Saul, Ananias passes the liminal test and submits to this reversal of his assumptions. In his obedience Ananias is now placed, despite his initial uncertainties, in the position of human ritual leader, a role similar to John in the foundational baptism account in Luke 3, the priest for Lucius (*Metam.* 11.22–24) and Bannus for Josephus (*Vita* 1.11).

Meanwhile, the still-blind Saul remains in an emptied, betwixt-and-between state as Ananias—paradoxical victim-rescuer—approaches as the Lord's chosen ritual leader and emissary of reincorporation. Ananias' next portrayed movement is pivotal but succinct as he moves directly to lay his hands on Saul (Acts 9:12), following in a ritual tradition of Scripture, witnessed in Luke-Acts itself, of the laying on of hands for healing (e.g., 2 Kgs 5:11; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 28:8). In addition to a generalized act of blessing,[29] this reference to a laying on of hands may also suggest the bestowal of the Spirit (Acts 8:17, 19; 19:6; cf. Deut 34:9), which often accompanies the same gesture in Acts, and even a traditional ritual transfer of power and authority (Num 8:10–12; 27:18, 23; Acts 6:6; 13:3).

Together with the physical ritual enactment, Ananias enacts the spoken word. His opening address, "Brother Saul," communicates an immediate *communitas* between former target and persecutor. As Ananias proclaims the good news that what Saul faced from this Lord who had arrested him on his way was not retribution or punishment, but sight and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Saul's spiritual vision clears further. It is with the combined ritual action of body and word that Saul's literal sight is now restored, as "scales" fall from his eyes, averring, like the dove which came in bodily form upon Jesus following his rite of baptism, the physical divinely-caused reality of this ritual event.[30] One acquainted with the general story of Paul would expect that with the solving of the riddle of Saul's immediate fate,

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28 Marguerat, "Saul's Conversion," 143; Norman C. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 77 (1965): 297–323; Raymond F. Collins, "Paul's Damascus Experience: Reflections on the Lukan Account," *Louvain Studies* 11.2 (1986): 115–16; and Hans-Martin Storm, *Die Paulusberufung nach Lukas und das Erbe der Propheten: Berufen zu Gottes Dienst* (ANTJ; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995); cf. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 62.

29 C. K. Barrett, *A Critical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 1:454.

30 Cf. Tob 11.13; Habel, "Form and Significance," 76.

the riddle of his future destiny would also be addressed. But this question is left by the text of Acts 9 still a riddle to Saul, though Ananias, and with him the Lukan audience, has been alerted as to what is to come. This glaring absence suggests that Saul's prophetic call is not the main point of this particular ritual account, but that it instead carries the aim of explaining the more fundamental transformation in Saul's general orientation and state through this divine ritualization.

Rather than undergoing the long waiting period experienced by Lucius between his physical restoration and his initiation, Saul's physical healing is immediately followed by his spiritual restoration as can be seen by his movement into the new world of the physically *and* spiritually sighted by partaking in the embodied ritual act of baptism. There is no need for the typical preaching of Jesus here, for Saul has personally met the risen Lord. Neither is there need to point out the appropriate and apparently well-known ritual act. Acts simply states that *"arising* (ἀναστὰς), he was baptized" (9:18) — with this second use of ἀνίστημι giving connotations not just of a necessary physical act, but of Saul's movement into a brand-new life, a movement which is now, for the first time since his blindness, of his own volition. Like most other baptism accounts in Luke-Acts, and like the account of Lucius' initiation, the physical details of this pivotal ritual event are not stated, being either assumed or even, like the mystery initiations, reserved for insiders.[31] As Adela Collins has pointed out, "the enactment of baptism in Acts is similar to the way in which other initiatory rites reenacted a foundational story and the identification of the participant with its protagonist in initiating individuals into certain mystery religions."[32] This skeletal reporting of the baptism leaves the audience to view the act through their own past experience of its symbolic meanings of cleansing and separation, and more recently of the new beginnings in Jesus with which Luke-Acts portrays it.

Saul's liminal time between what he had been and what he would be is concluded, as with Lucius (*Metam.* 11.24), by his taking of food, thereby entering, as Robert Brawley has suggested, into communion with the disciples of the Lord through shared table fellowship.[33] Saul's *incorporation* as a

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[31] With the exception of a few details regarding that of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:36–38.

[32] She states: "Reenactment of a foundational story and the identification of the participant with the protagonist of the story are strikingly reminiscent of what is known about the initiation rituals of certain mystery religions." See Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," *StudLit* 19 (1989): 55.

[33] Friedrich Avemarie, *Die Tauferzählungen der Apostelgeschichte. Theologie und Geschichte* (WUNT 139; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 336; Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 153.

member of the Christian community has already been suggested by Ananias' greeting, "Brother Saul," and also by the reporting of Saul's baptism in the passive voice (ἐβαπτίσθη), vaguely leaving the enactment of the rite to the community in general. The subsequent report that "he was with the disciples in Damascus" witnesses to the remarkably open acceptance of this former persecutor into the Christian community. Like the gifts and feasting given Lucius following his initiation, and the generous κοινωνία of the newly baptized in Acts 2:41–47 and 16:15, such behavior is typical of the *communitas* associated by Turner more normally with the *liminal* phase of a rite of passage.[34] The disregard of societal barriers, and the interest in the welfare of all also associated with *communitas*, is immediately evidenced in Saul's proclaiming "in the synagogues" (Acts 9:20) what he had learned about Jesus.[35]

The hearers' amazement (ἐξίσταντο), stimulated by this witness from one who came to destroy, makes even more emphatic the transformation that has taken place through this series of ritual events. Indeed, as the subsequent narrative demonstrates, the transformed Saul finds no place for *reincorporation* into his former social context, for his erstwhile allies now plot to do away with him, first in Damascus and then in Jerusalem, and he is forced repeatedly to flee (Acts 9:26–30). In the rest of Acts, an ongoing lack of full *reincorporation* into the larger society outside the marginal Christian group is also suggested: in his constant journeying, and in his flouting of societally-dictated social boundaries between Jew and Gentile, male and female, citizen and slave (e.g., Acts 16:14–24).[36] This is reminiscent of Turner's contention that the experience of the rite of passage may, at times, "result in the transformation of what is essentially a liminal or extra-structural phase into a permanent condition of sacred 'outsiderhood.'"[37] Such an individual "assumes a statusless status, external to the secular social structure, which gives him the right to criticize all structure-bound personae in terms of a moral order binding on all, and also to mediate between all segments or components of the structured system."[38]

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[34] Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 157.

[35] This act of witness attests to the Spirit's presence, for it enacts the very work for which Luke-Acts portrays the Spirit being given (Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:4–8).

[36] Cf. Christian Strecker, *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus: Zugänge zur paulinischen Theologie aus kulturanthropologischer Perspecktive* (FRLANT 185; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

[37] Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 116.

[38] Ibid., 117.

Such a dramatic shift is made partially conceivable, for Lukan audiences who understood a person's future to be determined by family lineage and birth, by their own previous exposure to events of liminal passage in experience and story. This process is described by Bell as the bringing together of *bodily enactment, words,* and *sensory symbols,* to operate on the *non-dualized body/mind* in constructing a new 'social being' through "the internalization of basic schemes and values" inscribed upon the body.[39] Acts 9 evidences such a process: in Paul's *bodily* travel, falling before the light, denial of food, and watery immersion; in the *words* communicating both confrontation and hope; and in *sensory symbols* evoking light and darkness, death and new life. Lucius' initiation in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses,* likewise, involves a transformation of direction and purpose growing out of a similar series of liminal body/mind events in the creation of a *re-socialized body,* giving rise, as Bell states, to dispositions that generate their own structured and structuring practices.[40]

4. The Place of the Acts 9 Rite of Passage Account in Luke-Acts

The Acts 9 account thus appeals to a number of traditional Jewish and more widely-shared Greco-Roman ritual motifs to provide an engaging and convincing portrayal of the transformation of Paul, a transformation which underlies and elucidates the new role in which he will come to dominate the last half of the book of Acts. Such a grounding in ancient tradition gives credence to this unlikely transition from zealous persecutor to unswerving ally of Christ by anchoring it properly in ritual traditions known and respected from the hallowed past. As in the carefully laid-out series of ritual accounts in Luke-Acts as a whole and in other contemporary ritual narratives, ritualization also creates an ideal setting for a divine in-breaking which demonstrates that Paul's transformation does not come about by happenstance but is not only divinely-attended but divinely-directed from the start.

The ritualized account of Acts 9 also functions to adjust perceived relations among the larger set of characters and social structures. The original apparent power imbalance between Paul (as representative of Jesus' powerful enemies) and Ananias (as unsuspecting representative of Jesus' followers) is reversed by the subsequent portrayal of divine ritualization, which

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[39]   Catherine Bell, "The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power," *JRitSt* 4.2 (1990): 304–5.

[40]   Ibid., 304–5. Thus as Comaroff states, the body mediates all action. Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 6.

not only subverts Paul's original goal of persecuting believers, but also re-shapes alliances. For, though ostensibly set on the margins of established social structure (where ritualizing most often takes place[41]), this rite proves itself to be enacted by a truer and higher structure against which earthly structures are powerless. Thus with the baptism of Paul, it is the powerful enemies of Jesus who are left without their advocate while his friends go free and act with (unearthly) power. By this means the perceived experience of contradiction for the Lukan audience, between their current historical experience of marginality and their sub-cultural worldview of Jesus as Lord, is redefined and addressed in terms of a fundamental dichotomy of earth/heaven by means of embodied ritual action in which the audience has shared, to some degree, through baptism. A particularized sense of identity is thereby created not only for Paul, but also, secondarily, for the Lukan audience.[42] Such an appeal to traditional ritual elements generates "privi-leged contrasts," as Bell states, "between the acts being performed and those being contrasted or mimed so as to produce ... actors imbued with the dispositions to engender practices structured by such privileged con-trasts—which are perceived in turn to promote the restructuring of the lar-ger cultural milieu."[43]

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[41] Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 28.

[42] Bell, "The Ritual Body," 306–10; Comaroff, *Body of Power*, 6–9.

[43] Bell, "The Ritual Body," 304–5.

HOLY PERSONS AND HOLINESS IN COLOSSIANS

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The subject of "holiness" has not received much attention, particularly with reference to Colossians. The aim of this study is to explore the significance of the use of holiness language, echoes, and allusions in the Epistle to the Colossians. This study also seeks to establish the value of such holiness texts for the interpretation of the epistle. The word ἅγιος is examined particularly with reference to its occurrences in the Epistle to the Colossians.

Key Words: holiness, holy persons, warnings, expositions, Colossians, ἅγιος

1. Introduction

The focus of scholarly investigation on the Epistle to the Colossians has been on task of unmasking the "heresy" that the author had in view, as a result this subject has occupied the center of numerous discussions on the epistle.[1] However, there are other related interpretational issues within the epistle that invite the attention of biblical scholars. For example, the use of the word ἅγιος in Colossians may promise a fertile ground for investigation and open possibilities for interpretation that deserve attention.[2] There is a

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[1] There are numerous views that have been proposed. For the summary of the arguments see Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy* (JSNTSup 96; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). Compare also Christian Stettler, "The Opponents at Colossae," in *Paul and His Opponents* (ed. Stanley Porter; Pauline Studies 2; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 170, who states that "scholarship is still far from a consensus about the character of the Colossian 'heresy.'" It must be noted that not all scholars accept the notion that there is reference to heresy in Colossians. See Morna D. Hooker, "Were there False Teachers in Colossae?" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: In Honour of C. F. D. Moule* (ed. B. Lindars and S. Smalley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 315–31.

[2] A study on ἅγιος in Colossians may contribute to the ongoing discussions on Colossians. One possibility that seems to suggest an emphasis on the word ἅγιος in Colossians is a comparison with other epistles, for example, Galatians. None of the forms of the word ἅγιος is used in Galatians. What makes this point even more significant is the fact that both epistles deal with opponents. In Galatians the author is rebuking the addressees who have been persuaded by μή τινές "certain persons" (1:6–7) and in Colossians the author is giving a warning in chapter 2 against μή τις "anyone" (2:4, 8, 16, 18).

growing interest on the subject of "holiness" among biblical scholars, after decades of a lack of serious attention given to the subject particularly in New Testament studies.[3] Among those who have discussed this subject in past decades, the lack of consensus is still glaring.[4] No serious attention has been given to the meaning of ἅγιος in the epistle to the Colossians. This study explores the importance of ἅγιος and related holiness texts within the context of the epistle to the Colossians. The issues of background and authorship are adequately dealt with in the work of James Dunn.[5] Therefore there will be no need to touch on these issues for the purposes of this study.[6]

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[3] This is evidenced in a dissertation by Jay Kim and an article by Sharon Ringe which have a clear focus on the subject of holiness in the New Testament. Kim observes that there is a vast array of literature on the theology of Paul, while recognizing that very few scholars have seen the need to give attention to Paul's concept of holiness. Cf. Jay J. Kim, "The Concept of Holiness in the Pauline Epistles" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004); Sharon H. Ringe "Holy, as the Lord Your God Commanded You: Sabbath in the New Testament," *Int* 59.1 (2005): 17. Ringe discusses the issue of Sabbath observance and points out that the observance of the Sabbath by the Jews in the Old Testament reflected the observance of divine holiness, but in the New Testament the command of Sabbath observance is expanded to encompass all of life. The Sabbath rather than a matter of ritual is planted at the heart of the gospel message. Her article touches on matters of holiness and ritual, but is only limited to the Gospels although the title promises to cover the entire New Testament. A good example of another oversight is the work of James Dunn who has written 808 pages on the theology of Paul but has nothing on Paul's concept of holiness. See James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). A more recent publication on the subject edited by Brower and Johnson makes further progress than the already discussed publications. It covers holiness in the Gospels, Acts, Pauline epistles (both disputed and undisputed), Petrine epistles, Jude, and Revelation. However, there is no particular treatment of holiness in Colossians in this important work. See Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson, *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[4] Harrington sums up the various views on holiness into four categories: moral, social, religious experience and a state of being outside of the norm. See Hannah K. Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[5] The authorship of the epistle to the Colossians has been debated recently after a long traditional view that has been held that it was Pauline. There are still many scholars who accept the traditional view that the author is Paul. The most convincing argument is its link with the epistle to Philemon which is a generally accepted Pauline epistle. Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 38.

[6] It suffices to provide an outline of the letter:
    1:1–2   Greetings
    1:3–14   Prayer and Thanksgiving
    1:15–23   Exalting Christ and the ministry of reconciliation
    1:24–29   Paul's ministry

2. Lexical Analysis of ἅγιος

2.1. The Use of ἅγιος in the LXX

In the Septuagint of the Pentateuch the word ἅγιος generally means "holy" or "sacred."[7] The word is used with reference to people and things.[8] The use of the word with reference to people is relevant for this paper because of its usage in Colossians. In the writings of the prophets the word is used with reference to God, people and things. Holy people are dedicated to God.[9] In a narrow sense this lexical information gives an indication of the semantic range of the word under consideration. An examination of the NT usage reveals a similar trend of usage.

2.2. The Use of ἅγιος in the New Testament

In the New Testament the word ἅγιος is used in a cultic sense to refer to someone or something that is dedicated to God and his service. It may also have a nuance of something or someone pure, perfect or worthy of God. The word may also be used as a substantive to refer to that which is holy: God, angels or believers.[10]

The forms of ἅγιος that are found in Colossians appear in the NT with the following numbers of occurrences: ἁγίοις (19x); ἁγίους (12x); ἁγίων (34x); ἅγιοι (6x). A majority of versions are consistent in the way they translate the word-forms listed above. Due to lack of space only the following versions were examined: American Standard Version (ASV); English Standard Version (ESV); King James Version (KJV); New American Standard Bible (NAU); New International Version (NIV); New Jerusalem Bible (NJB); and Young's Literal Translation (YLT).

2:1–3	Purpose of writing
2:4–19	Body of the letter Part I: Warnings
2:20–4:6	Body of the letter Part II: Exhortations
4:7–18	Epilogue and final Greetings

This is a suggested structure that seeks to recognize parts of the epistle within its genre type.

[7] Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, Chiefly of the Pentateuch and the Twelve Prophets* (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 4.

[8] See Exod 22:31; Lev 19:2 and Deut 7:6.

[9] See Hos 11:12; Am 4:2; Zech 14:5. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 3.

[10] *BAGD* 10. See sanctuary, Heb 8:2; 9:24; angels, 1 John 2:20; Rev 3:7; 1 Thess 3:13; believers, Acts 9:13, 32; Rom 8:27.

It may be observed that of the 19 times that ἁγίοις appears in the NT all the above versions translate the word to mean "saints." In all these references it is in the introduction section of an epistle that this translation is given. If this translation is correct it may call to question the understanding that the use of this word was formulaic.

The form ἁγιους appears 12 times in the NT and except for Eph 1:4 it is always translated "saints." In the case of Eph 1:4 all the versions cited above translate the word to mean holy. The entire phrase is rendered "be holy and without blemish."

Another variation may be observed with the form ἁγίων which appears 34 times. The form takes the nuance of "saints" except in Heb 8:2; 9:8; 10:19 where the reference is clearly to the sanctuary.

A comparison done on the form ἅγιοι, appearing 6 times in the NT, reveals that all versions translate the word to mean "saints." Other variations are consistent in all versions, 1 Peter 1:15 "be ye holy," and Heb 3:1 "holy brothers."

What should be underscored from the above findings is the importance of focusing on the context in which words are found for purposes of interpretation. We now look at the various forms within the context of the Epistle to the Colossians.

2.3. The Use of ἅγιος in Colossians

The term ἅγιος appears six times in the epistle to the Colossians in four adjectival forms: (a) ἁγίοις (1:2, 26); (b) ἁγιους (1:4, 22); (c) ἁγίων (1:12); and (d) ἅγιοι (3:12).

It may be noted that the word ἅγιος appears five times in the first chapter. It appears once in the third chapter and makes no appearance in both the second and the fourth chapters. The author first addresses the recipients as holy persons (vv. 2, 4), which may be seen as a conventional address in a greeting formula, from a casual reading of the text.[11] According to Moule

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[11] According to James Dunn, addressing the first readers as saints, was a common Pauline feature appearing in his salutations (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Eph 1:1; also Col 1:2; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1 [without reference to the church]). While Dunn views the reference in Colossians as a formulaic feature he adds that this was historically a Jewish designation. Paul uses it to also include Gentiles who have been incorporated into Israel by baptism and not circumcision. See James Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48. What Dunn claims as an inference, namely the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God, may be substantiated from the text (cf. Col 1:12, 21, 22). Charles D. Moule on the other hand argues for an adjectival form of ἅγιος in Col 1:2. He claims that "to treat τοῖς ἁγίοις as a noun, 'the members of God's people,' and the rest as descriptive,

the Greek grammatical structure of the sentence in Col 1:2 does not seem to support the substantival form of ἅγιος translated "saints," which is found in greeting formulae of other epistles.[12] In this occurrence one rather finds the adjectival form translated "holy brothers." The next occurrence seems to suggest that the addressees have been qualified ἱκανώσαντι "by the Father to share in the inheritance of the holy persons" (v. 12 [my own translation]).[13] This is followed by another reference that indicates how they were qualified: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (vv. 21, 22 [NIV]).[14] The word ἀνεγκλήτους seems to resonate thematically with κρινέτω "judge, pass judgment on, or condemn" (2:16),[15] where reference is made to holy institutions.[16] The reference to holiness found in Col 1:26 seems to be uniformly

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would probably require the repetition of the article." Moule further observes that the formula ἐν Χριστῷ (Col 1:2) is used by Paul to depict the Christians as incorporated in Christ and joined to the body to which they belong. See Charles D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 45. The claims that Moule makes are based on the text. Many commentaries and scholars seem to follow the Pauline traditional greeting and translate the word ἅγιος in Col 1:2 as a substantive. On the other hand there is also support for Moule's view. For example, the NIV translates ἅγιος in Col 1:2 adjectivally as "holy and faithful brothers." An observation made regarding other Pauline writings reveals that in "the major letters which are generally recognized as authentic (Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, Gal, 1 Thess and Phil), all the formulae are subtly different: Paul does not repeat the same form mechanically every time." R. Wilson McLachlan, *Colossians and Philemon* (ICC; London: T & T Clark, 2005), 65. In Col 1:4 the reference is clearly substantival, an understanding which is generally not contested.

12 Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 45.

13 The aorist tense suggests a completed action; therefore their qualification has been achieved by God. "The saints have, in effect, already been granted entrance into the kingdom, since they are 'in Christ'..." Robert W. Wall, *Colossians & Philemon* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 55. It has been suggested that the "holy ones" here could refer to angels. However, the context seems to support the notion that the believers are in view here. See Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 76–77. Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Sacra Pagina 17; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 50, supports the view of angels being referred to in Col 1:12, although she admits that it is not an easy matter to decide.

14 It has been suggested that the repetition of the word καί suggests three distinct descriptions. Compare Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 59. This may suggest an effort on the part of the author to highlight holiness.

15 Holy institutions are mentioned in this passage: eating and drinking, a religious festival, a new moon and a Sabbath day. Cf. Exod 23; Num 28 and 29.

16 These observations need further in-depth study, especially with reference to 2:16.

translated as "saints" by most translations, or "holy ones" (NAB) and "holy people" (NJB). Murray Harris identifies several possibilities for the interpretation of ἅγιος in Col 1:26: holy apostles and prophets (Eph 3:5), gentiles (Col 1:27b) or all believers (Col 1:2; 3:12). For Harris the latter is more probable, and agreeably, it is also supported by the context within the theme of holiness.[17] The last explicit ἅγιος reference in Col 3:12 is considered as adjectival clustered with ἠγαπημένοι in the same verse to demonstrate God's view of the believers. Therefore, the references to ἅγιος in Colossians deserve more than a casual look.

The concentration of "holiness" terminology in Colossians needs more than a casual treatment that has been given in many commentaries. This leads to a pertinent question: is there any evidence beyond the use of the specific terminology within the Epistle to the Colossians that points to the holiness theme?

3. The Holiness Theme in Colossians

The occurrences of the word ἅγιος in Colossians have been noted briefly in the foregoing discussion, now a more elaborate discussion of selected references follows. In Col 1:22 ἅγιος is couched in ritual language. There is a reference to the physical death of Christ as a means of holiness.[18] It is in this section that the holiness theme seems to resonate with the theme of the entire epistle, i.e., being "in Christ." The section comes after the christological hymn (Col 1:15–20).[19] In v. 21 there is a change of subject from Christ in the third person to the first readers in the second person. The word ποτε suggests a situation that prevailed before. The addressees have previously been alienated (ἀπηλλοτριωμένους) and were considered enemies (ἐχθροὺς) which was evidenced by their evil deeds (ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς). The pre-

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17 Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 69.

18 The word παραστῆσαι (Col 1:22) is used once in the gospels, twice in Acts and four times in the Pauline epistles. In Luke 2:22 (cf. Exod 13:2, 12) it is used with reference to the dedication of the first born son as holy to the Lord. Rom 12:1 also uses ritual language with παραστῆσαι, followed by an exhortation not to conform to the pattern of the world (see Col 3:1–3). 2 Cor 11:2 uses the word παραστῆσαι in the context of a conflict with the false apostles (similar to Col 2:4–23), while 2 Tim 2:15 makes reference to Paul's exhortation to Timothy to present himself as one approved. This is also in the context of a confrontation with false teachers (see v. 16 and holiness language appears in v. 21). The reference to the death of Christ in Col 1:22 is also discussed in Col 1:20, 24; 2:12–15, 20.

19 See Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 83; and more recently Matthew E. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions* (WUNT II/228; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

sent reality is introduced by the adversative conjunction δέ "but" and the adverb νυνί "now." The subject in v. 22 is not explicit. There are two possibilities for the antecedent, i.e., Christ or God the Father as the subject of the main verb. Both nouns are masculine singular; so the verb ἀποκατήλλαξεν "he reconciled" could go with either of them. From the context it may be observed that in v. 3 of this section, thanks is given to God; God's grace and truth are highlighted in v. 6; growing in the knowledge of God explicitly makes reference to God the Father; and again in v. 12 thanks is given to God, and this is another holiness passage where God is depicted as the one who qualifies the believers. Therefore the context seems to point to God as the one who reconciles those who were formerly alienated and enemies. This is achieved through the death of Jesus Christ. The purpose is to present (παραστῆσαι) the believers holy and blameless, and without reproach in his presence (ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ).[20]

There are also some allusions and echoes that point to the theme of holiness in the Epistle to the Colossians. It has already been noted that Col 1:22 uses ritual language with the specific key words.[21] The holiness theme extends further through these echoes and allusions to Col 2.[22] The argument of chapter two seems to form a chiastic structure (Col 2:4–19).[23] The parallels

[20] See also 2 Cor 5:18–19 and Heb 2:17 where God is the initiator of reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

[21] Relevant terminology includes θανάτου "death," παραστῆσαι "present," ἁγίους "holy," ἀμώμους "blameless," and ἀνεγκλήτους "above reproach." See also Col 1:20 where a reference is made to εἰρηνοποιήσας "making peace" and αἵματος "blood."

[22] Terminology suggesting holiness language include περιετμήθητε "you were circumcised" (2:11, 13; the word appears four times in these two verses, cf. 3:11); δόγμασιν "ordinance" (2:14); βρώσει ... πόσει "eating and drinking," μέρει ἑορτῆς "a festival," νεομηνίας "new moon," σαββάτων "Sabbath days" (2:16); θρησκείᾳ "worship," and ἀγγέλων "angels" (2:18). Klingbeil makes reference to "celebration of sabbaths or other holidays" (Col 2:16) in his discussion of ritual in the New Testament. He also observes that "ritual serves as an underlying connector between Old and New Testaments." See Gerald A. Klingbeil, "'Empty Forms or Vital Teacher?' The Role of Ritual in Spiritual Growth and Nurturing," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9 (2006): 166. The cluster of ritual elements in Col 2:16 may also reflect this link with the Old Testament, see also Richard Lemmer, "Why Should The Possibility of Rabbinic Rhetorical Elements in Pauline Writings (e.g., Galatians) Be Reconsidered?," in *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 131; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 161.

[23] There are some scholars who have identified chiasms in this section. For example, Ian Thomson, "Colossians 2:6–19: A Key Passage in a Complex Letter," in *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; JSNTSup 111; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 156. Admittedly, the complexity of the discussion in this passage is also reflected in the complexity that attends the formulation of its structure. In his chiasm Thomson leaves out the first warning. Thomson, "Colossians 2:6–19," 154, makes a relevant point that "chiasmus provides the skeletal framework of a passage, rather

displayed in this study follow a focus on the passage that has been recognized by scholars as the key issue in the chapter or the whole book, namely the focus on the philosophy and the philosophers.

    A μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς (2:4)

        B μή τις ὑμᾶς (2:8)

        B′ Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς (2:16)

    A′ μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς (2:18)

3.1. The Chiastic Structure of Colossians 2 with Reference to Holiness

In the outer parallel units of the structure A (2:4–7) and A′ (2:18–19) it is A′ that has the holiness allusions, and in the inner parallel units B (2:8–15) and B′ (2:16, 17), B′ has institutions of holiness and ritual echoes. The structure also brings out the clusters of philosophies that are divided according to the phrases repeated and paralleled as shown above. They are also clustered according to the content.[24] Figure 1 below reflects how the philosophies relate to the theme "in Christ."

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than a complete description of all its exegetical nuances and links." He also admits that "there are other verbal parallels here that do not fit within the chiastic framework" (ibid). The following section (i.e., Col 2:20–3:4) has been identified by J. P. Louw, "Reading a Text as Discourse," in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. David Alan Black; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 27, as a chiasm.

[24]   Smith observes that there are sections identified by key phrases in 2:8, 14, 16, 18, and from these sections there are themes that may be identified. Ian K. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle Paul's Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae* (Library of Biblical Studies; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 134. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 85, 117, also recognizes some structure that clusters these warnings, although he makes no mention of a chiasm.
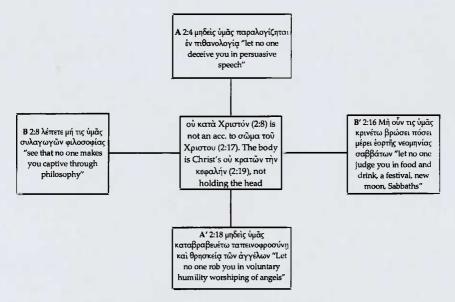
A 2:4 μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ "let no one deceive you in persuasive speech"

B 2:8 λέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς συλαγωγῶν φιλοσοφίας "see that no one makes you captive through philosophy"

οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν (2:8) is not an acc. to σῶμα τοῦ Χριστου (2:17). The body is Christ's οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλήν (2:19), not holding the head

B' 2:16 Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω βρώσει πόσει μέρει ἑορτῆς νεομηνίας σαββάτων "let no one judge you in food and drink, a festival, new moon, Sabbaths"

A' 2:18 μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβευέτω ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων "Let no one rob you in voluntary humility worshiping of angels"

Figure 1: Holiness Allusions in the Context of Col 2

A close examination of the clusters may reveal that in A (2:4–7) there are elements of deception against which the recipients are warned.[25] The next cluster B (2:8) with the explicit reference to philosophy seems to focus on anthropocentric philosophical ideas. The repetitive phrase of the cluster μή τις ὑμᾶς (2:8) seems to suggest a different focus from the previous cluster (A). The emphasis given in Col 2:8, οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν, harmonizes with the description given in this cluster. The clusters in A and B do not contain any holiness clues. The next cluster B' (2:16) is introduced by the phrase μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς (2:16). In this cluster James Dunn argues for a Jewish background and all the elements are Jewish elements.[26] Cluster A' is also introduced by the phrase

[25] A pre-Gnostic syncretism may be in view here, see Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 27.

[26] The position that Dunn takes does not stand without opposition. Donelson claims that "Colossians 2:16 sounds like a nice summary of the law, although it could refer to Greek or Roman religious regulations as well." Lewis R. Donelson, *Colossians, Ephesians, First and Second Timothy, and Titus* (WBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 40. McLachlan, *Colossians and Philemon*, 217, states with reference to Dunn's claims: "He [Dunn] has to admit, however, that both ἑορτή and νεομηνία are somewhat less favourable to his position: festivals of various kinds, including that of the new moon, were observed by Gentiles as well as by Jews. When we recall that the evidence for the presence of Jews in Colossae is comparatively slight... it would seem advisable not to lay too much emphasis on the Jewish character of the false teaching, although there is undeniably a distinct Jewish element."

μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς (2:18). The elements clustered here are: ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων. There is a debate as to whether the last phrase should be taken as an objective or as a subjective genitive. When one considers this as a deviation or excess according to the context it may be regarded as an objective genitive.[27]

3.2. Holiness Allusions and Some Syntactic Observations on Colossians 2

The fact that the warning is against the philosophers, is buttressed by the indefinite nominative pronouns μηδεὶς in A and A' and τις in B and B'. The focus here is clearly not only on the philosophy or the content of their teaching but also on the persons. This signified a real threat to the Colossian believers. While the characteristics of the teachings described in Col 2 may not be adequate for the purposes of fully identifying the philosophy or teaching, they do, however, give enough indication as to why the Colossians need to be warned against these philosophers.

The characteristics given not only categorize the persons but also their teachings. In A and A' above, two words used also tie up the content of the teachings παραλογίζηται (2:4) and καταβραβευέτω (2:18), meaning to deceive and cheat respectively. Col 2:4 has reference to attractive but false arguments or persuasive speech. The warning is followed by an exposition (2:5–7) introduced by the conjunctions εἰ γὰρ (v. 5). Col 2:18 is another warning followed by an exposition (2:20–23) introduced by the conjunction εἰ (v. 20). The warning has reference to false humility and worship of angels. The phrase εἰκῇ φυσιούμενος (2:18) may mean "vainly arrogant." The Colossians were in danger of being deceived by the philosophers whose characteristics are summed up in 2:4 and 2:18–23.

In B and B' above there are warnings against persons who adhere to teachings and institutions apart from Christ. In B their philosophy is characterized by κενῆς ἀπάτης "vain deceit," παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων "tradition of men," στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου "elementary principles of the world," and. they do not adhere to Christ (2:8). Holiness in Col 1 is centered on Christ (1:22). Therefore, in Col 2 the holy persons are warned against holiness apart from Christ (2:8). This warning is followed by a long exposition (2:9–15) introduced by the conjunction ὅτι (v. 9). There may have been those who pursued holiness by adhering only to outward form of religion, food and drink, festival new moon Sabbath days (2:16). Without Christ these institutions are meaningless (2:17). The warning is followed by a brief phrase σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ introduced by another conjunction δέ (2:17). Holiness in

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[27]   Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 121.

Col 2:4–19 therefore is not explicit as a theme, but the section carries the theme across by clear references to institutions of holiness (Col 2:16), as well as to worship and angels (Col 2:18). Col 2 warns against deviant forms of holiness that are not according to Christ (2:8, 17, 19).

3.3. The Theme of Holiness in Col 3

This chapter is preceded by Col 2:20–3:4, a section that is divided into two subsections, i.e., Col 2:20–23 and Col 3:1–4. Each of these subsections begins with the conjunction εἰ. In both sections there is a conditional sentence with a protasis and an apodosis. The first conditional sentence puts as a condition dying with Christ. It seems that this has already been established as a fact (Col 2:12).[28] In Col 2:20 there is a question in the apodosis with the verb δογματίζεσθε.[29] When one examines the following question within the context of the epistle, "Why do you submit to the rules as though you are in the world?" (Col 2:20), these rules may be seen as alternate means or supplementary means of holiness because they are apart from Christ. The point here is that you are in Christ now therefore no other rules of holiness apart from Christ should dictate the pattern of your life.[30] The second conditional sentence (Col 3:1–4) focuses on the resurrection as the central idea. In this case the protasis is followed by an apodosis that has an imperative ζητεῖτε (Col 3:1). This introduces the discussion of ch. 3 in which the believers are reminded of their status in Christ: ὡς ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιοι (Col 3:12). This reminder is followed by a series of imperatives intended to exhort the believers on how to pattern their lives in Christ.[31] So ch. 1 is an affirmation of the status of holiness in Christ. Chapter two alludes to other forms of holiness concerning which the Christians are warned not to conform with. Colossians 3 seems to point to moral holiness as part of the "holiness" theme.[32]

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[28] Dying with Christ implies that they are now reconciled to God through the death of Christ and are made holy, blameless, and free from accusation (Col 1:20, 22).

[29] This notion is expressed by James Dunn, observing that "for the first time a note of appeal seems to enter (as distinct from a warning or instruction)." Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 188. I fully agree with Dunn on the transition from v. 20. He adds, "and for the first time the suggestion is made that (many/some? of) the Colossian Gentile believers were finding, or beginning to find, the teaching of the Colossian Jews attractive and were (in danger of) being drawn into their practices."

[30] F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 124.

[31] See Col 3:5, 8, 12, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23.

[32] Some commentaries have expressed a disjointed view of the sections of the epistle to the Colossians. For example, Barclay in his commentary asks the question, "Is the material in ch. 1, for instance a quite innocent exposition of the gospel and the cosmic role

This chapter lists vices and virtues as demonstrated in Figure 2. The list of vices is complemented by a list portraying the old nature that must be put to death.[33]
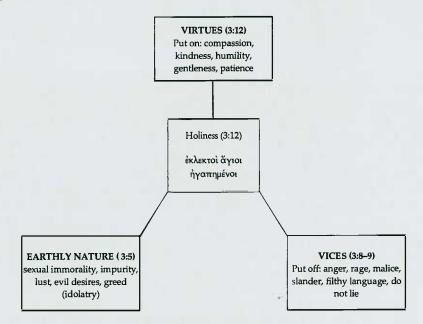

VIRTUES (3:12)
Put on: compassion,
kindness, humility,
gentleness, patience

Holiness (3:12)

ἐκλεκτοὶ ἅγιοι
ἠγαπημένοι

EARTHLY NATURE (3:5)
sexual immorality, impurity,
lust, evil desires, greed
(idolatry)

VICES (3:8–9)
Put off: anger, rage, malice,
slander, filthy language, do
not lie

Figure 2: Holiness in the Context of Colossians 3

4. Linguistic Considerations for the Use of ἅγιος in Colossians

The word ἅγιος according to the Septuagint lexicon is rendered "holy" or "sacred."[34] The Patristic lexicon exhibits the following meaning for the word ἅγιος: "separated" or "holy."[35] In examining the meaning and use of the

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of Christ, or is it designed to stockpile the theological weapons necessary for the attack in ch. 2?" (John M. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon* [London: T & T Clark, 2004], 37). He then proceeds to affirm the latter position. In the same vein, Barclay argues that it is less clear how the material in Col 3 and 4 relates to the battle played out in Col 2. Commenting on ch. 3 Wall states: "The moral result of salvation in the life of God's people is holiness. The catalogue of traditional virtues illustrates the character of holiness that grace creates in us…" Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, 145, 146.

33   Cf. Eph 4:22, 24, 31, 32.

34   Muaraoka, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 3.

35   Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 18. The word could refer to: (1) God as the essence and source of holiness; (2) the church, its worship and Scripture; (3) the worshipers of the true God, both in

word ἅγιος it may be important to recognize its wider use, namely, that it may refer to God, persons or things.[36]

The meaning of ἅγιος in Colossians signifies persons being chosen, and dedicated to God.[37] The use of the word ἅγιος in Colossians therefore points to an emphasis on the holiness of persons. Covenant language is also used to express the meaning of this status.[38] Expressed this way, holiness in Colossians goes beyond mere adherence to a set of rules.[39] The rules of holiness the Colossians are urged to follow must be within the ambit of that covenantal relationship. To clear any misconceptions, this life of holiness (3:12) is couched in a series of exhortations that are relevant to the situation facing the Colossian believers (3:5–4:6).

5. Theology and Holiness in Colossians

The main theological theme in Colossians is the exaltation of Christ as portrayed in Colossians 1:15–20.[40] At the heart of the hymn (Col 1:15–20) there is a frequency of reference to creation and reconciliation through Christ.[41] The theological connection that links the hymn to the theme of holiness is described by Lincoln and Wedderburn: "Thus, while the hymn is in essence truly universal in scope, the concerns of the author of the letter narrow this scope down and focus upon the reconciliation of human beings accom-

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heaven (i.e., the angels and the faithful departed) and on earth (i.e., the faithful in general).

[36] See *BDAG* 10–11. The study of the semantic range of ἅγιος is important for understanding its meaning. See Susan Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2003), 115. Even beyond the words, phrases, and grammar there is room for further explorations of linguistic links. See David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphors, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism 4; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 7. This study has attempted to demonstrate how "holiness" fits in the broader context of the letter. More can be done in the area of linguistics in order to elucidate meaning.

[37] See Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians* (AB 34B; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 186. There is an ongoing debate concerning Col 1:12 whether it refers to saints or angels. According to Barth and Blanke the context does not support the notion of angels as referents in Col 1:12. However, Dunn makes reference to Col 2:18 as a possible link to similar phrases in the Qumran literature. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 76; cf. Wis 5:5 and 1QS 11:7–8. Moreover, Dunn himself perceives this view as untenable.

[38] Col 2:11; 3:12; cf. Exod 19:5, 6; 1 Pet 2:9; Jer 31:33; see also Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 122.

[39] See Col 2:20–23; cf. Gal 4:8–11.

[40] Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

[41] See Col 1:16, 18, 20.

plished in Christ."[42] It is this work of reconciliation that offers a new status of holiness to the previously alienated (1:22). The hymn depicts cosmic powers (1:16) and the church (1:18). The cosmic powers are disarmed (2:15) by Christ in his conquest against them. But this comes later in the picture. The emphasis seems to be on the reconciliation of the human race to God in order to restore them to the state of holiness (1:22).[43] There is therefore a resounding resonance between the theological heart-beat of Colossians (1:15–20) and the theme of holiness in Colossians.

6. Conclusion

The references to holy persons, holiness allusions and echoes are embedded in the very fabric of the epistle's message and theology. Rather than forming a theme of their own the holiness texts are used to further develop the theme of the epistle "in Christ." The believers are holy only *in* Christ and *through* him. The believers are warned against philosophies or any other means of holiness outside of Christ.

The frequent use of the adjectival form of the word ἅγιος in Col 1 is significant for the interpretation of Colossians. It sets the tone within the context of the theme "in Christ" for the next chapter where the warning is given against philosophers who have a different view of holiness resulting in a distorted view of Christ. Col 1 has an introductory greeting (1:1, 2) in which the saints are addressed as holy ones (v. 2) and an extended thanksgiving section(1:3–14) in which the corporate view of the holy ones is given (v. 4) and the believers' qualification for sharing in the inheritance of the saints (v. 12) is mentioned. Christ's supremacy is highlighted in Col 1:15–20. The former life of the Colossians is depicted as a life of alienation from God (Col 1:21). "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col 1:22, NIV). The mystery of Christ is revealed to the holy ones (1:26). The word ἅγιος sets the stage for the warnings in ch. 2, and the exhortations in ch. 3. This may explain the purpose of the extended introductory section of the letter.

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[42] Lincoln and Wedderburn, *New Testament Theology*, 40.
[43] Ibid., 48.

HISTORICISM: THE ADVENTIST APPROACH? A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES TO HISTORICISM[1]

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The purpose of this article is to respond to various challenges against the historicist approach to the book of Revelation. After presenting debates among scholars, including Adventist scholars, concerning the historicist approach, this study proposes an approach that is based on the original readers' perspective as they read the Apocalypse. Rev 1:19, 4:1, and 21:6 establish the sectional division of the book: from ἃ εἰσὶν "things which are" (1:19), through ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι "things that must take place" (4:1), until γέγοναν "they have taken place" (21:6). This suggests that the Apocalypse itself calls for historicism.

Key Words: hermeneutics, Revelation, Historicism (the historicist approach), original readers

1. Introduction

Among the four interpretive approaches to the book of Revelation,[2] the historicist approach has been challenged.[3] Scholars have tried to show its

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[1]   The term *historicism* is understood as the historicist approach in comparison to the other approaches to the book of Revelation, namely, the preterist, the futurist, and the idealist approaches, and not understood as historicism from the perspective of the historical-critical method used, for example, in S. S. Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006). The present study has been presented in the Apocalyptic Literature section of the International Society of Biblical Literature congress, held at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, on July 11, 2008. I would like to recognize the valuable interaction with international scholars following the presentation as well as the helpful comments of the two unknown reviewers of the *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* international review board that have helped to shape the final draft of this study.

[2]   For a brief review of the four approaches to the book of Revelation, see Joel N. Musvosvi, "The Issue of Genre and Apocalypse Prophecy," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 5 (2002): 43–60. See also Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (rev. ed; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21–30; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 18–22; Gerhard F. Hasel, "Israel in Bible Prophecy," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 3.1 (1992): 123.

[3]   Other approaches have existed as responses to this approach. Cf. Musvosvi, "The Issue of Genre and Apocalypse Prophecy," 49–50.

weaknesses.[4] Furthermore, the historicist approach seems to be excluded in the attempts of scholars to blend interpretive approaches to the book of Revelation.[5] This approach is claimed as "clearly not in vogue."[6] This raises the question for the interpreter: Is the historicist approach still relevant in interpreting the biblical Apocalypse?[7]

The purpose of this study is to present some attempts made by Adventist scholars to respond to various challenges against the historicist approach to the book of Revelation, since Seventh-day Adventists have been branded advocates of historicism.[8] Finally, this article will propose an approach to the book of Revelation based on some literary indicators found in the book itself.

[4]   Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (New International Version Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 27, for example, argues that "the links between Revelation's contents and history's events always have proved forced." Osborne, *Revelation*, 19, points out, what he considers, the weakness of the historicist approach, including "… its identification only with Western church history, the inherent speculation involved in the parallels with world history, the fact that it must be reworked with each new period in world history, the total absence of any relevance for John or his original readers."

[5]   Keener, *Revelation*, 27, calls it the "eclectic (mixed) approach." George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 14, tries to blend the preterist and the futurist methods. As a result, he concludes that Revelation has a double application, namely, to its contemporary readership and to the modern church. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 29, makes a contrast between future prediction and timeless truth. He claims that the author of Revelation "was more concerned with his reader's faithful service to God than with the specific sequence of events that would transpire in the end times." As a result, Koester sees Revelation not as a review of history but as cycles of visions whose chronological sequence is not clear. The most important thing in the book is the message of "encouragement designed to promote faithful endurance." Ibid. Osborne, *Revelation*, 21, suggests that the solution for a better approach "is to allow the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to interact in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized."

[6]   Steve Gregg, *Revelation Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Tomas Nelson, 1997), 34.

[7]   Hasel, "Israel in Bible Prophecy," 125, recognizes a challenge by futurism that is "knocking at our door, the door of historicism, urging to be received. Its aim is to modify, challenge, and, if possible, to replace the historicist method of prophetic interpretation which has so profoundly shaped Christianity at large and Protestantism in the last centuries." Challenge to the historicist approach is not a new issue. In 1958, in response to LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1950), Roy L. Aldrich accused Froom as trying "to create the impression that the historical stream of orthodox prophetic interpretation culminates in Seventh-day Adventism." Roy L. Aldrich, "Can the End of the Age Be Computed by the Year-Day Theory?," *BSac* 115 (1958): 159.

[8]   Gregg, *Revelation Four Views*, 34.

2. Attempts Made to Answer Challenges Against the Historicist Approach

Historicist scholars are not silent in facing the challenges against the historicist approach.[9] Alberto R. Timm, for example, seems to suggest that Rev 2 and 3 may be interpreted from the historicist perspective,[10] a view that is opposed by Jon Paulien, another Adventist scholar.[11] Timm introduces the "year-day principle" that he considers as "a basic hermeneutical component of the historicist school of prophetic interpretation."[12]

In his conclusions, Timm opts that the time "ten days" of Rev 2:10 is part of the miniature symbolization of the church in Smyrna. For that reason, he argues that the church in Smyrna is a miniature symbol of the Christian church between A.D. 100 and A.D. 313. Therefore, Rev 2 and 3 should be interpreted in the historicist perspective.[13] However, Timm's condition-based argument needs further development.[14]

Ranko Stefanovic seems to suggest applying the historicist approach only to certain passages of the Apocalypse. In stating the method used for his commentary on Revelation, Stefanovic impresses a neutral position: "A good commentary on Revelation does not favor any particular one of the traditional approaches."[15] Further he argues:

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9   By historicist scholars I mean biblical scholars who apply the historicist approach to either the whole book of Revelation or even only to certain passages of it. I will focus on the responses of Seventh-day Adventist scholars, one of the "remaining bastions" of historicism. Cf. Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part Two," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17.1 (2006): 180.

10   Alberto R. Timm, "Miniature Symbolization and the Year-Day Principle of Prophetic Interpretation," *AUSS* 42 (2004): 149–67.

11   Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic–Part One," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14.2 (2003): 20.

12   Timm, "Miniature Symbolization," 149.

13   Ibid., 167. By putting the church in Smyrna in the Christian church historical line, Timm sees the seven churches in progressive line of church history.

14   "... *if* the 'church of Smyrna' is considered just as a reference to the first-century Christian community of that specific town, *then* the 'ten days' would have been taken just as a literal ten days. But *if* that church is understood as a miniature symbol of the Christian church between about the close of the 1st century c. A.D. 100 and about A.D. 313, when Constantine espoused the cause of the church, *then* the 'ten days' should also be considered as a miniature symbol of longer period, most probably ten literal years" [italics added]. Ibid., 161.

15   Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 11.

If the message of the studied text was primarily for John's day, then it calls for the preterist or idealist approach. On the other hand, if it discusses the very end times, then its interpretation calls for a futurist approach. If the studied text presents the events occurring throughout the course of history, however, a sound interpretation calls for a historicist approach to the text.[16]

However, Stefanovic does not provide guidelines as to how to determine whether a passage belongs to John's day, or to end times, or to the course of history. Although Stefanovic's approach seems to give place to all four approaches, in the section on Rev 2 and 3 of his commentary Stefanovic includes a summary of Christian periods represented by the seven churches.[17] This implies a historicist perspective.

Edwin Reynolds proposes that "only a balanced approach to the interpretation of the book, keeping in mind the true object of the revelation, will yield satisfactory results."[18] By a balanced approach he means: (1) each vision of Revelation has a personal message to the original audience; (2) each vision should be understood within the historical context; (3) each vision has personal present fulfillment; (4) what lies ahead is promise to those who make right decisions in the present.[19]

Although this approach seems to be related to all the four approaches: preterism, historicism, idealism, and futurism,[20] Reynolds's emphasis is predominantly on the historicist approach. He understands that, within the perspective of the historical context, each vision of Revelation portrays historical events but at the same time contains a personal message for the reader, especially within the Christian experience. In this case historical application of events is different from a personal message for any individual at any given time.[21] Pertaining to the seven churches, Reynolds argues, "The

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[16] Ibid., 12. He calls his approach, "the approach of letting the text govern the interpretation." Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 117–51.

[18] Edwin Reynolds, "Ten Keys for Interpreting Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 275.

[19] Ibid., 275–76.

[20] The four components of Reynolds's balanced approach are matched to the four approaches to Revelation: (1) each vision of Revelation has a personal message to the original audience (preterism); (2) each vision should be understood within the historical context (historicism); (3) each vision has personal present application (idealism); (4) what lies ahead is promise to those who make right decisions in the present (futurism).

[21] Ibid., 276.

seven churches represent the complete cross-section of the church in every age [...]."[22] This is a historicist understanding.

Reynolds's proposal may be understood from the point of view of an interpreter living in the twenty-first century, who has data of historical events that are considered as fulfillments of some visions of Revelation. Some events portrayed in the visions that were future from the perspective of the first century readers have now become history and past from the perspective of the twenty-first century readers. If the historicist approach is relevant for the modern readers, it must also be relevant for the original audience. However, from the perspective of the original audience of Revelation, what they had—the text before them—was about their present and future. They could not base their historicist understanding on past events. The clue that might direct them to the historicist approach was the text before them. Therefore, Reynolds's proposal must be supported by internal evidences—namely, the text of Revelation—that historicist approach is relevant not only for the modern readers but also was for the original audience.

Another attempt to answer the challenge against historicism is a redefinition of historicism itself. Reimar Vetne distinguishes historicism as a "school of interpretation" from historicism as "one-Label-Among-Many."[23] He describes the historicist school of interpretation as "take-it-or-leave-it" or "all-or-nothing" approach, in which "once you use the historicist method, everything else you do is by definition also historicism."[24] Vetne redefines historicism not as a school of interpretation, but an approach that applies only to historical apocalyptic.[25]

The main advantage of Vetne's proposal, according to him, is for Adventist scholars to be able to build a dialogue with those of a different opinion.[26] As to how to determine which sections of Revelation belong to historical apocalyptic, Vetne says: "It is the task of the interpreter to argue the case for historical apocalyptic in each individual section."[27] Vetne does not provide any definition, or explanation, of historical apocalyptic. However,

[22] Ibid.

[23] Reimar Vetne, "A Definition and Short History of Historicism," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14.2 (2003): 4.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 7. Vetne defines historicism: *"Historicism reads historical apocalyptic as prophecy intended by its ancient author to reveal information about real, in-history events in the time span between his day and the eschaton"* [italics original]. He emphasizes that "historicism is a method limited to certain types of apocalyptic literature." Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 5.

[27] Ibid., 7.

he lays an initial foundation for Jon Paulien who later develops further characteristics for a historical apocalyptic.

Similar to Vetne, Jon Paulien suggests identifying genres in Revelation. He says that the genres of Revelation are a mixture of general prophecy, mystical apocalyptic, historical apocalyptic, epistles, and narrative.[28] He sets a challenge to Adventists:

> If Adventists wish to revive the historicist approach to Revelation, there-
> fore, they will need to pursue a thoroughgoing examination of the genre
> of Revelation's visionary passages on a case-by-case basis.[29]

Paulien outlines the steps for interpreting passages in Revelation: first, the genre of a passage should be determined; next, when the genre is already determined, an approach can be applied. "A historicist approach is appropriate wherever the genre of a passage is clearly historical apocalyptic. Other genres call for other approaches."[30] Paulien sees that the seven churches (Rev 2 and 3) do not belong to historicism.[31]

In the part II of his article, Paulien establishes four general principles for determining historical apocalyptic genre based on a literary analysis of Dan 2 and 7, two visions that portray the same sequence of the world kingdoms from the time of Daniel to the coming of God's kingdom. He argues that whenever a passage in Revelation has allusions to Dan 7, that passage is historical apocalyptic.[32] After establishing, what he calls "taxonomy of historical apocalyptic,"[33] Paulien argues that Revelation 12 is a historical apocalyptic, since it has parallels with Daniel 7 and also meets all other criteria of the historical apocalyptic genre.[34]

Paulien is correct in saying that Rev 12 belongs to historicism. However, as far as the chapters of Revelation are concerned, one must analyze the other twenty-one chapters of the book to see whether each of the chapters is

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[28] Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Part One," 34.

[29] Ibid., 39.

[30] Ibid., 29.

[31] Ibid., 20.

[32] Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Part Two," 186, 193. The four principles are: (1) There are textual markers for sequence, e.g., "after you,... another... next" (Dan 2:39), "in the time of those kings" (2:44); (2) The sequence of both the symbols and the explanation is consistent. Although the sequence markers do not occur in the explanations, the sequence remains the same as it is in the symbols; (3) The vision and explanation have a comprehensive sweep of events that covers the period of time from the time of the visionary to the *eschaton*; and (4) Parallels with earlier historical apocalyptic are evident. Whenever a passage in Revelation has allusions to Dan 7, that passage is historical apocalyptic.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 194–207.

a historical apocalyptic or not. It might be advisable to reverse the work by analyzing the genre of Revelation as a whole before looking into specific chapters. Furthermore, consideration of the general structure of the book may contribute to the appropriate treatment of the book as apocalyptic.[35]

3. A Proposed Approach

This article would like to propose an approach to Revelation that is based on the division of the historical and the eschatological sections of the book.[36] The division is discussed from the perspective of both the original readers and modern readers of Revelation.[37] Approaching Revelation from the perspective of the original readers is important because John "must have believed that the original readers would understand his book."[38] Before doing this, it may be necessary to see the nature of Revelation as an apocalyptic prophecy and how familiar the original recipients were with apocalyptic writing and mind-set.

3.1. Genre of Revelation

Revelation is an apocalyptic prophecy by nature. The term "apocalyptic prophecy" is used here not merely to distinguish it from general proph-

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[35] Roy Gane, "Genre Awareness and Interpretation of the Book of Daniel," in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea* (ed. David Merling; Berrien Springs: Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 139–40, who argues that "'apocalypse' is a genre and genres are represented by whole works ... an apocalypse includes a narrative framework which leads into and out of visionary material."

[36] By historical section I mean the section that covers events that would happen between John's time and the *eschaton*, and by eschatological section I mean the section that covers events that will "take place at the *eschaton* and beyond." Reynolds, "Ten Keys for Interpreting Revelation," 265. Similar also Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 36–37.

[37] By "original readers" I understand the first century Christians who read the letters to the seven churches, and by "modern readers" the twenty-first century readers.

[38] Musvosvi, "The Issue of Genre and Apocalypse Prophecy," 46. He describes that John's Apocalypse was to be understood by his audience because "John the author was a pastor who was writing to his congregations. He was not an ivory-tower mystic, removed from the daily realities of his people." Ibid. Similar also George B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1966), 3. He asked a key question: "What did those early Christians know about this book that we do not know?"

ecy.[39] Rather, the term is used to show that Revelation is a general prophecy and at the same time an apocalypse.[40]

It is a prophecy because the author himself calls it "the words of this prophecy" (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19),[41] and the book contains prophecies of future events (1:1; 22:6).[42] It is also apocalyptic. Actually the word ἀποκάλυψις "unveiling, uncovering, revealing" is the very first word of the book of Revelation.[43] So inseparable is the relationship between prophecy and apocalyptic genres of Revelation that the book may be called "prophetic apocalypse or apocalyptic prophecy."[44]

Apocalyptic is not only a genre but also a "mind-set of the group that follows apocalyptic beliefs."[45] The audience of Revelation was already familiar with Jewish apocalyptic works, and these works influenced the mind-set of the audience.[46] Revelation is full of symbolic language that is common to the audience.[47]

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[39] For comparison between general prophecy and apocalyptic prophecy, see Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Part One," 28.

[40] Apocalypse is defined as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* (ed. John J. Collins; Semeia 14; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 9, as quoted in Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6. See also John M. Court, *Revelation* (NTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 80; Arthur W. Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 143. Wainwright suggests that the genre of apocalypse is similar to prophecy.

[41] The author uses the genitive expressions τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου "the prophecy of this book," (22:7, 10, 18) and τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης "the book of this prophecy" (22:19) interchangeably. This suggests that the book may also be called the prophecy. The near demonstrative pronouns τούτου (neuter, referring to the book) and ταύτης (feminine, referring to the prophecy) show that the author is not talking about any other book or any other prophecy but the book of Revelation and the prophecy contained in it.

[42] See also Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 48.

[43] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 7, argues that it is called apocalyptic because John "is taken in vision to God's throne-room in heaven to learn secrets of the divine purpose."

[44] Ibid., 6.

[45] Ibid., 14. See also Paul S. Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 44. He suggests, for example, that the Christians in Smyrna had already developed a "pattern of thinking" that helped them in understanding the message addressed to them.

[46] For example, the use of Enoch in Jude. For the information about the familiarity of 1 and 2 Enoch in the early church, see E. Isaac, "1 Enoch: A New Translation and Intro-

Unlike the occasional nature of any other NT epistle, it was not John's decision to respond to any particular issue in each of the seven churches. No specific names are greeted by John in the messages to the seven churches.[48] The messages to the seven churches are the continuation of the introductory vision in 1:9–20. They are part of the revelation of Christ through John (1:1–2). John "must write an apocalypse with the record of his vision, but he must enclose it in a letter to the churches."[49] One might say that the literary character of Revelation is a combination of three distinct literary types: apocalypse, prophecy, and letter,[50] in which apocalypse remains superlative.[51] However, "if a letter, it is like no other early Christian

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duction," *OTP* 1:8. See also some parallels between 4 Ezra and Revelation in B. M. Metzger, "4 Ezra: A New Translation and Introduction," *OTP* 1:522. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 21, states: "Some of the Jewish apocalyptic works, like 1 Enoch (Ethiopic Enoch), 2 Enoch (the Slavonic Enoch), 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch, were widely popular and read in the first century A.D." Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis* (2nd ed.; Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1979), 17, sees these as "extra-biblical apocalypses written shortly before the time of Revelation or approximately contemporary with it." In the OT, the book of Daniel is apocalyptic. It mostly contains eschatological visions. The apocalyptic characteristics of the book of Revelation are similar to that of Daniel. For further discussion about the characteristics or the nature of apocalyptic, see ibid., 17–20. For a guide to interpret apocalyptic works, see Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic*, 31, 45; and Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 28–29.

[47] Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 20, says: "In order to communicate his revelation effectively to those living in the pagan environment and culture, the inspired prophet used the language and terms that made sense to them." Keener, *Revelation*, 30, shows how the use of numbers was common for the first century readers. Osborne, *Revelation*, 16, mentions that the symbols used in Revelation are taken from the "common store of apocalyptic symbols in the first century." Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 26, gives three sources of symbols of Revelation: (1) preceding biblical literature, i.e., the OT; (2) the world of religious thought of the writer and hearers; and (3) customs and practices prevailing at the time. For a representative explanation about the familiarity of the original readers with the imagery language, see Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 17–22. See also Kenneth A. Strand, *Perspectives in the Book of Revelation: Essays on Apocalyptic Interpretation* (Naples: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1975), 24–31.

[48] For the occasional nature of NT epistles, see Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (2nd ed.; Manila: OMF Literature, 2002), 48.

[49] William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (rev. ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 27.

[50] Osborne, *Revelation*, 12; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 12–19.

[51] James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 205–6, argues that "the vision motif, a central element in apocalypses, remains preeminent."

letter we possess. If an apocalypse, it is like no other apocalypse, if a proph-
ecy, it is unique among prophecies."[52]

With a unique document before them and with an apocalyptic mind set-
ting, the original readers—specially selected seven churches (1:4, 11)—were
now ready to read the visions written in Revelation.[53]

3.2. Division between Historical and Eschatological Sections

Besides its literary characteristic as an apocalyptic prophecy, the literary
division of Revelation may also help the readers to understand the book.
Modern scholars recognize that there is division between the historical and
the eschatological sections of the book.[54] Excluding 11:19–15:4 as the central
piece of the book,[55] I would like to suggest a division between the historical

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[52] J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Guides to New Testament Exe-
gesis 7; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 32.

[53] Each of these churches lies on a trade route. Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the
Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26, ex-
plains how a messenger could reach those seven churches: "A messenger coming
from Patmos would arrive at Ephesus and moving North would come first to Smyrna
and then up to Pergamum. If he then turned and descended in a south-easterly direc-
tion, he would come to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and finally Laodicea, where the
route back to Ephesus would be due West." Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*,
123, states: "There never was a time when those seven churches existed, and no others.
Their situation shows that they could not well be the first seven to be founded: several
other unnamed churches certainly must have been founded before Thyatira and
Philadelphia."

[54] To mention some, Kenneth A. Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," in
Symposium of Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies. Book 1 (ed. Frank B. Hol-
brook; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6; Silver Spring: Biblical Research In-
stitute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 29, considers chs. 1–14
as the historical section and chs. 15–22 as the eschatological section of the book. Ste-
fanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 36, argues that Rev 1:1–11:8 is the historical section
and 11:9 to ch. 22 is the eschatological section of the book. Roy C. Naden, *The Lamb
among the Beasts* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1996), 20–21, draws a dividing line of
the book between 12:10 and 12:11. Reynolds, "Ten Keys for Interpreting Revelation,"
265, states, "In any case, chaps. 1–11 fall in the historical section of the book and chaps.
15–22 fall in the eschatological section of the book." Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of
John* (trans. John E. Alsup; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 15, sees 1:1–3:22 as the
first section and 4:1–22:5 as the second section. Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon:
The Revelation to John* (New Testament in Context; Harrisburg: TPI, 1998), 50, divides
the book by visions. The introductory vision is 1:9–3:22, and 4:1–22:5 consist of two
great cycles of visions.

[55] For a detailed discussion of the structure of Revelation, see Richard Sabuin, "Repen-
tance in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Adventist International Institute of Ad-
vanced Studies, 2006), 87–102, which offers a review and evaluation of structures pre-
sented in current scholarship and proposes an alternative structure.

and eschatological sections of the book, based on the explicit purpose of Revelation. This purpose is stated in both the prologue and the epilogue of the book: δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει "to show his servants what must soon take place" (1:1; 22:6).[56] The original readers of Revelation would have read the book with an awareness of the purpose of the book. Indicated in the purpose is also the content of the book: ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει "what must soon take place." The text before the original readers was about things that would soon take place. Any reemphasis of the purpose and the content of the book might help the original readers to understand what they were reading.

Between the prologue and the epilogue, John states three times that he heard the same voice, which is the voice of "the Alpha and Omega," reemphasizing the purpose and the content of Revelation (1:19; 4:1; 21:6).[57] These phrases could help the original readers to see the literary development of the book.

Before 1:19, the command given to John to write what he saw occurs already in 1:11, ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις "what you are going to see write in a book and send to the seven churches." This is a command to write everything that John was about to see or was seeing[58]—all the visions of Revelation.[59]

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56 When the original readers read 22:6, they would have understood that the purpose of the Apocalypse they read about in 1:1 is now repeated or reemphasized: "The angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place'" (22:6). As they continued reading this closing part of the book (22:6–21), they would find that many elements mentioned in the introduction (1:1–11) are now repeated. For a discussion of the prologue and the epilogue of Revelation, see Sabuin, "Repentance in the Book of Revelation," 87; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 37.

57 In 1:19 (cf. 1:8), the voice comes from "the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" In 4:1 the voice comes from "the voice I [John] had first heard" referring to 1:19. In 21:6, the voice comes from "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." The phrase ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος referring to God in 21:6 applies also to Jesus in 22:12, 13. In all three cases, the voices refer to either God (the Father) or Jesus.

58 The substantive ὃ βλέπεις could be better translated in the sense of futuristic present, either completely or mostly futuristic. The first testimony of John that he saw something/someone, which is indicated by the word εἶδον "I saw" is recorded in 1:12. It is contextually relevant, therefore, to consider that γράψον in 1:11 is a command to write everything that John was about to see or was seeing in the sense of futuristic present. For grammatical explanation about futuristic present, see Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 229–30.

59 The imperative is for John to write in βιβλίον "a book [without definite article]." This noun is mentioned again in the epilogue (22:9, 10, 18, 19), with definite articles, which

In 1:19, Jesus again told John to write what he has seen. This time the content or the nature of what John saw is mentioned: καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα "both things which are and things which are about to come after these things."[60] Reading this, the original readers would have understood that what follows after 1:19[61] would be visions about (1) things that were happening in their time (local), and (2) things that will happen in the future (historical and eschatological).[62]

In 4:1, once again Jesus says to John: δείξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα "I will show to you the things which must take place." With the absence of the phrase "the things which are" which occurs in 1:19, the original readers may have understood that, while chs. 2 and 3 describe the life of the Christian church in Asia Minor (local fulfillment) as well as the church along the timeline of history (historical fulfillment), what follows 4:1 no longer has local fulfillment. What remain are historical and eschatological fulfillments. Therefore, when they read about the seven seals (chs. 4:1–8:5), the seven trumpets (chs. 8–11), and the seven bowls (ch. 16), they would think of what was going to happen, and not what was happening.

In 21:6, Jesus says to John: γέγοναν "they have taken place."[63] At this point, the original readers would understand that they had just finished reading about the things that must take place (4:1), the historical and the eschatological section of the book—from ἃ εἰσὶν "things which are" (1:19),

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suggests that these occurrences refer to "a book" in the prologue (1:11). Here, in the epilogue, "a book" of 1:11 is now called "the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:10). This reference should not be confused with βιβλίον in chs. 5 and 10, in which the first occurrence of the noun is without definite article (5:1 and 10:2, respectively), and the next occurrences are with definite articles (5:2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10:8, respectively).

60   The translation "both things which are and things which are about to come after these things" for the phrase καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα is contextually evident. John was not instructed to write three things: (1) what he saw, (2) things which are, and (3) things which are about to come—a suggestion by Clinton Wahlen "Heaven's View of the Churches in Revelation 2 and 3," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9 (2006): 148. Instead, "things which are" and "things which are about to come" are what John saw.

61   I am aware of the fact that the original readers of Revelation did not have the text with the divisions of chapters and verses.

62   The terms *local, historical,* and *eschatological* were not originated by the first century readers. These terms are used in this article with reference to the subdivisions of the book.

63   In 16:17 there is also a voice saying: γέγονεν "it has taken place." This word is singular, while γέγοναν (21:6) is plural. The antecedent of γέγονεν could not be ταῦτα "these things" (1:19; 4:1). These references should be the antecedent of γέγοναν. Therefore, γέγονεν refers particularly to the series of the seven last plagues. Moreover, γέγονεν occurs exactly in the seventh plague, the last one of the final plagues.

through ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι "things that must take place" (4:1), until γέγοναν "they have taken place" (21:6). Although after 21:6 there are additional explanations about the New Jerusalem (21:7–22:5), these explanations do not point to another event. The event is already introduced in 21:1–2. The question is, How could, between 4:1 and 22:5, the original readers recognize the border between the historical section and the eschatological section of the book?

After reading three "sequences of seven that have dominated John's visions almost from the start,"[64] the original readers were introduced to an account of a great conflict between Christ and Satan, a long episode described in 11:19–15:4.[65]

While 4:1 introduced the original readers to what would be happening, it would be questionable as to why the vision in 11:19–15:4 covers a macro period from the beginning of the conflict in heaven up to the singing of the victorious song of the Lamb by the conquering saints on the sea of glass.[66] This section contains the events that have already happened from the perspective of the original readers. It interrupted the plot of the visionary narrative that had been established in the minds of the readers. Instead of continuing the visionary narrative of the previous chapters, the central piece of Revelation covers the account of the great conflict: started in heaven (11:19–12:12), has been continued on earth (12:13–14:13), will end at the *eschaton* with a celebration in heaven (14:14–15:4). Therefore, this section could be seen as the thematic key to the whole book or as "the micro-apocalypse within the macro-apocalypse."[67]

Excluding the central piece, one indication of the border between the historical and the eschatological sections is the use of the adjective ἐσχάτας "last" to modify the noun πληγή "plague" in 15:1 (cf. 21:9).[68] This is the first

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64 Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 63. The three sequences of seven are the seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets.

65 For a discussion on the central piece of the structure of the book, see Sabuin, "Repentance in the Book of Revelation," 87–102, arguing that the central piece of Revelation is 11:19–15:4.

66 Revelation 11:9 and 15:1–4 are included in this section because 11:19 mentions the opening of the temple of God to introduce the vision that begins in 12:1 and 15:1–4 presents the song of victory of those who conquer the beast (ch. 13), and is a celebration after the great harvest of the earth (14:14–20). See also Reynolds, "Ten Keys for Interpreting Revelation," 265, who recognizes that the vision in chs. 12–14 "points all the way backward to the beginning of rebellion in heaven and points forward to the glorified redeemed standing victorious with the Lamb on Mt. Zion."

67 Musvosvi, "The Issue of Genre and Apocalypse Prophecy," 54.

68 I consider that the central piece is overlapped with the following section (the seven last plagues). In addition to concluding the central piece, 15:1–4 introduces the seven last plagues. Although the seven angels with the seven bowls are introduced in 15:1,

occurrence of this adjective after 4:1. The seven plagues are called πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἐσχάτας "[the] seven last plagues" (15:1). The adjective ἔσχατος distinguishes the seven plagues from the previous plagues, namely, the seven trumpets.[69] The seven-bowl plagues—from the first to the seventh—are the last plagues. There will be no more plagues afterward. Therefore, the original readers would understand that when they came to 15:1 they were reading about the last things—the *eschaton*. They would understand that, although dealing with the things which are going to take place (1:19; 4:1), the seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets are not eschatological but historical—the things that would happen from their time up to the *eschaton*. Of course, there are some glimpses of the eschatological elements in the local and historical sections as well as some glimpses of the historical elements in the local and eschatological sections.[70]

When the original readers read γέγοναν "they have taken place" (21:6), they would understand that the local, historical, and eschatological events have already ended. The additional explanation about the New Jerusalem (21:9–22:5) is given by one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues (21:9). The seven angels—or at least one of them—who pour the seven final plagues also reveal details about the New Jerusalem. The original readers would understand that the last events cover a series of events from the seven last plagues to the coming down of the New Jerusalem to the earth. Therefore, these events are eschatological. What lies beyond the eschatological events will be the fact that God's people "shall reign for ever and ever" (22:5).

4. Summary and Conclusion

The historicist approach to Revelation has been challenged. Several responses have been given to these challenges. Of those scholars who responded to the challenges to historicism, it seems that only Paulien provides literary indicators to justify the historicist approach to apocalyptic passages that he labels as historical apocalyptic. However, Paulien's sugges-

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15:2–4 seems to have no connection to the seven bowls. Rather, 15:2–4 is the continuation of ch. 14. Revelation 15:2–4 is a description of the saints of God that follows the two harvests in 14:14–20. The narrative of the seven bowls resumes in 15:5, 6. This shows that the central piece is literarily overlapped with the seven last plagues.

69   The judgments in the seven trumpets are also called plagues. Notice the phrase ἐν ταῖς πληγαῖς ταύταις "by these plagues" (9:20).

70   So also Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 50. For example, in the local and historical sections, the promises to the seven churches, the seventh seal, and the seventh trumpet are eschatological; in the eschatological sections, the cry to come out in chap. 18 refers back to prior history.

tion disqualifies even Rev 2 and 3 from the historicist approach—chapters that are included by many historicist scholars as clearly requiring a historicist approach. His response to these challenges is by itself another challenge to historicism. This study has responded to these challenges including the one of Paulien, and at the same time proposes an approach to Revelation.

Between the prologue (1:1–11) and the epilogue (22:6–21), and without the long interlude of the central piece (11:19–15:4), Revelation presents the following outline:

REFERENCE	INTERNAL INDICATOR	FULFILLMENT	COVERAGE
Rev 2:1–3:21	"Things which are and things which are about to come" (1:19)	Local and Historical	The Seven Churches[71]
Rev 4:1–11:19	"Things which must take place after these things" (4:1)	Historical	The seven seals; the seven trumpets
Rev 15:1–22:5	"Seven last plagues" (15:1)—"They have taken place" (21:6)	Eschatological	The seven-bowl plagues; Second Coming; Millennium; New Heaven and Earth and the New Jerusalem

Table 1: Summary of the sectional divisions of Revelation

The outline above suggests that Revelation covers "a comprehensive sweep of events."[72] It presents (1) events that *begin* with a local fulfillment (or application) to the first reader of the first century A.D. that at the same time cover the timeline of history; (2) events that happen *through* the historical timeline from the time of the vision up to the *eschaton*; (3) events that will happen at the *end* of the history of the old heaven and earth that continues into eternity.

The outline is described by similar internal indicators or "textual sequence markers," a condition required by Paulien to identify a passage as historical apocalyptic.[73] This would alert the original readers as to what would happen in sequence *from* their time *through* their future *up to* the *eschaton*. The sequence is not only from one section to the other but also within each section.[74]

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[71] For a comprehensive discussion of the apocalyptic nature of the seven churches, see Wahlen, "Heaven's View of the Churches in Revelation 2 and 3," 146–56.

[72] Paulien, "End of Historicism? Part Two," 186.

[73] Ibid.

[74] For a discussion about sequence within the seven seals and the seven trumpets, see Ekkehardt Mueller, "Recapitulation in Revelation 4–11," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9.1–2 (1998): 260–77. In the case of the seven churches, it is noteworthy to

The apocalyptic prophecies are understood from the perspective of the original readers. The original readers knew that those passages would find their fulfillment along the historical timeline. However, they did not know exactly the historical periods within which those events would take place. What lay before the original readers was the text of Revelation and their future. One thing that was certain for them was that at the end God will establish an eternal kingdom and the saints will live together with Christ forever and ever (Rev 21:3, 4; 22:5).

This concept is similar to that of Dan 2. Nebuchadnezzar, being the first recipient of the dream and the interpretation given by the prophet Daniel, became aware of what would happen in sequence from his time (2:38) up to the coming of God's kingdom (v. 44). However, he did not know the names of the coming earthly kings or kingdoms and when those kingdoms would come. One thing certain for him was that at the end God would establish his eternal kingdom (v. 44).

The fact cannot be denied that the original readers lived almost two thousand years ago. Some of their future might have become history for the present-time readers. What lies before the modern readers is the same text and the history. Therefore, for the passages in the historical sections, an approach of historicism without being "over-zealous in attempting to define every detail of the symbolism in their schematization of history"[75] may be applied.

In dealing with eschatological section, promises given for the original readers are also for the modern readers; what was eschatological to the first-century audience is still eschatological for the present-time readers. The modern readers know what the original readers did not know: the *eschaton* that the original readers expected soon to take place has not taken place yet. However, the eschatological events are the continuation of the historical events. As time goes by, the eschatological events will in turn become history. The seven-bowl plagues, the *parousia*, and the millennium will become history for the saved ones.

The fact that many Adventist scholars use the historicist approach in interpreting Revelation does not make the historicist approach *the* Adventist approach. The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ itself provides literary indicators for historicism.

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observe that Christ is consistent with the sequence of the seven churches. The sequence that he gives in 1:11 is maintained in chs. 2–3.

[75]   Reynolds, "Ten Keys for Interpreting Revelation," 275.

CHRIST'S NATURE AS SINFUL OR SINLESS IN THE EARLY *REVIEW* (1850–1895)

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Before the mid-1890s, the phrase "sinful nature" was occasionally used in Christological discussions in the *Review*, mainly in order to reject such an idea. Around that time, however, influential writers adopted the direct terminology of "sinful flesh" for Christ's nature, instead of "likeness of sinful flesh" which had formerly been carefully distinguished from plain "sinful flesh" by J. N. Andrews and even by U. Smith. In the case of E. G. White the new terminology did not imply adopting the idea of sinful propensities in Christ, and in any case a sinful nature for Christ should not be equated with the historical position of SDAs.

Key Words: sinful nature, sinful flesh, Christology, historical Adventism

1. Introduction

The *Review* occupied in early Seventh-day Adventism a unique place.[1] "The story of the church paper, since 1978 called the *Adventist Review*, is the story of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."[2] It is fair to say that in the first decades of the movement the paper was not just an official church publication, but also the main visible link between the scattered bands of believers.

In the last fifty years, the human nature of Christ has become one of the most ardently debated theological issues in the denomination.[3] The historical position of Adventism on this issue is of course a matter of importance in this debate. Consequently, the position of early *Review* writers who mention the topic is presently examined.

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[1] The original name of the first publication of nascent Adventism was *Present Truth*, but the name was later changed to *The Advent Review* and then *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (with slight variations). In this study the name *Review* will be used for brevity. For a concise history of the paper and its name changes see the article "Review and Herald" in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1966), 1075–78.

[2] William G. Johnsson, "Our Roots and Mission," n.p. [cited 20 August 2008]. Online: http://www.adventistreview.org/article.php?id=22.

[3] This was repeatedly shown in the Andrews University *Symposium on Questions on Doctrine*, held October 24–27, 2007, though the debate has recently abated.

The phrase "sinful nature" was used in the *Review* before Ellen White first used it in 1896. Even though it was used 42 times in the *Review*, few of the references refer to Christ.[4] After that time Ellen White discussed the issue repeatedly. Her concept of the human nature of Christ is nuanced and even complex at times, as will be shown below, and has been much discussed within the denomination since the appearance of *Questions on Doctrine* in 1957.[5] However, given the special place that Ellen White has in Adventism, the opinions of later contributors to the *Review* are much less relevant to the historical discussion than her writings. This is why only *Advent Review* occurrences predating 1896 are examined here.

Not all these occurrences represent Seventh-day Adventist contributors. In many cases, the early *Review* reproduced material taken from other Christian publications or works. Even so, there is a clear responsibility assumed by the Seventh-day Adventist editors in selecting and publishing those materials. James White, the editor during the 1850–1855 and 1861–1864 periods, was also one of the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, and all editors were considered to be thought leaders in the denomination in early Adventism. Thus, all these occurrences are still relevant for a discussion of the historical Adventist position on the issue.

2. Analysis

Most of the 42 "sinful nature" occurrences refer to the condition of ordinary human beings, in a wide variety of contexts, usually connected with practical Christian living, and were investigated only to make sure that they do not belong to our topic. Apparently, in only three cases a sinful nature is discussed with reference to Christ. In one of these cases (1883) there is an unmistakable rejection of such an idea, and in another (1894) the rejection is clear, but implicit. On the other hand, in 1860 an author accepts the idea.

As early as 1856, the sinless nature of Christ is clearly presupposed.[6] James White inserted text selected from a work which takes the absence of any sinful impulses in Christ for granted. On the basis of such rejection the selected author argues for the personal existence of Satan and denies the modernist theory that turns the devil into a mere metaphor for evil im-

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4   This was determined with the help of the search engine in the official archive site of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Online: http://www.adventistarchives.org/search.asp?CatID=27&CatName=Review+and+Herald&Search=sinful+nature.

5   *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1957), especially pp. 50–59; cf. the main passages in Ellen G. White's writings in the Appendix B, pp. 647–60.

6   This is not one of the 42 references mentioned above, since the phrase "sinful nature" does not appear. It is here included because of its obvious relevance.

pulses. The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness had to come from a personal devil, he says, not from inner evil impulses; otherwise the tempted Jesus would have been sinful.[7]

In contrast, an Adventist contributor is clearly open to the idea of a sinful nature in Christ. E. Goodrich, in "Grace Through Unrighteousness" (Sept 25, 1860), makes the standard 19th-century SDA defense of the perpetuity of the 4th commandment by arguing that in Christ we are free *from* sin, but not free *to* sin (as in transgressing a commandment). Once forgiven, we are to sin no more. Rom 6:10 says that Christ is to die no more, and Goodrich argues that a dying nature and a sinful nature are synonymous, even in Christ's case: "Having inherited our nature with its sinful susceptibilities and promptings, he could feel the power of the tempter." But as printed in the *Review*, the article does not unreservedly attribute sinfulness to Christ's nature; it only says that he inherited "a part" of our nature.[8]

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[7]   In June 1856, "Personality of the Devil" (said to be taken from *Universalism Against Itself*, 252–61, but without other bibliographical information) the author argues: "If his own lusts, or his own carnal mind, was the devil that tempted, was he [Christ] not sinful? He certainly was; because the carnal mind is enmity against God. Rom. viii, 1. His lusts were most unquestionably sinful, if they were the devil that tempted him; for that which is holy, will not try to tempt any one into wickedness!"

[8]   The context may be ascertained in the complete paragraph (cf. E. Goodrich, "Grace Through Unrighteousness," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* [Sept 25, 1860], 5): "This is the liberty wherewith Christ makes free: a deliverance from the dominion of lust and sin. This kind of remedy is genuine and thorough, because it begins with the root of the matter and aims at a complete change of nature. The necessity, consistency and beauty of such a reformation as this, is the bettor seen and realized when we remember that a dying nature and a sinful nature are identical. To be delivered from one is to be freed from the other. This sentiment, is expressed by the apostle, [Rom. vi, 6], when he says, 'Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him; for in that he died he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth he liveth unto God.' Died unto sin: not that Christ ever sinned, or that guile was ever found in his mouth; but as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, and he also likewise took part of the same, *he inherited a part of our nature*, subject as it was to the-law of sin and death. And having inherited our nature with its sinful susceptibilities and promptings, he could feel the power of the tempter, yea, be in all points tempted as we are. And having been tempted, he could sympathize with and succor those that are tempted, and thus be a merciful and faithful High Priest. But when he died he was put to death in the flesh, but raised by the Spirit, the power, and glory of the Father, and placed infinitely above the power of temptation, the dominion of sin or death. Now, according to the apostle's reasoning and language, as Christ died unto sin, and as when we are baptized we are baptized into his death, to carry out the figure and doctrine, as Christ was raised up by the glory of the Father, and lives a new life,—so we, having died unto sin, should live the rest of our time to God. The above and foregoing is in brief the doctrine of the Bible from beginning to end; and how any one who has read the Scriptures, who has learned the reason why man fell, the pur-

In contrast to the main concern of Goodrich, which was the perpetuity of God's law, in 1883 a *Review* selection deals specifically with Christological concerns. Here the sinless nature of Christ is asserted specifically in a strongly worded statement. This is when G. S. Barret is cited extolling the "absolute sinlessness" of Christ in contrast to "that consciousness of a sinful nature, of an inherited bias toward evil, which makes its appearance with the first dawn of consciousness in every other human life."[9]

In a later occurrence, a rejection of a sinful nature in Christ is not explicit, but appears to be implied. This is an editorial note in the first page of the issue of May 22, 1894, where a contrast between our sinful nature and the nature of Christ seems implicit. The editor (U. Smith) notes:

> Many people read the text, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," with the idea of its meaning that it cleanses by granting remission of all the sins of the past, and removes the penalty from the sinner. It does all this and more. It cleanses from sin by *taking away the sinful nature, and implanting in the believer the nature of Christ*. Hence Jesus could say, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" [italics added].[10]

The optimistic view of the editor on the nature of man and sin is here in evidence. According to him, human sinful nature may be "taken away" even in present life. But when this happens, the nature of Christ is "implanted." Such a belief seems incompatible with any description of Christ's

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pose for which the Son of God was manifested, and who professedly has been converted,—how any such one for a moment believe that the moral law of God ceased by limitation, or was abolished by the death and mediation of Christ, is a mystery—a mystery that seems only to be explained by the deception of the human heart and the enormity of the carnal mind" [italics added].

[9] In *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Dec 11, 1883), 10, Barret is cited (from "The Greatest Miracle," without other bibliographical information) as follows: "The miracles wrought by Christ are not the only, or the most startling miracles of the gospel. Christ himself is his own greatest miracle. His absolute sinlessness, his freedom from the least taint of human infirmity and folly, his pure and perfect life, are a far more wonderful exception to the so-called 'laws of nature' than the healing of the sick, or the stilling of the storm, or the raising of the dead; for not only was Jesus 'without sin' in the outward acts of his life, but he was free from that consciousness of a sinful nature, of an inherited bias toward evil, which makes its appearance with the first dawn of consciousness in every other human life. And it is only when we remember that this sense of sinfulness is as truly 'a law of nature' as any of the great laws of the physical universe, that, to use the words of the late Professor Mozley—perhaps the deepest thinker of the English church since the time of Bishop Butler—'the sinlessness of Christ appears in its true light as a supernatural fact, an inward visible miracle, surpassing in wonder any of the visible miracles which he wrought'."

[10] U. Smith, "Editorial Note," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (May 22, 1894), 1.

nature as "sinful," since there would be no point in implanting the same kind of nature that had been just taken away.

It is likely that the editor used the term "sinful" with reference to actual sin,[11] in which case the Christ-like new nature implanted in the believer could have been still compatible with sinful tendencies. But whatever the import of the term "sinful" in his mind, it is clear that at the time he would not describe either the born-again believer or the humanity of Christ as being "sinful."

In sum, before 1896 the issue of a sinful or sinless nature for Christ is not frequent in the pages of the *Review*. The sinful nature of man was well known, even though out of the thousands of *Review* pages published by 1896 there are apparently only 42 occurrences of the phrase in all. The phrase is never applied unreservedly to Christ; on the contrary, it is repeatedly used to deny such an idea (1883, 1894), though in one case the author speaks of "sinful ... promptings" in Christ's nature (1860).

3. "Sinful Nature" and "Sinful Flesh"

We have seen above that only in a few instances does "sinful nature" appear to be related to the case of Christ in the pre-1896 *Review*. There is a clear rejection of any sinfulness in Christ's human nature in 1856, and a "sinful nature" in Christ is explicitly rejected in 1883. In another occurrence (1894) the rejection is implied, while in one case only (1860) it is accepted, but perhaps only partially. In no case is a "sinful nature" ascribed unreservedly to Christ. This clearly implies that it is incorrect to call "historical" the position that makes the human nature of Christ sinful.

However, though "sinful nature" is not directly attributed to Christ in the pages of the *Review* before the Ellen White article, the close parallel "sinful flesh" is so attributed starting in 1895. Until that time the *Review* had always used the biblical qualification "*the likeness of* sinful flesh" when applied to Christ (57 times until 1894). J. N. Andrews once explained that this "likeness" did not extend to inner sinful dispositions:

> What did the Lawgiver do to relieve man's helpless condition? He sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by a sacrifice for sin [margin], condemned sin in the flesh. Jesus came in the *likeness of sinful flesh, but he had no sinful disposition within him*. He was subjected to the utmost power of temptation, but he knew no sin. He rendered perfect obedience to his Father's law. Then he took the curse of that law which stood

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[11] See below on the 1896 *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* editorial position.

against us upon himself.[12] He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God [italics added; previous square brackets in the original].[13]

But things change. In the March 10, 1896 issue (p. 16) a letter from a reader to the editor objected to recent developments in Adventist teaching: "E. M. says: 'I notice that some of our writers refer to Christ as having 'lived in sinful flesh.' The Scriptures say that he came in 'the *likeness* of sinful flesh.' If one's *flesh* is sinful, why is he not sinful? Can you separate a man from his flesh, without separating him from himself?" [italics added]. The point of "E. M." seems to be that attributing "sinful flesh" to Christ would make him sinful, an idea clearly rejected in the Scriptures. But the editor (still U. Smith) tries to reassure him that this is not the teaching favored by the *Review*:

> We do not regard the statement, "in the likeness of sinful flesh," to be an exact equivalent to sinful flesh. It behooved Christ to be made in all points like unto his brethren. And as we partake of flesh and blood, he himself took part of the same. He was therefore tempted in all points "like as we are, yet without sin." We believe that in Christ's humanity dwelt the weaknesses and evil tendencies to which humanity is heir, otherwise he could not be "tempted as we are." In this sense he was in the likeness of sinful flesh. But he kept himself pure from sin. He did this by the same means that are provided to keep us—seeking help from above, and keeping his Father's will ever before him.[14]

It is not clear what persons were included in this editorial "We" who made a distinction between the biblical "likeness of sinful flesh" and plain "sinful flesh." What is clear is that for the same issue of the *Review* the editors had accepted the contribution of W. W. Prescott, in which such a distinction is completely lost: "The flesh that Jesus Christ took when he came here was the only flesh that one could take by being born of a woman, and that was the flesh of sin. No other flesh could be given. It was impossible that one should be born at that time into the human family, and become a member

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[12]   This appears to be also the understanding of Ellen G. White, "The Law of God," *Advent Review and Herald of the Sabbath* (May 6, 1875), 2, when she suggests that the "likeness of sinful flesh" in Christ was largely vicarious: "Christ became sin for the fallen race, in taking upon himself the condemnation resting upon the sinner for his transgression of the law of God. Christ stood at the head of the human family as their representative. He had taken upon himself the sins of the world. In the likeness of sinful flesh he condemned sin in the flesh."

[13]   J. N. Andrews, "The Righteousness of the Law—the Purpose of the Gospel," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Feb 9, 1869), 1.

[14]   U. Smith, "Editorial Note," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 10, 1896), 16.

by birth, without taking flesh of sin."[15] The *Review* had also accepted in the previous January a contribution by one "elder William Covert," mentioning "The perfect life which Christ led while in *sinful flesh...* on the same plane and terms in which man was required to act,"[16] which was perhaps the trigger of "E. M.'s" objection,[17] and another by G. E. Fifield, who held that "Christ *took our sinful flesh* at the point of weakness and sinfulness to which our sins had brought it [italics added]."[18] Also, there is a report on July 17, 1894, about a sermon pronounced in the Battle Creek Tabernacle, which apparently maintained that "Christ inhabited sinful flesh."[19] But plain "sinful flesh" is not applied earlier to Christ in pages of the *Review*.

It appears, then, that in the mid-1890s there was a sea change in the terminology used by *Review* writers to describe the human nature of Christ. This new trend apparently had started in other sources,[20] but had already

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[15] W. W. Prescott, "The Christ of Judea," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 10, 1896), 8–9. Soon after becoming chief editor of the *Review* he insisted that Jesus Christ "was the perfect revelation of God's ideal in sinful flesh." Cf. W. W. Prescott, "Full Salvation from Sin," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (June 3, 1903), 2.

[16] William Covert, "The Victory of Christ," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Jan 14, 1896), 18. Curiously, as late as August 20, 1895, he still seemed to distinguish between the "sinful flesh" of ordinary men and the "likeness of sinful flesh" in Christ: "It would seem that there was much room for conjecture and doubt among *men who were dwelling in sinful flesh* as to what God would do if he were here *in the likeness of sinful flesh* and subject to temptation as man was subject; but the coming of Christ to this world in our flesh has solved the query for the one who will believe" [p. 4, italics added].

[17] E. M. had read an author claiming that Jesus had "lived in sinful flesh." Covert spoke of the "perfect life ... in sinful flesh." Cf. Covert, "The Victory of Christ," 18.

[18] G. E. Fifield, "The Gospel in the Earthly Sanctuary," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (April 23, 1895), 3.

[19] The report reads: "The Tabernacle pulpit was occupied last Sabbath by Elder A. T. Jones, who delivered an impressive discourse illustrating the unity of Christ with God, and with mankind. 'God with us' and in us is the secret of the power of divine grace. It is not to do as Christ did, that we may be like him; but to be like him, that we may do as he did. *Christ inhabited sinful flesh* and overcame. It is by Christ dwelling in our flesh that we may overcome" [italics added].

[20] Ralph Larson, *The Word Made Flesh: One Hundred Years of Seventh-day Adventist Christology, 1852–1952* (Cherry Valley: Cherrystone Press, 1986), 53–110, correlates this new trend with articles in *The Bible Echo* (an Australian paper), as well as other publications and sermons by W. W. Prescott, A. G. Daniells (both of whom were in Australia in the 1890s, as was E. G. White herself), E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones. This Australian connection is persuasive. However, Larson also tries to show (ibid., 34–52) that the sinful nature of Christ was the ordinary position of Adventism before that time, but in spite of combing through the early *Review* and writings of E. G. White he was only able to come up with statements affirming the humanity of Christ and its fallen character (as in his infirmities), never its sinfulness. There is no argument in our denomi-

been noticed by *Review* readers and resisted at least by some of them. *Review* editors then held that "sinful flesh" by itself was an improper phrase in connection with Christ, but at the same time accepted articles with no such qualms. While *Signs of the Times* carries less weight than the *Review* for Adventist studies, it tells a similar story about new trends in the mid-1890s.[21]

It is in this historical context that we find the first direct attribution of a "sinful nature" to the incarnated Christ in the *Review*. In 1896 Ellen White stated: "Clad in the vestments of humanity, the Son of God came down to the level of those he wished to save. In him was no guile or sinfulness; he was ever pure and undefiled; yet he took upon him our *sinful nature*" [italics added].[22] After this statement writers in the new trend felt authorized to be much more elaborate in their teaching.[23] But Ellen White's adoption of the terminology of those writers does not necessarily mean that she also adopted the rest of their Christology.[24] It has been persuasively shown that

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nation about the full humanity or inherited (fallen) infirmities of Christ's nature, so Larson's discussion in that section seems largely beside the point.

[21] The *Signs of the Times* never had in Adventism a role comparable to the *Review*, but was also founded by J. White, though much later in 1875. By 1895 "sinful nature" had never been discussed in connection with Christ, but "sinful flesh" appears a total of 13 times: vol. 1, no. 23 (1875), 5; vol. 3, no. 29 (1878), 5; vol. 20, no. 17 (1894), 15; vol. 20, no. 24 (1894), 4; vol. 20, no. 27 (1894), 4; vol. 20, no. 28 (1894), 4; vol. 20, no. 32 (1894), 1; vol. 20, no. 34 (1894), 6; vol. 20, no. 39 (1894), 9; vol. 20, no. 43 (1894), 8; vol. 20, no. 52 (1894), 5; vol. 20, no. 57 (1894), 1; vol. 20, no. 59 (1894), 1. However, not until 1894 is it connected with Christ without the biblical qualification, "the likeness of sinful flesh." That year it appears by itself in this connection two times. The first is by the editor, Milton C. Wilcox, "The Righteousness of God," *Signs of the Times* (June 18, 1894), cover page, who says, "The sinless Son of God took man's sinful flesh and overcame sin in the flesh." The other is by L. A. Phippeny, "Life and Death—No. 2," *Signs of the Times* (Nov 5, 1894), 5: "He took upon him sinful flesh, and was obedient unto death because of the flesh." The year 1894, as noted above, is also when a report of a sermon in Battle Creek by A. T. Jones initiates the terminology of naked "sinful flesh" for Christ in the *Review*. Thus the *Signs of the Times* seems to participate of the same trend as the *Review* at about the same time.

[22] Ellen G. White, "The Importance of Obedience," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Dec 15, 1896), 789.

[23] For instance, A. T. Jones, "Ministers of God," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Sept 29, 1896), 9, explicitly teaches: "Do not forget, either, that the mystery of God is not God manifest in sinless flesh, but God manifest in sinful flesh. There could never be any mystery about God's manifesting himself in sinless flesh—in one who had no connection whatever with sin. That would be plain enough. But *that he can manifest himself in flesh laden with sin and with all the tendencies to sin*, such as ours is—that is a mystery" [italics added].

[24] For example, she differed on the issue of temptations. These writers thought, as U. Smith, that man's "evil tendencies" dwelt in Christ, who "kept himself pure from sin ... by the same means that are provided to keep us—seeking help from above, and

she consistently (and not just in the famous "Baker letter" of the same year)[25] understood the sinfulness of Christ's nature in terms of innocent infirmities of fallen humanity, but at the same time rejecting specifically any "evil propensities" in him.[26]

4. Conclusion

The complexity of the thought of Ellen White on the issue will probably continue to be a subject of argument in the future. However, a study of early *Review* discussions of the topic shows that her thought should not be set against a supposed background of general consensus on a sinful nature for Christ.[27] There was no such consensus, and the preponderance of pre-1895 sentiment leaned in the direction of a sinless nature for Christ—one might say by three to one, if only the small statistical sample could be trusted.

In 1896, following a change in the terminology of *Review* authors, Ellen White spoke of a sinful nature in Christ. By that time "sinful flesh" substituted for "the likeness of sinful flesh," which had been carefully delimited by J. N. Andrews in 1869 as not extending to internal sinful dispositions. While incorporating a plain "sinful nature" phrase into her theological language, Ellen White specifically rejected the evil propensities.

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keeping his Father's will ever before him." U. Smith, "To Correspondents," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 10, 1896), 16. See also the extensive quotations from A. G. Daniells, A. T. Jones, E. J. Waggoner and W. W. Prescott in Larson, *The Word Made Flesh*, 53–110.

[25] Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (7 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1957), 5:1131.

[26] Claude Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (American University Studies Series VII: Theology and Religion 6; New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 115–56.

[27] Contra Larson, *The Word Made Flesh*, 53–110, who subsumes the period preceding 1896 within a supposed "age of clarity" for the sinful conception of Christ's nature.

Thesis and Dissertation Abstracts

Theological Seminary, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

"A Comparative Study on the Understanding of Christian Perfection in John Wesley and Ellen G. White"

Researcher: Ronell Ike Mamarimbing, M.A. in Religion, 2008
Advisor: Woodrow Whidden, Ph.D.

Christian perfection has become a serious issue in Christianity. John Wesley and Ellen G. White were dominant figures in their denominations, who explained Christian perfection through their work. This study tries to find the similarities and the differences among Wesley's and White's teachings on Christian perfection, specifically on their definitions of the term, its standards, and its attainment. In order to achieve this it first seeks to define both Wesley's and White's concepts of perfection, analyze them, and then, undertake the comparison.

Chapters 2 and 3 explain John Wesley's and Ellen G. White's understanding of Christian perfection. The chapters start by picturing their historical-theological backgrounds and exposing their early Christian experiences. Finally, the chapters describe their teachings on Christian perfection and explain their definitions, standards, and attainments of perfection.

Chapter 4 compares both Wesley's and White's teachings on Christian perfection. Both believed that perfection contains justification and sanctification. There are major similarities in their definitions of the term, its standards, and its attainment. However, there are also some distinctive dissimilarities between them, such as instantaneous perfection, perfection of the soul, perfection in the time of trouble, and perfection as eternal growing and learning process. Chapter 5 summarizes the results and findings of each chapter and concludes the study with pertinent concluding remarks.

"The Interpretation of the Concept of *Hadēs* Described in Luke 16:19–31 — The Rich Man And Lazarus — in the Light of the Historical-Grammatical Method"

Researcher: Alfredo Agustin Jr., Ph.D. in Religion, 2008
Advisor: Richard Sabuin, Ph.D.

Biblical scholars and theologians propose divergent interpretations of the

concept of ᾅδης in Luke 16:19–31. In view of the existing lack of consensus regarding the meaning of the term the dissertation seeks to discover a plausible interpretation of the concept of ᾅδης in this narrative that is contextually and theologically possible. It does so by using the historical-grammatical method in order to suggest an interpretation of the concept of ᾅδης that may reflect primarily Jesus' intent, and secondarily Luke's.

The analysis of the genre of Luke 16:19–31, considering the OT מָשָׁל, NT παραβολή, and the passage itself, indicates that the story of the rich man and Lazarus—like other OT and narrative parables—is fictitious and as a parable stresses a spiritual truth.

The study of the background of the concept of ᾅδης in the Ancient Near East, Greek literature, Intertestamental Rabbinic literature, and early Church Fathers shows that ᾅδης is the abode of souls in the intermediate state. However, both OT and NT biblical literature suggests that ᾅδης may only mean "death," both physical and spiritual, as well as "grave," the abode of the dead—below the earth. There are no indications that souls are conscious in ᾅδης, except in this parable.

The structural-thematic analysis of Luke in general, and Luke 16:1–31 in particular, suggests that Jesus' and Luke's emphasis is not on the concept of ᾅδης. Caring for the poor of the community is one of Luke's structural-thematic focal points. In this sense, the use/abuse of wealth is the key theme of Luke 16:1–31.

The exegetical analysis of the narrative shows that ᾅδης in Luke–Acts and in the Synoptic Gospels may mean "death, grave, pit, abode of the dead"—below the earth. Its synonym γέεννα refers to the place of punishment of the wicked after the *Parousia*. In the literary analysis, the story serves as a parable used by Jesus to emphasize the perpetuity of the Law and the Prophets as the rule of life in the era of the kingdom of God, which began with the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. Jesus does not teach the doctrine of the punishment or reward of the dead in the intermediate state in using the parable. The eschatology of the Synoptic gospels, and the rest of the NT does not warrant such doctrine.

The study provides an extensive exegetical analysis using the Historical-Grammatical method. Specifically, the genre analysis and the structural-thematic analysis may contribute methodologically in the interpretation of the parables of Jesus.

"The Making of a Church: Ellen G. White's Views on Church Government 1844–1888"

Researcher: Ricardo A. González, Ph.D. in Religion, 2008
Advisor: Aecio E. Cairus, Ph.D.

Even though Ellen G. White is not usually seen as a theologian there is no doubt that she plays an important role in the understanding of Adventism. Two current issues regarding her writings need to be addressed. The first relates to her understanding of the doctrine of the church during the development of the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist church. The second attempts to find how and in what sense her understanding of the church affected church organization in Adventist history. This study approaches the subject using a historical-descriptive methodology and is divided into four major chapters.

The introduction suggests that no specific study of the role that Ellen G. White played during the early years of the denomination in guiding the process of its organization exists. Chapter 2 shows how immediately after the disappointment of October 1844, Ellen G. White began to introduce order among the troubled band of ex-Millerites.

Chapter 3 focuses on the challenges that the lack of a formal organization and fanaticism brought to Sabbath-keepers in the early years of the movement. It shows how Ellen G. White appealed to early Adventists to support their leaders, to remain united on issues of doctrine, to make wise use of their resources to preach the gospel, to keep themselves as a holy people, and to carefully scrutinize the qualifications of those willing to serve as ministers of the gospel.

Chapter 4 assesses the role Ellen G. White played in the circumstances that led early Adventists on the road to formal organization. This chapter also highlights her appeals to the authority of the church. Chapter 5 describes and analyzes the period from 1863 to 1888, during which Ellen G. White's appeals for church order were forcefully presented to the leaders of the church as never before. She advocated that: (1) mission had to be the driving force of any organizational structure among Seventh-day Adventists; (2) centralism in the activities of the church was not according to divine order; (3) ministers are to submit their individual independence and to support those whom God has chosen to lead the church; (4) leaders of the church are not called to rule or lord over the church; (5) fault finding among church leaders weakens the church as a whole; and (6) union on matters of doctrine is indispensable for the church.

This study concludes that the development of Seventh-day Adventist organization is pervaded by the influence of Ellen G. White. It shows that,

through her prophetic authority, she was able to advocate ecclesiological principles which gave direction and a unique missionary identity to the Seventh-day Adventist Church at that time. Her role set the basis for some order-fostering practices among Seventh-day Adventists which have remained up to the present time.

"The Role of the Watchman in the Context of Judgment and Restoration: An Exegetical Study of Ezek 3:16–21 and 33:1–11"

Researcher: Ronald George Sikilea Stone, Ph.D. in Religion, 2008
Advisor: David Tasker, Ph.D.

Most studies dealing with Ezek 3:16–21 and 33:1–11 focus more on the originality of the two passages rather than the content, which deals with the watchman. In contrast, this study investigates the role of the watchman in the context of judgment and restoration based on these two passages. To facilitate this, the historical-grammatical method of exegesis is employed.

Chapter 1 deals with the introductory issues, definition of the watchman, and the review of literature. In understanding the concept of the watchman, the Hebrew term צוֹפֶה "watchman" which is used also in the context of Ezekiel is the preferred word for this study. This is because it presents the watchman as a person who is "looking out" rather than שֹׁמֵר "watchman" whose task is mainly to "look in." צוֹפֶה "watchman" is also more intensive than שֹׁמֵר. Resulting from the review of literature six characteristics of the role of the watchman can be seen: (1) he is watching for danger or an enemy; (2) often connected to prophetic ministry; (3) focuses on the nation of Israel; (4) can be linked to the Messiah; (5) sounds an alarm as a trumpet; and (6) is waiting on the LORD.

Chapter 2 deals with the exegetical study of Ezek 3:16–21, with special emphasis on the role of the watchman. Here, the primary meaning for the Hebrew root זהר "warn" is to "teach," showing that the role of the watchman is not only to warn but also to teach. Interestingly, the presence of causal clauses indicated by the prepositional markers (בְ and כְ "because, on account of, for") reveal that the reason for the death of the wicked and the righteous who turn away from YHWH is based on the account of their sins and is not due to the failure of the watchman to perform his duty. Further, the expression וְדָמוֹ מִיָּדְךָ אֲבַקֵּשׁ "but his blood, I will require from your hand" is a "synecdoche of species." This means that the watchman is treated as a murderer. This phrase is also used in legal terminology based on the law of retribution or equivalency. The purpose of this is to discourage the watchman from being unfaithful to his responsibility.

The exegetical investigation of Ezek 33:1–11 in chapter 3 reveals the purpose of warning, namely, that the people might turn and live. It also affirms the consistency and fairness of Yhwh, in that Yhwh does not hold anyone responsible for someone else's sin.

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

The Semantics of Blessing and Cursing in Ancient Hebrew, by J. K. Aitken. Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series 23. Louvain: Peeters, 2007. Pp. xv + 306. ISBN 978-90-429-1986-2. Hardcover. €85.00.

Dr. James K. Aitken is the Academic Director of the Center for the Study of Jewish–Christian Relations of the Wolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths at the University of Cambridge. *The Semantics of Blessing and Cursing in Ancient Hebrew* is part of the ongoing research by the *Semantics of the Ancient Hebrew Database Project* (SAHD). The book is organized into two main parts. The first, entitled "Introduction," contains a literature review, dealing with the contemporary theoretical framework for semantic studies. The second deals with the pertinent lexical entries. This book is brief but comprehensive with an up-to-date bibliography. Aitken includes a specialized selected bibliography and a set of indexes of sources, authors, and words.

The introduction to the book is divided into two sections. The first deals with semantic theory and the field of blessing and cursing (pp. 3–22). The second section provides an inventory of textual evidence (pp. 23–41). Thus, in the first section, Aitken carefully and critically reviews the state of the art in semantic studies theory and practice before embarking on the study of the semantics of blessing and cursing in the Ancient Hebrew corpus. He tries to critically interact with a comprehensive set of approaches, including primitive anthropology, magic, the evolutionary approach, speech-act theory and pragma-linguistics. The work of the relevant authors is discussed and their arguments and conclusions are evaluated. Aitken detects in his review that theology has often affected semantic studies prejudicially.

Primitive anthropology, as a framework for semantic studies, is seen as insufficient. T. Plassmann's suggestions of the origin of blessing and cursing semantic in an ideal of the early nomadic life is not sustained by Israelite evidence (p. 7). Additionally, the proposed evolutionary stages of devel-

opment suggested by J. Pedersen are taken from studies on Teutonic peoples and are not supported by evidence from Israelite sources (p. 8).

The approach of magic *versus* religion as framework for the semantic of blessing and cursing that J. Hempel suggests, has its origins in an evolutionary approach to the study of Israelite religion. According to this approach, if the curse mentions God, it is a religious context but if it does not, then it should be considered a magical context. Aitken suggests that what is advocated as magic in the OT by this approach better fits within the OT portrayal of false religions (p. 11). Additionally, there is evidence that a western understanding of magic is being applied by theologians to similar kinds of studies (p. 11). Evidently, the approaches analyzed so far are evolutionary in their presuppositions and systematizations.

Speech-Act theory has also been tried as a framework for the study of blessing and cursing in ancient Hebrew. Aitken reviews the views of S. O. P. Mohwinckel, A. C. Thieselton, and L. Dürr related to the case of the dual meaning of דָּבָר as "word" and "thing" and he rules out a speech-act base here due to the very possibility that the Hebrew mind did distinguish between these two nuances of the word (p. 12). In Israelite society, the effectiveness of blessings and curses is dependent upon it "being uttered by the appropriated person in the appropriated circumstance" (p. 14). In this sense, it seems that speech-act theory is indeed limited. Aitken quotes B. Nitzan's studies in Qumran where blessings and curses have their "source of power in the Deity; hence these benedictions and maledictions may be considered prayers" (p. 15). Therefore, it seems that there is a basis for the "identification of the role of God in guaranteeing blessing and cursing..." (p. 16).

Aitken then moves to pragma-linguistics (pp. 17–21). As the Hebrew text is often vivid in its portrayal Aitken finds there the field for pragmatics to provide the needed information based on the "grammatical features of the passages concerned" (p. 18). These grammatical features are found in textual markers such as the provided example in Gen 4:11, involving the usage of וְעַתָּה in a deictic way which, according to Aitken, actualizes the command (p. 18).

Therefore, "to some extent words are power-laden, but this is not inherent in the words themselves but rather in the conventions of their use" (p. 21). Following this, Aitken discusses the relationship between semantics and social conventions as reflected in the text of the Hebrew Bible, involving issues of who said what, when and why (p. 22).

The second section of the introduction deals with the inventory of the textual evidence (pp. 23–41). The data includes textual evidence that covers a time-frame spanning from "the period of ancient Hebrew up to, but not including, the formation of Mishnaic Hebrew, although the evidence of

Rabbinic Hebrew is noted when it sheds light on ancient Hebrew" (p. 23). Inscriptions, texts from the Hebrew Bible, Qumran and Ben Sira are included.

Etymology, although still a matter of discussion, is brought into consideration and especially in the case of *hapax legomena,* as well as all available comparative Semitic sources, when the evidence is scarce. This includes even sources in Akkadian and Arabic. The morphological distribution of the lexemes is considered in their analysis. The syntagmatic relationships between the lexemes are analyzed especially in Aitken's study, including also aspects such as word order, word frequency and the frequency of syntactical structures (pp. 28–29).

Aitken recognizes that the use of evidence from the old versions is controversial and problematic and even so, he considers the available evidence from the Septuagint, the Peshitta, the Targum and the Vulgate. The limitations, issues and advantages related to each of these versions are carefully reviewed in order to contribute to the analysis of the evidence (pp. 30–37).

The lexemes chosen by Aitken for this study were selected following the criteria of semantic fields, a concept which the author carefully analyzes. A brief discussion of the rationale for the chosen nouns and verbs that are included in the study follows (pp. 38–40).

Part two of the volume (pp. 45–252) portrays twenty-one entries dealing with the lexemes pertinent to the old Hebrew semantic field of blessing and cursing, including nine verbs and twelve nouns, which are discussed in alphabetical order. Each entry is analyzed following a sevenfold procedure that provides multiple perspectives on each lexeme, taking advantage of current linguistic tools of Hebrew. This study exemplifies the state of the art in Hebrew linguistics as applied to semantic studies. The analysis includes an introduction to the lexeme that provides the grammatical type of the lexeme and the statistics of its usage throughout the textual corpus under consideration. Textual issues, if they are present (and they are, see pp. 45, 56–57, 64–65), are discussed here. Finally, the first section of the analysis follows with a consideration of the lexeme's root and of all available comparative material for lexical-etymological purposes.

The second section of the analysis exhausts the discussion of the formal (morphological) characteristics of the lexeme as attested in the available textual corpus.

The third section proceeds to the detailed description of the syntagmatic features of the immediate contexts of the lexeme in the texts where it occurs.

The fourth section describes and analyzes the available information derived from the old versions. It includes the discussion of this evidence against the background of the issues related to these versions as disclosed

previously (pp. 30–36). This is Aitken's strategy to deal with the limitations and contemporary issues related to the usage of versional textual data in relation to OT and Hebrew language studies.

The fifth section deals with the analysis of the lexemes with reference to the relevant lexical/semantic field(s). As a given lexeme might fit into more than one semantic field, this discussion becomes relevant as the justification of the lexeme's placement. The section also sets the lexeme in perspective as well as exploring possible aspects of polysemy and diachronic semantic development (semasiology).

The sixth section, exegesis, takes advantage of the information and insight provided by the previous sections and discusses them in addition to any other relevant issues. The discussion is made against the backdrop of the literature review previously made in the general introduction of the book. Any relevant element from the reviewed approaches is noted.

Finally, at the end of every lexical entry, Aitken elaborates his conclusions, based on the evidence he has already provided. Aitken is careful in the way he works in this section as made evident from those instances when the evidence points toward a lexeme as performative (pp. 55, 177), declarative (pp. 116, 242, 249), apotropaic (p. 83) or just as the recognition of a condition (pp. 87, 158, 192, 205).

This is a reference book that requires the reader to have a working knowledge of intermediate Ancient Hebrew language and an awareness of the current issues on Ancient Hebrew linguistics. As a reference book, it is exhaustive, systematically organized, concise and represents the state of the art in its field.

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I came to know about Accordance through my Greek professor who considered it the best Bible software. It was only after a year that I had the opportunity to test his claim. The present review offers a general and brief introduction to the Accordance software with a special focus on the *Scholar's 8 Standard Level* edition of Accordance. It will also point out the advantages and disadvantages. The final observations will include a personal recommendation.

There are five different versions offered by Oak Tree in order to make the use of the software convenient for the user. The *Starter Collection* con-

tains only a basic set of resources. Two more collections, i.e., the *Jewish Collection* and the *Catholic Collection*, include Hebrew and Catholic translations respectively and both have specific study tools. The sources for the Jewish collection include the *Tanakh* and the Mishnah, while the Catholic collection includes sources such as the Council of Trent, the Catholic Catechism, and the Douay-Rheims Bible. A variety of dictionaries, commentaries and basic Bible study tools are included in the *Library Collection* which is especially designed for studies using English texts. The *Scholar Collection* meets a need for a deeper study of biblical languages for any Bible student. The prices range from US$ 49.00 to 2,800.00 (see the official homepage of Accordance at *www.accordancebible.com*).

At a first glance one can appreciate the space and structure that Accordance offers. Superfluous icons, buttons, and menu bars are not present. Another feature is a clearly laid out working space. Lexicons, Bibles, maps, or commentaries that have been added recently are arranged into different tabs. Furthermore, the use of logical symbols makes the search easy. Important functions, as well as basic, individual adjustments are not hidden in the obscurity of menu bars. Only one click clears the way to many tasks: changing texts, dictionary search, text comparison, details and map display, etc. Moreover, the search option in the menu bar shows all the available search commands and symbols. It is also possible to enter lexical forms, inflected forms, or grammatical tags quickly and conveniently.

In the center is the *Search Window* which has two floating windows next to it, i.e., the Resource Palette and the Instant Details Box. Through this particular placing, Oak Tree succeeded in emphasizing two of its basic concepts—the centrality of the Bible and the search within the Bible (see *Accordance Bible Software Version 7.4 User Guide*, 40).

The *Floating Window* which may be found on the right side of the page (the Resource Palette), allows for the addition of new texts, dictionaries, or commentaries. It is also possible to obtain parsing and syntax information of a selected text, although there are some limitations in this area. The price increases with the amount of options added and the access to more information.

The *Instant Details Box*, a floating window found at the bottom of the page, provides instant parsing information, a translation, and the pronunciation of the word at which the mouse points. It also contains Bible texts that are included in commentary articles.

The *Scholar's Standard Edition* comes with a good collection of materials that enables one to do research in the original languages of the Bible. The library contains four Greek texts of the New Testament (*Nestle/Aland, Tischendorf, Textus Receptus,* and *Westcott/Hortt*), one Hebrew Bible text (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*), as well as four English versions of the Bible (ASV,

KJV, NET, and WEB). In order to assist with the biblical languages, Accordance provides four Greek/English dictionaries (*Louw/Nida, Thayer, Strong, and Newman*), as well as three Hebrew/English dictionaries (*Brown/Driver/ Briggs, Harris,* and *Strong*) and one Biblical Aramaic Glossary (*Cook*).

It is clear that there is a greater emphasis on Greek, and therefore on the New Testament, for the Scholar's Standard version is well equipped with Robertson's *Grammar of the Greek New Testament,* Burton's *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek,* and Deissmann's *Bible Studies.* Hebrew equivalents are not yet present. Oak Tree includes also its own collections—for example, the parallels (Gospels, Epistles) or the Classic Passages—as well as open-source material such as *Eastons Bible Dictionary, Nave's Topical Bible,* etc.

One of the greatest strengths of the software is its search abilities. There are two ways to accomplish a search, namely, the search using the search window input, and the graphical search (construct window). Through the latter one can profit from the search features of the former, adding to it graphical and position-specific elements.

Accordance offers unique search commands through which one can link windows/tabs by performing parallel searches, and compare search results of two different windows/ tabs etc. Version eight has new commands called "fuzzy" and "infer." The fuzzy command assists the user if the verse is only partially known by adding one word in between in a formerly specified frame if necessary. The infer command looks for analogies and interferences of text A in text B. These similarities are graphically highlighted for an easy comparison. The very helpful "search back" command allows the user, after doing a particular search, to look for analogies and interferences in the other direction.

Particularly attractive to teachers, pastors and students is Accordance's ability of creating a slide show from the tabs that have been set up. Several dictionaries, commentaries, Bible passages, graphics, maps, pictures, etc. can be prepared beforehand and used in the lesson conveniently in a fullscreen mode. This unique feature of Accordance will enrich every Biblebased class in a seminary.

There are also some weaknesses that need to be addressed. One would be the limited and not-well-selected access to different versions of the Bible. Even in the Scholar's 8 Standard edition there are only four English versions available of which two contain an antiquated English. The NKJV or the NASB would be very reasonable to expect of a program at such a level. The fuzzy search, for instance, is not useful if one remembers the text only in the wording of the NIV, the NKJV, or another more popular version, and not in KJV English. In research papers, as well as articles the versions used are generally not

the ones provided here. There are packages that can be bought which provide these missing Bible translations. However, there should be a representation of at least one or two of these common versions in order to call the collection *Scholar's Standard*. A collection that includes all the English Bibles is available at a cost of US$ 480.00 (see http://www.accordancebible.com/ products/packages/details.php?ID=604). Yet, the PC-based competing software package *BibleWorks 7* includes not only many unlocked English versions, but also several versions in German, French, Spanish, etc. and costs only US$ 349.00.

Another weak point of Accordance is the imbalance concerning the amount of resources available to the NT scholars as compared to the resources available for OT scholars/students. Four Greek versions of the NT are available, as compared to the one Hebrew text. The same imbalance applies also to commentaries, grammars, and dictionaries. A look at the available products on the Accordance homepage will make NT students happy, for there are manifold options for them. The new user is very dependent on the User Guide of Accordance version 7.4. Although the help guide within the program has a chapter that describes the new features of Accordance version 8, these are only briefly explained. Tutorial videos can be ordered at Oak Tree Software Incorporation for a price of US$ 15.00. However, for one who is not living in the USA this would be a more costly experience. Other programs provide these tutorials together with the program disc.

Scholar's 8 Standard is primarily recommendable for its powerful search engine, and its well-structured appearance to students of theology as well as scholars. The easy-to learn features of Accordance will make the program also attractive to non-theologians that use the program sporadically. Limitations, however, can be felt in the available and sometimes unbalanced resources. In this regard, *BibleWorks* (or *Logos*) are stronger competitors, especially now that they also have access to the world of Macintosh through virtual machines.

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Jon Paulien is presently the dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University, USA. He has been a professor of New Testament Interpretation at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, for more than 20 years

and has authored 11 books and more than 100 articles and scholarly papers. He is a specialist in Johanine literature.

Armageddon is a key word which has been a subject of discussion in recent time especially in the light of the international military conflicts of the major world powers. This creates the need for a clear understanding of its implications from the biblical context since it is derived from the Bible's Apocalypse.

In this book, Jon Paulien presents a study on the biblical view of Armageddon beginning from a survey of the present War on Terror and investigating the significance of the term, especially from the context of the book of Revelation and the New Testament. He does this in twelve chapters and an appendix.

In the first two chapters, the author begins with an overview of the present War on Terror and the factors that are central to it. Many people, including Adventist evangelists, have seen major wars as Armageddon: World War I, World War II, and the Cold War as a prelude to World War III. Presently, many look at the War on Terror as World War IV, the beginning of Armageddon. Paulien discusses this war by presenting the defining issues that led to its beginning. He traces the origin of Al-Qaeda from the days of Muhammad and the rise of Islam to the first war in Afghanistan and the Gulf War. He explains the power tussle and negotiations between the United States and the Islamic jihadists and its present implications.

In chapter two, Paulien looks at both sides of the War on Terror: the American side and the Jihadist (Al-Qaeda) side. He lists the signs or factors that will show which side is winning or losing (pp. 34–40).

Chapters three and four describe the author's personal search for the meaning of Armageddon. Even though major views of Armageddon are presented (pp. 53–54), Paulien favors the view that Armageddon is the symbolic name for the antitypical events of Mount Carmel, since this fits best within the context of Rev 13–17 (pp. 57–60). Chapter five traces the "Mount Carmel" theme in Rev 12–14 and identifies the key players involved in the conflict, i.e., the unholy trinity (pp. 62–68). It also points out the role of deception in the war of Armageddon (pp. 69–81).

The sixth chapter analyzes the end-time role and context of the seven last plagues of Rev 16 and creates the background for interpreting Armageddon (which is related to the sixth plague). The author tackles the exegetical challenge of interpreting certain prophetic specifics of Armageddon in Rev 17 (especially v. 10) in chapter seven and (in more detail) in the appendix at the end of the book.

In chapters eight and nine, the major confederacies involved in the war of Armageddon are identified, based on the author's exegesis of the context

of Rev 12–17. Chapters ten and eleven enumerate the major events of Armageddon, while chapter twelve contains reflections on the implications of the study's view of Armageddon for the present time, beginning with the War on Terror and concluding with basic spiritual principles that are pertinent to the reader's preparedness for what is coming.

First, the book contains a basic definition, description and explanation of the War on Terror as an introduction, stating the factors affecting the two parties involved and also relating the nature of this War on Terror to the real soon coming battle of Armageddon and end-time events. This is relevant and attractive to contemporary readers. It was an eye-opener for me on the background of the War on Terror.

Second, the spiritual and pastoral nature of the book can be seen in its stress upon important spiritual points from prophecy by repeating them for emphasis. For example, the author states that the purpose of prophecy is not to satisfy curiosity but to teach us how to live today (pp. 166, 172, 193). The most repeated and stressed of all the points is that Armageddon is a struggle/battle for the mind (pp. 113, 114, 115, 118, 120, 141, 170, 193). Paulien also emphasizes that God is in control of end-time events even when they seem to be getting out of hand (pp. 94, 132, 150, 167, 194–96). In addition, he points out that the hard texts of Scripture make us return to study God's word more. He honestly admits that not all texts are clear and easy to understand (pp. 97, 98, 121–23, 200–2). Finally, he stresses that things are not always what they seem and that end-time deceptions will make us pray more, study the Bible more and trust ourselves and our senses less (pp. 69–81, 200).

Third, the book simplifies the exegetical process of interpreting the Apocalypse for lay members to understand and use for their own personal study. He does this by introducing important hermeneutical principles. This is clearly seen especially from chapters three to nine and also in the appendix (pp. 99, 100, 136). Paulien also uses diagrams (pp. 83, 110, 111, 132, 143, 144, 165, 170, 173, 183) and repeats significant points previously mentioned for a clearer understanding and flow of thought.

Fourth, the author clearly avoids and warns against the human tendency to make specific predictions or speculations and date setting about the events to come. He bases his work on the clear principles identifiable from the exegesis of the text of Revelation. He also supports these general events with quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy where necessary.

Fifth, I appreciated the author's opinion and evaluation of the "Mount Megiddo (or Mount Carmel)" view. However, I would have appreciated a more thorough biblical evaluation of the "Mount of Assembly" view of Armageddon which appears to be more tenable than the Mount Carmel

view which he holds to. In the book, the author appears to bypass or simply overlook this view. I hope that in subsequent works he will revisit this view in comparison to his and provide an in-depth biblical critique of it (pp. 41–60).

Sixth, while the volume is generally well-edited, I identified the following typographical errors: *fulfillment* instead of *fulfilling* (p. 200); *John 17:6* instead of *Rev 17:6* (p. 209); *GThe Great Controversy* instead of *The Great Controversy* (p. 223, n. 48).

In summary, the book is logically organized and exegetically sound. It is recommended not only for students of the New Testament, interested in the Book of Revelation, but also for non-specialist audiences, including Christians, Muslims and others who want to learn more about the topic and understand it from a biblical perspective.

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Persuading the Galatians: A Text-Centered Rhetorical Analysis of a Pauline Letter, by D. Francois Tolmie. WUNT II/190. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005. Pp. xii + 207. ISBN 3-16-148455-X. Paper. € 54.00.

Francois Tolmie received his D.Th. in New Testament studies in 1992; in 2004 he earned his Ph.D. in Greek from the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Currently, he is Professor of New Testament at the Faculty of Theology of the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

The book is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, presented at the same university, and represents the first systematic attempt to reconstruct Paul's rhetorical strategy in the Epistle to the Galatians in a different way, namely, by concentrating on the letter itself, as a means of developing the most coherent categories of describing the way in which Paul tried to persuade his audience.

The study is divided into three chapters. In the introduction, the author begins by clarifying the meaning of the word "rhetorical" to be used in his study. He makes it clear that the term in the narrow sense indicates an approach which aims to analyze the ways in which a text is used in order to persuade its audience. Chapter 1 has two parts: first, it includes an evaluation of rhetorical studies of Galatians and, second, a description of the approach to be followed in his study. Tolmie begins with an overview of the pioneering and well-known study of H. D. Betz, who claimed that the epistle must be regarded as an example of an apologetic letter. It presupposes the fictitious situation of a court of law, and as such, it constitutes an exam-

ple of forensic rhetoric and must be analyzed in terms of a classical rhetorical system. Tolmie notes that the rigid (and sometimes imposed) application of this system has resulted in a mixed reaction by scholarship. On the one hand, it has been acknowledged the skillful way in which Betz applies the forensic rhetorical system to the letter as well as his grammatical, lexical, historical and theological abilities reflected in his commentary on the text. But, on the other hand, many commentators are reluctant to accept the rigid way in which Betz imposes the model to the letter. Tolmie cites among them H. Brismead, U. Ruegg, H. Hübner, J. Becker, J. Hester, and T. Martin (pp. 4, 5, 6) who basically agree with Betz' proposal about Galatians as a forensic defense speech with slight modifications, and those like D. E. Aune, G. W. Hansen, and J. Schoon-Janßen who consider Galatians a mixture of forensic and deliberative rhetoric.

There is a third perspective, however, to Betz's proposal on the rhetorical genre of Galatians which rejects Betz's aims and suggests that Galatians must be classified as a deliberative oratory. Among those who hold this view Tolmie cites G. A. Kennedy, R. G. Hall, J. Smit, and W. B. Russell. Two possibilities are usually followed in this perspective: Either modern rhetorical theories are applied to the letter, or the argumentation is analyzed strictly in terms of a text-centered approach in which case the letter itself serves as the starting point for the analysis instead of applying a rhetorical model to the letter (p. 19).

Tolmie proceeds to explain the approach he is going to follow in his study. He does not choose any specific rhetorical model (ancient or modern) to apply to the letter. He decides to reconstruct Paul's rhetorical strategy from the text itself, using the letter as the starting-point. His study is a text-centered descriptive analysis of the way in which Paul attempts to persuade the Galatians (p. 28). Tolmie uses a minimal theoretical framework to guide the analysis. The general guideline in this study is the identification of what the author calls "the dominant rhetorical strategy" (p. 28). In analyzing a particular section of the letter Tolmie tries to answer the following two questions: first, "How can one describe Paul's primary rhetorical objective in this specific section?" and second, "How does he attempt to achieve this objective?" Once the dominant rhetorical strategy is identified it is then followed by a detailed analysis of that particular section.

The second chapter consists of the rhetorical analysis of the epistle to Galatians using the text-centered approach. This chapter is divided into eighteen sections also called "phases" (p. 29) which sometimes overlap with the demarcated sections/paragraphs as they have been delineated in commentaries and other studies. However, the author recognizes that, in some instances, there are differences. He points out the principle he uses in demar-

cating the sections. The author calls it *"a change in Paul's rhetorical strategic"* (p. 29 [emphasis in original]). It is the most important guideline for demarcating the various sections (p. 29). Whenever a definite change in Paul's dominant rhetorical strategy is detected, a new section is demarcated. Tolmie argues that "the reason for using this notion as a guideline is that it enables one to divide the overall rhetorical strategy in the letter into smaller 'phases'" (p. 29). Thus, each of the eighteen sections is delimited in such a way that it represents one particular phase in the apostle's overall rhetorical strategy in the letter; a strategy that is different from that of the other phases immediately before and after it.

In chapter three the author presents the results of his investigation. One of the important issues he addresses in the conclusion is the organization of the argument of the letter as a whole. In this sense the author gives consideration to two issues, first, the overall organization of the letter, and, second, the wide variety of arguments that Paul uses in the letter (p. 233). Tolmie also draws attention to two other issues: the first is Paul's use of two techniques which scholars thus far have apparently overlooked. The first is called "making events transparent for the situation in Galatia" (p. 233) in Galatians 2:4, 5 (...ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσουσιν... ἵνα ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου διαμείνῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς), and in 2:11–21. The second technique is called "rerouting the attention of the audience" (p. 233), and it refers to the fact that Paul creates the impression that he will address a certain issue which he knows is of importance for the readers, but then, in fact, he discusses something that fits his own strategy better (3:19–21). Tolmie also presents a list of seven points (p. 234) that could have undermined Paul's argumentative strategy.

Following this, Tolmie focuses on the most important issue in the chapter, namely, the way Paul argues in the Epistle to the Galatians, in other words, the overall organization of the argument as a whole. The eighteen phases identified previously are reduced to six basic rhetorical objectives: (1) divine authorization (pp. 235–36); (2) Paul's gospel as the true gospel (p. 237); (3) the inferiority of the law (p. 238); (4) spiritual slavery/spiritual freedom (pp. 238–40); (5) the practical outcome (p. 240); and (6) the final refutation. These rhetorical objectives tend to organize the argument of the letter as a whole in a way different from that followed in most rhetorical studies (including Betz's, p. 242). Another issue the author pays attention to in this chapter is the wide variety of arguments used by Paul in his letter within which the argument of the divine authorization constitutes the backbone of Paul's rhetorical strategy (p. 244).

The author includes a useful appendix of some rhetorical techniques employed in the Epistle to the Galatians which are listed by order of first

appearance. His useful bibliography contains almost one third of non-English sources which is a possible indicator of the scope of his work.

Francois Tolmie's study has greatly benefited me. Since my first reading of Betz's commentary on Galatians I had the impression that the imposition of classical rhetorical models upon the biblical text does not allow the text to speak for itself. Tolmie's study has confirmed my suspicion and, at the same time, opened a window to see the text from a totally different rhetorical perspective. In his study Tolmie has reached the objective of reconstructing Paul's rhetorical strategy in the Epistle to the Galatians without imposing any external model upon the text. In this sense his study is an outstanding one. It should constitute an obligatory reading assignment for those interested in the rhetorical approach to the biblical text and more specifically in the Pauline epistles.

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